Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission: Global Mission
Issues Committee Papers Volume 2, 2002-2005

Bruce Bauer

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ADVENTIST RESPONSES TO CROSS-CULTURAL MISSION

Global Mission Issues Committee Papers

Volume II
2002-2005

BRUCE L. BAUER, Editor
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INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL RYAN

Mission has always been a foundational value of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Even prior to 1844, those who studied, prayed, and were led by the Spirit to the distinctive beliefs of the Adventist Church were passionate about sharing those truths with neighbors and countrymen. By the 1870s, the Church's definition of mission had grown to include the whole world. Seventh-day Adventists believed they were a special part of God's great plan to invite every person in the world to know Christ and the saving truths of the Bible.

By the year 1900, a small number of missionaries were serving in selected countries around the world. Over the next ninety years the number of missionaries increased and the Church grew rapidly in the Americas, the southern part of the continent of Africa, selected countries in Asia, and the Pacific islands. By 1990, there were 6 million members and the Church had a presence in more than 200 countries—all but 28 countries. A network of schools, hospitals, clinics, publishing houses, food factories, and radio stations served the Church in countries around the world. In 1990, every day, one new church was established and more than 1,000 people were baptized into church membership.

God be praised, the growth had been remarkable and a worldwide foundation had been established. And yet, it was as though God, in his all-knowing and caring wisdom, then began to move the Church to understand more fully the mission challenge that still remained. World population had exploded to 5.4 billion people. Several studies conducted by non-Seventh-day Adventists and data coming from inside the Church strongly suggested that the mission challenge was far greater than previously understood.
Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission

The Church initiated a study to discover where the presence of the Church was located across the countries of the world. Membership and church locations were compared with populations in the context of territories that had been organized into groups of one million people. Of 5,400 segments (the world population in millions) data revealed that the Church did not have a presence in 2,300 of those million population segments.

Quickly it became apparent that the Adventist Church was best represented in rural, island, Christian, animistic, and poor areas in our world. In 1990, nearly half the world's population lived in cities and the vast majority held values represented by Islam, Communism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and a growing secular/postmodern generation. These world religions, governments, and ideologies held more than 70 percent of the world's population. These territories were becoming known as the 10/40 Window—the great Christian mission field of the world. In these areas the Seventh-day Adventist Church had only a small presence.

In 1990, the highest authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the General Conference in session, voted an initiative called Global Mission. Global Mission was mandated to establish a church in every segment of one million people. The action of the world church called for the establishment of religious study centers to develop methodologies and materials for advancing the mission of the Church into those great unentered areas of the world.

By 2005, world population had increased to 6.3 billion adding another 900 segments of one million beyond the 1990 total of 5,400. The data indicated that of 6,300 segments of one million, the Adventist Church now had a presence in all but 430 of them. Every day, 11 new congregations are being established somewhere in the world. Every day, somewhere in the world, 2,800 people are joining the Church.

While urban and 10/40 Window mission advances seem considerable, the church has really only just begun. Without question, the early pioneers' struggle to establish a foundation from which to initiate mission was both testing and considerable. However, the Church of 2006 may possibly face the Church's most challenging years.

Rapid growth in the 10/40 Window has forced the Church to look at the interface between members and a population who come from different worldviews and religious backgrounds. While the Church's doctrinal message remains biblical, mission methodologies and the logistics of providing language and culture-relevant literature, radio, television, education, nurture, and training
Introduction

have stretched the Church into unfamiliar territory. Additionally, the Church is challenged to keep alive the interest and vision for mission in the hearts of those whose support is critical—3rd, 4th, and 5th generation Adventists.

As the Adventist Church has advanced into vastly diverse cultures, tribes, and peoples, a wide array of issues have arisen that must be addressed if the Church is to remain a unified world community. The biblical principle of unity is vitally important to the mission of the Church.

The Administrative Committee at the world headquarters established a Global Mission Issues Committee (Issues Committee) to meet each year at the time of the Church’s Spring Council. The Issues Committee’s immediate task is to prepare an agenda of current mission issues that have potential to advance or disrupt the mission of the Church or challenge world unity. The search for contextualized methods provides a wide array of issues for discussion and resolution.

The agenda of the Issues Committee is often expressed through papers that present the context and history of an issue and that then suggests a rationale and lists values to serve in developing solutions or resolutions. Committee membership includes a wide spectrum of administrators, biblical scholars, and those training frontline workers. The Issues Committee has no constitutional authority.

After the presentation of informative papers and lengthy discussion, representing a wide discipline of experience and academia, a small writing committee is appointed for each issue to express the consensus of the wider committee. The position paper is brought back to the Issues Committee to be discussed. If the majority of the Issues Committee agrees with the position paper, it is recommended to the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) to be studied, edited, and considered for recommendation to the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM). ADCOM takes responsibility for processing the recommendation. Depending on the issue, ADCOM may extend the process to include additional developments and endorsements.

One must ask the hard question, Does the Global Mission Issues Committee help advance the mission of the Church? Or, is the Issues Committee just another theoretical exercise gathered around a few well-crafted words, which issues resolutions and returns home with the misguided impression that those serving on the frontline of mission are immeasurably benefited?

An immediate response to this question must recognize that if the Issues Committee makes any contribution to mission it is only because of the faithful
work of the Holy Spirit. The Issues Committee is part of a network receiving information and providing information. It is a critical part of the mission information system.

As methods, theology, resources, policy, or structure advance or restrict mission, all levels of the Church structure and their officially recognized committees may submit items to be considered for the agenda of the Issues Committee. The Issues Committee provides a forum to discuss worldwide opinions on mission issues.

The opinion of the Issues Committee does not represent the position of the Adventist Church. However, the Issues Committee, as an official committee of the Church, has the authority to recommend an opinion to committees whose terms of reference provide the power to act. Because this forum exists to discuss mission issues and recommend opinions it helps focus the mission and protect the unity of the world church.

As recommendations are endorsed by committees with power to act, a consensus is built that can guide administrators and educators in advancing mission. A healthy mission culture, guided by understood parameters, serves the long term mission of the Adventist Church.

It is only fair to say that all meaningful mission issues come as a result of the Church being involved in mission. Issues that signal opportunities to be more effective and efficient emerge from the toil and sacrifice of believers wrestling to advance God’s cause. The Global Mission Issues Committee processes issues; it does not create issues.

While the papers that follow will provide examples of how the work of the Issues Committee has been used, one example might be helpful.

Global Mission pioneers are lay missionaries that plant churches in unentered areas of their home countries. Thousands of pioneers work in areas where the vast majority of the population lives in fear of evil spirits. When most of these sons or daughters of God begin to catch a glimpse of freedom in Christ they immediately ask, What can your Jesus do about the evil spirits that control our lives? Other questions about the Sabbath, the second coming, the state of the dead, etc., are usually not foremost in their minds.

Most answers from church workers are good biblical answers. However, some have advised the seeker to be careful not to anger the spirits. Accommodating evil spirits is not part of Adventist theology. Why was such an answer given? What was the problem?
Introduction

While Seventh-day Adventists have a theology on evil spirits and God's supreme power over them, this theology was assumed but never stated in the Church's Fundamental Beliefs. When it became apparent that most people in the 10/40 Window, home to 70 percent of the world's population, live in fear of evil spirits, it also became imperative that the Church provide a statement that correctly states the Church's theology, guides frontline workers, and assures seekers of God's victory and power over evil.

The issue came to the Church because the Church is involved in mission. The Issues Committee represented just one step in a process that eventually brought the Adventist Church to vote a new Fundamental Belief. Frontline workers now have a statement that guides them in providing assurance in Christ to those who would otherwise live in fear.

We pray that these papers will benefit the larger Adventist Church as it responds to Christ's command to teach all nations. Until Jesus comes, the Church will always seek better ways to go about God's business. If it is to successfully serve the Church, the Global Mission Issues Committee must continue to see itself as an instrument of God's will and his eternal plan for people.

Silver Spring, MD, March 1, 2006
The aim of this paper is to provide a basis for discussing the challenge Adventist theology faces in our practical task of doing global mission.

Our Commitment to Mission

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to the mission of *making disciples of all people*, from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people group. This is a commitment to communicate God's truth in an efficient and intelligible way to people in various cultures and conceptual systems. There are reasons to believe that we are not as successful in doing this as we could be.

Truth in the Bible

In the Bible, the concept of "truth" is applied in various ways. The Hebrew and Greek words for "truth" are used to refer to such entities as the word of God, his teachings, wisdom, divine righteousness, the believers' attitude of faith, the gospel of salvation, the nature of God, God as revealed in Jesus. (See

Thus, truth is not only cognitive, but relational, experiential, practical, aesthetic, and ethical. It relates to the life of human beings, wherever they live.

The ‘truth as it is in Jesus’ is both a biblical and Adventist concept which could serve as a practical guide to help us begin defining the essence of Adventism. Theoretically, this must begin with God, and the concept that in Christ is found ‘all the fullness of God’ (Eph 3:19). But in the practical task of bringing God to people, we may need to begin with Jesus as a human being, for ‘human being’ is a unique common denominator, or “universal,” that all people will understand and accept.

The Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs

A key element of our understanding of truth is the wording of how we as a church summarize the core teachings of the Bible, the so-called Fundamental Beliefs. What are the fundamental beliefs and what role should they play for us? It is vital to approach this question from the origin and development of the fundamental beliefs in our church. This can be studied in the relevant articles in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, so I will just refer to a couple of points here.

First, for many decades, Adventists were not happy with a statement of beliefs, because there was a strong conviction that the Bible is our only creed and that no statements should be added to it. This was a radical application of the Protestant view that the Bible alone is to be our authority for faith and life. This position was endorsed by Ellen White. And it is important that we still bear this principle in mind (see the introduction to Seventh-day Adventists Believe).

Second, at various times in our history, however, practical needs resulted in a summary of our beliefs and practices, in order to keep both Adventists and non-Adventists informed about where we stand. The twenty-two points published by Uriah Smith for some time in the Review in the 1870s had to be removed due to resistance from within the church.

Third, when another version of beliefs surfaced in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook in the 1930s, it was to address a practical need, namely the situation in the mission fields, where our church was working along side many other Christian denominations. Adventists needed to define their positions and legitimize themselves as Bible-believing Christians.
Fourth, for many years Adventists have had at least two different versions of their beliefs in the Church Manual, one summarizing how they understand the teachings of the Bible, and another one to be used as the baptismal vow. Again, the practical function seems to direct the content and wording. But difference in emphasis, selection of content, and wording does not seem to be a major issue.

Fifth, as late as 1980, the General Conference in session formally voted a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs for the first time. The introduction states that

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word (emphasis supplied).

Sixth, it seems that the statement of our beliefs is primarily a practical tool to summarize our understanding of the essential teachings of the Bible. This can then be used in different ways and for different purposes.

Seventh, the statement does not say anything about how the Fundamental Beliefs are to be used. Or how they are to be translated and applied. My experience is that a number of different re-applications of the Fundamental Beliefs already exist. Some examples:

When unions translate the English version into their own languages, a process of interpretation and recreation of new concepts is inevitable. I translated the 27 Fundamental Beliefs from English to Swedish in the early 1980s for the church and faced a variety of challenges in trying to find proper equivalents in modern Swedish for the North American, Protestant-Evangelical theological language of the text. This task becomes even more complicated the further away from Christian (or Post-Christian) and Western cultures we go.

Many local churches like to present our beliefs in a handy way on the back of their printed Sabbath Service programs, usually for newcomers, but also to remind church members of what we stand for. And every version looks different. But if a theological issue would arise, the Bible itself, or the Fundamental Beliefs, would normally serve as a guide to settle a conflict.

Eighth, I suggest that making disciples is a spiritual and hermeneutic task, as exemplified in the story of Philip’s meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch ac-
cording to Acts 8:26-40. This task presents itself with equal force in areas such as Bible translation (bringing the words of the Bible to readers in various cultures), evangelism (leading people to conversion), and Bible teaching (making disciples). The Fundamental Beliefs may be given different functions here: (a) in Bible translation, we go beyond the fundamental beliefs to their wider source, providing them with a wider context for sharing our faith, which allows for a variety of concepts to be used. In this connection, the role of fundamental beliefs is to help the translator both in the process of interpreting the original text and in transferring it into the new language; (b) in evangelism, we use what is practical from the 27 Fundamental Beliefs, and from the Bible, to guide a person to a decision, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; (c) in Bible teaching, the fundamental beliefs help teachers see the whole picture while focusing on details, or to see the essentials while focusing on peripheral elements.

The role of the fundamental beliefs may be to help us focus, on the whole, and on the essence. But they were not intended, I think, to hinder the Spirit from leading believing and committed people in the work of translation, evangelism, and teaching. And the Bible itself must ultimately be our authority. The Bible needs to be a necessary correction to the Fundamental Beliefs, for it stands above them by definition. This offers many possibilities for mission workers in the church to draw on biblical material to translate the Fundamental Beliefs into foreign cultures.

The Fundamental Beliefs As a Summary of the Bible

The fundamental beliefs do not describe themselves as a summary, but this is implied when it says that “certain fundamental beliefs (are) the teaching of the Holy Scriptures . . . [and] constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture.”

The fundamental beliefs obviously are to function as a general summary of the specifics found in the Bible. This concept is biblical. Jesus and Paul followed the Jewish rabbis in applying the same distinction: (1) Jesus says that the Law and the Prophets hang on the twofold commandment of love (Matt 22:40). This means that the summary brings together the essence of a wider material; (2) Paul says that the commandment to love your neighbor is the fulfillment of the Law (Rom 13:10). Here, the summary functions as a superior statement that
organically incorporates all the specific details of the Law. The same thing is true when Christ is seen as the essence of God, incorporating all his fullness.

Thus, the fundamental beliefs may be used as a summary which has a practical function. It focuses attention on the whole and its essence. In any translation of the biblical message to a foreign culture, these functions of the fundamental beliefs should be remembered.

**A Suggested Distinction**

The fundamental beliefs are expected to function in two quite different ways:

First, they have a role in our *Church Constitution*. As such, they fill an organizational role. The constitution of the church as an organization has to be done somewhere and in some kind of language. And the fundamental beliefs fill that role, defining the existence of the worldwide body that we are. In this context, it is enough for the fundamental beliefs to be a well-worded, theological, and theoretical statement. But maybe it could be revised now, after more than twenty years, to incorporate some of the growing knowledge about cultural differences that the global mission work is bringing, and make it a truly global statement. This would mean that missiological issues would drive the process of revision.

Second, the fundamental beliefs are sometimes expected to have a role in the *lives of human beings*. But even in English and in North America, this calls for a practical application to the individual lives of people and this cannot be done without dynamic interaction. For a person's reception and appropriation of received truth depends on his or her capacity to understand, his or her needs, and situation, interests, and values. It is obvious that in this connection the letter may kill, but the Spirit will give life. It must be necessary for front line workers to act under the Spirit's guidance and adapt the words of the Fundamental Beliefs, drawing on the Bible, as the Spirit leads, in order to assist people as they grow into an experience of conversion and then to continue discipling them. Experts on various religions could help us develop guidelines for work among various people groups, using the best possible points of entry.

**Hierarchical Concepts**

It would be interesting to rewrite the fundamental beliefs from the point of view that modern semantics has taught, namely, that every concept can be
hierarchically built into another superior concept until only one remains. Such structures could then vary, depending on where one is working.

Another interesting exercise would be to identify global, human, conceptual *universals*, which are very general and open concepts that are common to all people. And then build a statement of fundamental beliefs on those concepts, filling them with various relevant and proper material from the Bible.
ONE BRIEF CASE STUDY OF THE USE OR NON-USE OF THE 27 FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS AND THE BAPTISMAL VOW

JAMES COFFIN

April 8-9, 2002

The purpose of the following brief paper is to provide one case study in which the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and/or the Baptismal Vow are being adapted to make them more context-appropriate. Specifically, we will note what is being done in presenting Adventist doctrine to children and youth in preparation for baptism in one place in North America.

To glean information for this presentation, I contacted six youth pastors in the Orlando, Florida area, asking how they use or do not use both the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and the Vow in their baptismal preparation for both children and youth. I chose to look at the approaches being used with the youth for two main reasons: (1) this sub-group of American society might find difficulty in understanding the rather ponderous language of both documents; and (2) today’s youth pastors are tomorrow’s senior pastors, and the methods being employed with youth today may well be employed with adults in the future.

None of the youth pastors with whom I spoke use either the 27 Fundamental Beliefs document itself or the book that elaborates on those beliefs as they
prepare youth for baptism. Nor did any of them use the traditional Baptismal Vow as a source in their teaching. Most used materials that have been written to teach the basics of Adventism specifically to children and youth. These include: "A Reason to Believe" by Chris Blake; "It's My Choice" by Steve Case; "Come Alive; Stay Alive" by the Hart Research Group; and "Good News for Kids" (I was not able to ascertain who produces this material). However, even these materials are not followed slavishly but are deleted from and added to at the discretion of the youth pastor.

One youth pastor said that as he deals with high school and college students who are seeking baptism he sits down and talks to them extensively about their spiritual journey, seeking to "unwrap" the spiritual package they have acquired along the way. The viewpoints they hold have been influenced by parents, teachers at church schools, Sabbath School, pastors, and many more. The youth pastor said it is amazing to him how much misinformation the youth have acquired in their brief lifetime. So "at least half" of his time is spent just addressing the misconceptions they hold to dispel the "toxic" aspects of their faith. Then he moves on to introduce them to those other things he feels they should know.

Quite consistently, the aspects of our belief that receive the most attention from youth pastors are the relational issues of God and humans—salvation, the love of God, the friendship of Christ—as well as issues of Christian behavior and lifestyle, especially relating to our fellow humans. The more abstract and heavily theological aspects of our beliefs tend to be covered more superficially or not at all.

No youth pastor interviewed asks the youth to sign either the traditional Baptismal Vow or any modified form of it. And only one youth pastor has the youth make any kind of public commitment before the congregation. That commitment includes just three points: (1) Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? (2) Do you believe in the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? (3) Do you wish to become a member of __________ church?

The other youth pastors use the Blake or Case adaptations of the Baptismal Vow, or an adaptation of their own creation. However, they use this more in the form of a review sheet, addressed personally and privately, and not in a public examination of the candidate.

In explaining their practice of not using the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and the Baptismal Vow as they are written, several youth pastors talked about the need to communicate. If the youth do not really understand what is being said, or if
it is being packaged in a format that is foreign to them, what good is it to use that form, no matter how right and accurate it might be? In the same context they seriously question the advisability of Bible study guides that require the use of a particular translation, as in the case with most of the more commonly used lessons today. Not only does it seem to put an official stamp of approval on a given translation, but it may keep the student from using a translation that would be more readily understood and would speak more directly to the heart, without having to be explained.

There is much to be said in favor of teaching from standardized, officially approved documents of doctrinal belief. It maintains uniformity and it minimizes the risk of the teacher focusing on personal biases and riding hobby horses. On the other hand, if the official documents do not speak in a language that is readily understood by the baptismal candidate, or if they package the information in a format that is foreign to the baptismal candidate, then the documents are not achieving the mission that we would all want for them.

Understandably, the church is hesitant to create a great variety of official doctrinal statements. Similarly, it is hesitant to give carte blanche to pastors to adapt the statements as they see fit. But it is happening, by default, in places where youth pastors feel confident enough to break from tradition. And in the places where it is not happening, one wonders if it is to the detriment of the youth, and that the truths we hold are possibly not being communicated as effectively and as adequately as they should be.
Chapter 3

* * * *

THE URBAN CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

BRUCE CAMPBELL MOYER

April 8-9, 2002

The Context of Cities

Cities are not new. They date back to the fourth chapter of Genesis and found their first full flowering in post-diluvial Babel in the land of Shinar. At the same time, they are a very recent phenomenon as our urban population exploded during the twentieth century and became infused with new and volatile political, economic, and social factors. At the beginning of the twentieth century 15 percent of the world's population lived in cities. By 1950 that figure had grown to 28 percent and by 1975 it had become 41 percent. Today's global urban population is well over 50 percent.

As a twenty-first century phenomenon, cities present us with a new type of social organization, contrasted with that of towns and villages. The following chart (somewhat imperfectly) illustrates this.
Redfield's Rural-Urban Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RURAL LIFE</th>
<th>URBAN LIFE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>established, traditional</td>
<td>mobile, free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homogeneous</td>
<td>heterogeneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group-oriented</td>
<td>individualistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ascribed roles</td>
<td>achieved roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community</td>
<td>intersecting communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harmonious</td>
<td>managed conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>status quo, little change</td>
<td>rapid change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>egalitarian</td>
<td>hierarchical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holistic life</td>
<td>segmented life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human in scale</td>
<td>impersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sacred cosmos</td>
<td>secular cosmos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are, however, grains of truth in all of this, the city is far more complex than this simple model or picture. The city does not exist in opposition to countryside, but the two are linked in webs of complex social, economic, and political systems. Cities often incorporate peasant, even tribal communities within their boundaries (examples can be cited in such diverse places as Portland, Bombay, Cairo, and Washington, DC). Toeffler's three waves (the agricultural, industrial, and post-industrial information ages or revolutions) are frequently found side by side in many cities, particularly in the two-thirds World (1980). The chart also disregards large scale commuting back and forth, and the reality of telecommunications. Tom Wolfe suggests that the real difference between urban and rural is that urban equals connected or wired (2000). If this is true then there are few rural areas left in the Americas, Europe, and Southeast Asia.

There is a tendency, reflected in the above illustration, to create stereotypes in our minds: cities equal poverty, crime, danger, and secularism; while the countryside reflects family, safety, quietness, and spirituality.

In fact, cities differ from each other as much as neighborhoods differ within a city. Each has a specific history, personality, and rhythm. Many have spe-
cific functions. Some are political cities or cultural cities or commercial and economic cities, and, in the developing world there are primary cities that combine two or more of these functions

**The Nature of the Urban, Secular Mindset**

Secularism grew out of the emerging cities of Europe, following the Renaissance, Reformation, and Industrial Revolution. Together and reinforcing each other, urbanism and secularism now constitute one of the great challenges to the growth of the Christian Church. This has often been compounded by the pervasive Christian reluctance to grow with and relate to what Christianity has frequently viewed as the urban/secular threat or enemy, a social anti-Christ.

As Western civilization has swept over the globe, it has brought this secularism to the other urban centers through media, business, and education. Globalization is the present capstone to this process.

George Hunter provides a list of ten characteristics of urban, secular people that may help us understand what we are up against (Hunter 1992).

1. Secular people are ignorant about basic Christianity. They are biblically illiterate and thus they sense an awkwardness and even embarrassment at entering a sacred building. As such they tend to approach religion as consumers, prepared to “buy” what they want, what meets their needs.

2. Secular people are seeking life before death, not after. They are life oriented rather than earlier generations who were more traditionally death oriented. They see sickness as an inconvenience, not as a crisis. They have no concept of heaven or hell, only extinction. This means that religion must be related to the moment of living, not dying.

3. Urban, secular people are more conscious of doubt than of guilt. A profound sense of personal guilt has almost disappeared. Doubt (cynicism) puts people in a resistant frame of mind.

4. Urban, secular people have a negative image of the church. The church has been relegated to antiquity. Its answers to serious questions have been inadequate at best. They have more confidence in science and common sense. They live in the “public world” and understand religion to belong to a “private world” of non-scientific, personal opinion. For those with a scientific orientation, religion is no longer needed to answer life’s major questions. For those with a postmodern orientation, all opinions are equal and yours may or may not be “interesting.”
5. Urban, secular people experience multiple alienations. They are alienated from nature, from neighbors, and from political and economic systems over which they have no power. Often they are alienated from their work, which provides no meaning to their lives.

6. Urban, secular people are untrusting; Christians thus, should view people as untrusting, fearful, and suspicious, rather than evil, depraved, or rebellious. Secular people’s model of “god,” if they bother to have one, is the grim reaper, Santa, a cop, or a duplicitous politician.

7. Urban, secular people may experience low self-esteem with the disappearance of a sense of personal meaning and dignity. They may wonder, if a person dies and no one notices, did that person ever really live?

8. Urban, secular people often experience forces in history as out of control. They may see history as an endless series of large-scale surprises with no one in charge.

9. In addition to this urban, secular people often experience forces in personality as being out of control; there are forces in their own personalities and their families that they cannot control. They experience widespread, self-destructive addictions.

10. The last common thread is that urban, secular people simply cannot find the door to God or to any other over-arching paradigm or meta-story.

**Current Attempts at Contextualization**

It is obvious to the concerned pastor or evangelist that while urban mission may not require trans-oceanic travel or the mastery of another language, it is just as much cross-cultural mission as any “foreign field,” and, as such, requires serious attention to the critical contextualization of our fundamental teachings.

In preparing this paper I chose to survey a brief number of urban pastors from cities around the world. I asked them for examples of how they have adapted or contextualized the Fundamental Beliefs of the Adventist Church to enable urban, secular people to understand, accept, and appreciate them. I share here a number of responses from these urban practitioners.

Among the pastors that I surveyed, one of the most common responses was a sense of the irrelevance of the original question. Urban outreach is not directed to people who are asking, What is true or What is truth? Urban people are asking much more practical questions such as, How can I cope? and, more
sub-consciously, Where can I find community? In the poorer sections of cities the question is more often, How can I survive? How can I get through this week or even this day?

Friendship is often the first point of Christian contact. This is not one of the fundamental beliefs. Worship is often the first point of contextualization. Amazingly, worship is not one of the Fundamental Beliefs of our church. Yet it certainly requires contextualization. Because it is so much a part of us, we fail to realize that our Western-based worship style is very rural. It is formed by our Western individualistic, privatized culture. Even the time of the service is geared to the accomplishment of farm chores. How many of us have to milk cows and collect eggs and eat a large breakfast before leaving for Sabbath School?

Urban worship reflects the urban lifestyle. It is much more participatory, immediate, engaging, egalitarian, and enthusiastic. The word “charismatic” comes to mind, devoid of some of the extreme behaviors generally associated with “Pentecostalism.” Some of our “celebration” churches have led the way in exploring this urban style. Because urban people are more prone to sleep in on Sabbath mornings, urban worship may also break from the traditional 9:30 A.M. schedule. Millennium Ministries in Silver Spring, MD begin the day with a continental breakfast and get started with worship at about 12:00 noon.

And what of our more specific beliefs?

One response noted that, “I’m doing a brief history of the development of the Bible by looking at the development of the canon, ancient manuscripts, and translations—English, Filipino, Spanish—since each language group is represented. None of the Filipino people I talked to, including several pastors, knew who first translated the Bible into the Filipino dialects. I called Wycliffe Bible Translators who referred me to their Summer Linguistic Institute. All those I talked to knew the Wycliffe people who had done translations, but no one knew the pioneers. . . . One of the Wycliffe librarians called me from Dallas, TX and told me he had found a book that gave a brief history. The people (my church members) will learn some things they have not known before.” Note that urban congregations are inevitably ethnically diverse and all of that diversity must be recognized and celebrated. When the Bible has been related to my ethnic background, to me, it becomes more real and meaningful. There is also a naturalness about using web-based resources.

Another urban pastor responded to my survey, saying, “I’ve addressed the Spirit of Prophecy issue. The view I present is that the technical word for proph-
et is one who speaks for another. I use the story of Moses and Aaron as support where God said to Moses that Aaron will be your mouth, your prophet. I’ve also brought in the aspect of someone who speaks with authority or on behalf of another. I’ve linked these statements to Ellen White by saying words to the effect that she was a woman who spoke with authority and was accepted by many in the Adventist Church as speaking for God. So far, no one has objected to these statements and the conclusion.” Ellen White and the Spirit of Prophecy thus becomes a self-authenticating, personal belief, using de-mystified jargon.

Marriage and the Family is certainly a significant belief, particularly in the urban setting where “serial polygamy” is often the rule. An urban pastor writes, “Song of Songs was my subject. I’d never preached a sermon from the Songs before. The book affirms human sexuality, and addresses in very open language the topic of human sexual desire. I made it clear to people that this is a love poem that affirms human sensuality. More people asked for tapes than of any sermon I’ve done in a long time.”

In an urban setting sex and sexuality is used commercially. It sells everything from tires to toothpaste. This approach stresses God’s intentions for sex while defusing the erotic commercial use of sexuality.

A respondent spoke of how he deals with the Sabbath in an urban setting. Rather than relate Sabbath to eschatology, judgment, and obedience, he spoke of the Sabbath as a positive response to the anti-Semitism of the early church, and of returning to the Jewish roots of Christianity, parts of which had been severed in the second and third centuries when the Jewish revolts made “Jewishness” very unpopular, causing Sunday to be adopted to provide a more politically correct image. Others have taught the benefits of the Sabbath in a stressful urban world. In urban society that is very short on meta-stories, or overarching stories that explain all of life, the Sabbath as a day to relieve stress is much more understandable.

Relative to Spiritual Gifts and Ministries, some urban churches are experimenting with new forms of gift-based leadership in which a “pastor” becomes a member-facilitator, rather than an authoritative voice based on ordination. Other urban churches, aware of the moral (and legal) implications of gender in ministry are ordaining, or at least commissioning, women for ministry. Recently a major controversy raged in the Adventist churches of one African country over the propriety of women preaching. Urban Adventist churches won out in a Union statement that asserted the right of women to exercise speaking gifts in all the churches.
In terms of the contextualizing process, language becomes an issue. It has been noted that growing urban churches “adapt to the language, music, and style of the target population’s culture” (Hunter 1992:32). This means far more than merely using the local dialect or the eradication of “stained-glass, god-talk,” it involves the style of speaking, and the use of appropriate technologies. For urban people dialogue will often replace preaching (one-to-one or to many). Ministry to urban people also takes into consideration that the music (certainly an important part of language) must be appropriate. Throughout most of my Adventist life (1958 to the present) Christian music has generally reflected a musical style that was popular on the radio twenty or more years previously. Somehow the passage of two decades has been understood to have sanctified or cleansed the style for church use. Urban churches will certainly close that time gap.

Suggestions

Contextualization, particularly in the Western, urban, secular setting, and now increasingly diffuse in the two-thirds world, involves working with the worldview of urban people. Contextualization must address their plausibility structure, or their sense of what is real and reasonable. Personal, daily experience is real. Struggling to keep a job is real. Trying to manage a mix of relationships or to understand teenagers is real. Dealing with the complexity of multiple urban systems and globalization is real. The majority of Western, urban people are not into theological reasoning, but rather they are into coping and survival. Occasionally urban people are conscious of moral issues or dilemmas, but for many truth is too relative and personal to be effectively addressed.

Urban people are more comfortable with a scientific method, although they may not totally understand it or its presuppositions. They are not familiar with or comfortable with myths or meta-stories.

The issue of Sabbath vs. Sunday lacks historical meaning to most urban people. Biblically and historically illiterate, they are not asking what is right or correct, but what is real? They are less interested in ancient historical conflicts than in the practical benefits of the subject. How will this “Sabbath” enable me to cope better? What is in it for me?

When one watches popular TV (and U.S. television is exported to the world), one realizes that one of the serious quests of urban people is a sense of community. From Cheers to Friends and beyond, people are seeking a commu-
nity to which they can belong. In extreme situations, youth gangs or al Qaeda satisfy this longing. In the city the church must be presented in this light, as a community where “everybody knows your name.” But the church must be more than the presented ideal, it must actually be that community in which people are accepted and affirmed.

While the Scriptures should and will remain ultimately determinative of life and practice, urban people are also conscious of other “spiritually authoritative voices” in the media, in politics, and even in other faiths. A wise urban pastor or missionary knows these voices and can quote them, as did the first-century urban missionary Paul (Acts 17:28).

There are other beliefs that may need to be elevated to fundamental status. In many parts of the urban world people are conscious of the need for power. People need power to help in answering questions, in making decisions, and for protection from evil spirits. In the city the Holy Spirit must be presented, not as a cold, factual doctrine, but as a real power, demonstrably at work in the lives of believers. This may also involve the question of spirits and ancestors.

Richard Rice has just published his new book, Believing, Behaving, Belonging (2002). The book discusses three levels of participating in a religious community. Traditionally Adventists have followed a process of becoming a church member by moving from believing to behaving to belonging. In urban settings the process is more likely to move from belonging to behaving to believing. Urban people will commit themselves to a community in which they find meaning, in order to find faith. Behavior and belief will follow naturally.

Notes

1 In 1940 four of the five largest cities were in the Western world: New York, London, Paris, and Berlin. Today four of the five largest are in the two-thirds world: Tokyo-Yokohama (29 million), Mexico City (23 million), Sao Paulo (19 million), and Shanghai (18 million). There are 3,450 cities over 100,000 population, 330 mega-cities of over a million, 45 super cities of 4 million plus, and 12 super giants of over 10 million.


3 Cf. a line from the musical Rent, “There is no future, there is no past. I live each moment as my last.”

4 Personal reading of local church organization records in rural Michigan.
Reference List


Working among the Jewish people is a privilege, because we are working among the people of the Bible, the very people of Jesus and the apostles. Jesus was born among Jews and started his ministry among the Jews.

Because the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists are biblically based and were authenticated by Jesus and his disciples through the Hebrew Scriptures (the Tanach which was the whole Bible of their time) we can teach all of them to Jewish people today.

If as missiologists we think that we have to reformulate the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs, it is not because we want to change them. They are from the Bible and from God, but we should contextualize them in a way that enables them to be understood by the people we want to reach.

It is important to understand that the difficulty in sharing our beliefs with Jews is not in our beliefs themselves, but with the historical attitude of Christians toward the Jews. A further difficulty is the many statements in Adventist literature which can be understood by Jews in a very negative way.
It would be better for the Adventist Church to change her vocabulary and to distance herself from the deeds of the “Church” during the many centuries since the time of Christ. I am very confident that such a change is possible, because from time to time Adventist leaders come out with powerful and positive statements in this direction. The latest example was published in a recent editorial in the *Adventist Review*. William G. Johnsson in his editorial entitled “Please No More ‘Crusades’” recognized that the “Church” killed thousands of Jews and Muslims during those infamous crusades so it would be better to avoid such a emotional word in the future. Notice the tone of that article: “A motley, disorganized host of about 600,000 men, besides women and children, embarked on the First Crusade. Freed from moral obligations, they wrought devastation everywhere. Many died of pestilence and hunger; some 40,000 reached the Holy Land and captured Jerusalem in 1099 in a bloody slaughter that left not one Muslim or Jew alive in the city” (Johnsson 2002:5).

I remember studying the Bible with a couple of Jews in France several years ago. They were very happy to know more about the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of their beliefs in Jesus as the Messiah. At that time the Adventist Church had just issued the new book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe... Biblical Exposition of Twenty-Seven Fundamental Doctrines* in a French edition. After studying for some time I offered them this book. After two weeks of reading they gave me back the book and broke off all connection with our church. They could not understand how the Adventist Church, even after Auschwitz and the holocaust could make such strong statements against Israel, neither could they accept some statements which could be understood as affirmation of “replacement theology” statements.

On another occasion, I received an email from Jeff Zaremski, a pastor in Florida who was working among Jewish people. Jeff wanted to get in contact with the Messianic pastor in his area of the state, but that pastor did not want any contact with Adventists because of the Adventist stance on “replacement theology.”

I can give several other examples of experiences I have had in Israel. Many people are interested in our church because we have had the courage to come back to the full truth of the Bible, including the validity of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath, clean and unclean foods, etc., but many cannot understand what we are saying about the rejection of the Jewish people.
Use of the Hebrew Scriptures by Jesus and the Apostles

Since Jesus, the apostles, and the early Christians, who were predominantly Jews, were preaching the gospel among Jews, we should follow their example.

The Bible of the Early Church was the Hebrew Scriptures

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16, 17). “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of the Scripture” (1 Tim 4:13).

Jesus and the apostles spoke a lot with the Jews of their time. They let them know that all that happened was written in the Hebrew Scriptures. Notice the many references and quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament:

“As the Scripture has said” is found thirty-three times in the New Testament. In this way Jesus and his disciples clearly indicated that they were Jews and carefully followed the Jewish Scriptures.

“It is written” is used ninety-two times in the New Testament. Perhaps the most significant usage is found in Luke 24:44-47 when Jesus himself explained what had happened just a few days before. “He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”

“The Lord had said through the prophet” appears twenty-eight times in the New Testament. The words of the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures—Elijah, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Micah, Jonah, Joel, and especially Moses—were quoted with this type of introduction. Also used were the phrases, “was said through the prophet” or “was spoken through the prophet.”

“As it is written in the Law” is another phrase used to refer to the Hebrew Scripture in the New Testament. The term “Law” was used in the broad sense of the word and referred to the entire body of writings. An example would be when Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the law. The term “Law” is often
used with the same meaning as Scripture or the Bible. For example, "have you not read in the Law" or "as it is written in the Law" is used forty-eight times just in the gospels and Acts. In the Pauline writing these phrases refer 142 times to the Torah or the Bible, seven (perfect number) times in the letter of James the concept is referred to as the "Perfect Law" or the "Royal Law," and in his first letter, John explains that the definition of sin is to break the Law, another reference to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Case Studies from the Bible

The best case studies available on how to present the truths of the Scriptures to Jewish people are found in the New Testament examples of how the disciples worked with Jews. The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and were very successful in presenting biblical truth. Notice three case studies: (1) in Acts 2, Peter's speech to a large group of people, (2) in Acts 7, Stephen's speech to the small group in the Sanhedrin, and (3) in Acts 8, Philip's speech to an individual, the Ethiopian eunuch.

Peter's Speech in Acts 2:22-41

In this narrative Peter was preaching to a very large crowd. The story takes place in Jerusalem during the feast of Shavuot, or Pentecost. The people in the audience had come from many countries (Acts 2:5-11). At the end of the passage we are told that three thousand people were baptized (Acts 2:41), a number that was apparently only a part of the audience who heard Peter's speech.

Peter began his sermon by asserting that Jesus was "a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs." Peter was prudent and took care at the beginning of his sermon not to say that Jesus was the Messiah. He affirmed that even though Jesus was put to death, "God raised him from the dead . . . because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him." And then Peter began to quote from the Hebrew Scriptures. Acts 2:26-28 is a quotation of Ps 16:8-11.

This is an important quotation for Peter. He was speaking with the Jews who were in Jerusalem. The Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah, and according to their understanding, the Messiah was the one who was to sit on the throne of David. Peter argues his case by only quoting from Psalms and speaking about King David.
After quoting the Psalms, Peter closely identifies himself with his audience for they were Jews, just as he was. He speaks to their hearts by saying, “Brothers, I can tell you confidently” (Acts 2:29). Peter, as well as all Jews, considered David not only a king of Israel but also a prophet (Acts 2:30-31), so by quoting David he uses a source that bolsters his case.

Then comes the affirmation and the fulfillment of the prophecies referred to. “God has raised this Jesus to life,” and they can produce witnesses. The law requires two or three witnesses (Deut 19:15), but Peter can produce many more than just two or three. Jesus appeared to the twelve, and then the 120 disciples who were in the upper room, and then “he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time” (1 Cor 15:6). Then Peter said, “We are all witnesses of the fact” (Acts 2:31).

Peter again quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures (Acts 2:34, 35; cf. Ps 110:1) to prove that what was said concerning David was not for himself but for one of his descendants.

The end of this account closes with two appeals and the response from the audience (Acts 2:36-41) that results in 3,000 people being baptized.

**Stephen's Speech in Acts 7**

Stephen's speech is more of a defense than a speech to convince people about Jesus. There are no baptisms at the end of his speech and Stephen was stoned by the angry leaders.

But, this speech presents an interesting case study because Stephen was preaching before a small group of priests and members of the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:15). Stephen had been falsely accused by some foreign Jews (Acts 6:9-11), so wanting to defend himself he explained that he was not willing to change anything in the religion of his fathers. In order to emphasize his commitment to the religion of the nation he started his speech at the very beginning of Jewish history with the story of Abraham (Acts 7:2-8), Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers (Acts 7:8-16), and of the Hebrews in Egypt and their slavery (Acts 7:17-19). Stephen then refers to the story of Moses, Aaron, and the Hebrews in the desert (Acts 7:20-46). Then he reminds them of the temple and Solomon who built it (Acts 7:47-48).

Only after all this history of the Jewish people does Stephen quote specifically some texts from the Hebrew Scriptures (Acts 7:49-50; cf. Isa 66:1, 2). Then he reminds the priests and members of the Sanhedrin of the sins of Israel. As
a result his hearers became furious, and in the end stoned Stephen with Saul assenting and looking on (Acts 8:1).

This report from the book of Acts is very dramatic and has a tragic end for Stephen, but it offers insight into how present-day Adventists can present the gospel and Jesus to the Jewish people. Stephen's approach included a telling of Jewish history and pointing out to them how good God was during those 2,000 years.

While there were no baptisms as a direct result of Stephen's speech, the narrative does mention that Saul (Paul) was there. I am sure the speech of Stephen touched his heart, and even though officially he went to Damascus to persecute the Christians who were living there, is it possible that his trip was a pretext to flee Jerusalem and to think more about all the events that had taken place there in the preceding months. I believe that Saul, after hearing Stephen, was open and ready to accept Jesus when he received his vision on the road to Damascus.

**Philip's Bible Study in Acts 8**

This case study is very interesting because Philip gives an individual Bible study to a Jew. I believe that there is strong support for the fact that this Ethiopian was a Jew, living in Ethiopia like thousands of other Ethiopian Jews (today we know them as the Falasha). The Ethiopian had come to Jerusalem to worship God and as he returned home he was reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The first verse in the story clearly indicates that teaching biblical truths is not our work, but is God's work, and the great need is for people to be open and available for the Holy Spirit to use (Acts 8:26).

Philip is led by the Spirit to an encounter with a fellow who is reading the Bible. The Ethiopian was already open to spiritual things and was willing to listen and learn. When Philip met him he started by asking a question, "Do you understand" (Acts 8:30)?

Philip's attitude is interesting because Philip began to teach from the very text that the eunuch was reading. The text was a very well-known text for a Jew, coming from the Hebrew Scriptures (Isa 53:7, 8). The response of the Ethiopian was very positive, and as he heard the story of Jesus, the Ethiopian was convinced of the necessity of baptism. Philip gave his appeal and baptized him (Acts 8:36-39).
Recent Case Studies

Recently in Israel, Adventist members have had many experiences in sharing the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs with ordinary Jews and even rabbis. Following are two examples:

Sharing the Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs with an Individual

Initial contact with an observant Jew led to a discussion of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. The contact was surprised to learn of Adventist beliefs and that they were consistently Bible-based. A request for more information on Seventh-day Adventists was made and pamphlets describing who Adventists are, how the denomination was formed, and Adventist beliefs were given. After studying the information, the recipient described the experience as 'an epiphany'.

Although follow-up was not continued, the contact had a positive attitude towards Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and the basis was laid for acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah and his certain return.

Sharing the Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs with a Small Group

One of the church members in Israel regularly attends a class that studies a portion of the Torah each week. During the discussion of the passages, the member often has the opportunity to show how Adventists are consistent with Scripture and conservative Judaism's understanding of biblical truths. Some of the class members and even the rabbi leading the class were initially surprised to hear how much Jews and Adventist shared in common. The class members had not been aware that Seventh-day Adventists followed the biblical teaching on creation, lifestyle, and the Sabbath. When the topic of tithing was being discussed, the church member was asked what the Seventh-day Adventist position was. When appropriate, our member refers to Jesus as fulfilling the criteria of the Messiah. These references are always met with respect. The interaction has led to a genuine interest in Seventh-day Adventists in general and in our teachings in particular.
Lessons From These Case Studies

1. Jews should teach Jews. This principle is also supported from the Spirit of Prophecy.
2. Jews, their culture, and history should be respected.
3. Jews need Jesus, just like any other people.
4. Jews can be converted and baptized.
5. The New Testament and Jesus must be presented in the light of the Hebrew Scriptures. “Souls will be saved, from the Jewish nation, as the doors of the New Testament are unlocked with the key of the Old Testament. Christ will be recognized as the Savior of the world, as it is seen how clearly the New Testament explains the Old. Many of the Jewish people will by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer” (White 1946:579).
6. The presentation of biblical truth should begin with and affirm what is already known or can be read in the Hebrew Scriptures, or from traditional Jewish literature and history reference books.
7. Contacts should be reassured that their Jewish identity and culture are not diminished by their recognition of Jesus as the Messiah.

Example of a Good Bible Study for Jewish People

The Jewish Adventist Friendship Centre works closely with Shabbat Shalom, which is the main publication for English-speaking Jewish people. Dr. Jacques Doukhan, editor of Shabbat Shalom, recently published a new set of Bible lessons called “Shema Israel,” comprised of fifteen Bible studies. Each lesson includes a document or an article from Shabbat Shalom for background reading. This series of Bible studies is very effective in reaching Jews, because only Hebrew Scriptures and traditional Hebrew references are used. The study “The Nature of Man” is included in the appendix to illustrate the approach that is used.

Conclusions

It is vitally important to be sensitive to the particular interests of those to whom we are witnessing. We should listen to their questions and comments and respond to what they are interested in initially, rather than merely following our own agenda.
Whether the times we are living in really are "a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation" or if it only seems that way, people are distressed and perplexed, anxious and even fearful about what is going to happen. Through sharing our fundamental beliefs with Jewish people, Jews can be reassured of God's control of history, can be brought to an appreciation of his love and care for them personally, and given confidence in the soon coming of the longed for Messiah, our Lord Jesus.
Appendix

The Nature of Man

By Dr. Jacques Doukhan

1. How did humans originate?

Text: “And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27, cf. Gen 4:9, 10).

Note: “For this reason man (Adam) was created only one person, for the sake of peace between mankind, so that one man should not say to his fellow: ‘My father was greater than yours.” (Sanhedrin 88b).

2. What is the human person made of?

Text: “The LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being (Gen 2:7, cf. Gen 3:19).

3. What does the “soul” mean in Hebrew?

Text: “In the towns of the latter peoples, however, which the LORD your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall not let a soul remain alive” (Deut 20:16).

Note: The expressions such as “my soul,” “his soul,” etc., are idiomatic expressions for the personal pronoun I, his, etc. (See Lev 11:43; Ps 3:2; Jer 37:9).

The term nefesh means the neck of the throat (Ps 69:2) or the breath that passes through the throat (Job 41:13) or the life-blood (Lev 17:10, 11). The term neshamah also means breath (1 Kgs 17:17).

4. What are the functions of the soul?

Text: “When the LORD enlarges your territory, as He has promised you, and you say, ‘I shall eat some meat,’ for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish” (Deut 12:20, cf. Prov 3:22).

Note: The nefesh can be hungry (Ps 107:9), be thirsty (Ps 143:6), enjoy good food (Isa 55:2); it can also love (Gen 34:3), be troubled (Ps 31:9), know (Ps 139:14), be wise (Prov 3:22), worship God
5. What are the functions of the flesh or the body?
   Texts: “Spoilers have come, Upon all the bare heights of the wilderness. For a sword of the LORD devours from one end of the land to the other; No flesh is safe” (Jer 12:12).
   Note: The words for soul and body are often interchangeable (Num 31:35; Ps 145:21).

6. How did God create man?
   Text: “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.’ And God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him: male and female He created them” (Gen 1:26, 27).
   Note: “The love of God for humans is manifested in the act that God created them in His image, and especially, that He revealed this to them” (Avot 3:15).

7. Why is it forbidden to kill men?
   Text: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in His image did God make man” (Gen 9:6).
   Note: “He who destroys one soul in Israel is as if he had destroyed the whole world” (Mishnah, Sanhedrin, 37).

8. What does the fact that God created man in His image imply for men in their lives?
   Texts: “Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2; cf. Gen 9:6; Exod 20:8-11).
   Note: “Walk in the ways of God; as God is merciful and gracious, so you will be; as God is righteous and just, so you will be; as God is holy, so you will be” (Sifre, Ekeb 85a).

9. What is the relation between the physical (body) and the spiritual (soul) dimensions of the human person?
   Texts: “Please test your servants for ten days, giving us legumes to eat and water to drink. Whenever the king put a question to them requiring wisdom and understanding, he found them to be ten times better than all the magicians and exorcists throughout his realm” (Dan 1:12, 20).
Note: "The body cannot survive without the soul, nor soul without the body" (Tanh Va-Yikza 11). "I will tell you a parable. To what is the matter likened? To a king who has a beautiful orchard . . . and he placed two guardians over it, one a cripple and the other blind. Said the cripple to the blind man, 'I see beautiful ripe fruit in the orchard. Come on, carry me and we will bring and eat them.' The cripple rode on the back of the blind man and they brought and ate them. After a while the owner of the orchard came and said to them, 'Where is my lovely fruit?' The cripple answered, 'Do I have legs to go?' Answered the blind man, 'Do I have eyes to see?' What did he do? He placed the cripple on the back of the blind man and judged them as one—so also the Holy Blessed One brings the soul and throws it into the body and judges them as one" (Sanhedrin 91 a-b).

10. How do the spiritual dimensions affect the physical ones?
Text: "Let fidelity and steadfastness not leave you; bind them about your throat, write them on the tablet of your mind, and you will find favor and approbation in the eyes of God and man" (Prov 3:3-4).

11. How do the physical dimensions affect the spiritual ones?
Texts: "My son, do not lose sight of them; hold on to resourcefulness and foresight" (Prov 3:21; cf. Ps 31:11).

12. Why is health a spiritual issue?
Texts: "They are life to him who finds them, healing for his whole body" (Prov 4:22; cf. 1 Cor 3:16).
Note: "The preservation of the health of the body is one of the godly ways."

13. What is the connection between being alive and being spiritual?
Texts: "Send back Your breath, they are created, and You renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30; cf. Num 27:18).
Note: The first implication we may infer from the story of this creative act is that man's life is directly dependent on his relationship with God. God breathes into man's nostrils and man becomes alive. Life is then a dimension of the "encounter" between God and man. The notion of "air" or "breath" (ruah) (Job 15:30; Isa 26:18) which refers to the Hebrew principle of life (Gen 6:17; 7:15; cf. Gen 1:2; Job 33:4; Isa 38:16), refers also to the Hebrew principle of spirituality (Num 27:18; Isa 63:10, 11). There is no distinction between
the *ruah* of God and that of man (Ps 104:30). The lesson of this identification is double. First it means that man owes his life to God. God gave him the *ruah*, the breath. God is the Creator. It also implies a philosophy of existence. Man exists only in relationship with God. Man is religious, or he does not exist. The religious dimension is not simply an answer to spiritual needs, it is a biological necessity (Gen 2:17; cf. 3:17, 19). The Israelite of the Bible does not envisage life without that dimension. This would be an absurdity (Ps 14:1). Religion is not a choice, it is simply the observation of a fact. We cannot omit the spiritual life as we cannot omit breathing. On the other hand, if a man stops breathing, he stops having a spiritual life; the dead cannot worship (Ps 115:17).

14. Can man survive apart from his fellow human beings?
   Text: “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him’” (Gen 2:18).

15. How does the nature of man affect his destiny?
   Text: “By the sweat of your brow Shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground—For from it you were taken. For dust you are, And to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19).

Note: A reading document from *Shabbat Shalom*, December 1996, 18-20 and a questionnaire follow.

### Reference List


While serving as a pastor in northeast Thailand, I was invited to give Bible studies to a group of village elders in a small village several kilometers out in the country. Though I had been working in Thailand for several years already, my experience to date had been primarily that of nurturing those who had already made a basic commitment to Christianity and Adventism. I had virtually no experience working directly with Buddhists. So, after agreeing to go, I was faced with the question of what I would present to these men. I knew very little about them except that they were Buddhists, literate (probably at the fourth grade level), and wanting to study about Christianity.

I searched through everything in my library—from *Bible Readings for the Home Circle, Daniel and Revelation*, and other books on the fundamental beliefs of Adventists to various Bible study outlines and courses I had collected through the years. There was nothing in my background or studies (an undergraduate minor in religion and a M.A. in religion with a concentration in missions) that had prepared me to know how to give Bible studies to a Bud-
What approach should I use? Where should I begin? What subjects or doctrines would make sense to them?

As I looked over all the materials in my library, it became clear that the standard starting point for our Western model of Bible studies was usually something that would help establish the certainty of the Bible as the Word of God by either using a series of Bible texts proving that point or by focusing on prophecy. I rejected the first of these approaches since it seemed pointless to try to use a series of Bible texts to prove the inspiration of the Bible with people who had no previous knowledge or experience with the Bible and had no more reason to believe it than they did the local newspaper. So, I settled on prophecy, Dan 2, to be exact. It seemed like a valid choice for several reasons:

1. Daniel and the Buddha were contemporaries, thus giving me both historic and geographic points of contact. (I had already learned that it is important for Christianity to show its Asian roots, since it is frequently dismissed of no consequence as only a Western religion.)

2. Dan 2 seemed like a good choice because meaningful dreams are significant to many people in this part of the world.

3. Dan 2 provides a panoramic view of history from very early times, culminating in the second coming which is a very significant Adventist belief.

4. Lastly, I had some graphics (a picture chart) that would help me with the presentation.

When I actually arrived in the village, however, I gradually began to realize that there were some serious problems with my proposed presentation. The most obvious challenge was going to be the lack of previous knowledge the villagers would have of world (European) history. I knew intuitively that these men seated before me knew nothing of Babylon or Medo-Persia, and probably had very little, if any, knowledge even of Greece and Rome. What, I wondered, is the message and significance of Dan 2 for these men? What should I say? The moment of truth arrived, and with a prayer for guidance, I dove in. You may decide that what happened in the next half hour was not guided by the Lord. I can live with that, and I have wondered about that myself.

I started with an introduction to the historic and geographic framework for the book of Daniel, thus linking Daniel and the Buddha. I also focused on the importance of the king’s dream, and his confidence in the supernatural. I then opened the chart to the image of Dan 2 and began. At that point I decided against mentioning Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome by name or any of the well-known dates we generally use. Instead I felt impressed to present...
it somewhat as follows: "This statue that the king saw in his dream depicted
the history of the world from earliest times when this world was more perfect
(the head of gold) down through various eras of history as the world and the
nations of the world became less and less perfect. Today we are living down at
the end of history, depicted by the feet. The iron and clay shows that the na­
tions and peoples of the world cannot get along and that there is strife and war
everywhere."

At this, my audience nodded in agreement. "But," and at this I turned the
page to show the great stone coming, "the Creator God who made the world
originally, is going to return and destroy all the evil in the world and recreate a
perfect world once again where the people who choose to trust the Creator will
live in peace and harmony." When I finished, there was a polite silence followed
by fifteen to twenty minutes of animated discussion as these men discussed all
that I had presented, looking at it from various angles, struggling to understand
the concepts, struggling to find something in their previous experience and
understanding that would help it make sense.

"How did this (or that) compare with such and such a teaching of the Bud­
dha?" I heard them say over and over. What had seemed simplified and straight­
forward to me was totally baffling and beyond their understanding. They had
no cognitive or experiential hooks to hang anything on. Even the linear view of
time my story implied was a worldview shift that was beyond their immediate
comprehension because of their own cyclical view of time.

You may rightfully question my biblical interpretation. I know it would
not stand the tests of exegesis. And I never gave that Bible study in the same
way again. However, looking back, I realize that my problems were more and
greater than just bad exegesis. They were multiple. Most significantly, I had
chosen a topic that was inappropriate as a starting point for Bible studies for
these people. But, where should I have begun?

Case Study Number 2

During my years at the Chiang Mai Educational Center where my work
was primarily one of nurturing young people who had already made a basic
commitment to Christianity, I saw over and over again the need to address
worldview issues that, if not addressed, would create basic and long-lasting
challenges to Christian growth and maturity. But to do this, I had to go out­
side the bounds of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and create my own emphasis.
Because much of Buddhism, as practiced by the common people, is really folk Buddhism, we had to deal regularly with issues related to the spirit world, spirit possession of people and objects, amulets, and charms which led to power confrontations at times. During one incident of spirit possession I was called up to the dorm to pray with a spirit-possessed girl only to find that her roommates had gone all over the dorm and collected all the Bibles they could find and she was completely covered with Bibles. One of her friends sat by her side holding a picture of Jesus inches above her tightly closed eyes, shouting at her, "Look at the picture. Look at the picture!"

At that point I realized that in the minds of these students "Christian amulets" were simply replacing the Buddhist amulets they knew so well. I was watching syncretism at work not because we had "baptized" previous beliefs and practices as we frequently accuse other churches of having done in the past, but because we had simply not addressed the serious issues in their lives.

Over the next few years I sought to better understand some of the basics of Buddhism, especially the beliefs and practices of the average person. Later, and after both of the above events, while working in Bangkok I was asked to hold several series of evangelistic meetings for Buddhists. But though I had studied and knew considerably more about Buddhism by then, I still struggled to know how to present American Adventism in a way that would be meaningful to my listeners. Though I have a strong belief in and commitment to all 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I eventually concluded that for Adventism to be significant to my Buddhist friends, it must offer answers to their questions about life, not answers to my questions.

Eventually I developed studies on the topics most significant to a Buddhist—suffering—its cause and cure (the core teaching of the Buddha), karma, making merit, and even prayer from a Buddhist viewpoint. And since Buddhism in Thailand is definitely folk Buddhism with many beliefs about, and a great deal of focus on the spirit world, it was important to address all aspects of their beliefs, concerns, and fears in regard to the spirit world, including not only the power of the spirits, but such things as amulets, charms, and fortune tellers.

My experience of frustration in seeking to bring Buddhists in Thailand to a meaningful and life-changing encounter with Seventh-day Adventist Christianity caused me to wonder if our lack of success among Buddhists in general can be traced to our failure to address their belief system and their questions about life. Adventists have traditionally presented a standard series of doctrinal
studies that have been developed and honed in the West, growing out of 2,000 years of Christian discussion, tradition, and culture. But those doctrinal studies are not addressing the burning issues that trouble the Eastern mind. If the Bible is a book for all people, it must answer their questions and address their issues as well as ours.

In addition, I have wondered if it is possible that what at times appears to be a somewhat superficial experience among some Adventists from Buddhist backgrounds is not growing out of the same root. Many members wholeheartedly accept and genuinely believe in the tenets of Adventism they have been taught, and yet, because their undying beliefs and Buddhist worldview issues have never been addressed, some seem to practice a type of split-level Christianity. Would such converts from Buddhism be stronger and better Adventists in the long run if we addressed more than the 27 fundamentals? My experience leads me to believe that they would.
Introduction

Any belief system is imbedded in a particular worldview. As we discuss the communication of Adventist beliefs in the Muslim context it may be helpful before we examine the details to take a view of the broad picture—the worldview as it is related to the belief system. In brief I am using worldview to refer to the fundamental assumptions about reality. It orders our culture and various fields of knowledge from mission, to theology, to science.
## The Religious Worldviews of Adventism And Islam Compared

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ADVENTIST WORLDVIEW</th>
<th>MUSLIM WORLDVIEW</th>
<th>COMPARISON</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>God has revealed himself in creation and created works, in Scripture through the prophets, in Jesus, and through the Holy Spirit.</td>
<td>God the Creator has sent messages of guidance through his messengers who wrote in the Torah, Zaboor, and Injil. The final revelation was given to Muhammad in the Qur’an.</td>
<td>We agree on the basic concept of the Creator God sending messages through the prophets for the guidance of his people. We need to move the Muslim to the more personal concept of God revealing himself. While respecting Muhammad as a reformer and the Qur’an as containing some truth we must move the basis of faith to the Scriptures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>God is “Superintendent” of history, and is working out his eternal purposes in the “Great Controversy” between good and evil.</td>
<td>God, in his transcendence, does as he wills in history. There is a battle between God and Iblis (Satan), and Satan is seeking to deceive as many as possible, but God provides protection and guidance to the faithful.</td>
<td>The key concepts are similar including the God—Satan controversy. We can build on this to introduce the “expanded” understandings of the issues in the Great Controversy and how God is working through a demonstration of his character rather than force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is the Creator of all things, his creation of the earth was perfect, but was defiled by the fall of man.</td>
<td>God is the Creator of all things, a perfect world that was lost in the mistake of Adam and Eve.</td>
<td>God as Creator is the same. The fall of man is similar but the nature and consequence of the fall is not as severe in Islam. Again we build on the similarity to lead to an understanding of the seriousness of sin leading to a state of brokenness.</td>
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God's work in solving the sin problem in the universe, refuting the accusations of the evil one, becoming one with us, sacrificing himself in human form, reconciling us to himself. Thus ensuring the security of the universe from sin through eternity, securing full loyalty and trust of his creation while respecting the individual freedom to either give or withhold that loyalty.

God solves the problem of "misguidance" in his universe by (1) forgiving the repentant and submissive believer; and (2) judging between one's good and bad works on the day of judgment. His judgment is transcendent and final and results in the faithful in paradise and the unbelievers in hell fire.

This entire proposition contains perhaps the largest degree of difference. The general concept of forgiveness and a day of judgment are similar. However, the way of forgiveness through God reconciling man to himself by incarnating and then sacrificing himself must be gradually taught. God's respect for the individual's freedom of choice is news to the Muslim.

| The creation of a new heaven and earth at the end of time and the beginning of an eternity of righteousness. | God will establish a rule of righteousness and cleanse the earth from unbelief, ushering in an eternity of righteousness. | The general concepts are quite similar. The details of the millennium and the final end of sin vary. |

Statement of the Issue

The question of how we move "the message" across cultural differences, worldview differences, and socialization differences takes on unique relevance to Seventh-day Adventists. Our eschatology sees a unique role for Adventists in the last days, a worldwide prophetic movement with the mission of preparing a people to meet Jesus. This is the Kingdom of God in people's hearts in contrast to the common Christian motif of the "reign of Christ" or the earthly establishment of the Kingdom of God through the "Christian kingdom" gaining in superiority over other religions and religious nations. Since the Adventist objective is a certain quality of faith exhibited in all people groups so that the issues in the Great Controversy over the character and government of God are demonstrated and proclaimed accurately to all people, it is even more imperative that this faith development take place in context. This results in similar parameters of trust in God among peoples of diverse worldviews and ways of thinking and expressing those "faith parameters." It requires that the faith be uniquely theirs, rather than a foreign import which often simply overlays the old worldview, values, and beliefs resulting in syncretism. As John Kent, Adventist Frontier Missions missionary, related to me his dilemma after helping
to establish a church among an “unreached” remote tribe in New Guinea, he noted: “I realized I had forty Adventists on the outside, and forty animists on the inside.” And so began a journey, a struggle to do Adventist theology in context so that it would become truly theirs, an accurate internalization of the principles of the message in that time and place, resulting in a demonstration of that faith in the lives of those Adventists in all situations.

**Reframe Beliefs in the Muslim Way of Thinking**

In the Muslim setting the need is similar to the animist setting, but the path is slightly different. Western Christianity (Western and Christian are nearly synonymous in the Muslim’s mind) is outright rejected and even hated as an inferior, immoral, barbaric, and fanatic faith system (we may question this view for its accuracy or reasonableness, but it is the reality in the Muslim world that we must deal with). Therefore, to even get a hearing in the Muslim world, we must not only “package” the message in Muslim friendly terms, but we must also “reframe” the contents of the package so that it speaks truth accurately to the Muslim mind. If the Muslim must adopt a Western frame of thinking in order to understand the message, the message will be rejected from the start.

**Prioritizing Beliefs for Faith Development in Context**

**Present Truth Is Time and Place Specific**

Within the Adventist heritage, “present truth” is a familiar phrase. It carried the notion that at a particular time in earth’s history there was a unique focus and emphasis on certain truths from the larger universal body of truth that were of supreme importance. I suggest that for a Muslim at any given time and place there is also “present truth” for that person. To try to force belief by focusing on other points of belief that the presenter may think are most important is to fail in mission. There is a “constellation” of beliefs that we espouse, but we must focus first on the star that will captivate the heart of the Muslim. Only later will the person be able to appreciate the other stars in the constellation and then the constellation as a whole. If those working with Muslims fail to realize this, they only raise walls and alienate. This requires understanding of what the heart need of the Muslim is, rather than stressing our understanding of his truth need. Nicodemus’ truth need was to discuss Christ’s divinity, his identity as Messiah. His heart need was to understand and experience the
new heart that only God could create within. Present truth for Nicodemus at that time was heart conversion, not knowing of Christ’s divinity. Knowing the character and mission of Christ would come later.

The Need Is for a New Heart

This reality requires not only knowledge of and spiritual sensitivity to the Muslim, but also a comprehension of essential truth for spiritual growth at that point in time, versus what is supportive and enhancing of that essential truth. It follows then that our understanding of “essential truth” plus our understanding of the Muslim heart need at the time, both contribute to what is the priority focus at that point. Again, this does not alter the larger body of truth. However, certain contexts, in addition to affecting what is essential at the time, may also add faith issues that are not addressed in our present statement of beliefs.

Basic Moral Principles Are the First Priority

In our prioritizing there are certain universal, moral, and spiritual principles that must take precedence. Jesus summarized the entire duty of man as love to God and love to man (Matt 22:37-40). Paul focuses it even more as one command, love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom 13:10). We are not referring to some naïve love for everyone, no you’re OK I’m OK mentality. There are certain specific principles that must be exemplified in our relations with Muslims and which we must endeavor to instill in them as we challenge them to deeper faith.

Tolerance, Respect, and Affirmation of Spirituality

First, because of the history of intolerance and use of force in the relations between Christians and Muslims, Christians must be champions of tolerance. Respect for the Muslim’s faith is a given. They are not heathen or pagan. They orient their lives around God much more than most Christians. I have listened to sermons in the mosque that, with little or no alteration, could have been delivered from an Adventist pulpit. Too often we reflect the understanding of the disciples when they said, “Master, we saw a man driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn’t belong to our group” (Luke 9:49 TEV). We must move to the Muslim with an attitude of respect, tolerance, and even further of appreciation and affirmation for the spirituality they ex-
hibit. We must encourage that same respect and affirmation within them. It is present in the Qur'an and can be appealed to in our work with them.

_Taqwah_ (Righteousness)

Beyond respect, tolerance, and affirmation I can summarize the priority issues under the subject of holiness. Holiness is a gift from God as one experiences the new heart from him and renews his commitment of faith. This is not an unbalanced emphasis on perfectionism. Perfectionism emphasizes behavior; holiness focuses on a quality of the inner man, a _wholeness_ for God. The Muslim must be challenged to holiness not through form and ritual, but through the new heart from God. This is done by using biblical principles, but expressed in Muslim language and in terms familiar to them. This requires an understanding and usage of the Qur'an. We build on the Islamic concepts of submission to God, and _taqwah_, inner righteousness, as a gift from God. It is important to guide the Muslim to this new heart experience first. We have reached a significant milestone when a Muslim responds and says, "Please pray for me that God will give me that new heart." Such a heart is a heart of obedience, a heart that is open to God's voice, a heart that is willing to listen, a heart that asks, What must I do to be saved? The heart that says, How can I be sure of my standing in the day of judgment? Initially this takes priority over doctrinal details. This is foundational to an understanding of all subsequently considered beliefs. Before acceptance of a certain set of abstract beliefs and even before adoption of a new way of religious practice must come this new heart experience. The set of beliefs and practices will follow as a result of this new heart, this gift of holiness. Doctrines will then be facilitators of this deeper faith experience rather than mere ritual.

Sensitivity to Absorptive Capacity

Another priority in our spiritual work with Muslims is sensitivity to their spiritual absorptive capacity, the speed at which the Muslim can incorporate new understanding of spiritual matters. I marvel at Jesus' patience with his disciples. Even as he was giving them last minute instructions on his way to the place of his ascension, they still didn't get it. "When will you restore the kingdom to Israel"? they asked. It was only as they were seemingly left to their own resources that the greatest resource was sent to them, the Holy Spirit, which was then able to guide their understanding of the vital truths of Jesus' divinity.
and his true mission (White 1940:506, 507). This degree of patience in leading them from a restricted monotheistic position, and away from a political agenda, to a more complete understanding, is directly instructive for us in working with Muslims.

The Divinity of Christ

A particularly instructive example of this prioritizing and gradual sequencing of truth in our work with Muslims is Jesus' handling of the question of his own divinity. He essentially does not make it a matter for discussion until late in his ministry in his confrontation with the religious leaders in the temple (John 10) and during his trial. After asking his disciples, Whom do you say the Son of Man is? and clarifying that Peter's answer did not come from human understanding or teaching but directly by inspiration from God, he "ordered His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah" (Matt 16:20 TEV). I have never heard this text referred to as instructive for classes in personal or public evangelism, but I think it bears tremendous import for us in working with Muslims. This command and others like it were given to his disciples who would first work in Jewish areas or to those healed in Jewish territory. When in Samaria, where the issue of the divinity of Christ was not inflammatory as it was in Jewish areas, he openly spoke of his Messiahship, "I am He" (John 4:26). The divinity of Christ is not a subject to force on the Muslim. It is not to become a point of controversy or a stumbling block. It is our job to pile up the evidence for his divinity without directly referring to it, and then the Holy Spirit will bring that evidence to bear on the mind of the seeker in due time and lead them to that "aha" experience, "He must be. . . . He is my Lord." Christ's example informs us on this matter as well as Paul's assertion in 1 Cor 12:3, "No one can confess 'Jesus is Lord;' unless he is guided by the Holy Spirit" (TEV). This experience has been repeated over and over again in our work with Muslims. Several weeks after a series of studies was conducted on the Hanif, one of the Muslim persons who was baptized communicated: "I was shocked when it dawned upon me what you were trying to tell us regarding Jesus. Now I truly believe. He is God." By the way, when Muslims come to this realization they see in Jesus, God, not Son of God, because of the background of revulsion at the least implication that God had a physical son. Brennan Manning summarizes it well in the following statement. "The possibility of anyone's recognizing in the fragile humanity of Jesus the plentitude of God's power to save comes only
from a miraculous intervention of God. 'Radical faith is not an achievement, for if it were we would will it and be done. Rather, it is a gift, and we are left to react respectively, to watch and to pray’” (1992:24).

We present the evidence in a way that the Muslim can understand, and the Holy Spirit works to bring the conviction.2 We have found this is the way that we can effectively lead the Muslim with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, to the full belief in his divinity. Also, we have Christ’s example as noted above. The follower of Adventist beliefs from a Muslim background will always use monotheistic terms to describe the Godhead, in contrast to the Adventist from a Trinitarian background who will use terms that will make the Muslim background believer think he is a polytheist.

Examples of Faith Development in Context

As we proceed in this task of moving the gospel into the Muslim context, the practical question arises: How much local theologizing do we allow? Are we in danger of developing a diversity of theologies that will result in a theological pluralism, a relativization of Adventism? Will we lose the essential unity of the movement?

Importance of Local Theologizing

As we move into diverse cultures and specifically Islamic cultures, how do we chart our course? For the most part, I think we agree that there must be some adaptation to local situations. But the reformulation of the set of theological statements needed to make those statements relevant to the people in various cultural settings has been largely neglected. However, the priesthood of all believers implies a responsibility to make the gospel and the theology that carries that gospel relevant to the local situation. Doing theology should not be confined to the missionary and the sending body. It must extend to the local believers in the Muslim context. The theological formulations must be made relevant in the local culture, and then lifted off the page into the reality of everyday life in that context. The practice of exporting our Western theological statements and explanations unchanged has simply not been effective in the Muslim setting.
This lack of meaningful theological statements is what has pushed us to look for foundation stones within the Muslim culture and belief system, for there are many basic values, beliefs, and concepts, upon which we can build biblical truth. These have been called by some missiologists redemptive analogies, and are cultural phenomena which have been preserved by divine purpose and which can be used to illustrate and make clear certain biblical truths. In our work with Muslims we find many of these. The rescue of Abraham’s son by a “tremendous sacrifice” is one example (Surah 37:107). Another more specific example would be the belief among some Shiites that if you stray from belief, you need a *tuba ghusl*, a body washing, to reinstate your status as a believer. This then assists in the explanation of baptism. There also is a verse in the Qur’an that refers to the “coloring of God” or “*sibghat Allah*” (Surah 7:26). The word *sibghat* means “to color” as “to dye cloth.” It also carries the idea of “innate nature” as translated by Khatib. In other words, this “coloring” is the recreation of a godly nature in man (the “new heart” of Ezek 36:26) which has been lost because of sin. The parallel to *baptizo* is helpful in our discussion of baptism.

**Redemptive Windows**

But in addition to these redemptive analogies we have gone a step further and utilized what we are calling *a redemptive window*. The redemptive analogy assists in explaining certain ideas or concepts in the biblical belief system. A redemptive window, however, is much more. It is a window into the very heart of the culture which, when the gospel shines through that window, has a powerful impact at the very heart of the Muslim. It impacts the key spiritual motivators in a culture and belief system. The concept of the *Hanif* seems to provide just such a window. It has been lost by many Muslims because it has seemed unattainable. To be totally submitted and loyal to God, to follow completely the faith of Abraham, has been beyond reach. So the devil has played havoc in the Muslim world with folk beliefs, spiritism, fear of evil forces, seeking for *barakah* or blessing from power objects, places, or people to protect from these forces. But the concept of being God’s *Hanif* is present in the Qur’an, in history, both pre-Islamic and at the time of Muhammad. The following description by
an Islamic scholar seems to fit the Adventist understanding of true believers hiding in the wilderness to preserve biblical faith.

They [Arab Christians] took their Christianity farther east to Persia and India, to Egypt and Abyssinia, north into the Caucasus and wherever around the Mediterranean their ancestors had planted colonies for trade or settlement. As we have seen, the ascendency of the Church of Rome backed by the Byzantine Empire had alienated these semitically oriented Christians. When they were hereticated by the Church of Rome, and persecuted by the Byzantine Empire or its puppets on the scene, they took refuge in the desert. . . . Both Jews and Christian immigrants to the desert found a ready welcome among those Arabs who upheld the Mesopotamian-Abrahamic tradition. Together they consolidated that tradition in Peninsular Arabia which came to be known as Hanifyyah. Its adherents, the hanif(s), resisted every association of other gods with God, refused to participate in pagan rituals, and maintained a life of ethical purity above reproach. It is common knowledge that the hanif was a strict monotheist who paid no tribute to tribal religion, that he was of impeccable ethical character, and that he kept aloof from the cynicism and moral lasciviousness of other Arabs. The hanifs always stood above tribal disputes and hostilities. Everybody knew of their presence since they belonged to nearly all tribes (al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986:61).

Ellen White applies this understanding to Rev 12 and specifically identifies the Waldenses in Europe, Armenians in Central Asia, and believers in Central Africa (White 1950:63, 64). It seems fitting to also include those faithful monotheists in the Arabian desert known as Hanif. Therefore, we are using this window, appealing to the spiritual conscience of the Muslim but providing the means, the Way, the Power to be truly Hanif.

Coupled closely with the concept of the Hanif is the theme of taqwah (inner righteousness). Since this is a prominent theme in the Qur'an, we begin with a discussion of righteousness from the Qur'an, then move to a deeper biblical understanding of righteousness by faith in God's grace and his sacrifice of himself in Jesus for reconciliation, forgiveness of sin, removal of our shame, and the granting of eternal life.

What we are involved in is a process of re-forming Adventist and biblical theology in context rather than simply exporting a given set of formulations and applying them unchanged to the Muslim world. This process is making theology relevant in the Muslim context and bringing it home to the heart of the Muslim. It is important that we grasp this concept as we evaluate what is happening in the Adventist mission to Islam. We must also remember that we are involved in an ongoing process in which there is continual growth and refinement.
Describing the Atonement in the Muslim Context

One of the most difficult areas for the Muslim is the atonement. How do you explain why Jesus had to die? What is this “payment of a price?” To whom is it paid? Is not God the supreme judge and will he not simply decide whom he will save and who will go to the fire?

Key Cultural Dynamics

As a result of sin all cultural worldviews have developed around three dynamics: First, the dynamic of guilt versus innocence which is common to Western and many cultures where Christianity predominates. Second, the dynamic of shame versus honor which is common to Eastern and group cultures including cultures where Islam and other Eastern religions predominate. Third, the dynamic of fear versus power which is common among animistic peoples. It is possible to find elements of all three in any one culture; however, most cultures will exhibit predominantly one of the three.

By way of illustration, in the West, in the spiritual realm, guilt plays an important role. If a person experiences fear and anxiety, it is often from a sense of guilt or its close ally, inadequacy or not measuring up. Guilt revolves around the breaking of law or not achieving a standard, either human or divine. Western people then use this concept as the basis for explaining a sinful nature, that people are inherently sinful and guilty. In summary then, in the West we are guilt and performance oriented. Our theological statements reflect this (see belief statement number seven concerning the nature of man under the “definition of sin” and “sin and guilt” (Ministerial Association 1988:89).

Shame and Fear

Because of the wide prominence of folk Islam which includes many animistic elements, Islam shares two dynamics, shame and fear, with shame being predominant. These constitute the two most powerful spiritual motivators: shame—the ultimate motivator of knowing one will stand alone, ashamed, and naked before Allah in the day of judgment; and fear—of evil forces which drives one to seek Baraka (blessing) in various ways to gain power to protect from evil forces and assuage the fear. It is these two spiritual motivators in the Muslim’s life that influence our presentation of the subject of how God deals with sin.

Of the two, the most pervasive and powerful dynamic is shame. In contrast to the guilt and performance orientation of the West, which is very in-
dividualistic, Islam is shame and being oriented, which is being in a state of defilement or shame in relation to the group. An additional contrast of the two indicates guilt as being a feeling or a condition occurring when one has broken or not kept a divine or human law. Shame, by comparison, is a feeling or condition stemming from a shortcoming in one's state of being, either before God or peers. Shame, similar to guilt, can result in a subjective feeling or condition, but also an objective condition of brokenness, alienation, and even death. It would seem possible, therefore, to use the concept of shame similarly as we have traditionally used the concept of guilt.

It is interesting to note that the concept of shame is much more prevalent in Scripture than is guilt. The English translation “shame” appears in ninety-nine verses in the Old and New Testaments while “guilt” appears twice, and “guilty” twenty-six times. Many of these verses containing the word “shame” use it in reference to the result of sin or wrong acts. There are several Hebrew words for shame (some translated reproach, disgrace, or dishonor). One of these, bosheth, is described in Strong's Bible Dictionary as “shame (the feeling and the condition, as well as its cause).” Ezek 16:51, 52 provides an example of the usage of “shame” as the consequence of sin. “Samaria did not sin half as much as you have. You have acted more disgustingly than she ever did. Your corruption makes your sisters look innocent by comparison. And now you will have to endure your disgrace [shame]. Your sins are so much worse than those of your sisters that they look innocent beside you. Now blush and bear your shame, because you make your sisters look pure” (TEV). See additional examples in the endnote.

Use Simple, Descriptive Terms

Thus, in our translation of the understanding of the atonement effected by Jesus' life, death, and continued ministry as our high priest, we have used the shame-honor paradigm instead of the traditional guilt-innocence framework. Also, in our discussion of this belief, we have avoided the use of vague or complicated words that require considerable explanation in English, let alone trying to translate them simply and accurately into the Muslim mindset (examples of these would include: propitiation, expiation or expiatory, atonement—in its common usage of “to atone for,” sanctification, justification). In working from the English we prefer to use simple, easily understood terms such as: to reconcile, to bring together (at-one-ment), to set right (with God), to cover (sin or shame), and to receive the new heart (from God).
Muslim View on the Nature of Man

Foundational to the consideration of the doctrine of salvation is the doctrine of the nature of man. The Muslim position is in contrast to the Adventist and biblical position on this point. These concepts are covered in beliefs seven through nine in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Ministerial Association 1988: chaps 7-9.). Kateregga summarizes the contrasting Muslim position well:

Islam does not identify with the Christian conviction that man needs to be redeemed. The Christian belief in the redemptive sacrificial death of Christ does not fit the Islamic view that man has always been fundamentally good, and that God loves and forgives those who obey his will.

Islam is the way of peace. The Muslim view, which is in total contrast to the Christian experience, is that man experiences peace through total submission to God's guidance and mercy. Jesus Christ (PBUH), like many prophets before him, and Muhammad (PBUH), the Seal of Prophets, were both examples of God's mercy to humanity (Kateregga and Shenk 1997).

Begin With an Accurate Diagnosis of the Problem

Obviously, the remedy can only be understood to make sense if the disease is properly diagnosed. If sin is, in fact, only a mistake to be forgiven by a merciful God with no inherent consequences, to speak of the need for a sacrifice to redeem man is like prescribing surgery for the common cold. The advice to go home, drink lots of water, rest, eat more fruits and fewer sweets, i.e., “live right” is sufficient. If, however, sin is a deadly cancer, then major surgery is required. The Muslim would generally agree with the sentence in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, “The antidote for guilt is forgiveness (Matt 6:12) which results in a clear conscience and peace of mind” (Ministerial Association 1988:89). But the Muslim would then be puzzled by the need for payment of a price, the need for a substitutionary death, and satisfaction of justice. To the Muslim these seem to be unnecessary additions. How do we move through these objections?

Even though Kateregga has clarified the “official” view of Islam, it is of interest to note that the Qur'an, in fact, does describe the nature of man, or the result of sin in man, in terms close to the biblical view of a sinful nature.

Of the people there are some who say: “We believe in God and the Last Day;” but they do not (really) believe. Fain would they deceive God and those who believe, but they only deceive themselves, and realize (it) not! In their hearts is a disease; and God has increased their disease: and grievous is the penalty they (incur), because they are false (to themselves) (Surah 2:8-10).
Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame): the (human) soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His mercy: but surely my Lord is oft-forgiving, most merciful (Surah 12:53).

**Sin Results in a Broken Condition**

We use these texts to move the Muslim's consideration of sin to a more serious level. Sin is a serious disease that requires serious treatment. God has given help through *fitra*, the nature that God has placed in man to worship Him (Surat Al Rum, 30:30), *ilm* (knowledge), and guidance. However, *Iblis* (Satan) has vowed to bring under his control "all but a few." There is only one way that we can avoid being under his control, if we allow God to create a new heart within us (here we use the biblical references in Ezek 11:19, 20; 36:26, 27; Jer 31:33, 34).

**Comparing Guilt and Shame**

There is an additional consequence of sin in the Muslim setting—shame or dishonor. Just as in the Western explanation of the biblical teaching that sin, rebellious actions, or thoughts result in a state of guilt that leads to the consequence of death, it is equally strong in the shame and honor culture of Islam that sin results in a *condition* of shame, both objective and subjective, which can only be remedied by death or removal of the shame object. In the shame and honor culture, serious shame or dishonor on the family requires death of the person bringing the shame. The family cannot survive or maintain its position of honor in the community unless honor is restored by removing the shame person. The fact that shame and honor cultures are group cultures provides the context for this reality.

**Abraham's Example**

When people consider the story of Abraham sacrificing his son from within the shame and honor context, it takes on new meaning. It was common for a father to kill his own son if he (the son) had shamed the family sufficiently; however, in this case the son had not shamed the family. Rather he "submitted" himself to his father. In that case, if Abraham had proceeded with the sacrifice of his son, it would have brought shame on him for sacrificing an honorable son. But "when they had both submitted their wills (to God)" (Surah 37:103), a
way out was provided. The honor of both was preserved through the provision by God of a lamb to sacrifice in the place of the son (Surah 37:107). This lamb points forward to what God would do for man. It symbolizes the way out of our condition of shame which is deserving of death.

Therefore, critical to this discussion is the description of what God would do for man's shame. In the Qur'an, associated with the concept of God providing the first sacrifice to fashion clothes for Adam and Eve to "cover their shame," is the provision of the best covering, the "covering of taqwah," or righteousness. "O ye children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness, that is the best" (Surah 7:26). This is consistent with Rom 3:25 where the word "propitiation" (KJV) is the translation of the Greek word for the mercy seat (hilasterion). In Hebrew the word for mercy seat (kapparoth from kapher) means "to cover." We could then justifiably translate the verse, "God offered him (Christ) so that by his sacrificial death he should become the means by which people's sins are covered through their faith in him" (adapting the TEV translation and emphasis mine).

God's Way of Restoring Honor As Depicted in the Story of the Prodigal Son

With these components we then have the elements to begin impressing on the heart of the Muslim God's way of solving the problem of sin and God's way of restoring honor to those who have so dishonored his name. God has not disowned us. God has not abandoned us, nor has he killed us. God's way of "restoring honor" in his universe that has been "shamed" by sin and rebellion is not man's way of seeking revenge. The story of the lost son in Luke 15 epitomizes the way God handles rebellion. The son is never disowned by the father, which is the expected response in Middle Eastern society to such shame, but rather he is continually grieved over and prayed for as "my son." This father would do no less than David weeping over his rebellious son Absalom: "O my son! My son Absalom! Absalom, my son! If only I had died in your place, my son! Absalom my son!" (2 Sam 18:33). Notice also God's grieving over having to let Israel go (Hos 11:8, 9).

Now, back to the story in Luke 15. When other villagers threaten to do away with "that boy" so as to preserve the honor not only of the family but of the village, the father orders them to not touch "my son." The father suffers the shame alone. He is now isolated and misunderstood by the village and seen as a
weak and impotent head of his house. When the son is seen in the distance, this elderly father does not worry about the shameful scene of him running to meet the filthy, rag-draped remnant of humanity. Rather, he meets him more than halfway, covers him with the symbol of goodness, “the best robe,” restores him by placing the ring of his own authority on the finger of the boy, and commands a celebration. The only cure for the human cycle of revenge in the shame and honor society is to understand and accept for ourselves this way of restoring us to honor and then mediating such a picture of God to those sinking into the enemy’s way of dealing with shame. The role that God has assigned to his people in these last days is that of proclaiming his way of restoring honor in face of the ultimate insults from the evil one.

It is of interest to note that the older brother in the story was still operating on the shame, honor, and revenge paradigm. He had long before disowned his brother. He would in no way associate with or acknowledge such a shame and dishonor on the family. He was so concerned about preserving his own honor with justice and revenge that he missed the party.

Paul’s Summary

Paul summarizes the saving acts of God in Rom 5:9, 10: “By his sacrificial death we are now put right with God; how much more, then will we be saved by him from God’s anger! We were God’s enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Now that we are God’s friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ’s life”! (TEV). This is consistent with the notion that by sacrificing himself (in Christ) he absorbs the shame, covers us with his own righteousness, thus restoring us to honor (setting us right). This is the reconciliation that Christ’s sacrificial death accomplishes. The broken condition of man (condition of deep shame) which has alienated man from God is removed and the relationship restored. (Note the use of shame in the message to Laodicea in Rev 3:18.) In the shame honor paradigm the focus is on the restoration of the person’s shameful condition to a state of honor, full reconciliation, and reinstatement in the family. At the same time God’s honor before the universe is vindicated in the face of the accusations of the evil one that he is “arbitrary, unforgiving and severe” (White 1890).

If this great work of reconciliation was accomplished through Christ’s death, how much more will he be able, through his life, to continue to keep us, empower us, and grant us eternal life!
Summary

This paper has addressed several important issues regarding the communication of the biblical message in the Muslim context.

1. The need to re-frame principles of belief for the Muslim setting.
2. The importance of prioritizing what is important ("present truth") for a person at a particular time and place, according to the spiritual heart need of the person. With this priority personal piety and spirituality are the focus.
3. The need to respect the absorptive capacity of the Muslim.
4. The indirect approach to the understanding of the divinity of Christ through accumulating evidence and letting the Holy Spirit impress this truth on the heart.
5. The utilizing of elements of truth within Islam as foundational stones upon which to build more complete truth as we re-form Adventist beliefs in context. In doing so we use "redemptive windows" into the spiritual heart of the Muslim.
6. Use of the shame-honor paradigm to describe the atonement in terms that more accurately convey the truth of the gospel than the Western guilt-innocence framework.
7. Use of the concept of shame to communicate more effectively the seriousness of sin and our broken condition with its consequences of death.

This approach has resulted in believers in Jesus as Lord and Savior and in the Adventist message who (1) experience a close relationship with God, (2) consider the Bible their primary source of faith and apply basic exegetical principles in their study of the Scriptures, (3) have a clear sense of their "remnant identity" in the Muslim community, and (4) trust in Jesus for salvation, forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and acknowledge his divinity.7

Notes

1I was led into this line of thought early in my ministry during the few weeks prior to leaving Libya, in which I and my associate were the last Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) workers in the country in 1970. Over several weeks I knew it was only a matter of time until immigration would insist I leave. With my leaving, the official SDA presence in Libya would end. What had thirteen years of SDA presence accomplished? Only one baptism performed in secret in Italy (we had agreed not to proselyte as a condition of our entry into the country). Yet we had impacted numerous lives and not the least of which were the Libyan workers in the hospital, some of whom had been with us for
nearly the entire time of the hospital’s existence. As I evaluated the situation, knowing I had only a few weeks left, I realized that almost all of the Libyan workers in the hospital, with a few exceptions, had never had a personal visit in their home by a SDA worker. The spiritual contact had ended with knowing that we had devotional time in the morning and on Saturdays (no Libyans dared attend these very Christian services) and occasional arguments over certain points of disagreement between certain zealous SDA workers and the Libyan staff. I realized that doctrinal knowledge was not the most important thing to focus on in this context. More important was a certain quality of trust and faith in God and a certain openness to spiritual things. I set a goal to visit every home of a Libyan worker. I was touched by the reception I received. I prayed with them that their faith in Allah would be strong and that they would remain submitted to Allah in their lives and be ready for the Day of Judgment and the coming of Isa el Masih. I talked with them about the falling away from faith that would increase as time went on, but that God would have a faithful few who would continue in their devotion to him. I shared with them certain key events that would happen to force people’s religious practice in the end time (such as Sunday observance) and that they should be aware that this was a plan of the evil one to deceive as many as possible. I shared with them that we believed the Sabbath would become a sign of those faithful to Allah. We discussed what it meant to be an “Adventist,” one who anticipates the coming of the Messiah. It was no time to launch into a presentation on issues that would only generate argument or points too hard for them to accept. I think I felt somewhat like Jesus must have felt those last few hours with his disciples, “There are many things I would like to tell you but you cannot bear them.” It was a time for a spiritual appeal within their realm of understanding to be ready to face their Creator in the day of judgment, to appeal to them that we may never meet again on this earth but we could, if faithful, meet in paradise, to leave them a few pointers which they would remember as final day events began to unfold, and then to commit them into the hands of the Almighty. This whole experience has shaped my subsequent ministry to Muslims. We have simply wasted too many opportunities and too much time by concentrating on doctrinal differences instead of focusing on the heart readiness to meet their Lord. We must put first things first and place as priority certain eternal heart spirituality issues before we consider the more difficult doctrinal points.

The growth steps in understanding Christ’s divinity are summarized as follows: (1) Isa (Jesus) is referred to as a prophet, (2) Isa is the prophet with special power over evil forces, (3) Isa is the “healing prophet,” (4) because of this power that Allah has mediated through Isa, he is the channel of special barakah (blessing) from Allah, (5) in healings of disease that were a direct result of sinful lifestyle (or believed to be), Isa exhibited the power to forgive those sins as well, (6) Isa is the one designated by Allah to stand with us (mediator) on the Day of Judgment, (7) Isa mediates the forgiveness, acceptance, and empowerment of Allah into our lives, (8) Allah provides, through the
will of Isa, his very presence in the hearts of the believers, (9) Isa is the great sacrifice that Allah provides to cover our sin and to restore Allah's honor and the honor of the family of believers from the shame of sin, (10) Allah "cleared him [Isa] of the faults of others," he had no sin of his own, (11) Isa, as the great sacrifice, gave his life, no one took it from him, (12) Isa was the victor over death, (13) "God [Allah] made manifest in Christ." "Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work." (White, 1890), (14) "My Lord and My God."


5 Jer 3:25 "We should lie down in shame and let our disgrace cover us. We and our ancestors have always sinned against the Lord our God; we have never obeyed his commands" (TEV). Ezek 34:29 "And I will raise up for them a plant for renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more" (KJV). Ezek 44:13 "And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy place: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed" (KJV). Hos 4:7 "As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory [honour] into shame" (KJV). Obad 1:10 "For thy violence against thy brother shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off forever" (KJV). Rev 3:18 "I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (KJV).

The cities of refuge were instituted to prevent the indiscriminate revenge killing that took place when one's family was shamed. Even then, if the person who had killed someone accidentally wandered out of the city of refuge, he could be killed by any member of the dead man's family who found him and "this act of revenge is not murder" (Num 35:27 TEV).

The virginity of a bride was crucial to the honor of her family (and her new husband). It was critical that they (the girl's family) keep the evidence of her virginity (blood on the bed sheet from the wedding night) or she would be liable to be stoned for bringing shame on a family of Israel (Deut 22:13-21).

Lepke, Wolfgang. 2001. *An Evaluation of a Contextual Witnessing Project within a Resistant People Group*. Ph.D diss., Andrews University, 307, 308. The following is a summary description from Lepke’s doctoral dissertation on a ministry that is a prime example of “faith development in context.” For security reasons it is referred to as the “R-movement.” “From all the descriptions above, the R-movement definitely changed the belief system of its members in many ways that contrasts starkly from what a ‘traditional’ Muslim believes. There are four areas especially that deserve mention.

**Relationship to God**

“Traditional Muslims (with the most notable exception of the Sufi sect) do not live in a father-child relationship with God. Their faith demands a master-slave relationship by which the master, God, is so aloof and distant that there is no sense of closeness and love in it (see Geisler & Saleeb 1993:27). R-movement believers are different. They have expressed that they are the recipients of God’s love, and that they experience a closeness to God, especially when reading the Bible.

**Authority of the Bible**

“Considering that nearly all Muslims are trained to believe that the Christian Bible is a totally corrupted version of the original, it is one of the greatest achievements of the R-movement to instill the strong belief that the Bible is not corrupted and that to understand all truth a believer has to study the Bible and believe everything it says. As could be seen above, this is not something imposed on the believers, but reflects their own desire, as they especially love the gospels. To enhance this attitude, there is a definite move away from the reliance on traditional interpretation toward a study method that puts one’s own struggle to understand (*ijtihad*) guided by the Holy Spirit at the center of interpretation.

**Remnant Identity**

“A significant part of the self-understanding of the R-movement members is that they are part of a remnant that follows all of God’s truth, especially that which had been forgotten by other Muslims, i.e., the truths that are taught in the Bible. This reflects, of course, the identity of SDAs who see themselves as part of the remnant who in the last days restore and proclaim the forgotten truths of the Bible (Sabbath, condition of the dead, etc.).

**The Salvific Identity and Acts of Jesus Christ**

“All of the above would be of little value if the believers had not gained an understanding of Jesus Christ that reflects the Christian understanding of his identity and his ministry. The believers in the R-movement have clearly transcended the typical Muslim notion about Jesus as just being a prophet like others. He is the one with supreme power who can protect them from evil forces and also the Mediator in the judgment. The believers have gained an understanding of the severity of sin, and that only through the cross as a sign of God’s mercy can they experience the forgiveness of
these. Ultimately they have understood that Jesus Christ is more than a human being, but has a divine nature as the spiritual (as opposed to physical) son of God.”

Reference List


The Seventh-day Adventist Church is rapidly expanding numerically and will soon pass the 15 million mark. The growth is most remarkable south of the Tropic of Cancer in the developing and mostly non-Christian world.

Initially Seventh-day Adventists, in their prophetic interpretation and understanding, envisioned that their call and main task was to call other Christians to come out of their “fallen” Christian denominations and join “those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17). For that reason, the summary of the most important Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs was geared toward people belonging to other Christian churches. The worldview and vocabulary in the summaries were expressed in such a way that it was assumed that the readers and new followers had a Christian background and were literate. In this way, the Fundamental Beliefs were developed to explain to Protestant Christians where the Adventist beliefs were in agreement with their beliefs and where they were different. The Fundamental Beliefs stressed belief in God and the Bible more than guidelines on how to
live out these convictions in one's daily life. It was taken for granted that true ideas about God would naturally result in Christian actions and lifestyles that need not be stated (Ministerial Association 1988).

**Are the Fundamentals Meaningful for All Religions?**

In the late eighteenth century, people of non-Christian religions also became the focus for evangelistic outreach. Mission activities of various kinds, often with good results, took place in areas where non-Christian religions were dominant and where illiteracy was prevalent. Global Mission increased the Adventist emphasis on reaching the two-thirds world with the Three Angels' Messages. Among the non-Christian people in the world, various Christian mission agencies, including the Seventh-day Adventists, have had and still have their greatest successes among people belonging to so-called tribal religions. There are approximately 270 million people in this category.

**Definitions and Geography**

For practical reasons, a distinction is made between a world religion and a tribal religion. A world, or universal, religion is of a missionary nature. This means that it is not only open to people of all races, nationalities, and cultures, but it also wants all people to embrace its beliefs and practices. These religions generally have sacred writings, a common language, and a kind of priesthood. World religions living up to these definitions include Christianity and Islam, while Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism are also world religions, but ones that are not so active in their missionary endeavors.

Tribal religions are of various kinds and have many labels. They are termed as traditional, ethno, primitive, preliterate, pagan, heathen, animistic, or fetish religions. Those types of descriptive names were to some extent determined by a variety of circumstances and probably given to them by the first anthropologists and missionaries who met them, researched them, and experienced them. The terms, pagan, heathen, animistic, and fetish for these religions are somewhat derogatory terms and should not be used. For our purpose in this chapter, we will use the terms “traditional religion” and “tribal religion.”

Traditional religion is generally confined to a single tribe. For that reason, the terms “tribal religion” or “ethnic religion” could also be justified. Traditional religions are, as a rule, not universal. Each tribe has its own religion with concepts of divinity, humanity, and nature. In their worship, they are dependent on
their ancestors and, as tribes, revere only their own ancestors. It is obvious that it is not possible for a member of one tribal group to be an adherent member of another tribal group in worship forms and rituals as their ancestors are not the same. For that reason, there are no attempts by one group of traditional religionists to win another group to their faith and traditions.

The traditionalists are found in African tribes, Indians of the Americas, Eskimos in Canada and Greenland, mountain people in Southern Asia, fringe people in China, Aborigines in Australia, Pacific Islanders, and Siberian clans. The ethno-religionists represent more than 3,000 cultures, each with its own special brand of traditional religion with a combined population of a little under 300 millions adherents.

People From Traditional Religions Proved To Be Most Winnable for Christianity

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, Christian missions began to focus on the adherents of non-Christian religions, and Christian churches and missions were established. However, the missionaries found that when they encountered the so-called world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam), the results in soul winning were very meager, even negligible. The major successes were among the many smaller and isolated ethnic groups of adherents to traditional religions intermingled with a predominantly world religion. In this way, reports to the home churches that told about baptisms in a Hindu or Muslim country gave the impression that Hindus and Muslims had been reached. In reality the new Christians were from the tribal groups living as a minority in those areas.

Main Beliefs and Practices in Traditional Religions

Although traditional religions exist in many cultures, anthropologists, assisted many times by missionaries, have done more research and have written more extensively on the many African brands of traditional religions than other parts of the world. On the African continent there are diversities and variations from one tribal group to another, making it impossible to do justice with a brief sweeping outline of their beliefs and practices. However, it can generally be stated that a traditional religion is a religious system of relationships between man's visible and invisible world. Traditional religionists believe
that this world is ruled by a Creator and various other powers, all of which are manifestations of the High God. These powers are accessible through specialists and rituals meaningful to daily life. There are many common traits among traditional religions, but I will touch upon the six most prominent ones.

Belief in a High God

The High God is above all other powers in the universe and is regarded as universal and the god for all people. He is viewed as creator, but is withdrawn and mysterious. There are no temples where the High God is worshipped, no priesthood or organized worship to serve him, and no holy books to describe him. The concept of the High God is somewhat arbitrary, as he is sometimes understood to be interested in people's morals and at other times to be aloof from life in this world. Communication with humans takes place through lesser gods, the spirits, and the ancestors. Most traditionalists share the belief in a High God although generally they do not know or say much about him.

The Spirit World

The Polynesian concept of "mana," which is a belief in an impersonal supernatural force inherent in a person, god, or sacred object, is also present in traditional religion. The spirits can be ancestors (living dead) who passed away in the distant past and are distinguished from other spirits. These spirits and ancestors can be good or evil, friendly or unfriendly, helpful or tricky. Spirits are present everywhere, dwelling in material and even immaterial things. Offerings and prayers brought to the spirits can be accepted or rejected.

The Living Dead

The traditionalists believe that after physical death, people continue to exist in the spirit world and can be promoted to a status a little less than that of the gods or god. It is possible to have direct communication between the living and the ancestors. Ancestral spirits are generally honored, are recognized by surviving relatives and friends, and serve as intermediaries for the higher spirit powers. They can protect and guide, but they can also do harm. The ancestors, especially those who have reached the status of being a lesser god, are worshipped. For a few generations after their death ancestors are honored and remembered as humans. Some traditionalists believe in partial reincarnations
of an ancestor reborn as a child of the same family. Up to five generations later, some see characteristics that remind them of the ancestor.

Death does not mean the end to life, and the bonds between the living and the dead are not severed when a person passes away. Death is really an occasion for the family to seek more benefit and greater help in life for the departed person can bring messages, health, and children to barren women. Death affects the whole tribal community in a positive way, as the rituals in connection with the departed person draw the community together.

**Importance of Myths**

In traditional religions, there are generally neither scriptures nor creeds. Myths related from generation to generation are the important guardians of traditions and teachers of morals. Myths tell how resources and skills are obtained from spirit powers and how spirit powers operate. Through these myths, commands, counsels, warnings, and rewards from the unseen powers are communicated to the people. Communication takes place through dreams, visions, and even ecstasy.

**Rituals**

The traditionalist belief in two worlds (the world of the living and the world of the "living dead") employs rituals as important in communication from one world to the other. Rituals are based on ancient myths imparted from generation to generation. The rituals are complex, detailed, and an important part of all acts of worship. Stories from myths are acted out from time to time, thereby helping people feel that they share in the power of gods and that they can renew life from their origins. Many traditional religions believe that the first man in the tribe originated from the High God, and some even believe that the High God was the first man.

**Magic, Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Medicine**

The most disturbing elements in traditional societies are black magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. When things go wrong for a person, family, or community, the cause must be found. Common enemies of society include disease, accidents, barrenness, suffering, and attacks by insects and animals. Misfortunes can also have their source in nature such as drought, earthquakes, famines, and
locusts. A physical explanation is, however, not sufficient to satisfy the sufferer for they question which powers or persons caused such things to happen. The source might be the spirits or individuals who have used witchcraft, magic, or sorcery.

The cure can then be found through the use of a specialist, a “medicine man.” He or she can be a medium, diviner, prophet, magician, healer, or rainmaker. There is also a belief that sacrifices can be performed for various purposes, such as to chase off evil, to secure ancestors’ support, to pacify supernatural beings, or to express gratitude for favors from the spirit world.

Positive Aspects of Traditional Religions

Religion is the strongest element for people in traditional societies and it permeates all facets of life. There is no formal distinction between the secular and the sacred, between the spiritual and material, for all is integrated. Over centuries, tribal societies have been kept in balance by their religions, which have provided them with a worldview and helped to cultivate the whole person. Their religions have given answers to questions about suffering, pain, death, and life after death, and have also explained fortune, good harvests, and birth of healthy children.

Traditional religion also serves as a means of education for tribal people and as a means of social control, for the religious elements of the culture check anti-social behavior. Through the many rituals, initiation rites, and taboos, people are taught the means of horizontal and vertical communication with divinities, elders in society, other members of their own society, and with people of other tribes. At times of confrontations with other tribes, religion gives unity through a common foe, which can create an opportune occasion for finding a scapegoat for local problems.

Traditional religions grant rights and power to the powerless and identities to the deviants. Rites of passages ensure that attention is paid to the important various stages in life.

The traditions of the religion such as respect for nature, sexual morality, and dietary laws are also instilled subconsciously over the years. Rituals provide moral and ethical values to live by, instill respect for the authorities, and show people their limitations. The religions are storehouses for the history and cultural values of the traditionalists, and are viewed as celebrations of life. Culture takes the form of poetry, music, dance, carvings, and pottery.
Religions, as integrated systems, have for centuries kept many societies and cultures in reasonable balance and have made sense to the people living in the traditional cultures. Christian missionaries must show understanding, tact, and care when introducing a new religion with another worldview and code of conduct.

**Negative Aspects of Traditional Religions**

One of the primary negative aspects of traditional religions is that the people live in constant fear. There are multiple reasons for being afraid. Natural forces, such as earthquakes, epidemics, famines, calamities, and locust invasions can be destructive. As mentioned previously, the people do not question *why* these negative things happen as much as they question *who* caused them. Natural explanations are not adequate for tribal people. They fear the influence and acts of wicked ancestors. Witchcraft and evil spirits can have a variety of harmful results, including disease and death. People may feel threatened by an attack of witches or, even worse, may fear that they may themselves be possessed by evil powers that will turn them into witches. Their fear will bring them under suspicion, and tribal people will assume that they could be responsible for any misfortune or death within the tribal community. These premonitions and fears can cause them to reduce spiritual practices, avoid responsibilities in local matters, and be reluctant to take part in social activities. Continuous mistrust will eventually lead to ostracism, even torture and death. Women face special challenges if there are problems such as the birth of twins which can cause fear within a tribal society. Then there is the cruel female circumcision that is practiced by some of the tribes in Africa.

Fear will generally result in a preoccupation with and search for all kinds of protections that are available through charms, magic, anti-witchcraft medicines, and sorcery. Fear can even lead to various cruel practices; even human sacrifices to appease nature. There is also fear of others using negative African medicines. To further complicate the fear, there is also the fact that consultations with the specialists who can “protect” from all the dangers of society are generally extremely expensive, causing financial ruin for the family unit and thus, creating a sense of powerlessness. Experiences over generations have left a deep-rooted belief that, generally, even the application of all the most expensive means and measures prescribed by the specialists are not able to provide the needed help and self-protection. This results in an ultimate feeling of hope-
lessness and misery. Traditional religion is, in this way, an enemy of society and people.

The people in traditional religions are like other people in their search for God and truth. However, some of them live in a terrible state of depravity that encourages the practice of cannibalism, patricide, infanticide, body-mutilation, human sacrifices, and intertribal warfare—all practices and customs that are approved of and even directed by their religion.

**Role and Status of Women in Tribal Societies**

In missionary outreach to adherents of traditional religions, it is important to have an understanding of the role and status of the women. Measured by Western standards, women have an inferior position, and their lives are controlled by many taboos. Almost all tribal religions practice polygamy, where the women share the husbands with other wives. In tribal societies, it is usually women who are under suspicion of being witches and of using witchcraft. On the positive side, it is found that in some tribes women serve as queen mothers and hold important political positions, thereby wielding authority. Some tribes even have women priests, women mediums, and women who practice medicine. Still, in most tribal societies, it is observed that, although women engage in about the same amount or even more physical work than men, they do not have the same rights. They have no voice in the councils, and are generally excluded from the many secret societies dominated by men even though they can attend similar societies for women.

This inferior position has, in many instances, made women more ready to accept the change and position in life that Christianity offers. The opportunities for getting an education and participating in religious rituals as they are found in Christian churches are very attractive to women. This is especially true among the many independent Christian churches in Africa that give women a chance to express their religious sentiments and be much more self-assertive. However, it has been observed that after conversion to either Christianity or Islam, women from traditional societies are also the most persistent retainers of the old beliefs and rituals and thereby the ones most likely to engage in syncretistic religious experiences.
Why Are Traditionalists Winnable for Christianity?

Christian missions have had their greatest successes among ethno-religious people. The oldest and best example is, interestingly, best illustrated by Christianity in Europe. The pre-Christian, non-literate, tribal, and pagan European religions were among the first, outside of the Middle East, to discard their religions and accept Christianity. Subsequently, similar successes were achieved in Africa, Latin America, on the islands of the Pacific, and in some parts of Asia. Seventh-day Adventist missionaries have also been successful among these peoples for, in addition to the success of reaching other Christians with the Three Angels’ Messages, Adventists have seen their greatest increases in membership in Africa south of the Sahara among traditional religionists. However, Christian missionaries are not the only ones who have become active and successful in winning tribal people in Africa, for Muslims have been able to lead many of these traditionalists to pray in the direction of Mecca and take on a form of Islam.

There are multiple reasons why these tribal people are winnable and convert to organized, historical, and scriptural religions. Various explanations, some negative and some positive, could be listed. In evaluating the special situations, all basic motivations, including the more materialistic, must be studied. The presence of a Christian mission that offers modern medicine and education, no doubt, can be a heavy argument for inviting missionaries and accepting their preaching. Also, the powerful methods used by some Western evangelists, with visual aids, well-organized sessions, and other convincing features, will draw people into churches.

On the more spiritual and positive side, there is, in traditional religions, a lack of developed philosophy and thought compared with what Christianity has to offer. Tribal religions are generally isolated and local, not universal. Traditional religions generally have no ethical systems adequate for life in the modern world and are not organized with holy books, a priesthood, or even a common language. Therefore, the gospel and other biblical messages are quite easily accepted and if rightly perceived, will meet the people’s demanding and deep-felt needs, releasing the people from their fear of local spirits and evil practices in their old religions.
What Kind of Christians Do They Become?

Western scholars have for centuries not taken the traditional religions seriously, and only recently have they received much attention. Tribal people, in small pockets scattered among the adherents of the world religions, were regarded as "primitive," and their religion was termed "natural" and pagan. The major reasons for this neglect were that there were no written histories, no sacred writings, and no records of prophets and founders.

Even most missionaries had similar attitudes toward these people. Early missionaries especially despised and ridiculed these religions and regarded them as being of the devil because of the human sacrifices and cruel customs. Still, it was among these people that Christianity was usually most successful in establishing the first churches in newly-entered areas.

However, it is especially difficult for tribal people to leave behind the comprehensive and often complex beliefs concerning the causes of harm, death, and its aftermath, and the existence of ancestors and the spirit world. Even after conversion to either Christianity or Islam, the presuppositions of traditional religions continue to influence life and thought of the former traditionalists. The customary ways continue to shape people's actions and innermost thoughts. When people face real problems, and when it appears that Christianity is not giving them fast and definite solutions, traditionalists tend to seek answers and remedies from their old religions. Muslims estimate that more than 90 percent of their converts to Islam from the various tribal religions still live in a kind of "Islamic folk religion," and a Roman Catholic priest in an African country stated that it takes at least three generations to transform someone from a tribal religion into a true Roman Catholic believer.

Where Did Missionaries Fail?

The traditionalists need the biblical message of the Christian gospel to bring them a true picture and understanding of deity. The Bible, when rightly understood, will show them a sense of justice, ethics, and morals as they are revealed in the Word of God. As the life of Jesus Christ is explained, it will have a great influence on them as they grasp his nature, love, justice, and righteousness. The Ten Commandments and other precepts from the Bible will replace the often-cruel tribal morality and rituals and will give them an incentive for a better life. Christianity, with its understanding of prayer and God's intervention through his messengers, will liberate tribal men and women from the vari-
ous fears of the spirit world. The rules for diet and healthful living, based on
the Old and New Testament, will give them better health and physical welfare.
To all these great spiritual blessings must be added the fact that Christianity
will bring tribal people into the modern world by helping them over the of­
ten-painful transition from illiteracy to education and from village life to city
dwelling.

In many cases, however, missionaries who worked among traditionalists,
witnessing and teaching about the Christian faith, wanted to have fast and im­
pressive reports for the home-fields. Frequent baptisms of traditionalists could,
therefore, supply accounts of "successful" activities. Too often, Adventist mis­
ionaries accepted new converts into church fellowship, baptizing them based
more on a visible change in lifestyle rather than a deep understanding of spiri­
tual matters. The questions asked and conditions for baptism and fellowship in
the church often focused on church attendance, Sabbath-keeping, health prin­
ciples (especially the non-use of alcohol, tobacco, and various native drugs),
tithe-paying, accepting church organization, and other beliefs that revealed an
outward, visible lifestyle more than an inward experience with God and Jesus
Christ.

In dealing with people steeped in traditional religions, the most important
biblical truth Seventh-day Adventists have to bring to them is the extremely
important biblical eschatology with conditional immortality. Most of the tribal
people's traditional beliefs and rituals are completely inconsistent and contrast­
ing with these comforting realities and biblical truths. Their concepts of a High
God, lesser gods, spirit world, ancestors, rituals, magic, and medicine are fo­
cused on death and what happens after death. The biblical messages that God
alone is immortal, that death is an unconscious condition for all people, and
that at the Second Coming of Christ there will be a resurrection for all the righ­
teous while the unrighteous will be annihilated—these are the most important
Fundamental Beliefs for traditionalists.

Therefore, the important Adventist biblical eschatological beliefs should
be taught in detail. In accepting these biblical messages, a person from an ani­
mistic background, with various practices and rituals, has his whole world­
view completely torn apart and condemned. The main essentials of traditional
religion, including the overwhelming role supernatural beings play, are re­
nounced. Because satanic forces will still attempt to haunt the new convert,
the new Christian faith should offer biblical alternatives that can fill the great
and decisive vacuum created when the old supernatural world experience is
completely renounced. Generally, in our evangelistic approaches to Western Christians, we do not meet this challenge, and, for that reason, no doubt, we have not put much emphasis on it in our Fundamental Beliefs. For most people in non-Christian religions, however, an understanding and grasp of the ministry of both loyal and fallen angels would be of extreme significance.

Towards a Meaningful, Practical Angelology

God's people in both the Old and New Testament times at various occasions in their dealings with the surrounding nations met cultures that had somewhat similar beliefs and practices as tribal religionists have today. Therefore, the stories of the personalities and events in the Old Testament make good sense to people who live in a society and culture close to the biblical narratives. Fertility cults, heathen sacrifices (sometimes including infanticide), necromancy, sorcery, and worship of stones and trees are all mentioned in the biblical stories.

In working with persons from traditional religions, many experiences and incidents from the Bible, when detailed and rightly explained, will help the people understand the biblical message. The positive role that God's angels played in helping, warning, and delivering God's people who depended on and prayed for their assistance will be of tremendous help in working with traditionalists. The biblical narratives will fill the vacuum in their worldview and, when convincingly taught, will make it clear that spirits, ancestors, and other supernatural creatures in their former world were demonic and do not have the right and power to be part of their new lives in Christ.

In the Word of God, we learn of various roles played by angels. Angels are revealed as messengers of divine truth to mankind, as conveyers and heralds of special events, on assignment to protect God's faithful people, both individually and collectively, and even sent to execute punishment on adversaries. Angels effectuated divine judgment on the sinners in the Israel of Old, and in some cases, served as suppliers of special aid by bringing food and water. They even assisted in setting jailed prisoners free.

The Bible also outlines the rebellion in heaven where Lucifer became Satan and seduced many angels (Rev 12:4) to be part of his revolt against God's dominion. The role and activities of the fallen angels against God's government and plan of salvation are adequate to explain the deception behind the supernatural happenings in the traditionalist's former religious worship and experience. This teaching will explain that Satan and the fallen angels are the
deceivers in all false religions and can take upon themselves many forms and
imitations to lead people astray.

Such teaching also unveils the deceitfulness, futility, and ineffectiveness of
their former worship of gods, demigods, ancestors, and spirits that do not in
reality exist but are a part of the deceptions caused by fallen angels.

Good biblical teaching concerning Satan and his angels will also reveal the
danger and even counterproductive use that medicine, magic, and witchcraft
can cause.

Angels have a very significant role to play in God's plan, and we have per­
haps neglected this important aspect of the plan of salvation. Angels were wit­
tnesses to creation, were associated with the giving of the Law, and will have an
important role in the final judgment. In the Bible there are about 300 references
to angels (see appendix).

The Fundamental Beliefs and the Traditionalists

All the biblical truths, which are so well expressed in the Seventh-day Ad­
ventist Fundamental Beliefs, should be stressed and strongly emphasized in
evangelism among ethno-religionists. They are needed not only to bring tra­
ditional religionists into a meaningful relationship with Christ and his church,
but they also serve to help the new converts face the issues in their daily lives.
The all-important teaching in Adventism that Jesus triumphed over and subju­
gated all demonic powers should be convincingly emphasized in detail. To this
must be added that some of the Fundamental Beliefs inevitably have more rel­
evance than others in these cross-cultural and cross-religious situations. When
tribal religionists fully accept Christianity their world is completely torn apart
as the dependence on, belief in, and fear of the spirit world is condemned and
declared to be unbiblical and of the devil.

A few observations from a missiological viewpoint on the Fundamental
Beliefs will be appropriate at this point. In evangelistic approaches to people
in traditional religions, as well as to adherents of the world religions, all Fun­
damental Beliefs are needed. They must, however, be carefully adapted to local
cultures, beliefs, and situations. As mentioned earlier, present wordings are too
often based on a "Western" theological understanding.

Fundamental Belief number 7 (Nature of Man) and number 26 (Death and
Resurrection) should be furthered developed and extended. Even in outreach
endeavors to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, ethno-religionists, and the majority
of non-Adventist Christians, the biblical teachings on conditional immortality and the state of the dead are the greatest challenges for Adventist evangelists.

Fundamental Belief number 18 (Gift of Prophecy) is a point in our proclamation that will be readily accepted by people in traditional religions because they believe in prophets. Fundamental Beliefs number 15 (Baptism) and number 16 (The Lord's Supper) are of significant importance. Rituals and ceremonies are extremely significant, not only for living out faith in traditional societies, but also for transmitting biblical truth from one generation to another in a preliterate society. Pastors in these situations should also be prepared to make child dedications, weddings, ordination of church officers, church dedications, and funeral services into meaningful “rites of passage.”

**A Long Overdue Need for an Additional Fundamental Belief on Angels**

Seventh-day Adventists need to develop a more detailed biblical angelology. In our concepts of the celestial world, we believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, but we also believe in loyal angels. “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (Heb 1:14)?

Opposing forces consist of the fallen angels created by God who rebelled against him and were cast out of heaven. These rebellious angels serve Satan. Their power is limited, and judgment awaits them in the future. In the Bible, there is no real distinction between fallen angels and demons. In accepting and understanding the active existence of angels, both good and evil, there are all the possible components needed to fill the great vacuum created when Christian preaching condemns and insists on a removal of the many-sided supernatural and spirit world that surrounds the traditionalists and in which they believe.

Angels are already mentioned in the Fundamental Beliefs under number 8 dealing with “The Great Controversy” which reads: “To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.” Here loyal angels are mentioned.

In Fundamental Belief number 27 on “The Millennium and the End of Sin,” there is the following statement concerning fallen angels: “The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected and, with Satan and his angels, will surround the city, but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth.”
These two short, general statements on the loyal and fallen angels may satisfy and fill the vacuum created by the biblical demand to make Christ the only master, when they are explained, supported by other biblical texts, and accompanied by practical examples. However, a doctrine on Christ's victory must be followed by practical teachings on who is assisting Christ in the victory.

Traditionalists, and for that matter, the majority of people in the world religions of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism, have for generations had their lives focused on and controlled by a complexity of supernatural creatures whom they feared and by whom they were both persecuted and helped. These people will experience a tremendous vacuum when these dominating factors are removed without being replaced. It will never be sufficient to use well-expressed doctrines in a Western way. There should be practical references explaining not only who is causing the trouble, but also who will assist in the spiritual warfare between good and evil. Nothing can be more meaningful and helpful to the non-Christian converts than explanations and examples of the work of loyal angels and their counterparts, the fallen angels, as narrated in Bible history.

**Conclusion**

As stated above, as a church Adventists need to develop a thorough and sound biblical angelology in order to help missionaries in facing the complex spirit world of the various world religions as well as the millions still in the traditional religions. Such a doctrine will assist such people in understanding the plan of salvation.

Adventist theologians should develop detailed discourses on the many aspects of angelology in the framework of an Adventist eschatology and understanding of the Scriptures. A serious and thorough study of the role, ministry, and importance of the angels in God's overall plan of salvation should be a meaningful addition in the church program. The negative role of fallen angels should also be an important section of these studies. Several other Christian denominations are presently involved in developing a detailed angelology. They feel that there is a need to study this important aspect of Christian faith and theology. In Islam, the second point in their Articles of Faith, next to the article on Allah, deals with angels.

Church members should have access to literature on the subject of angelology, and the subject should be part of the ministerial training in Adventist
seminaries. Angelology definitely is a “must” in educating ministers and missionaries who are attempting to win converts from non-Christian religions, whether they are Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or traditionalist religionists.

Appendix

The Ministry of Angels in the Bible

Old Testament Examples

Abraham and Isaac: Angels restrained Abraham (Gen 22:11)
Jacob and Laban: Angels restrained Laban’s cheating (Gen 31:11)
Angel appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:2)
Angel gave message on birth of Ishmael and Samson (Gen 16:11; Judg 13:3-5)
Angel escorted Israel through the wilderness (Exod 23:20-23)
Put a cloud between Israel and the Egyptians (Exod 14:19)
Invoked a curse against a village that refused to help Jews (Judg 5:23)
Fed Elijah in the desert (1 Kgs 19:5)
Inflicted disasters on invaders of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 19:35)
Angels appeared in human form (Gen 18)
Angels are beautiful (1 Sam 29:9)
Angels know everything that happens on earth (2 Sam 14:20)
Angels eat special food (Ps 78:24-25)

New Testament Examples

Angels gave message on birth of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 1:11-20)
Warned Joseph to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus (Matt 2:13)
Encouraged Jesus on way to Mount of Olives (Luke 22:43)
Rolled away the stone from Jesus tomb (Matt 28:2-3)
Released Peter from prison (Acts 12:7-10)
Active in evangelism and in the early church (Acts 8:26; 10:1-7)

Special Orders of Angels

Seven spirits (archangels) connected to God’s throne (Rev 1:4; 4:5)
Four angels at four corners of the earth (Rev 7:1)
Cherubims (Gen 3:4; Ezek 28:14, 16)
Seraphims (Isa 6:2-6)
Hostile Angels

Satan and many angels rebelled against God (Rev 12:7-9)
They work against God by seduction (Rev 12:4)
Characterized as murderers and liars (John 8:44)
Incite whole human race to sin (John 13:2)
Brought death and judgment for all (Rom 5:12)
Accuse men and women before God (Zech 3:1-4; Rev 12:10)
Work under guise (Gen 3:1-6)
Satan appears as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14)

Reference List


Chapter 8

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EXPANDING MISSION'S IMPLICATION FOR FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS AND CHURCH UNITY

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April 8-9, 2002

Introduction

Adventist mission is expanding rapidly. This expansion is numerical. Many of us can remember what a milestone it was when we reached our first million members. The Adventist family now officially numbers over 12 million, and the rapid increase continues. The largest portion of this growth is in the two-thirds world.

This expansion is also strategic. For most of our history we have geared our mission primarily to other Christians. In recent years under the impact of the Global Mission initiative and a growing vision of our work and our world, we have begun to deliberately reach out to non-Christian religions. Our mission priority has become the 10/40 window where the majority of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus live.

The time has come for us to ask the question, What are the implications of this God-given mission expansion for the church? One area that has not been carefully considered is the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs. How does expanding mission impact the form, content, propagation, and teaching of our
basic beliefs? Since church unity is related to common belief, the question becomes how can we pursue our expanding mission and at the same time maintain our essential beliefs and church unity? This paper is a beginning attempt to speak to this question and open dialogue on the issue.

**Fundamental Beliefs**

In 1980 by a vote of the world Seventh-day Adventist Church in general session, Adventists adopted a statement of fundamental beliefs consisting of twenty-seven points. This list has served as an official statement of Adventist doctrine, appearing yearly in a prominent place in the annual *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook.* The statement has also served as a standard of orthodoxy and theological truth. Teaching that differs from these fundamental beliefs would be deemed questionable or heretical. These fundamental beliefs continue to be widely discussed, in part because the prologue to the document specifically states that "revision of these statements may be expected." This statement is often referred to in Adventist circles as "The 27." All of these things make this statement of fundamental beliefs a key unifying factor in the Adventist Church.

Two other facts also contribute to the importance of the statement and its power to draw the Seventh-day Adventist Church together. First, many Christian churches have more than one reference point for belief. A large number espouse a creed and/or confession as well as a belief statement of their particular denomination. Adventists from their beginning have not adopted a creed or confession, and thus the fundamental belief statement has no official creed to compete with for attention. Second, Adventists have a world-wide connectional organization. Many other churches in non-Western lands are independent or semi-independent of international denominational ties and have their own statements of faith. Mission related churches may have accepted a basic international Christian creed in addition to a local complementary list of beliefs. The Adventist statement of faith is understood to be the one worldwide standard and is perceived by most as an international declaration that is above culture and thus applicable to all cultures. All of this means that the belief statement is viewed by church leadership as normative in Adventist churches from Kinshasa to Kanakakee, from Thailand to Trinidad, and has no official alternatives.
Recent public discussion of these fundamental beliefs in North America and the West has centered on theological issues. This paper's thrust has a different focus—a missiological one. This missiological concern drives the content of the material which follows.

**Ignorance of the Fundamental Beliefs**

There is widespread ignorance about the fundamental beliefs statement in the local church and among regular members. Worldwide in the evangelistic setting and in the encounter between Adventism and the world religions, there is a lack of knowledge. This ignorance takes at least three forms.

**Ignorance of the Content of the Belief Statement**

Some Adventists do not even know that a formal statement exists. Others may have heard that one exists, but have no knowledge of the content. Often those who are proclaiming the message, such as lay evangelists or Global Mission Pioneers, may themselves know little or nothing of the statement. Even those who do know about the belief statement may have decided it is too detailed, complex, and theologically abstract for their hearers to comprehend.

The Bible lessons or sermons used by the evangelist may not cover all of the fundamental beliefs. When people are ready for baptism, the examiner is most interested in their response to the baptismal vows. Although thirteen baptismal vows are stipulated by the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (*Church Manual* 2000:32, 33), the use of these vows differs from place to place even in a first world setting. I personally have seen places where the vows were not even used at all. These thirteen baptismal vows, of course, do not violate the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs, but do not attempt to mirror them in order or specific content.

While in some parts of the world Bible studies and sermons used in evangelism are standardized, in North America and some other places, a wide choice is available. I counted fifteen different sets of Bible studies available at my local Adventist Book Center. It appears that in many parts of our church a certain series of Bible studies and/or the baptismal vows have by default, become the statement of belief that is the standard for believers.

Some are ignorant of at least parts of the twenty-seven fundamentals because those teaching them know that the details and complexity of certain issues cannot be grasped by their hearers. I recall my own experience as a young
missionary in the mountains of Thailand. I was teaching six young men with a fourth-grade education to be teachers for their people. I remember my decision to teach the 2300 day prophecy to them. What an experience! The procedure was complicated because I forgot how many assumptions played a role in understanding the prophecy. I also did not really think about how their different system of yearly dating would challenge us. Eight teaching hours and two days later I realized that if these young men were struggling to understand this prophecy, the ideas would never be comprehended in the villages. I was saved by a student’s question, “What is the reason you are teaching this to us?” I reflected a moment and said, “I’m telling you that all the Bible prophetic time periods are finished, and that Jesus can come any time. I’m also telling you that Jesus is working as high priest for you now.” Faces lighted up and one said, “We can understand that. Why didn’t you just tell us that to begin with?” Wise counsel! Similar things happen all over the world in the mission context.

Ignorance of the History of the Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs

Speaking for early Adventists, Richard Hutchinson, preacher and leader in Canada for the Millerite movement, wrote in the Advent Herald that the only major difference he saw between Adventists and other evangelical Christians was the millennium (Fortin 1998:51). Other denominations were post-millennialists, expecting the millennial kingdom of Christ to come through preaching the gospel, restoring the Jews, and converting the world. Adventists, on the other hand, were pre-millennialists and believed that the literal second coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the righteous began the millennium. Hutchinson thus saw only one Adventist fundamental belief that separated Adventists from other Protestants.

By 1872, a Seventh-day Adventist editor (probably Uriah Smith) produced a statement containing twenty-five articles. This statement was never adopted by an administrative session of the church, but was printed by the Review in pamphlet form. It was also published twice by the Signs of the Times, and after two revisions was incorporated into the first church manual in 1883 (Fortin 1998:54).

In 1931 a new statement of belief was voted and for the first time appeared in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook. Part of the reason for the statement being included was an appeal from Africa to explain church beliefs to colonial
(Christian) government officials. This twenty-two article statement first appeared in the back part of the *Yearbook*, but in a short time had been moved to the front of the book where such statements remain until today. This was the official statement until the revised twenty-seven point list used today replaced it in 1980.

This brief retelling reminds us of two things. First, there is nothing sacred about the number twenty-seven. The statement contained twenty-two points for more years than it has had twenty-seven. The prologue to the statement itself reminds us we should expect change.

Second, the belief statement idea itself began in an attempt to explain Adventist beliefs to other Christians. The statements are best understood as an attempt to give the Adventist position in the Christian context. Adventists are endeavoring to tell other Christians where they have similar beliefs to them and where they differ in doctrine. Understanding Adventist history and the interaction between Adventists and other Christians forms the background and setting of the statement.

Adventists certainly do not object to non-Christians studying their beliefs, but should not be surprised if secularists, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims are confused or mystified by the belief statement. What this means is that the statement, as it now is written, has very little value in helping missionaries to non-Christians do their work or explain their beliefs.

Ignorance of Worldview Assumptions Which Lie Behind the Fundamental Beliefs Statement

All writers make certain assumptions in their work. Some of these assumptions are known and deliberately made while others are unknown. Others are partially understood but never reflected on. The following assumptions, which I think are largely unrecognized, need to be carefully considered as we pursue our mission among non-Christians.

First, *the statement assumes literacy*. The length, complexity, and listing of biblical references which characterize the statement assume the audience is literate. According to United Nations figures, there are approximately one billion non-literate adults or about 26 percent of the world's adult population (www.sil.org/literacy/LitFacts.html). All parts of the world are affected. While illiteracy rates for Africa are over 40 percent, North America has its own problems. According to Alvin Toffler, 70 million Americans are functionally illiterate, and
44 percent don’t read even one book per year (www.efnoody.com/miscedarians/illiteracy.html). Recent United Nations research suggests the rate of illiteracy is growing, not decreasing (www.globalpolicy.org/socecon/global/unicef98.html). The framers of the statement were probably correct in writing it for the majority of the world who are literate, but did they think about the implications? If the statement is to be widely understood and universally accepted, its form must be adapted to fit this sizable number of illiterates who are important to the church and its mission.

Second, the statement assumes a definition of religion which is heavily cognitive. The statements talk of what we believe or think or understand to be true about God, man, and the world. Behaviors such as Sabbath-keeping, observance of the Ten Commandments, tithing, amusement, dress, and health principles are mentioned, but even here the call is primarily how to believe about these issues. The kind of life, the kind of response, the kind of experience expected to arise from this belief, is, by and large, not clearly spelled out.

I agree with the fundamental beliefs, but the way they are stated follows a long line of Western Protestantism that assumes thinking true ideas about God is crucial and that results in action will follow naturally and need not be stated.

Our emphasis on the cognitive doctrines becomes more evident when we compare ourselves with other religions. Islam has five pillars: (1) The creed (“There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet”), (2) Prayer (five times a day), (3) Almsgiving, (4) Fasting (Ramadan), and (5) Pilgrimage (if possible to Mecca). Only the first of the five pillars is a theological cognitive belief statement. Even that statement is understood as a call to recite the belief or witness to it, not simply think it.

Buddhists have four noble truths as well as an eight-fold path of action for life. The four noble truths talk about suffering and its cure and could be called theology. The fourth truth says that the way to live and escape suffering is to follow the eight-fold path. In other words, theology is a prologue to life which is tied directly to the theological beliefs and naturally flows from it.

Most of the world, especially non-Westerners, thinks more in line with the life-oriented practice statements of the Muslims or Buddhists than they do our more cognitive one. In fact, when most of our Adventist evangelists proclaim our message in these areas, they preach a life to be lived. Action in life is tied to teaching about God.
To illustrate my point consider fundamental belief number one. It talks about the inspiration of the Bible and the fact that Scripture tells us what is necessary for salvation and that it reveals God's will. Nothing is said about the necessity to study, read, or follow it! In other words, we are to accept its inspiration, but nowhere are we told of the need to use it daily in our life. Why not spell it out or mention it? Do we believe people need to study, memorize, internalize, and follow scripture? This whole emphasis on the cognitive has led to a neglect of devotional theology.

If we go strictly by the belief statement, you can be an Adventist in good and regular standing and never pray. Most Adventists believe prayer is important, but they do not receive that belief from their fundamental beliefs statement. Statement number two on the trinity tells us God is “forever worthy of worship,” but nowhere are we called to worship or told its meaning. Thus the whole area of Christian devotional practice in study, prayer, and worship is neglected.

Third, the statement assumes a Western first world cultural context and neglects certain issues crucial to other areas of the world. Many of the things I have mentioned earlier could fit into this section also—the literacy issues, the cognitive definition of religion, the complexity of the statement, and its use of Western dating. There are, however, additional important issues that fit only here that need to be mentioned.

The first is the issue of wealth and poverty. While fundamental belief number twenty does deal with the giving of tithes and offerings, the issue for the two-thirds world is, however, a much broader one. Wealth and poverty is a question of their very existence. Many struggle just to find enough to eat, and the material wealth and consumerism of the West are, for them, a moral issue. The Bible says many things about rich and poor and concern for the hungry and homeless. All major world religions attempt in some way to relate this issue to the core of their religion. For them it is not simply a political or economic issue like it is for many Westerners, but a moral and religious one which is not addressed in our basic statement of doctrine.

Perhaps even more crucial is the issue of the spirits and the demonic. While our fundamental statement of belief in article eight affirms the existence of Satan and cosmic conflict between God and evil, it stops short of any statement about demonic activity in everyday life or the Adventist way of dealing with it. For a large part of the world, activity in the spiritual realm is a daily, real occurrence which affects their lives in many ways. They live much closer to the world
of the New Testament than we do. If we fail to speak to this area, reversion to cultural norms of visits to healers or shamans and the use of amulets and spells is almost inevitable. This problem of dual allegiance is widespread in many parts of the world. Many attend church on Sabbath and on Tuesday take a sick child to an animist spirit healer.

At a recent meeting in Africa the issue of the spirits came up and the discussion exploded. Someone from America asked, “Have you never discussed this before?” The answer was, “Of course, we discuss it privately, but were told that since it was not part of the twenty-seven fundamentals, we were to say nothing about it in public.” Certainly the New Testament gospels never heard of this approach.

Simply because these two issues were (are) not burning issues for Western Christians in their context, the fundamental statement of beliefs has not addressed them.

The above issues and examples are just a few of the observations and questions that have occurred to Adventist missionaries, evangelists, and Global Mission Pioneers as they have reached out to non-Christians, especially in the 10/40 Window. They believe in the Adventist message, but struggle to communicate the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people in a way that connects with people’s needs.

Suggestions

We cannot leave this simply as an open question. I would like to tentatively suggest some steps that might be taken so that the unifying role of the fundamental beliefs might continue ever stronger in our active evangelism among non-Christian peoples. I hope I can stimulate your thinking so we can come up with even more ideas as to how to address this issue.

De-emphasize the Number of the Fundamentals

Do not call them “the twenty-seven.” Earlier there have been twenty-five and twenty-two, and in the future there may be twenty-nine or thirty. We may want to summarize their themes and state them in different ways so numbers will change. They are the fundamental beliefs, not the Ten Commandments, and are meant to be adapted and changed.
We Must Find Ways to State Our Fundamental Beliefs
In the Context of the World Religions

Perhaps we could develop introductory or pre-fundamental belief statements for the major world religions. Another idea would be to take the major themes of the current statement and couch them in terms the world religions would relate to. We could make clear that the present statement relates to the Christian context and should be used cautiously in non-Christian contexts.

Belief Statements and Baptismal Vows Should Be Coordinated

I am also tempted to suggest that Bible studies, meant to lead to baptism, should also be coordinated, but that may be asking too much. Obviously some adaptation is needed. There are currently twenty-seven fundamental beliefs and thirteen baptismal vows. It would seem, however, that the order and themes could be thought through and brought together. Both would be strengthened and that would enhance unity.

The Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs Should Be Grouped or Summarized by Organizing Them Around Major Themes

Recently in print and in scholarly meetings some have been suggesting that we should theologically organize the twenty-seven fundamentals by seeing some as core and others as more peripheral. What I am suggesting is different. Simply take major themes like God, the revelation of God, salvation, man, second coming (eschatology), church, law and Sabbath, and Christian life, and group the fundamentals into these categories. Make sure evangelists and Bible studies that prepare people for church membership cover these themes and that baptismal vows teach key ideas in each category. Presentation of these belief categories could be adapted to each religion and culture, but key issues would be covered by all. This would allow for a unified basic message that could be adapted to fit any situation.
Develop Simplified, Shortened Statements of Our Beliefs, Perhaps in Catechism Form

For instruction of children, illiterates, and new converts, develop teaching tools that make beliefs simple, straightforward, and easy to memorize. One of the best ways to do this is by a question and answer format used by some catechisms. Ask questions like, How do we find out about God and truth? What is God like? How does Jesus help us? What does God ask of us? And then answer them with our basic beliefs. The catechism should be related to the baptismal vows and the fundamental beliefs. We did something like this, unofficially, of course, for our early Hmong believers in Thailand. Attached to the end of this paper is the result of our efforts.

Work on Correcting Omissions in the Belief Statement That Are Particularly Crucial

We must deal with issues that reflect global concerns relevant to an international church. These additions do not necessarily need to be new statements that change the number of paragraphs in the fundamental statement, but in many cases can be added to existing points. I think there are at least four areas that should be spoken to: (1) spirits, evil angels, and Jesus' power over them, as well as the church's ministry to afflicted people; (2) the Christian devotional life of prayer, Bible study, and worship; (3) the imperative to love one another and avoid racism, tribalism, gender bias, and perhaps Christian family life could be a part of this; and (4) the issue of wealth, poverty, economic justice, and sharing among Christians and the world.

In my opinion, at least the first three should be included in baptismal vows, i.e., people should at baptism renounce all dependence on power from evil spirits, the use of amulets, and visits to shamans, etc., should state their desire to spend time daily in communion with God, and should commit to love those not of their own social group. Certainly these are crucial to living as an Adventist Christian.

My suggestions are not to be taken as the final answer. What I really want to do is issue a challenge—a challenge to honestly face the issue of what it means to declare our message to the non-Christian world in a way they can understand and so our fundamental beliefs can be maintained and our unity may grow.
I look forward to vigorous dialogue as we try together, under the Spirit’s
guidance, to facilitate this happening in our midst. This will stretch us all and
will help fulfill God’s missionary commission to our church.

Notes

1Published yearly by the Review and Herald Publishing Association under the
auspices of the Office of Archives and Statistics of the General Conference of Seventh-
day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland.
2See for example (Knight 2001:5-7). A recent three-day meeting of the Adventist
Society for Religious Studies produced a number of papers on theological issues
related to the 27 Fundamental Beliefs. One did deal with missiological issues.
3Interestingly, only one of the fifteen was directly based on the 27 Fundamental
Beliefs, but that fact was not even mentioned in the study guide!
4The Thai dating of years starts with the year of Buddha’s enlightenment. So 2002
A.D. is 2544 in Thailand.
5See note 1 above. The recent Adventist Society for Religious Studies meeting in
Denver, November 2001, had this core vs. peripheral idea as its main theme.

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Chapter 9

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2002 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor's Note: At the conclusion of each year's Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 2002 five recommendations were prepared dealing with love and unity, Israel and Jewish people, spiritual life, spiritual powers, and wealth, poverty, economic justice, and sharing.

Love and Unity

Recommended 9 April 2002

Inasmuch as

1. The church is seen increasingly as irrelevant to the real struggles of the people of the world torn by terror, violence, tribalism, nationalism, racism, and interpersonal abuse and bias of many kinds, including gender bias, and

2. We have seen in the church examples of tragic discord, strife, bias, and violence, and

3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a global church encompassing every nation, tribe, language, and people, and
4. The living practice of understanding and love does not come naturally to believers, and

5. The Bible emphasizes the preeminence of love and Christ taught us that the demonstration of love is the most convincing argument for the truth of the gospel;

It is recommended that the General Conference Administrative Committee give consideration to a statement in the Fundamental Beliefs which addresses the following issues:

1. That Christians are called to love all people regardless of tribal, ethnic, or national origin and to treat them as equals;

2. That the Christian's first loyalty to the Lord Jesus and his kingdom transcends all other loyalties;

3. That Christians are called to avoid violence toward people, interpersonal abuse, racism, and gender bias;

4. That while the church affirms the personal and group identity of its members it needs to ask its members for a commitment against prejudice, violence, and bias.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Israel and Jewish People

Recommended 9 April 2002

Inasmuch as

1. Many Jews in the New Testament times had a positive attitude towards Jesus, and

2. There is a growing Messianic movement, in which Jesus is worshipped according to the Jewish culture, that already numbers about 300,000 worldwide.

3. There is a growth of Jewish Adventist communities, and

4. We have been given by the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy the responsibility to preach the Three Angels’ Messages to the Jewish people, and

5. We realize that according to the writing of E. G. White a large number of Jews will unite with us in proclaiming the Three Angels’ Messages;
That we recommend that the Administrative Committee adopt a policy that

1. In all our literature and public statements nothing will be published or spoken that will be a stumbling block or offense that would prevent Jews from accepting our message.

2. We avoid making negative generalizations (e.g., Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus, God has rejected the Jewish people),

3. And that the Biblical Research Institute be asked to prepare a document refuting the theology of supercessionism.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

**Spiritual Life**

*Recommended 9 April 2002*

Inasmuch as

1. The current Adventist Fundamental Beliefs inadequately address spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, meditation, worship, and the resulting gospel outreach, and

2. Major world religions have a strong belief in and respect for these spiritual disciplines;

   It is recommended that the General Conference Administrative Committee set in motion the process to add to the Fundamental Beliefs a statement that includes the following crucial elements of spiritual life:

   Maintaining a connection with divine power through: (1) prayer, (2) Bible study, (3) meditation (reflection), (4) individual and corporate worship, (5) service, and (6) outreach.

   (Careful consideration should be given to avoiding communicating a salvation by works idea when forming this statement.)

Editor's Note: This recommendation was combined with the recommendation on spiritual powers and approved at the 2005 General Conference session (see chapter 32).
Spiritual Powers
Recommended 9 April 2002

Inasmuch as
1. The 27 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists were written in a Western context where belief in spirits is not a major issue, and
2. For the majority of the world, including traditional religionists, folk Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims, and New Age believers, the issue of spiritual powers and ancestors is an important day to day experience, and
3. The New Testament deals extensively with the issue of angels, spirits, demons, and Jesus’ power over them;

It is recommended that the General Conference Administrative Committee give study to the addition of a statement to the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists covering spiritual powers which should include the following issues:
1. The victory of Jesus and his authority over all evil spiritual powers;
2. The role of good and evil angels (spirits) in the life of people;
3. The responsibility of the Church to follow Jesus model of ministry in bringing deliverance and healing to afflicted people;
4. The role of the Holy Spirit and the Bible in giving guidance, victory, and indwelling power to believers in the day-to-day life.

Editor’s Note: This recommendation was combined with the recommendation on spiritual powers and approved at the 2005 General Conference session.

Wealth, Poverty, Economic Justice, and Sharing
Recommended 9 April 2002

Inasmuch as
1. A major proportion of the world’s population lives in poverty, while in Christian countries many live in affluence, and
2. The Bible in both the Old and New Testaments has, as a general principle, the notion that God’s people not selfishly keep his blessings to themselves, but are commanded to receive blessing by caring and sharing, and
3. The Second Coming of Christ is a central doctrine of the Adventist Church. For this reason, we should not overlook the fact that Christ, in Matt
25:31-40 illustrated that social concern has a decisive role to play in the final judgment when he says to those who enter the kingdom: "I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me."

It is recommended that the General Conference Administrative Committee give study to the addition to, or the expansion of a statement in the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists that addresses the issue of wealth, poverty, economic justice, and sharing.

1. We as Adventist Christians, in our programs as well as individually, should be involved in combating economic injustice in the world.

2. We as Adventist Christians are to be actively involved in making this world a better place in which to live for the millions who are suffering, one way or another, for lack of wealth and economic justice.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.
WHO CAN ADMINISTER THE SACRAMENTS?

JAMES COFFIN

April 6-7, 2003

In a world of underground churches, para-church structures, political and religious restrictions, burgeoning membership among illiterate and semi-literate people, and isolated converts whose only contact with the world Adventist Church is listening to Adventist World Radio, the foregoing question becomes increasingly significant and urgent.

Communion

When Jesus was eating his final Passover with his disciples before his crucifixion, he "took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, 'Take and eat; this is my body.' Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.' When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives" (Matt 26:26-30).

The setting was simple. Jesus and his disciples were participating in a feast that the Hebrews had celebrated since the exodus—the Passover. Taking the el-
lements of the Passover which were on the table before him, Jesus invested them with new meaning and promise. He took something familiar and added to it something that, at that moment, was not fully comprehended. Jesus wanted his disciples, both those present that night and the millions upon millions who would follow him through the centuries, to have a tangible reminder of what he had done for them by dying, and what he would do for them when he came again. As God had set his rainbow in the sky to remind that there would never again be a universal flood, Jesus gave an equally tangible and ever-present reminder of the salvation he came to give, symbolized through the bread and the wine.

In fact, in the book *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White extends the symbolism of the Last Supper far beyond the occasional ritual of the formal communion service. She states: "The bread we eat (talking about our daily bread) is the purchase of his broken body. The water we drink is bought by his spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of his great sacrifice. The light shining from that communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament" (1940:660).

Jesus' actions at the Last Supper appear to have been spontaneous. The event was not something for which he had primed the disciples in detail. He had not given them prior instruction about what was going to happen that night and the great significance it would have for centuries to come. Rather he took something ordinary that lay before him and, without undue ritual or fanfare, gave it extraordinary significance.

Although the Bible provides rules concerning how the Passover should be celebrated (see Exod 12), Jesus did not issue any procedural edicts about how this new ritual should be transacted. In fact, Luke presents a somewhat different sequence from Matthew and Mark. In Luke's portrayal of what happened, the wine was blessed and divided among the disciples before the meal and then drunk after the bread was consumed (see Luke 22:14-20). Also, the promise about not partaking again until we do it together in God's kingdom, according to Luke's rendition, is a prelude to the communion service rather than a postlude. The promise pertains first to the bread, and then to the wine. "For I tell you, I will not eat [emphasis mine] it again until it finds fulfillment in the
Who Can Administer the Sacraments?


Christ’s command, “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19), implies that the celebration of communion would be an ongoing ritual. And the apostle Paul implies the same: “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). But Jesus did not say whether this beautiful reminder should be celebrated daily, weekly, quarterly, or yearly. Rather, “whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup,” however often that might be, we are reminded of both the past and the future.

Similarly, Jesus did not state nor did Paul or any other New Testament writer who should lead out in such a celebration, how many need to be present, or what preparatory rituals need to be followed. So over the centuries protocols simply emerged in what became the Catholic Church. These were later adjusted by the various denominations that have come about since the Reformation. While the prescriptions for the Passover give insight into what happened at the Last Supper, there is no directive that says we must mimic the exact procedure followed then. Nor is there any directive that we should alter anything. The Bible presents a simple story of a celebration and suggests that we should continue to celebrate.

Now let’s turn our attention from communion to baptism, another of the rituals that Christ enjoined us to follow.

Baptism

When John the Baptist came as the forerunner of Jesus, a major component of his ministry was baptizing as his name suggests. Baptism was a symbol of cleansing. And John preached a message concerning the need to clean up human behavior. Baptism was the tangible ritual that people went through to indicate their decision and desire to lead a changed life. Jesus placed his stamp of approval on this ritual by going through it himself.

In Matt 3:13-15, we read: “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness,’ then John consented.” The fact that Jesus went through this ritual, and the fact that he explained why he was going through it, clearly suggests that it was an experience he desired for all those who would become his followers.
The great commission that Jesus gave to his disciples before returning to heaven affirms the significance of baptism. “Therefore,” Jesus said, “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:19, 20).

The great commission contains four parts:

1. We are to go. This may not in every case necessitate abandonment of one’s home to traverse the globe, preaching to faraway people. But the expression does imply an intentional and deliberate action. Our witnessing is not just happenstance.

2. We are to make disciples. Those who accept the message that we are privileged to carry are to be made part of the Body of Christ. They are to become Christ’s followers and play significant roles in the building up of his body.

3. We are to ensure that they follow Christ’s example of being baptized. Baptism is the initiation and induction into discipleship.

4. Spiritual growth is ongoing. It never stops in this world. Therefore, we are to ensure that those we bring to Christ are instructed and assisted in this ongoing process of becoming all that God has in mind for us to be.

Inconsistency

Interestingly, Seventh-day Adventists (like most other denominations) have applied the entire great commission except for the baptizing to all members of the Church. We believe we all, laity and clergy alike, have been commissioned to go forth and share with others the good news of salvation. We believe that we all, laity and clergy alike, play a vital role in helping others to become Christ’s disciples. We believe that we all, laity and clergy alike, should be involved in fostering the ongoing process of spiritual growth described here. But when it comes to baptizing, we believe that only the clergy should have power to act. Why?

On what basis have we decided that three of the four aspects of the gospel commission apply to everyone, but that one of the four applies only to the clergy? A more telling question: Where did we come up with the idea that such a category as “clergy” is mandated by Scripture? And how does the concept of clergy fit in with the doctrine of the priesthood of every believer?
Certainly, the Bible talks about the members who make up Christ's body having varying spiritual gifts and functions (1 Cor 12). Some are administrators, some are teachers, some are evangelists, some are pastors, and some may have a wide range of other gifts. Some may even be endowed with many or most of these gifts. But on what biblical basis do we elevate some gifts over others and give to the possessors of those gifts certain sole prerogatives such as leading out in communion or baptizing? Or have we been unwittingly influenced by longstanding religious traditions that, without biblical justification, introduced these distinctions?

The Bible does lay down a principle that "everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way" (1 Cor 14:40). In the same way that it wreaked havoc with church services when everyone was talking at once, particularly if they were speaking in a language that others could not understand, it could create chaos if all Christians initiated others into the body of Christ through baptism. It may be advantageous, from an organizational perspective, to have designated baptizers. And, as long as we understand that we are doing it for the sake of organizational expediency rather than because of a qualitative difference in the members of the body of Christ, fine. It is not that others could not baptize or lead out in communion. Rather, for the sake of order and to avoid chaos and confusion, we choose to restrict these functions. But we need to be extremely clear on why we have restricted them.

Because of the administrative and organizational impact, we have a stronger argument for restricting who baptizes than we do for restricting who leads out in communion. For example, why shouldn't any Christian family who happens to be together for the holidays celebrate communion, if they wish, as a family, without the presence of ministers, elders or deacons? Or why shouldn't a group of church members who are involved in some special endeavor celebrate communion together, even though there may be no minister, elders or deacons present? Is communion limited to the confines of a church's four walls, with the participation of the church hierarchy? The Bible does not seem to say so.

Current Adventist Mandates

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (1995 edition) states that "the communion service is to be conducted by an ordained minister or a church
elder. Deacons, although ordained, cannot conduct the service, but they can assist by passing out the bread and wine to the members” (74).

This restriction on who can lead out in communion also appears under the section “Conduct of Church Services.” “The communion services must always be conducted by an ordained minister or by the elder. Only ordained ministers or ordained elders holding office are qualified to do this” (48).

Also, “During the interim between election and ordination, the elected elder may function as church leader but not administer the ordinances of the church (46).

The manual also says, “There should be great reluctance to introduce alternative symbols and means (except under truly emergency conditions) lest the original significance of the service be lost. Likewise in the order of service and the traditional roles played by ministers, elders, deacons and deaconesses in the communion service, there should be caution lest substitution and innovation contribute to a tendency to make common that which is sacred” (69).

Interestingly, the tradition of pastors being the sole officiants at baptisms is so strongly established that the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (1995) does not even reiterate this commonly held understanding. It has considerably less to say about who can baptize than about who can administer communion. The manual states that “a local church elder should not officiate in the baptismal service without first obtaining permission from the conference/mission president” (48), implying that there may be circumstances in which a pastor may not be available to officiate. However, I could find no definitive statement that baptism is, except by special permission, limited to credentialed or licensed clergy. It is simply understood universally, I would suggest, within the Adventist Church.

**Challenge of the Atypical**

One does not have to spend much time reading the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual to realize that it presupposes a fairly visible and defined organizational structure. And, to date, the church has maintained an amazing uniformity as it has entered various regions around the globe. Certainly, the Church Manual has played a significant role in maintaining such cohesion. Increasingly, however, the church is encountering circumstances that make it difficult to follow many of the manual’s provision.
Adventist World Radio has carried the gospel and the unique emphasis of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to areas that have never been visited by official church personnel. Many have listened to the broadcasts and have accepted the messages they have heard. Individuals, families, or small groups may be joining together regularly to listen to the broadcasts. They may, in essence, have formed a congregation, yet they have none of the structures that are outlined in Church Manual. In many cases they are not baptized, nor are they celebrating communion because they have not been given instruction in how to proceed, nor have they received the green light to proceed. Such believers are too often missing out on the joy and blessing of these two sacraments.

Variations of this situation exist in a variety of places around the globe. In some cases, political and religious prohibitions make it all but impossible for representatives from the Adventist Church to travel to see isolated believers or groups. Further, such a visit can place the isolated believers or groups at great risk, not to mention the one who does the visiting.

In some countries with repressive regimes, the Church may have existed for years. However, government restrictions have made it nearly impossible for the official church to evangelize and grow. So a parallel church, not recognized by or known to the government, has emerged. In some cases these underground, loose-knit movements are growing at a rapid rate. But the infrastructure presupposed by the Church Manual does not exist. Since there are no guidelines for such non-traditional structures, church leaders, from those regions where the Adventist Church only has traditional structures, do not know how to advise when they interact with members from the alternative structures. Thus they may give no advice or give conflicting advice.

Global Mission has had remarkable success in reaching out to people groups who heretofore have been totally unreached or barely touched. Many of these people are illiterate or semi-literate. They certainly do not have the benefit of the support materials and personnel that traditionally have been part of the Church's slower and more systematic expansion. What is going on in some of these Global Mission situations is more synonymous with wildfire. So a church with a different face is emerging. And the organizational presuppositions of the Church Manual often do not meet the needs of these people. Some of the fastest growth in the Adventist Church is taking place in this context.

So, in these atypical situations, who baptizes? Who leads out in communion? From a biblical perspective, there appears to be no obstacle to our breaking with tradition and the provisions of the Church Manual to accommodate
these special needs. Our traditional restriction on the administering of the sac­raments is an organizational expediency, not a biblical mandate about qualita­tive differences between members of the body of Christ. Thus we need to pro­vide clear and unambiguous guidelines for administering the sacraments under conditions that scarcely qualify as the “truly emergency conditions” alluded to in the Church Manual because these situations, in all probability, will be long­term, if not permanent, and they definitely call for a different approach.

Failure to provide for alternative approaches does not mean that depart­ures from the norm will not happen. It simply means that the departures will be more haphazard and random. It also means that those who know about the provisions of the Church Manual but see no way to comply will feel guilty when they feel forced to forge their own path. Such guilt is not necessary if the Church Manual can appropriately recognize and allow broader latitude than it currently does for the atypical situations that the Church faces with increasing frequency.

Notes

1All biblical references are from the New International Bible.

Reference List


My first exposure to the question as to whether or not the communion service could be contextualized was raised in a college class when a Korean student admitted that, in an emergency situation, during the Korean police action, they had used grape-flavored Kool-Aid. A lengthy, sympathetic, and incomplete discussion of this seemingly heretical action occupied our young, inexperienced, and somewhat rigid minds.

Two factors grow out of the minimal case study just presented. The first is the present ready, availability of almost all products in all parts of the world, thanks to globalization and the global marketplace. The second is the theological factor.

The theological factor must ask the question as to what Jesus intended to do at that last meal with his disciples. Did he intend to institute a "rite," to be exactly reproduced at all times and in all places, perhaps even carrying sacramental power? If so, then what happens when concern for exactitude outweighs the meaning of the symbol? Or did Jesus intend to provide an easily reproducible, symbolic activity that was meant to carry over into daily life?
It may be useful for us to remember that Jesus actually contextualized a Jewish *seder* (Passover supper) which itself has been contextualized over time to the point that Christians today no longer stand as in the original Passover setting, and no longer recline as during the Roman era, but sit during the service. During the Cold War, a fifth cup was frequently added to remember the persecuted Jews behind the Iron Curtain. How long the original practices lasted as a common meal (such as the *seder*) is not known. We can surmise that the communion meal probably became shortened to simply bread and wine at least during times of Roman persecution, before it was formalized later still as a sacramental ritual in the Roman Church.

One of the most significant statements on the topic of the communion is found in *The Desire of Ages*. I have italicized several phrases that we will examine.

The Communion service points to Christ's second coming. It was *designed to keep this hope vivid in the minds of the disciples*. Whenever they met together to commemorate His death, they recounted how “He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.” In their tribulation they found comfort in the hope of their Lord's return. Unspeakably precious to them was the thought, “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come.” 1 Cor 11:26.

These are the things we are never to forget. The love of Jesus, with its constraining power, is to be kept fresh in our memory. Christ has instituted this service *that it may speak to our senses of the love of God* that has been expressed in our behalf. There can be no union between our souls and God except through Christ. The union and love between brother and brother must be cemented and rendered eternal by the love of Jesus. And nothing less than the death of Christ could make His love efficacious for us. It is only because of His death that we can look with joy to His second coming. His sacrifice is the center of our hope. Upon this we must fix our faith.

The ordinances that point to our Lord's humiliation and suffering are regarded too much as a form. They were instituted for a purpose. Our *senses need to be quickened* to lay hold of the mystery of godliness. It is the privilege of all to comprehend, far more than we do, the expiatory sufferings of Christ. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,” even so has the Son of man been lifted up, “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:14, 15. To the cross of Calvary, bearing a dying Saviour, we must look. Our eternal interests demand that we show faith in Christ.

Our Lord has said, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. . . . For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed” John 6:53-55. This is true of our physical nature. To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. *The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we
drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of His great sacrifice. The light shining from that Communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament.

And how much more are Christ's words true of our spiritual nature. He declares, "Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life." It is by receiving the life for us poured out on Calvary's cross, that we can live the life of holiness. And this life we receive by receiving His word, by doing those things which He has commanded. Thus we become one with Him. "He that eateth My flesh," He says, "and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me" John 6:54, 56, 57. To the holy Communion this scripture in a special sense applies. As faith contemplates our Lord's great sacrifice, the soul assimilates the spiritual life of Christ. That soul will receive spiritual strength from every Communion. The service forms a living connection by which the believer is bound up with Christ, and thus bound up with the Father. In a special sense it forms a connection between dependent human beings and God.

As we receive the bread and wine symbolizing Christ's broken body and spilled blood, we in imagination join in the scene of Communion in the upper chamber. We seem to be passing through the garden consecrated by the agony of Him who bore the sins of the world. We witness the struggle by which our reconciliation with God was obtained. Christ is set forth crucified among us (White 1940:659-661).

Let us focus on the italicized phrases:

**Designed to keep this hope vivid in the minds of the disciples.** The practical intent of Jesus' action cannot be over emphasized. This symbolic "meal" was intended to be transferable. Jesus took the common food of the seder (Passover supper) which was common of virtually every meal, and used the bread and wine to remind people of what he was doing for the salvation of the world.

**That it may speak to our senses of the love of God.** To the degree that "our senses" are culturally conditioned this will require adaptation. Form and meaning are not universal. They are very cultural. While bread (in a variety of forms and ingredients) is the common food in much of the West, it is tortillas or chapattis or rice or cassava or plantains or sadza in other cultures.

**The ordinances that point to our Lord's humiliation and suffering are regarded too much as a form.** We should take this phrase very seriously in this discussion. Formalism is a very natural human organizational tendency and can lead easily to sacramentalism in cultures that tend to be more concrete and literal in their thinking.
The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of His great sacrifice. The light shining from that Communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament. At the very least this suggests that the meaning and the sanctity of the communion service is to be easily transferable to ordinary meals. While I doubt that Ellen White used the term "sacrament" in a strict theological or Roman Catholic sense, I do not doubt that she intends us to be thus regularly reminded, two to three times a day, that all of life is sacred. Many family meals in our hectic times could be transformed by this reminder.

It was at the conclusion of a four-week intensive during my graduate studies, during which our very culturally and ecumenically diverse small group had experienced numerous Spirit-infused hours together that one member of our group had brought an apple-for-the-teacher, and handed it to her. The facilitator studied the apple reflectively and then took a small bite and handed it to the student to her right. That student took a small bite and passed it to his right and the apple made its diminishing way around the circle. In that Spirit-charged moment all of us sensed what was happening. We were sharing "communion," celebrating our oneness with each other and with the Lord Jesus. And the Lord Jesus was very present. There was no bread, there was no wine. There was only our group and an apple, all refugees from Eden, redeemed, together in the Lord Jesus.

If the table of the Lord is an event that must be correctly and carefully duplicated in each detail then we must consider the specific words to be used and the adequacy of translations, the form of the bread, and the nature of the wine. But, even such carefulness is troubling when we look at the history of communion. For "red wine was normally used, though this was not a rule in the time of Jesus... Up to the 3rd century water was used by the church instead of wine in some areas" (Bromily 1985:155).

Looking back at history could open the door to theological discussion of the frequency of the event, for history suggests behavior that would lead us a step closer to the sacramentalism of the liturgical churches, which we have rather carefully avoided. Historical accuracy would also signal a lack of concern for the transference of meaning (contextualization) by replacing a concern for meaning with a concern for behavioral orthodoxy.
An alternative is to view the act of Jesus as the institution of a frequently occurring event that easily carried over into daily life. The use of bread and wine were the adaptation of common foods to symbolize his sacrificial death. These “common” foods would thus be locally adapted and understood and the meaning of the event thus transferred to locally normal meals, quickly reminding people that “the cross of Christ is stamped on every meal, reflected in each drink.” The spiritual impact of such an understanding could be truly amazing and beneficial as each meal becomes a sacrament: a “religious ceremony or act regarded as outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace” (Fowler and Fowler 1964).

Another alternative, a middle way, suggests itself. Since “bread” and “wine” have become so identified with the communion service over the centuries, they have become a form of sanctified “comfort-food.” The traditional form of communion has been spread around the world and is almost immediately recognizable. At the same time, there are occasions, due to isolation or to social and political disruptions, when these “elements” are not readily available. These occasions may become even more frequent as we approach the eschaton.

In these situations people should understand that it is perfectly acceptable to substitute other local “elements” that the local congregation considers appropriate. Apparently, this has already been done and authorized by some levels of church authority.1

The benefits of such an understanding would allow for some local adaptation when grape juice and bread are not available, but would preserve the unity of the church through maintaining the present practice of strongly suggesting the use of the traditional elements.

Questions Raised

1. Will we address this issue on the level of availability vs. non-availability or on the theological level? The context of our discussion suggests the latter.
2. Is the form more important than the meaning?
3. Can the meaning be effectively communicated by other forms?
4. Is the “middle way” actually creeping compromise?
5. Is the “middle way” in reality a denial of the New Testament practice?
6. To what degree can the church tolerate diversity on this issue?
Notes

In an e-mail dated 12 February 2003 from Barry Oliver, General Secretary, South Pacific Division

Dear Paul,

A few years ago (probably 5-8 years ago) the Biblical Research Committee of the South Pacific Division took an action recommending that in those areas of the South Pacific where grape juice was not available for supply or economic reasons, churches may use pure fresh coconut milk as a substitute for grape juice. This should only be done if every effort had been made to obtain grape juice. In some places, communion was not being celebrated year after year because grape juice was not available.

Would you please research this action in the minutes of the Biblical Research Committee and send a copy of the action to Bruce.

I know of no other action or activity in the South Pacific with respect to the question.

Thank you

Barry

Reference List


Chapter 12

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EVANGELISM AMONG RESISTANT PEOPLES
WITH DEEPLY ENTRANCED POLYGAMY

RUSSELL L. STAPLES

April 6-7, 2003

Introduction

This paper has to do with the problem of polygamy in the evangelization of peoples in societies which are resistant to the gospel. Examples of these are some Muslim societies in the Middle East, Africa, and Indonesia, and some ethno-religionist societies such as the Southern Nilo-Hamites (including the Maasai) of East Africa. While the focus is on polygamy in a few select societies, an introductory overview is given of some aspects of the dealings of the churches and mission societies with polygamous families over the years. This is followed by a review of the trajectory of the Adventist experience and of the biblical/theological foundations of the issue in order to provide a background for discussion regarding an appropriate course of action.

The way missionaries respond to the polygamy problem has always been, and remains, a particularly sensitive issue for two main reasons: first, because of the deeply entrenched views in the Christian West regarding the theology and forms of marriage, and second, because of the fear that an accommodating position will undercut the Christian standard of monogamy in the church,
and consequently impact the security of women who are concerned about any threat to their monogamous status.

A Cursory View of the Road Traveled

General Missions History

The problem of how to accommodate converts coming to Christianity with polygamous families in a manner that is both faithful to the gospel and sensitive to human needs has been a recurring item on the agenda of missionary and church conferences for a century and a half. Change in the general attitude toward polygamy, at first slow, seems to have accelerated rapidly during the past thirty years. Until about that time most of the major churches and mission societies had adhered, at least in theory, to a firm refusal to accommodate polygamy in any form. The position defined at the Anglican Lambeth Conference of 1888, and subsequently repeatedly reaffirmed, was adhered to by most of the English-speaking missionary bodies. In general, practice was as follows:

Polygamous men were not baptized or accorded church membership. Further, inasmuch as polygamy was generally regarded as a form of institutionalized adultery rather than marriage, the separation of wives was not regarded as divorce. Polygamous families and wives were dealt with in two major ways: (1) separation of families was encouraged in which case the husband was required to keep the first and only true wife, or was allowed to choose the wife he wished to retain, or (2) families were held together and in some societies converting wives were baptized but not the husband.

Recently missionaries and church leaders have gained greater insight into the forms and functions of marriage in traditional societies, of the wide differences in patterns of polygamy, and of the social dislocation and dire consequences for women and children caused by the separation of families in some societies. The general attitude is changing. Many missionaries have either observed or experienced some of the following consequences of rigid insistence upon monogamy.

1. The recognition that polygamy is marriage, and stable marriage at that, has led to increasing unease about being the agents of divorce.

2. The serious problems involved in separating families, such as the separation of young children from their mothers and the dereliction and isolation of divorced wives.
3. Many have experienced or observed serious untoward results, such as splits or offshoots in their churches by leaders accepting polygamous families, or in some cases some of the most exemplary men attending their churches, including unofficial leaders, have been unbaptized polygamists. Leaders have not known how to deal with this situation short of admitting them to membership. Church leaders have failed to disciple chiefs and other leaders of society who wished to become Christians because the chiefs and societal leaders felt they could not alienate their wives without creating serious friction between clan groups and severely disrupting the society. Church leaders have become aware that some of their prominent and wealthy church members have secretly maintained secondary wives. Church leaders have also come to recognize that acceptance of polygamy has been a significant factor in the growth of independent movements, including loss of their own members. Many have come to recognize that acceptance of polygamy has also been a significant factor in the rapid spread of Islam in some countries. Then, many have experienced tension between mission societies regarding different practices in dealing with polygamists. One missionary told me, “There is literally a Babel regarding polygamy among missionaries.”

Other changes are also taking place. Erstwhile colonial countries have become sovereign, independent nations and many of the young churches, including mainline ones, are gaining greater freedom and adopting a more accommodating stance toward polygamy. Already in 1969 Donald McGavran, director of the Institute of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, dedicated a whole issue of the *Church Growth Bulletin* (vol. V, no. 4) to “Polygamy and Church Growth” in which insistence on monogamy was recognized as a major obstacle to church growth. An accommodating stance is boldly advocated by such leading lights as McGavran; Alan Tippett, leading anthropologist of the movement; Ralph Winter, who in due course established the U.S. Center of World Mission; Kenneth Taylor, translator of *Living Letters*; and Lesslie Newbigin, then secretary of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism in Geneva, shortly before his return to India as the Bishop of the Church of South India.

The famous Lambeth Conference Resolution of 1888 has dominated the polygamy issue for over a century, but here too change is underway. A resolution was adopted by the Synod of the Church of the Province of Kenya in 1982 approving the baptism and confirmation of polygamists (Minute 22/82). This was presented to the 1988 “Centennial” Lambeth Conference with the sup-
port of the bishops of many provinces in Africa and elsewhere. The resultant Resolution 26 of 1988, like its predecessor a century earlier, constitutes a major landmark.

This Conference upholds monogamy as God's plan, and as the ideal relationship of love between husband and wife; nevertheless recommends that a polygamist who responds to the Gospel and wishes to join the Anglican Church may be baptized and confirmed with his believing wives and children on the following conditions:

1. that the polygamist shall promise not to marry again as long any of his wives at the time of his conversion are alive;
2. that the receiving of such a polygamist has the consent of the local Anglican community;
3. that such a polygamist shall not be compelled to put away any of his wives on account of the social deprivation they would suffer;
4. and recommends that Provinces where the Churches face problems of polygamy are encouraged to share information of their pastoral approach to Christians who become polygamists so that the most appropriate way of disciplining and pastor ing them can be found, and that the Anglican Consultative Council be requested to facilitate the sharing of that information (The Lambeth Conference 1988:220-221).

One can only wonder what the experience of missions in polygamous societies would have been if this position had been adopted a hundred years earlier. What would the result have been if leaders who balked at becoming Christians because of the social dislocation resulting from the alienation of wives had enthusiastically joined the church and supported the evangelization of their people? The history of missions among some peoples might have been strikingly different.

Because of the radical social change now taking place in most traditional societies, this resolution seems more appropriate to pioneering movements among largely unevangelized peoples, such as those which are the focus of this paper, than to the general outreach work of the church in contemporary society.

While no one is loudly trumpeting the victory of an accommodating stance, the general attitude toward polygamy seems to have changed from an unbending prohibition to a gracious and selective extension of church fellowship to polygamists under some circumstances. Many, if not most, churches in societies with inflexible forms of polygamy have quietly begun to baptize husbands and wives who contracted plural marriages before coming to Christianity on condition that they do not marry additional wives. At the same time
there is great concern to promote the Christian ideal of a loving and congenial monogamy and to protect the church and its youth from the incursion of an incipient polygamy. Much attention is now being given to concerns such as the following: (1) education regarding the meaning, mutual responsibilities, and beauty of a Christian monogamous family relationship, (2) promotion of the adoption of civic marriage laws that protect monogamy and the rights of women, (3) education of members regarding the above, and of how a woman can protect herself in the event that a husband wishes to bring another wife into the marriage.

We thus approach the central concerns of this paper in the context of a broadly different general attitude toward polygamy than that obtaining even two decades ago.

Trajectory of the Adventist Experience

Adventist missionaries entered the field a century after the beginnings of the great Protestant thrust without any pre-established policy regarding the marriage situation. They immediately found themselves face to face with extremely complex issues, which varied widely from society to society. They also found themselves in contact with the established practice of other societies, and these too varied from rejection of every trace of polygamy to selective accommodation. Many Adventist missionaries were thus confronted with a two-sided dilemma: their conception of the Christian/biblical solution, and the accepted missionary practice in the area. In places what seemed to them to be the appropriate course of action ran counter to current mission practice.

Missionary Round Table Sessions

In search of a solution to this and other issues a Missionary Round Table session, presided over by W. A. Spicer, was convened in conjunction with the General Conference Session at Takoma Park, Maryland in June 1913. The report of the discussions reveals the perplexity of the missionaries regarding the complex marital issues they faced, and the diversity of their thought and practice. This is reflected in the following comment by W. C. White:

I do think we will lose something if you fail to make an effort to come to an agreement regarding a moderate, well-balanced standard to work to. It is not law, and you can say how it shall be placed before the public. I cannot but feel that it will tend to the unity
and strength of your work to have such a moderate, well-balanced standard as has been presented, recognized. Then each man is free to make exceptions as his judgment demands; and when he finds that he has made mistakes in his exceptions, and that he has to retrace his steps and make different standards, then such a resolution will help him a lot (Missionary Round Table 1913:13).

A "Recommendation" was drafted (appendix A). W. A. Spicer described the status of the recommendation by saying, "In putting this on record it is not a legislative action as though passed by the General Conference, as an order in force, but it is the consensus of the counsel of the missionaries. We may still learn more, and we may possibly unlearn some things (Missionary Round Table 1913:1).

Thirteen years later, in May-June 1926, a second Missions Round Table was convened in connection with the sixth General Conference Session at Milwaukee. The difficulty missionaries faced in breaking apart polygamous families in some societies was discussed more specifically than at the earlier conference, and it became immediately clear that many missionaries had indeed followed the course of flexibility. In some fields, polygamous families were baptized; in others a rigid monogamy was upheld. Judging by the conversations, one gets the impression that most of the missionaries were in favor of flexibility given the different social circumstances of the marriage institutions with which they had to deal. Discussion also included the problem of what to do with defacto, but not legally married families in some countries in South America in which it was not possible to obtain divorce. A committee was appointed to make recommendations to the General Conference Committee.

General Conference Resolutions and Policies

The first formal General Conference Resolution on "Polygamy and Marriage Relationships" was adopted on 13 June 1926 (appendix B). It represented a brief, but stern, endeavor to correct errant excess and precluded the baptism of polygamous men. The status of plural wives was not defined. The simplicity of the resolution seems to belie the complexity of the reality the missionaries faced. In somewhat strange juxtaposition in this same policy, grace was extended to the unmarried Latin defacto family allowing them to be admitted to church fellowship (Recommendations 2 and 3), but grace is strictly denied the African polygamous family.

The brethren from Africa returned to their mission fields perplexed as to how they could respond to this resolution. W. H. Branson, president of the
Africa Division, took the matter under investigation and came to a realization of the absolute intransigence of the large Southern Bantu patrilineal patriarchal societies regarding the dissolution of polygamous families. Tribal leaders maintained stoutly that marriage was an agreement between clan groups in which men incurred responsibilities for women and children from which they were not entitled to withdraw because they became Christians. Branson and some of his co-workers came to a full realization of the grave injustices perpetrated in the breaking apart of families which, in some of these societies, involved the separation of children from their mothers, and the dereliction of divorced women. In addition, they learned of the harshly critical judgment of the tribesmen on a religion that would inflict such suffering and injustice upon women and children in the name of a God of love. They discovered that missionary insistence upon monogamy had engendered such hostility to the gospel among some tribesmen that it countermanded the missionary message of a benevolent God. They began to ask themselves whether becoming a monogamist was a *sine qua non* of becoming a Christian. To add to the difficulty of the situation, converts who had learned to read began to come to missionaries with Bible texts in their hands asking why, if so many of the great men of the Bible practiced polygamy, it could not now be accommodated in a more considerate manner? There was a strong feeling on the part of Elder Branson and his group that the 1926 resolution was inadequate to the situation they faced.

Branson brought the matter to the attention of the fifth biennial council of the African Division at Solusi Mission in June 1929. A decision was made to request the General Conference to reconsider the resolution. J. I. Robison, secretary of the Division, drafted an excellent fourteen page paper on polygamy in the Bible, including a brief survey of the practices of some of the churches in the area, and made a strong case for a more accommodating stance. Branson sent this to Elder Spicer along with the formal request of the Division.

The African Division was successful in getting a committee appointed at the 1930 Annual Council, which recommended major revision of the 1926 Resolution. A radically changed policy was adopted on 3 November 1930, which was adequately flexible and opened the way for the baptism of polygamous families under certain circumstances (appendix C).

This policy remained in force until 1941. Acceptance of the new policy in Tanganyika brought protests from the British missionaries in neighboring Kenya where the hard line of the 1888 Lambeth policy had been adhered to. They did not see how they could go back on their earlier rigorous insistence on mo-
nogamy without engendering much confusion in the minds of their members, or invoking the severe criticism of their neighboring mission societies.

An appeal for a firmer stance on monogamy as prerequisite for church membership was made to the General Conference by the Northern European Division. In response a subcommittee of the Home and Foreign Officers was appointed to give further study to the matter and make recommendations that would lead to a united worldwide standard. The General Conference in session at San Francisco in 1941 adopted a policy which countermanded the 1930 position (appendix D). This policy, re-edited in 1977 but substantially unchanged, remains the official position of the church (appendix E). It is of more than passing interest that very few missionary representatives were able to attend the session because of the severe travel restrictions imposed by World War II. One wonders whether a broader less restrictive policy would have been maintained had a larger number of those directly involved with the complexity of the polygamy situation been present. According to this policy a polygamous man is "required to change his status by putting away all his wives save one" before baptism. It allows, however, that under certain circumstances the wives in a polygamous marriage may be baptized.

A More Recent Initiative

In 1980, under the leadership of General Conference President Neal Wilson, a decision was made to reorganize the divisional structure of the church in Africa. This restructuring joined together segments of three former Divisions, forming the Africa-Indian Ocean Division. In one of the Divisions the attempt to separate families had been largely abandoned and converting wives, but not the husband, were baptized. Greater pressure in the direction of monogamy had been maintained in the other two Divisions, but there were differences regarding which wife should be retained. Some insisted that it should be the first and only legal wife, others permitted the husband free choice of which wife to maintain.

Neal Wilson, who had previously worked for a number of years in the Middle East, was much concerned to promote an effective evangelistic program among Muslims. However, Islam permits polygamy and it is widely recognized that Muslims with young families who respond to the gospel will generally enter the church en famille or not at all. He sought to promote consensus regarding the polygamy-related concerns in the new Division, and while the matter was under consideration, open the way for a revival of evangelism among
Muslims. Wilson requested a study paper on the forms of, and dealings of the Adventist Church with polygamy in Africa, and brought the matter to discussion at a meeting of the General Conference and Division officers in October 1981. A study conference was convened in 1983 and the concerns and hopes raised there were introduced to the Annual Council in October of that year (Coffin 1983:9).

Study papers soliciting a response were subsequently circulated throughout the world field. At a broadly representative study conference convened in March 1986, a tentative alternate and more accommodating policy was drafted (appendix F). The editor of the *Adventist Review* reported on the process and the issues discussed (see appendix G).

Wilson shared a "Progress Report" of the "Plural Families" study with church leaders at the Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro on 6 October 1986. Finally, the proposed policy, which was intended to replace the 1977 C85 policy, was presented to the Annual Council in Washington in October 1987. The following action was taken.

**Plural Marriages (Polygamy)**

For several years there have been discussions and study as to whether the guidelines on plural families as outlined in the *General Conference Working Policy* should be changed, or remain as they have been for approximately fifty years. Recently the divisions were asked to carefully explore this matter and comment on whether they felt a change should be made. The majority are clearly opposed to any change at this time. It seems obvious that there is no Biblical authority for plural marriages. Although some patriarchs were involved in plural marriages, it was outside the Lord's will. It is felt best to set this matter to rest for the present until the Holy Spirit, in His own time, shows the church a better solution (Annual Council 1987:31).

And there the matter remains. What then can be learned from those eight years of serious, careful, and broadly considered endeavor to overcome the enormous difficulty confronting polygamous men who give their hearts to the Lord and wish to become active members of the church, but who cannot in free conscience bring themselves to wreck havoc upon the wives and children they love?

First, it would seem that efforts to gain approval of an accommodating stance would be more likely to gain consent if application is restricted to a few select societies in which deeply entrenched polygamy is a major obstacle to conversion and church membership, as is the case among the Maasai and
some Muslim societies. Details of these situations will be considered later in this paper.

Second, a program sharing information on three fronts could be helpful in preparing the way for change.

a. A description of present missionary programs in which an altered stance regarding polygamy is indicated and why insistence upon monogamy at the outset is a major obstacle in a particular society would be helpful. This could include a description of the ordering of the priorities of mission: acceptance of Christ as Savior, the biblical basis of Adventist belief and hope, the gathering of members into the witnessing community of the church, progress toward monogamy as an ideal to be achieved as members mature in faith rather than as an essential initial requirement.

b. The preparation and publication of a detailed and balanced study of polygamy in the Scriptures by respected biblical scholars should be undertaken. This could include information regarding the position now taken by most churches.

c. An explanation of the missionary problems and resistance to the message that results from rigid insistence upon monogamy at entry into the church should be documented. An explanation of personal problems resulting from the separation of families should be illustrated by a few case studies.

**Biblical Evidence**

**The Old Testament**

There have been numerous attempts to either minimize or explain away the biblical evidence indicating that polygamy was an accepted pattern of marriage in Israel, much of which amounts to special pleading of one kind or another. Monogamy is the ideal form of marriage established in Eden and this ideal has been staunchly upheld by the Christian Church from its early beginnings. And this is the form of marriage which has been taught and upheld by the Adventist Church throughout its history and strongly affirmed here.

The patriarchs departed from this ideal surprisingly early, and there is abundant evidence that polygamy came to be an accepted practice in Israel. Two major forms of evidence testify to this. First, there are the biblical records of the practice of polygamy in the Old Testament. Second, there are the historical records regarding polygamy in the Talmud and Mishnah, and also in the...
works of Jewish and Christian historians and the early Church Fathers. Much has been written about the matter. It is beyond the scope of this paper to conduct even a cursory survey of the evidence; however, a few of the highlights from the biblical record are outlined below. This consists largely of two patterns of evidence: first, records of the practice of polygamy by patriarchs, kings, and ordinary citizens; and second, the regulations controlling the practice of polygamous marriage.

As regards the first pattern of evidence, the records of two events are of significance inasmuch as it can be argued that they confer an imprimatur on the practice:

- The word of God to David from the mouth of Nathan: “This is the word of the Lord . . . to you . . . I gave you your master’s daughter and his wives to be your own, I gave you the daughters of Israel and Judah; and had this not been enough, I would have added other favors as great” (2 Sam 12:7, 8 NEB).
- The action of Jehoida the priest on behalf of Joash whom he and his wife had sheltered and reared: “Jehoida got two wives for him (Joash), and he became the father of sons and daughters” (2 Chr 24:3 NRSV).

Of even greater weight in indicating that polygamy was an accepted practice in Israel are the many recorded instances in the Levitical laws regulating the practice:

- “You shall not take a woman who is your wife’s sister to make her a rival-wife” (Lev 18:18 NEB).
- “If a man takes a wife and her mother also, it is depravity” (Lev 20:14 NRSV).
- “If he takes another wife to himself he shall not diminish the food, clothing or marital rights of the first wife” (Exod 21:10 NRSV).
- “And he (the king) must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away” (Deut 17:17 NRSV).
- “When a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, . . . and the son of the unloved wife is the elder, then when the day comes for him to divide his property . . . he shall recognize the rights of the firstborn, the son of the unloved wife” (Deut 21:15-17 NEB).

Weight is added to the above passages by the law of the levirate which is defined as follows: “When brothers live together and one of them dies with-
out leaving a son, his widow shall not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother . . . shall take her in marriage and do his duty by her as her husband's brother. The first son she shall bear shall perpetuate the dead brother's name" (Deut 25:5-10 NEB).

The levirate ensures continuity of the family name and in addition defines the inheritance and transmission of family property from firstborn to firstborn son. Leviratic marriage in Israel was not a matter of choice, it was a defined responsibility. Today, wherever the levirate is strictly practiced, polygamy is an inevitable consequence.

It is inconceivable that this considerable body of law regulating both the practice of polygamy and leviratic marriage, and expanded upon in the Talmud and Mishnah, would exist in a society in which polygamy was not recognized as an acceptable form of marriage. And when one adds the fact that there is not a single forthright prohibition of polygamy in the Old Testament to the textual evidence for the incidence of polygamy and the regulatory system controlling it, it becomes impossible to deny that polygamy was an accepted practice in Israel.

The New Testament

While the incidence of polygamy declined after the exile, and was not commonly practiced by the Jews of the diaspora, there is considerable evidence that polygamy was practiced by some Jews, especially the aristocracy including those of the priestly caste in Judea in Jesus' time, and was protested against by the Essenes of the Qumran community (Jeremias 1969:93-94, 369-370). The laws governing the transmission of name and property (the levirate was a part of this system) remained a part of the Jewish heritage. Polygamy was not officially condemned in Judaism until the Middle Ages, and some Jewish communities have continued the practice until modern times.

Jesus certainly points to the depth, intimacy, and binding nature of marriage in "the two shall become one flesh" statement (Matt 19:5). This description of marriage is much more appropriate to monogamy than to polygamy, but is not necessarily exclusive of the latter. It is of more than passing interest that when the case of the woman who had had seven husbands was put to Jesus by the Sadducees he made no comment regarding the polygamous implications of the leviratic law (Matt 22:33-33). Jesus specifically and strongly countermanded divorce (Matt 19:8, 9), but nowhere did he condemn polygamy even
though he must have known that it was still practiced by some. This should perhaps give cause for thought regarding the insistence on separation (divorce is really the proper term) of families coming into the church.

Among the most commonly used New Testament pericopes in missionary discussions regarding the place and role of polygamous men in the church is the Pauline rule. “Our leader, therefore, or bishop, must be above reproach, faithful to his one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:5, 6). While this phrase is open to several interpretations, it was employed by noted leaders in the early centuries of the church as a rubric for the treatment of polygamous husbands. For instance the biblical scholar Jerome (circa 400 A.D.) wrote the following on the “One Wife” rule of the church:

The apostle came of the Jews and the primitive Christian church was gathered out of the remnants of Israel. Paul knew that the Law allowed men to have children by several wives. . . . Even the very priests might . . . enjoy the same license. He gave commandment therefore that the priests of the church should not claim this liberty, and that they should not take two wives or three together, but that they should each have but one wife at a time (1890-1900:114).

Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (circa 400), and Theodoret of Cyprus, a decade or so later, gave similar interpretations of the text. Because of the stature of these men and their closeness to the days of the early church, considerable weight should be given to their interpretation of this Pauline prohibition. There is, however, little direct historical evidence of the existence of polygamy in the early church; therefore, many New Testament scholars suggest that this rubric could have served a dual purpose; i.e., as a prohibition against the election to leadership of men who had been divorced as well as defining the status accorded polygamists in the church.

There has been considerable discussion regarding the relevance to the issue of polygamy of Paul’s directions concerning marriage (1 Cor 7) to the church at Corinth. Here we see Paul the realist who recognizes that the ideal is not always attainable, even by the redeemed.

First, Paul addresses the difficulty of the Christian woman in Corinth (1 Cor 7:11) who wished to terminate a tension-laden marriage with an unbelieving husband. Paul’s fundamental advice is that the Christian should remain in the marriage contracted before she became a Christian and endeavor to win the husband. Several reasons are given for this (1 Cor 7:12-14). Then, having quoted the “command of the Lord” (1 Cor 7:10) to the effect that the wife
should not divorce her husband, he invokes his apostolic authority, "To the rest I say—I and not the Lord" (1 Cor 7:12) to grant permission for divorce, as a last resort, in the event that it is the unbelieving spouse who withdraws. And in that event "he or she is not bound" (1 Cor 7:15). There is ongoing debate about the meaning of this clause. However, it is widely interpreted to signify that in this circumstance the divorced spouse is free to marry.

Second, having advised Christians to earnestly strive to remain in the marriage in which they came to the gospel Paul gives similar advice in three parallel circumstances. Whether circumcised or uncircumcised (1 Cor 7:19), whether free or a slave (1 Cor 7:24), whether celibate or a widow (1 Cor 7:26), "Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called" (1 Cor 7:20). Paul concludes his admonition with a resounding affirmation of the binding nature of the marriage contract, "A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives" (1 Cor 7:39).

Even though there is no specific reference to polygamy in this chapter-long pattern of advice to the Corinthians, and it thus gives no exactly corresponding model to follow, it has been frequently utilized in discussions regarding polygamy in the following ways: First, Paul affirms the binding quality of a marriage, even though it is contracted with an unbelieving spouse before one becomes a Christian. The implication is that pre-Christian marriages are to be regarded as marriages, and that dissolution is divorce against which there is a divine interdiction. Second, Paul's basic advice is that Christians should remain in the condition in which they are called; i.e., it is better in missionary practice to keep polygamous families together if possible, and this may possibly mean bringing them into the church as a whole rather than enforcing monogamy. Third, divorce is possible under some circumstances, but should be reserved for extreme cases. Missionaries should not be in the business of teaching divorce, least of all in societies where it is barely recognized as a possibility. Fourth, Paul realizes that rather than simply following inflexible principles in these practical matters, it is important to take cognizance of the situation and adapt even firm principles in a realistic and constructive approach.

In light of the above, the question is asked; Would Paul have required a converting Jewish polygamist to divorce his wives, the mothers of his own children, as a condition of entry into the church? The answer is generally, No.

Thus, while it is recognized that no specific mandate is given here regarding the status to be granted polygamous families entering the church, it is also held to be the case that the apostle's instructions to the Corinthian Church...
are more in harmony with a compassionate and accommodating stance which keeps families together and admits them to church fellowship, than with a rigorous enforcement of monogamy that tears the family apart.

A Suggestion Regarding Interpretation

I have heard it suggested on several occasions, particularly in connection with American Presbyterian missions in India during the 1880s and 1890s, that the resistance missionaries encountered in gaining board approval for an accommodating stance in dealing with polygamous converts was due, at least in part, to societal abhorrence of the Mormon practice. This is not surprising since missionaries and mission board leaders are invariably conservative and staunch advocates of high Christian values and ethics, and would be expected to react even more negatively toward the aberrant Mormon behavior than members of society at large, and would not want to perpetuate this in the young churches overseas.

If there is validity to this thesis, then its applicability to Adventists would be vastly greater than to any of the mainline mission societies. This is so because, from the early days of the Millerite Movement until the first decades of the twentieth century, the general public persistently confused Mormons and Adventists. There are several reasons for this: Mormonism and Millerism arose at about the same time, and in the same socio-geographical area, both were millennial sects and, more importantly, both laid claim to special revelation. As a result, each was constantly involved in disassociating itself from the other. David Rowe writes:

The public associated Millerites with other religious rebels of the day. . . . Unfavorable comparisons with the Mormons were particularly numerous. True, both prophets were from upstate New York, transplanted New Englanders, and both were millenialists, though in quite different ways. But neither Mormons nor Millerites approved of the comparison. Adventists were shocked when they heard people claim “our doctrine is as bad as Jo Smiths” and that the people should “put them down immediately, as it might be more easily done now than when it was deeper rooted.” Smith’s revelation that Christ would not return in 1843 was almost certainly his attempt to dissociate himself from the Millerites, and the Millerites tried equally hard to distance themselves from him. “One day the world represents Mormonism as twin brothers. The next, they hear that ‘Joe Smith’ has wiped all the stain from his pure skirts which a belief in Christ’s near coming would attach to him, and they seem disposed to fondle their favorite pet (Rowe 1985:105).
This confusion remained. James White described the reception they received in Iowa in 1860: "Just before we reached Knoxville, the cry of 'Mormons' was raised against us, and a strange enthusiasm seemed to seize some of the people in the place, as if inspired by Satan. . . . We can excuse the people who are deceived and imposed upon, but not those ministers who raise the cry 'Mormons' to keep the people from hearing us" (White 1985:415-416).

Ellen White points to the most significant basis, or source, of this confusion: "As the cry of Mormonism is often raised, especially in the west, at the introduction of the Bible argument of the perpetuity of spiritual gifts, I have felt anxious that my brethren should know what my experience has been and where it has been" (1980:iv).

Adventists were categorized as Mormons and accused of polygamy in some of the Sunday Law trials of the 1880s and 1890s. I counted thirteen articles containing significant reference to polygamy in the Review and Herald between 1870 and 1894 (four were reprints from major papers) many of which relate to the Mormon/Adventist confusion in one way or another.

The confusion was not confined to this country. Early Millerite Adventists in Great Britain repeatedly felt called upon to explain that they were not Mormons (Dunton 1984:218). This association continued for many years in Europe. Ellen White wrote in 1886 concerning the fact that greater effort was needed in Europe: "As soon as the truth is brought to the place the ministers of the different churches become alarmed and send at once for ministers to come in and commence revival meetings. . . . Warnings and threatenings will be poured out from the churches against the seventh-day people, who are classed with Mormons, and who they say are breaking up churches and causing divisions" (White 1946:410).

Adventists were thus continually at pains to disassociate themselves from any connection with Mormonism. Any attitude which was perceived as being soft on polygamy would have served to undercut the distance they were at pains to maintain. Even in a recent Gallup Poll a few who said they had some knowledge of Adventism connected it with Mormonism.

Given this background, Adventist writers of the period, including the Whites, would naturally take a hard line against polygamy, even in commentary on the Old Testament patriarchs. Anything that could be interpreted as favoring polygamy could have been easily construed as a pro-Mormon stance. Further, the general public concept of polygamy was that of a loose woman entering the family circle and alienating the affections of the husband, or of wives competing
for love and favors, and of resultant dysfunctional families. All of which is considerably removed from the concept of polygamy as fulfilling important functions in organized social systems that appear in the ethnographical studies a generation later. And there seems to have been but little literature during the period that cast the polygamy of the Old Testament in a favorable light.

Ellen White would hardly have been a normal woman of the period had she remained totally uninfluenced by the general social abhorrence of Mormon polygamy. In addition, she would have been acutely aware of the jeopardy a sympathetic stance could constitute to the young Adventist Church seeking to establish its identity as the faithful bearer of God’s last message to humankind. A fundamental principle of biblical interpretation is that the events and messages of the prophets are best understood, in the first instance, in the time and social circumstance in which they take place. After establishing as clearly as possible the meaning of the message and the intentionality of the messenger in the perspective of its particular context the interpreter is equipped to explicate its contemporary meaning and significance. This applies also to the interpretation of the writings of Ellen White. She too was a faithful servant of the Lord at a particular time wrestling with some issues and public opinions which have ceased to be of pressing concern to us. She is consistently negative about polygamy in commentary about the Old Testament patriarchs, and much concerned about its effect on family life. Given the ambience and concerns of her writings, this should come as no surprise. However, she passed from the scene of action before the reality and enormity of the missionary challenge vis-à-vis polygamy had broken through upon the Adventist consciousness. As far as I have been able to discover, she does not directly or clearly address the missionary issue of polygamy as it came to light, probably for the first time in Adventist circles at the 1913 Conference. However, in her general letters to workers overseas she consistently advised them to be sensitive to cultural and social differences lest penultimate issues obstruct acceptance of the message.

It remains to us to carefully and prayerfully weigh her words and ask how she would have responded to the not unusual, but extreme case scenario in which the missionary functions as an agent of divorce consigning alienated wives to lives of abandon, and separating mothers from their young children. Ellen White had a heart filled with the love and goodness of her Lord, and I am convinced that had she herself seen and experienced the reality that confronted the next generation of missionaries in some societies, she would have advocated a course of love and compassion, lest in the overthrowing of one evil a greater is
precipitated. Of course the Church and its workers are committed to upholding the Christian ideal of marriage, but in some circumstances this may be most effectually realized *gradatim*, by stages which proceed from one expression of love and kindness to the next until the ideal is brought to fulfillment.

**Practical Application**

The problem of how best to deal with polygamous families has always been, and remains, one of the most complex and difficult issues with which missionaries have had to deal. The history of both missionary conviction and vacillation regarding polygamy, of failure to understand the depths of the problem, of harsh social disruption, and of consequent opportunities lost is not entirely edifying. More than any other it has been the source of much personal bewilderment and of intense disagreement between missionaries. It is, of course, easy to be critical from a distance, but the problem is still there and it remains to be seen whether we can be more faithful to the missionary imperative of rightly communicating the gospel message and inculcating Christian standards of living while at the same time being more sensitive to local needs than some of those who have gone before. We have the great advantage of hindsight, of examining the issues in historical perspective, and with more developed sociological and hermeneutical understanding than was available to our forebears. And in addition, there is now much broader ecclesiastical precedent for an accommodating stance.

The foregoing brief survey of some of the major issues and turning points in the convoluted history of the general missionary and Adventist approaches to this problem has been presented for this purpose. So also have some aspects regarding the interpretation of the applicable biblical and revelatory evidence. There is strong evidence in justification of, and compelling need for, a more sensitive and accommodating approach to polygamous families in some societies than that defined by contemporary Adventist polity. The mandate assigned to us therefore is to decide whether present Adventist Church practice is adequate to the situation in those select societies, and if not, to outline a better way.

The section following this broad introduction to the polygamy challenge serves to bring the issue to concrete expression—to help us see it in terms of the practical realities of both family and church life. Stefan Hoeschele, theology
lecturer at the Adventist College at Arusha in Tanzania provides the study on the Maasai.

If there is general agreement that the cause of the gospel in some designated societies would be better served by a more accommodating approach than that mandated by the present policy, then an alternate plan, to be employed on a tentative basis, should probably be drafted and submitted for study to the front line workers involved and appropriate church administrative officers.

The obvious starting point for a revised approach would seem to be the suggested policy drafted by the ad hoc polygamy committee in March of 1986 (appendix F). Amendments regarding the following issues should perhaps be considered: (1) restriction of applicability to designated societies, and subject to periodic re-evaluation; (2) the polygamous baptismal candidate should be required to solemnly promise (before the congregation?) that he will not contract a further marriage while any of his spouses are alive; and (3) discipline of church members who subsequently contract a polygamous marriage should be dealt with.

The Maasai, Polygamy, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Reflections on a Missionary Problem in Tanzania

Stefan Höschele

Adventist Mission Among the Maasai
The Historical Background

Seventh-day Adventists in Tanzania have been aware of the existence of the Maasai since the denomination's inception, for some of them lived near the first Adventist mission field in the Pare Mountains. However, first attempts to reach out to this semi-nomadic people were made only between 1937 and 1939 that resulted in two Maasai joining a hearers' class temporarily, but apparently did not lead to any baptisms. In neighboring Kenya, the first three believers were reported in 1948 (Hyde 1948:2, 3) but in Tanzania, it was only in the 1960s that the first Maasai individuals were baptized. From 1969 to 1971, 17 baptisms were reported, and in 1982, the number had increased to 126. It is only in the late 1980s and 1990s that conversion numbers became more significant; by the year 2000, total Maasai Adventists in Tanzania counted some 800 to 900 out of a total of 500,000 Maasai. In Kenya Adventist numerical success has been much
more significant; there are probably about 5,000 Maasai Adventists there today out of the 500,000 Kenyan Maasai.

Polygamy and Divorce Among the Maasai

Anthropological Background

For a long time, polygamy among the Maasai has been recognized not only as a hindrance for successful missionary work but also as a deep-rooted custom that, unlike in other ethnic groups, does not seem to be a matter that can be eliminated in a single generation. The practice has several functions in traditional society which are closely related to central Maasai values. First, as among so many cattle-keeping peoples, is economic. A man with one wife can never acquire the wealth and status associated with hundreds of cows, for it is the wives and children who take care of the cattle. Second, also connected with the first, is social, i.e., gaining respect in society. Any elder (a man who has "graduated" from the Moran warrior stage of life in his 30s), wants to be respected, and this usually includes a sizeable household. Third, (and there may be more, less obvious functions) is the women's security. An unmarried woman does not have any status in society, and it can therefore even happen that a woman who has no husband approaches a wealthy polygamist in order to be added to his group of wives, which the rich man would at times gladly accept.

It is a misconception that it is the men alone who make the decision to marry more than one wife. Interestingly, especially first wives commonly suggest that their husbands marry a second wife for they often feel, Why should I do all the work alone? and Why should you not become a man whose honor is visible in society?

Divorce, on the other hand, is a most difficult action almost unheard of among the Maasai. It is a very shameful thing to both the divorced wife and her father; the latter will do all he can to ensure that the wife remains with her husband. Thus, even in cases of adultery by the wife, there is usually no divorce; rather, some fine will be imposed on the guilty person, or the wife's father may bring a cow and implore the husband to keep the wife in order to avert the great shame if she is divorced. Thus, full restoration is made instead of breaking up the family unit. Divorce is so uncommon that it requires a meeting of elders to settle the issue, and because divorce implies the return of bridewealth, it may be an almost impossible thing for a not so well off father-in-law since the bridewealth cows may not be available anymore. Following the divorce things
become even more difficult since the remarriage of a divorced lady is very un­likely, and it is common that she lives almost like a prostitute, for there is no husband to honor and who can defend her.

Ecclesiastical Attitudes Towards a Dilemma
The Missiological Background

The main Christian denominations that have been working among the Tanzanian Maasai with significant success, mainly in the last thirty years, have been Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Catholics have theoretically rejected polygamy but in practice have tolerated it to a very large degree. It is characteristic that one of the most well-known missiological books on polygamy, Eugene Hillmann's *Polygamy Reconsidered* (1975) was written by a Catholic missionary to the Maasai.

Lutherans have worked with a policy specifically designed for the Maasai that allows polygamists to be baptized, but they have to promise not to marry any more wives after baptism. This policy had never been applied to other ethnic groups (Mtaita 1998:211-231, especially 226). However, it has also been argued that this method was not always necessarily effective because the marriage process can start when the girl is still a small child, and thus there have been a good number of cases where Lutheran polygamists added even more wives after baptism, which would lead to church discipline (1998:227 and Keil 1996:319-326). Still more notable is the fact that even today most Lutheran Maasai churches consist of 80 percent or more of the members being women because men understand the church's insistence upon monogamy even if there are "loopholes" to get around it. On the other hand, the Lutheran policy has been helpful in many cases when men sincerely wish to become Christians together with their wives.

Some Pentecostal denominations apparently also tolerate polygamy and insist on monogamous life only for their church leaders and pastors, but Pentecostals are not very widespread among the Tanzania Maasai, except in the south of the country.

Adventism and Polygamy Among the Maasai Today

The Tanzanian Maasai live in a very large area, scattered over almost one-quarter of the country. The Adventist presence among the Maasai is concentrated in four areas: Kwedihalawe near the Usambara Mountains, where there
are now more than 700 members, and three other areas with more than fifty members each (Mwakikonge near Tanga, Ruvu near the Pare Mountains, and Simanjiro District on the Maasai Steppe). The work in these four areas is not connected geographically and historically, and other smaller groups of members live in several other areas which are also far removed from the mentioned places.

I have been in Tanzania for six years, and since late 1997, I have been involved with a church planting project among the Maasai which has led to the establishment of four congregations, two of them in the Simanjiro District. It has been my privilege to meet all the Maasai workers in our church, five pastors and several lay evangelists, and to closely cooperate with several of them.

It is a striking fact that so far the most significant growth has taken place in one location, Kwedihalawe, which is the district where the oldest Maasai pastor, Matthew Njake, has been working since 1980. Njake is now close to retirement. His missionary approach is interesting in several respects. First, unlike his younger colleagues, he rejects all adornment, which is a rather extreme stand among the Maasai who traditionally wear a lot of adornment, some of it being considered necessary items that show a lady’s respect for her husband. Second, he has been silently tolerating polygamy among his members. It appears that only a few conference leaders knew this, but they did not oppose this practice openly. In fact, Njake has a very strong character (he is a typical Maasai!), and any attempt to oppose his methods would inevitably lead to strong conflicts. Third, Njake has been working among his people for more than twenty years now, and the growth and success of the church in that area can largely be attributed to his dedicated work.

In the areas that we have been involved with in our project, polygamists have not been officially baptized for fear that this might cause problems for both the conference leadership and the members. Adhering to policy was a necessity in spite of the fact that this barred the way into the church for a significant number of elders who were willing to be baptized but could not be admitted. On the other hand, the lay evangelists we cooperated with and with whom we discussed the polygamy issue quite a number of times, never advised such persons to divorce their wives because of the tragic consequences of such an action.
There are, however, several cases that have occurred that show the impact of an actual insistence upon divorcing all wives except one. Three conspicuous examples come from Mwakikonge near Tanga.4

Mepong’ori Lebabu

Lebabu, the first Adventist in the area, had two wives when he asked for baptism in 1986. The Seventh-day Adventist pastor at Tanga, Imani Yohana, a Pare, suggested that he separate from one of them. Lebabu then stated that he had divorced the elder wife and was baptized with one other monogamous man. Many others had been interested in the Adventist message, but when it came to the conditions of baptism, no one except Lebabu accepted this step. Even Lebabu was not able to fully divorce his elder wife, because the common feeling among the people was that “Adventists have good teachings but they destroy family unity.” This stumbling block of evangelization has remained until the present.

Lendakuya Lairumbe

Lairumbe had four wives in the late 1990s when he asked for baptism. Upon being advised to divorce all but one, he used a traditional way of geographical separation (but not divorce) to satisfy these demands. When a wife has a grown son, the son can be instructed to take care of his mother in his kraal, although the old man will still visit his wife. This is what Lairumbe did for his elder wives, but the reaction of society was still rather negative. They felt that if Adventism insisted upon such procedures, it was not a denomination to join.

Abraham Ladaru

Ladaru is a rich man who owns more than 800 cows. He was converted at the first Maasai camp meeting in 1999 and was baptized the same year in spite of the fact that he had five wives. Apparently the district pastor ignored the church’s policy. In 2002, church elders (originating from the Pare Mountains) advised him that he had to divorce four of his wives in order to be a “perfect Christian.” He was told that a polygamist is not allowed to do any activity in the church, “not even sweeping the floor.” Ladaru is a serious committed man who recently gave eighty cattle as tithe. Before his baptism, he built a Lutheran church which, however, became a Seventh-day Adventist Church upon his
conversion. Because of his seriousness, he informed his wives that he wanted to divorce all but one. They did not accept the proposition, instead they argued and said, Can four of us wives live in shame and grief and one remain and live in self-gratification? Even the wives’ parents were not willing to leave one wife with him while all the others were divorced. In the end, all five wives went away. This caused such a stir in the area that it became a common opinion that “the Sabbath [religion] kills the kraal” [that is, the family]. Out of the previous fifty Adventist members at Mwakikonge, only twenty remained after this event.

Adventist Positions

Maasai polygamy has been a rather difficult issue to deal with for Adventists. A contributing factor is that several ethnic groups among whom the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been strongly established—the Pare, Jita, Nyakyusa, and Ha—have not experienced major difficulties with polygamy, at least not in the last four decades. Among others, however, such as the cattle-keeping Sukuma and Kuria who also practice polygamy much more than the other groups mentioned, the issue was much harder, but church policies have been strictly applied. At the same time, there is another Nilotic tribe, the Datooga, who are related to the Maasai but who are their traditional archenemies, among whom the church has just recently made a beginning of church work. There are fewer than 50 members among the Datooga who number around 200,000. Less than 10 percent of the Datooga are Christians of any denomination. Among the Datooga polygamy is as strongly entrenched as among the Maasai, so we are wondering how the work will proceed in view of this obstacle.5

Among Tanzanian Adventist leaders, hardly any voice can be heard that would advocate a change of the present position. The problem is too far from their thoughts; most leaders are involved in city evangelism, institutional development, and different church departments, and only a few see the challenge lying in what they consider a “primitive” group such as the Maasai. An exception is, however, the first Tanzania Adventist to receive a doctorate in the field of theology, John Kisaka, a Pare who had been an Adventist pioneer missionary to the Maasai in the 1960s. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on “The Adventist Church’s Position and Response to Socio-Cultural Issues in Africa,” one of issues being polygamy. He advocated a policy much like the Lutheran’s position (Kisaka 1979:23-32, 90). The majority of the leading Maasai in the church whom I know and with whom I have discussed the issue—pastors and lay
evangelists—would agree with his position, including the former Global Mission Director of North-East Tanzania Conference, Godwin Lekundayo, who is now pursuing a M.A. at Newbold College and with whom I worked together in the Maasai church planting project.

Summary and Interpretation

The above can be summarized and interpreted as follows:

1. Polygamy is a deeply entrenched custom among the Maasai.
2. Divorce is perceived by the Maasai as shameful and unacceptable and leads to most pathetic situations.
3. Adventism grew among Maasai who were accepted in their polygamous state (against the policies) in spite of the fact that the pastor was strict on adornment issues.
4. In areas where no separation was demanded but where no polygamists were baptized, growth was inhibited to some extent.
5. In areas where separations occurred growth was stifled and actual decline took place.
6. The issue was never brought up for discussion among church leaders because it was not an issue among the ethnic groups dominating the church. Furthermore, present policies are unequivocal.
7. An alternative way of dealing with the issue may be the Lutheran practice which, however, also has to be administered with care.

Appendix A

The Recommendation of the Committee on the Question of Polygamy
As Amended by the Missionary Round Table, “Informal Discussion on Dealing with Converts from Polygamous Families,” Takoma Park, MD, June, 1913.

WHEREAS, In heathen and Mohammedan lands polygamy is large practiced,
WE RECOMMEND, That, when a man practicing this custom becomes a Christian, he be accepted into the church on condition that he support all his wives and children, but that he live only with his first lawful wife as husband and wife. It be further understood that such a convert be not eligible to any office in the church.
In the case of a plural wife accepting Christianity, she be required, as a condition of church membership, to separate from her husband, and if possible to obtain his consent, or if the separation can be effected by legal process, that she be privileged to marry again.

Appendix B

The 1926 Resolutions on Polygamy and Marriage Relationships
General Conference Committee Minutes, Vol. XIII, Book 1, 6th Meeting, June 13, 1926

WHEREAS, the practice of polygamy on the part of many races for whom we are laboring is in itself a challenge to Christian principles, and constitutes a ground of compromise if permitted in the Christian church; therefore,

WE RECOMMEND, 1. That great care be used in the examination of peoples in heathen lands for entrance into the church, and as this examination relates to this practice, we would advise the following:
   (a) That in no case should a man living in polygamy be admitted into the fellowship of the church.
   (b) That preceding his entrance into the church a sufficient time of probation be given him to test out his sincerity in separating himself from this practice.

WHEREAS, the marriage ordinance is instituted by God for the good of society and for the protection of the home; therefore,

WE RECOMMEND, 2. That where parties are living together as husband and wife, that they be not baptized nor received into church fellowship until they have been legally married; however,

Inasmuch as we find many parties whose matrimonial alliances became badly tangled before they accepted the truth, and as the laws of some of our countries are such that it is impossible for them to become legally married; and as some of these desire to obey the truth when it comes to them, to be baptized and unite with the church; and in many cases, after careful investigation, we cannot advise them to separate and thus break up their home and present relationship, for this would only make conditions worse, and knowing that the gospel truth does not come to people to make their conditions worse, but bet-
ter, and that God receives a sinner where he is found and saves him when he repents and turns to Him; therefore,

WE RECOMMEND, 3. That in countries where the laws are such as to make impossible legal marriage of certain persons whose matrimonial alliances have become badly tangled on account of these laws; and when such persons have given real evidence that they are truly converted and are in harmony with the truth and desire to unite with us, all such cases shall be presented to the conference or mission committee of the field in which they reside; and if, after careful investigation, this committee is clear in the case, then the parties may be recommended to church fellowship; with the understanding, however, that if the time ever comes when such persons can be legally married, they do so, and that until so married, they be not eligible to hold any office in the church which requires ordination.

Appendix C

The 1930 Resolution on Polygamous Marriages in Heathen Lands

"Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee,”
Vol. XIV, Book 1, Fifty-Ninth Meeting,
November 3, 1930

WHEREAS, the message finds people in certain heathen lands living in a state of polygamy, and where tribal customs subject a cast-off wife to lifelong shame and disgrace, even to the point of becoming common property, her children also becoming disgraced thereby, it is,

RESOLVED, that in such sections, persons found living in a state of polygamy at the time the gospel light comes to them, and who have entered into plural marriage before knowing it to be a custom condemned by the Word of God, may upon recommendation of responsible field committees be admitted to baptism and the ordinances of the church, and may be recognized as probationary members. They shall not, however be admitted to full membership unless or until circumstances shall change so as to leave them with only one companion.

This action merely contemplates the recognition of a condition which in some places cannot be changed without resulting in great injustice to innocent persons and is not to be construed as endorsing polygamy in any way. Anyone entering into a plural marriage relation after receiving a knowledge of the truth
should be regarded as living in adultery, and dealt with by the church accordingly. A man who has apostatized from the truth, and who during the time he is in apostasy, enters into plural marriage may not be received again into any church relationship until he puts away the wives taken during his apostasy and in every way brings forth fruits meet for repentance.

In countries where separation of families can be arranged without injustice being done to innocent parties only one wife should be retained, but we recognize the right of the man to choose the one to be retained.

Appendix D

General Conference Policy, as voted June 4, 1941

WHEREAS, It is clearly God's plan that man should live in a state of monogamy, that is, that a man should have only one living wife; and

WHEREAS, Any contravention of this plan results in confusion and the lowering of the moral standards that should govern human society, and especially the church of Christ; and,

WHEREAS, The practice of polygamy on the part of many non-Christian peoples for whom we are laboring is in itself a challenge to Christian principles, and constitutes a ground of compromise if permitted in the Christian Church;

WE RECOMMEND,

1. That a man found living in a state of polygamy when the gospel reaches him, shall upon conversion be required to change his status by putting away all his wives save one, before he shall be considered eligible for baptism and church membership.

2. That men thus putting away their wives shall be expected to make proper provision for their future support, and that of their children, just as far as it is within their power to do so.

WHEREAS, The message finds people in certain countries living in a state of polygamy, where tribal customs subject a wife who has been put away to lifelong shame and disgrace, even to the point of becoming common property, her children also becoming disgraced thereby;

WE RECOMMEND,

3. That in all such cases the church cooperate with the former husband in making such provision for these wives and children as will provide for their care and protect them from disgrace and undue suffering.
4. That we recognize the right of a wife who has been put away by a polygamous husband to marry again.

5. That wives of a polygamist, who have entered into marriage in their heathen state, and who upon accepting Christianity are still not permitted to leave their husbands because of tribal custom, may upon approval of the local and union committees become baptized members of the church. However, should a woman who is a member of the church enter into marriage as a secondary wife, she shall be disfellowshipped and shall not be readmitted to the church unless or until she separates from her polygamous husband.

6. That it is understood that the above policy supersedes all previous policies on polygamy.

**Appendix E**

**General Conference Working Policy on Polygamy**

*Constitution Bylaws and Working Policy, 1977 Edition*

It is clearly God's plan that man should live in a state of monogamy, that a man should have only one living wife. Any contravention of this plan results in confusion and the lowering of the moral standards that should govern human society, and especially the church of Christ. The practice of polygamy on the part of many non-Christian peoples for whom we are laboring is in itself a challenge to Christian principles, and constitutes a ground of compromise if permitted in the Christian church. The denomination has therefore adopted the following policy:

1. A man found living in a state of polygamy when the gospel reaches him shall upon conversion be required to change his status by putting away all his wives save one before he shall be considered eligible for baptism and church membership.

2. Men thus putting away their wives shall be expected to make proper provision for their future support, and that of their children, as far as it is within their power to do so.

3. We recognize that the message finds people in certain countries living in a state of polygamy, where tribal customs subject a wife who has been put away to lifelong shame and disgrace, even to the point of becoming common property, her children also becoming disgraced thereby. In all such cases the church is to cooperate with the former husband in making such provision for
4. We recognize the right of a wife who has been put away by a polygamous husband to marry again.

5. Wives of a polygamist, who have entered into the marriage in their heathen state, and who upon accepting Christianity are still not permitted to leave their husbands because of tribal custom, may upon approval of the local and union conferences become baptized members of the church. However, should a woman who is a member of the church enter into a marriage as a secondary wife, she shall be disfellowshipped and shall not be readmitted to the church unless she separates from her polygamous husband.

APPENDIX F

Suggested Resolution of March 1986

It is clearly God's plan that marriage should be monogamous, one husband living with one wife in the “one flesh” model established in the beginning and reestablished by Jesus Christ while on earth. Any other form of marriage contravenes this plan and results in the lowering of the standards that should govern human society, and especially the church of Christ.

The family also had its beginning in Eden with divine approval and blessing. The New Testament repeatedly asserts the significance of the family as the basic unit of society and seeks to protect it from disruption through the application of Christian principles of human relationships and standards of behavior.

The practice of polygamy among non-Christian peoples challenges the ideal of monogamy and the human values set in place by Scripture. As an aberration of the original biblical family unit, it represents something less than the ideal even though practiced in biblical times. Every effort should be made to encourage prospective adherents living in a polygamous state to so order their lives that the monogamous ideal is achieved.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has always required its members to accept monogamy as the Christian norm for marriage. It does not and cannot accept polygamy as a suitable Christian model. However polygamous persons not already committed to Christianity may be restricted from monogamy owing to legal, tribal and cultural practices that they cannot modify. The breaking
up of such families may bring lifelong shame and disgrace tragically affecting the spouses and their children. In such situations it may be advisable to preserve the polygamous family unit as individuals accept Christianity, while at the same time urging monogamy and requiring it in every possible instance.

RECOMMENDED

1. That we affirm that the biblical account portrays and urges monogamy as God’s best plan for mankind; and that the sacredness and inviolability of the family unit is an integral part of biblical teaching.

2. That we instruct members and adherents on the Christian values and relationships sustaining monogamy, and on the legal position in their societies that may protect them from polygamous relationships.

3. That we continue to witness by example and proclamation that the Christian marriage is monogamous, and that we uphold monogamy as the norm for marriage.

4. That every effort be made for monogamy to replace polygamy as individuals and families enter the church.

5. That we maintain a rigorous standard of monogamy for those who are entering into marriage after receiving the gospel.

6. That in cases where the Adventist message reaches persons living in a state of polygamy and where legal, tribal, and cultural strictures cannot be modified without causing severe damage to individuals sharing in the polygamous unit, church membership may be made available to such persons provided:

   a. Thorough pastoral investigation and counseling have preceded the offer of membership.

   b. A screening committee at local field level makes such a recommendation after satisfying itself that the polygamous marriage is true and stable; that tribal, legal, and cultural strictures exist that warrant consideration of admission into membership without dissolving the polygamous status; that the polygamous status is not a guise for what would otherwise be an adulterous relationship; and that the parties concerned are genuine in their desire for membership and are otherwise worthy of acceptance into church fellowship.

   c. Such cautious admission into membership shall not make the persons concerned eligible for holding any church leadership position.
As followers of Jesus we live between the ideal and the actual. The Master summons men and women to wholeness—but His invitation reaches us in relationships so broken by sin that they sometimes can never be restored to the model. We see this especially in marriage.

Jesus made quite clear His ideal for marriage: a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman (Matt 19:4-6). The church, for her own and society’s good, must reinforce this goal by every means at her command.

But Jesus also calls us to minister—to help men and women mired in sin. As we take the good news to them, we find that many have already married and divorced, perhaps several times over. The actual stands in stark disparity from the ideal.

What then should we do? Tell them to return to their first spouse before they can be baptized? Instruct them to separate from their current spouse?

No, we accept the situation as it is. We do not break up an existing home; we will not disenfranchise the children. The church seeks the best good in an imperfect world, and that means we have to live between the ideal and the actual.

Jesus, of course, took that approach. Strong as He stood for the marriage ideal, He recognized how human frailties caused the marring of God’s plan. “From the beginning it was not so,” He said (verse 8).

Likewise in Adventist history, Ellen White, counselor supreme who upheld the tenets of Scripture, dealt pragmatically with men and women in broken human relations. In no instance did she advocate dissolution of the existing marriage when faced with the cases of people who had divorced and remarried.

Plural Marriages

Adventists in the Western countries understand this tension between the ideal and the actual in marriages in our society. Most, however, don’t know about a parallel problem that confronts the church in some Third World countries. The situation? Plural marriages, usually in the form of polygamy.
Current church policy, adopted in 1941, permits believing wives of a polygamous family unit to be baptized but withholds baptism from the man unless he puts away all wives except one. (The logic is that wives in a polygamous relationship have only one husband, whereas the husband has multiple wives.) As the church in these areas strives to follow the Master, she wrestles with questions of conscience and compassion:

**The Good of the Church at Large Versus the Good of the Individual**

The church seeks to do nothing that will weaken the marriage institution; she also wants to preserve her own reputation. But she has to deal with men and women—and children. Society and law—tribal, religious, and civil—recognize the polygamous family unit: will she call for its breakup? What will happen to the wives who are put away? To the children?

**The Evil of Polygamy Versus the Evil of Divorce**

Polygamy is a far cry from the biblical pattern of marriage; nonetheless, it is a form that Scripture recognizes although not approves. The Bible nowhere endorses polygamy; however, nowhere does it specifically condemn it. Stalwarts such as Abraham, Jacob, and David practiced it. Adventists do not mention polygamy in the fundamental beliefs. Nor have we regarded a polygamous relationship as adulterous. Divorce also is evil. Unlike polygamy, it was specifically condemned by Jesus. If we grant a polygamous family unit validity (although acknowledging its imperfection), the requirement to dissolve a polygamous relationship before baptism is tantamount to the church's calling for divorce.

**Evangelism in Polygamous Societies Versus Evangelism in Others**

As Adventists we see our mission in terms of Revelation 14:6, 7—the evangelization of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. So far, however, we have almost no penetration among one of the largest religions worldwide—Islam, with more than 500 million adherents. Since Islam permits a man to marry as many as four wives, the biblical commission to take the good news of
the kingdom to all the world finds itself in tension with the biblical ideal of monogamy.

The church also has to consider the worldwide impact of her decisions. If, for instance, she should make some concession to new believers who are bound by a polygamous relationship, would this weaken her moral force in other societies?

The Biblical Ideal of Family Versus the Biblical Doctrine of Baptism

Not infrequently all members of a polygamous family unit seek baptism. The husband, while desiring to join the church, cannot bring himself to break up the family. Some have suggested that he be accepted into quasi-membership: he can attend church services but not be baptized and received as a full member.

Such a course of action preserves the biblical ideal of marriage and the church's reputation but runs directly counter to the Lord's command to go and baptize (Matt 28:18-20). And baptism is one of the 27 fundamental beliefs of SDAs.

Polygamy and Evangelism

The church's stance toward people already bound by polygamous relations who become believers has changed over the years. Although present policy excludes polygamous husbands from baptism, between 1930 and 1941 policy cautiously included them.

Our church today enjoys unparalleled growth. Especially under the impact of the 1,000 Days of Reaping and Harvest 90, Adventism is reaching out to the unreached on a global scale. Not surprisingly, the problems raised by evangelization of polygamous societies have come into renewed focus.

For the past six years leaders in Washington, in conjunction with those from the world divisions, have pondered this issue, considering whether the church should make adjustments to its current policy (for example, see the report of the 1983 Annual Council, Adventist Review, 10 November 1983).

Recently I participated in a study committee that included representatives from the world division of the church where the problem is acute and weighed the pros and cons of the matter. After two days of discussion the issue boiled
down to this: the imperatives of evangelism and baptism versus the ideal of marriage and concern for the church’s reputation.

By a strong majority the committee favored an uncompromising standard for people who enter upon marriage after baptism but a modification of policy to allow for the retention of the polygamous family unit in special circumstances. The committee, of course, had no power to change policy. Thus, the 1941 policy is still in effect.

Adventists are idealists; may we ever remain so! But the world isn’t ideal: men and women have been broken by sin. Faced with the situation, we could opt for one of two extremes—make the church the exclusive province of those who measure up to the ideal, or capitulate to the norms of the world.

But the Master calls us to a different course. It is more difficult than either of these, because it lacks the simplistic approach of “either-or” and is fraught with dangers. He challenges us to uphold the ideal but also to minister to people in their brokenness. If we would do His work, through compassion, courage, and conviction we must act to draw all people in all circumstances into His kingdom.

Notes


4 These have been narrated to me by Pastor Loitopuaki Lebabu who is a student at Tanzania Adventist College at the moment. Before his studies, he was a district pastor and then the producer of Maasai language broadcasts for Adventist World Radio. The three stories come from his home area, and the first person mentioned is his father.

5 I am personally involved with a church planting project among this people group since the year 2000. We have been supporting the work of two lay evangelists,
built a small church, and we are now training one young Datooga man on the secondary school level and one Datooga lady for ministry.

Reference List


Missionary Round Table. 1913. *Informal Discussion on Dealing with Converts from Polygamous Families.* Takoma Park, MD.


As a lay person and somewhat of an “outsider” in church manual issues, my thoughts and reactions as presented in this paper may not reflect the views of all. However, my reactions may not be completely irrelevant since I am looking at the Church Manual from a world perspective to consider the question of whether or not it is necessary to make adaptations of the manual to meet the current needs of a world church.

The Purpose of the Church Manual

Perhaps the best place to begin this discussion is by asking ourselves the question, What is the purpose of the Church Manual? In the introduction to the present version I read that in the early years of the church, “Actions were taken on various matters of church order in an endeavor to spell out the proper rules for different situations in church life. The 1882 General Conference Session voted to have prepared ‘instructions to church officers, to be printed in the Review and Herald or in tract form”’ (Church Manual 2000:xix-xx).

The first actual book that was used much as today’s Church Manual is used, was a personal undertaking published by J. N. Loughborough in 1907 entitled
The Church, Its Organization, Order and Discipline. The first Church Manual actually published by the General Conference committee was in 1932 with a stated purpose to deal with church government, to set forth our denominational practices and policies, and to preserve our denominational practices and policies.

In simplest terms, the goal of a document such as the Church Manual is to give guidance for the “daily operation” of the church, to maintain order, promote growth, and encourage unity. A church manual has a significant place in the life of the church. It is therefore important that its contents be such that it will be viable and meaningful to churches around the world. If, for whatever reasons, the Church Manual is irrelevant and not meaningful or applicable in a certain area or for a certain group, the tendency will be to ignore it altogether. The result would then be that with no guidance in regard to church life, groups would tend to create patterns of church life, worship, and governance that might not be acceptable to the world church.

There are several reasons this could happen: (1) if the book is not culturally relevant, (2) if it is unavailable to church leaders, and (3) if it is written in such a way that it is too cumbersome to serve many cultures, languages, and specific situations. We will look at each of these separately.

So why have a church manual? Who uses it? What purpose does it fulfill in the church? Is it an apologetic document meant to support every detail of Seventh-day Adventist Church organization and life, or is it meant to be a practical manual that a local church leader could actually use? Are we considering a change in the present Church Manual or a practical document designed for general lay use? These are basic questions we must consider as we look at the question of adapting the Church Manual.

Is the Church Manual “Adaptable” to a World Church?

Our church today has been planted in hundreds of cultures, languages, and religions, both Christian and non-Christian. Included in this variety of backgrounds are a number of different social and economic structures and types and levels of education. We have not always been a world church; however, despite the global reach of the denomination today, our church was planted and grew in its early years in the soil of North America. In a multitude of ways it still reflects those early roots, probably much more so than most North Americans realize. As I read various parts of the Church Manual I realized how North
American our church is in organization, in structure, in governance, and style. The Church Manual reflects this. My overall impression is that it is a good document for North America and maybe a few other parts of the world with cultures somewhat similar to the North American culture. It expresses ideas, addresses issues of organization, and gives detailed answers to questions and issues that interested church members, in these parts of the world, might legitimately ask.

However, the very things that make it a good document for a particular part of the church may, in fact, be its greatest handicap for a world church. The Adventist Church of the twenty-first century is increasingly non-North American. Today the vast majority of our membership (over 90 percent) is now in parts of the world that is culturally as well as geographically distant from the church's North American base and its North American roots. In addition, the growth of the church in previously unentered areas is the mission challenge we face today. For these reasons, I believe there needs to be consideration given to making adaptations to the Church Manual to enable it to deal with church life and organization in those places. For the church to function in a relevant way and be meaningful in varied situations there must be provision to take all of the differences in language, culture, social, economic, and literacy levels into consideration and allow for variations in how the church operates based on local situations.

My understanding is that each of the world divisions has prepared some supplemental material to deal with some of these unique conditions that exist in their particular areas. This is as it should be, and as the world church continues to expand into areas more and more culturally different from North America, this will be ever more important. It is also important that these variations should not be considered either temporary or inferior or second class. If our church is to effectively serve a world of great diversity, there must be recognition that different ways of dealing with the same situation are not to be judged as superior or inferior, but simply different. For instance, a church in one part of the world that worships God from week to week with a tabla and a harmonium should never feel that their form of worship is in any way inferior to a church that chooses to worship God with an organ or a piano. Regional variations in all aspects of church life need to be recognized and validated.

My conclusion is that the present Church Manual is not readily adaptable to the needs of a world church.
Is the Present Church Manual “Usable” by a World Church?

For the Church Manual to be usable by a world church it must not only make room for variations due to cultural and language differences, but it must be in a form that is actually usable by those who need it. I have several specific areas of concern about the present form.

First, the present Church Manual is too detailed, too long, and too wordy to be of practical use to many local church leaders. It appears that in an effort to answer every possible question a North American member might ask, plus some more recent additions to answer a few questions from other parts of the world, the document is much too verbose. There is too much general commentary and too many details. Today, the Adventist Church is primarily being planted in the previously unentered areas of our world by lay people, by Global Mission pioneers, and other volunteer workers. These church planters and missionaries need a document that not only recognizes and validates their specific situations and needs, but is also practical and concise. The Church Manual must be user friendly. Paul’s advice to the new churches he established is extremely concise. Primarily, he stated general principles, such as doing things decently and in order, giving basic guidelines for choosing leaders, and making general suggestions for proper worship. It would appear that the details of how each church would follow these principles were apparently left to the local leaders. The original decision in 1882 was that the instructions to church officers “be printed in the Review and Herald or in tract form.” The present book is obviously much too lengthy for either of these forums. Perhaps getting back to that original goal would be worth our consideration.

Second, the present Church Manual has too many lengthy quotations. Though it is obviously necessary and helpful to have supportive material from both the Bible (primarily) and the Spirit of Prophecy (secondarily), it seems that in almost all cases, there is an overabundance in both types of quotations. In a document such as this that is meant to be used in a multitude of cultures and translated into dozens of languages, the principles need to be stated clearly and the supporting quotations carefully and sparingly chosen.

When thinking in “world terms” we face an additional challenge in the area of choosing texts and quotations. Inevitably, we choose, read, and interpret everything, including the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, through the lenses of our own culture. We therefore naturally tend to emphasize those texts or quotations that resonate with and reflect our own behaviors, cultural beliefs,
values, and worldview. We may thus, inadvertently, ignore other equally pow­
erful texts or statements that present other views of an issue. Since the Church Manual definitely mirrors its North American roots, the texts and quotations used often represent ways of thinking and acting that are very North Ameri­
can.

An example of this is found in the section on “Church Discipline” (2000:175-
190). The Spirit of Prophecy quotations and the Bible texts listed on these pages reflect a very Western way of dealing with problems, misunderstandings, and conflict. In both of these authoritative sources, Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, there are many other quotations and texts on this subject that reflect other styles of dealing with conflict and discipline in other cultural contexts. We in North America depend almost 100 percent on Matt 18 to define how all mat­ters of differences should be dealt with. This fits well with our cultural mode of dealing with things in a very individualistic and direct way. But Scripture is full of other beautiful ways of dealing with differences in societies where the type of directness, which is both appropriate and successful in North America, is neither appropriate nor successful. A few examples would include: (1) the use of parables to bring a point across without causing the listener to “lose face,” such as Nathan with David and Jesus with Simon the Pharisee; (2) the indirect approach used by Jesus with the accusers of the woman taken in adultery, and with Judas. These are equally valid and biblical ways of dealing with problems requiring conflict management or discipline in a church, and when used in cultures where indirect, non-confrontational approaches are culturally appro­priate, they can be used in the church to bring resolution to difficult situations and maintain unity to the glory of God. None of these is recognized or recom­mended in the quotations in the present Church Manual.

Third, we need to make allowance for cultural diversity in the actual opera­tion of the Adventist Church. There are vast cultural differences in how groups operate, how decisions are made, how leaders are chosen, and how groups wor­ship. There must be room within the Church Manual for different groups to ap­ply the general principles of church life and governance within their own cul­tural and social situation. For example, the principle of showing reverence in worship and praising God as a part of worship are basic principles that should be followed in every Seventh-day Adventist Church around the world. But the details of how reverence and worship are expressed are culturally determined. Does one take one’s shoes off or wear highly-polished shoes? Does one kneel, stand reverently, or prostrate oneself in prayer? Does one worship God with a
tabla, a harp, a pan pipe, tambourine, a marimba, or an organ? Such questions are simply related to cultural differences, and yet, in the current Church Manual one of these very cultural worship items is validated, the others ignored. There are frequent references to having a pianist or an organist in a church (see pages 96, 98, 103, 105, 145, 146). This organizational detail of worship clearly relates to a very limited part of the world church. Such details should not be a part of a document meant to serve the world church.

Fourth, there will always be a need for supplemental materials with details for those needing or desiring to study in depth the background and rationale for various areas of church life and practice. Such detail will include rationale, the necessary commentary, and as many Bible and Spirit of Prophecy quotations as needed. These should be available in a separate volume. I believe the present Church Manual could work well for this purpose if it were edited and expanded in some areas to reflect more fully the realities of a world church.

**Need for a Core Document**

To better serve a world church there needs to be a core document that lists basic principles of church life, practice, and governance, a shorter, more succinct document with very few details, a supra-cultural document. In a document created to guide the world church in matters of structure and organization, a shorter, more concise statement of the basic principles is needed. A basic document for lay use should therefore include the following:

1. The *core principles* in each area with a few basics in organization and governance that would apply to the church in any culture, language, socio-economic, and literacy background.

2. A simple *format* that is not so "word-dense." An outline format using bullets would be much easier to read, translate, and actually use.

3. There should still be room for local unions and divisions to apply the principles and add essential details showing application to local cultures and situations, making adaptations, amplifications, and even variations as needed. There are responsible, committed, mature leaders in all the areas of the world who can be trusted to "put meat on the bones" of a basic core "skeleton" outline, suggesting details that would be more appropriate for the local setting and better suited to helping new churches grow within their own cultural style, while at the same time adhering to a basic core.
What About the Present Church Manual?

For churches located in areas where North American styles of organization are the cultural and social norms, and where the membership comes primarily from Christian urban backgrounds similar to North America and Europe, the present organizational details may be valuable. In addition, as stated above, there will still be a need for a document similar to the one we currently have, one with lengthy, detailed information about each area of church life. Included in this document would be much of the information I previously described as “too detailed, too wordy, and with too many quotations.” When an issue is originally introduced to become a part of the Church Manual, there is undoubtedly a need for a lengthy presentation of the “case” including both detailed commentary and rationale, as well as scriptural and Spirit of Prophecy support. This type of material is very important for church leaders and pastors to help them better understand the historical and theological background for how our church operates.

The First Global Mission Issues Committee

In conclusion I would ask you to think back to the first Global Mission Issues Committee. It did not meet in Silver Spring, Maryland, four years ago, but rather in Jerusalem around the middle of the first century. The Christian Church had been planted in the soil of Judaism with its thousands of years of tradition, beliefs, and religious practice. All of the early Christians were Jews and brought their Jewish heritage with them into the Christian Church. Only after Paul and Barnabas encountered Gentiles who wanted to become Christians did questions of church life and practice become an issue. The issues grew out of mission.

In Acts 15 that “Issues Committee” met to consider whether or not the “Church Manual” of Judaism and the Jewish-Christian Church must be applied in its entirety to Gentile Christians. The guidelines by which these Jewish Christians functioned went back throughout their history to Moses and Abraham. Many of their practices were given and ordained by God to the patriarchs and written in the Levitical laws. But Paul and Barnabas knew that just as there was no need for a Jewish Christian to give up his Jewishness to become a Christian, there was also no need for a Gentile to become a Jewish Christian in order to be an authentic Christian. People could become authentic Christians as Gentiles.
The decisions of the Jerusalem Council were radical. In essence they determined that within a very short time there would be more than one type of Christian church. These new churches would look, think, and worship very differently. Inevitably, Jewish Christian churches and Gentile Christian churches located in various locations would not be uniform in many details of church life. But knowing that, they still were guided by the Holy Spirit to make the revolutionary decisions found in Acts 15. Consider their words.

James states: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19).

In the letter sent with Paul and Barnabas to the new converts the leaders in Jerusalem stated: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things” (Acts 15:28). With this statement they cut through 2,000 years of Jewish religious customs and practices—customs and practices that had often been ordained and commanded by God. They reduced all that tradition and practice into a brief summary of four major points.

In summary, I would recommend that to meet the practical needs of a world church, we must have a new version of the Church Manual that deals with principles, not details. It must be concise and simple. It must leave room for individual cultures to express their worship and organize their churches in ways that are more appropriate and meaningful within their context, their culture, while also relating to their level of literacy and economic level. A Seventh-day Adventist church in a village or small town in Cambodia or Cameroon or Colorado should look different and function somewhat differently from each other or from one in Nairobi or New York or Newcastle. There can still be unity around principles even though there may be great variation in the details of how those principles are expressed.

As Paul and other early church leaders continued to plant the church all over the Roman Empire and later wrote letters of instruction and encouragement to them, they enunciated general principles of church life and practice, allowing each church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to work out the details. Can we improve on this model?
Reference List

Over the past decades the Seventh-day Adventist Church has had a tendency to centralize the responsibility for mission, witness, and world evangelization. This centralization of the mission task has resulted in widespread disengagement by local membership from their personal responsibility for witness. This short paper will look at some of the factors that have impacted in this area and will suggest how a more decentralized approach to mission would have far-reaching impact on the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the twenty-first century.

Who Is Responsible for Witness and Mission?

Who is responsible for mission, witness, and world evangelization? Some will tell you that the General Conference (GC) is, others will say that local fields hold that responsibility, while still others will say that public evangelists and pastors are responsible. Let's begin by looking at three myths concerning responsibility for world evangelization and witness in our world.
Myth #1: The General Conference is Responsible

Over the decades the General Conference took responsibility for calling the Adventist Church to mission and world evangelization. The magnetic personalities of Daniels and Spicer galvanized the church to action, to growth, and to the task of planting the Church in every country of the world. However, when the Daniels and Spicer era ended in the early 1930s, the vision for mission began to fade. Subsequent General Conference leaders had agendas and priorities other than mission.

One of the flaws of the reorganization of 1901-1903 was the lack of a mission board or mission department that would spearhead Adventist mission. As long as the General Conference prioritized mission, Adventist mission flourished; but without strong GC leadership mission from the 1960s on began to take a back seat. Notice the decline in Seventh-day Adventist supported missionaries.

SDA Supported Missionaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rank &amp; Denomination</th>
<th>Total Sent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>#1 Southern Baptist (SB)</td>
<td>2,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#4 Seventh-day Adventist (SDA)</td>
<td>1,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>#1 SB</td>
<td>2,906</td>
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<td>#13 SDA</td>
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Source: Mission Handbook, 10th - 17th Editions

This decline in SDA supported missionaries took place during the time when unreached people group thinking was impacting Christian mission, and most other groups were gearing up for a greater emphasis on sending mis-
Decentralization to Facilitate Mission

sionaries to unreached people groups. At the very time when other evangelical groups were doing more, we started doing a lot less. Notice what was also happening to Adventist mission giving patterns.

**Tithe and Mission Giving**

<table>
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<tr>
<td>Total World Mission Giving</td>
<td>29,046,380</td>
<td>42,631,642</td>
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<td>NAD Mission Giving as % of Tithe</td>
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<td>World Tithe per capita</td>
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<td>NAD Tithe per capita</td>
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Source: Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

What has resulted is a looking to the GC to lead in the area of mission, but when the GC becomes occupied with other pressing issues, the sense of urgency for sacrifice and sending of personnel and monetary resources to reach the unreached begins to diminish. A centralized approach to mission tends to give people the security of allowing the GC to lead in mission without much sense of personal responsibility on the part of the unions, local fields, and individuals. Today, few in our church sense any real personal responsibility to reach the unreached in our world. In many parts of the world, only a few have a compelling desire to be active witnesses. Most Adventists spend little if any time pleading with God for breakthroughs in the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese worlds.

Divisions, unions and conferences are often too busy responding to the needs of their constituents (those who are already Adventists) to have much energy, personnel, or monetary resources with which to minister to the unreached in their territories or to commit resources to work in the 10/40 Window. Fortunately, the Global Mission initiative changed this to some degree, but there is still a sense within Adventism that mission is the responsibility of the GC. And if the General Conference does not act, does not mobilize the church, and does not call the church to responsible witness, then too many at the various levels of our organization seem to think that they are not responsible and that they have no personal responsibility to witness or to evangelize.
Myth #2: Public Evangelists Are Responsible

The emphasis on public evangelism has also eroded the personal sense of responsibility for witnessing. Too much honor and glory is attached to the persona of the evangelist. They often arrive after months and months of hard, diligent work by lay members, but in the write up in church papers we see pictures of mass baptisms and mention is made of the evangelist, but too often little is said about the vital work of the many who studied and prepared the hundreds for a reaping series of meetings. Too often our church publications make it very clear that a large public campaign by high-powered professionals is the honored way to do evangelism. Again, this practice has impacted and diminished a personal sense of responsibility for witness. What is needed is not less public evangelism but more appreciation of the role of the many who make public evangelism successful.

Myth #3: My Pastor Is Responsible

Even at the pastoral level in many areas of the world we have long-established practices that have undermined the individual member's sense of responsibility for personal witnessing. The paid clergy preach and teach while the membership lives a life without much sense that they are to be active in witnessing to neighbors and friends. In the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* a strong statement says that “the minister who does not have the gift of training, does not belong to the pastoral ministry” (Ministerial Association 1988:211), yet the majority of our pastors in many parts of the world spend little time training the membership concerning effective witness and personal evangelism.

Factors Leading to Disengagement From the Mission Task

The three myths listed above have contributed to the problem. By placing responsibility for mission, witness, and world evangelization on the General Conference, the public evangelists and the pastor, many Adventist members have completely disengaged from any sense that they are personally responsible for completing the task of world evangelization. But there are other factors that have also contributed to the lack of a sense of personal responsibility for witness and outreach.
#1 A Lukewarm, Laodacian Condition

Many factors seem to combine to keep people from personal witness. There is no doubt that the conditions of the Laodacian Church infect Adventism in many parts of the world. Members are not hot for their faith, are not a shining light to those around them, and are not salty enough to flavor their neighborhoods.

#2 Influence of Post-Modernism

Even more dangerous is the degree to which many Western Adventists have partaken of post-modern philosophy when it comes to feeling that faith is personal, that one should not try to convince another of the rightness or wrongness of any one course of action, that one should just respect people's religious views and not feel that any one faith system is the right one. In a post-modern climate, witness, evangelism, and sharing one's faith has become suspect and viewed as inappropriate and anti-establishment.

#3 Materialism, Wealth, and the Desire for the Good Life

Another factor that mitigates against widespread involvement in witness is the grip of materialism on large portions of the Adventist membership. The disease of wanting a little bit more has driven many families to such hectic lifestyles that even the thought of spending one night a week at a Bible study is more than most can imagine. But busyness is only part of the dilemma. Wealth creates a softness and a desire for an even more pampered way of living. Fewer and fewer are even willing to consider that God may be calling them to work in some inconvenient part of the world in order to share the Good News with those who have never heard. Materialism and wealth seem to create attitudes where people are less willing to risk much for God and his kingdom. People seem to live almost entirely for self, for family, and not much for God.

#4 A Poorly Defined Theology of Witness

Perhaps another contributing factor is the weak theology of witness taught and believed by many Adventists. In the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, there is a three-sentence section entitled "Witnessing—the Purpose for Gifts" that says: "Believers receive a diversity of gifts, an indication that each has a
individualized ministry. Yet every believer should be able to witness about his faith, sharing beliefs and telling others what God has done in his life. The purpose for which God gives each gift, no matter what it may be, is to enable its possessor to witness” (Ministerial Association 1988:212). That's all it says about witness in the whole book. Membership in the church is not conditioned on sharing the faith. Many pastors and most administrators have not led a person to Christ in years. It's almost as if witnessing were an option that few take seriously.

#5 No Cultural Model

When you couple this weak concept of the Christian's responsibility to witness with the fact that in many parts of the 10/40 Window where Adventism has struggled to grow there are no cultural models of witnessing in Hinduism or Buddhism. With no cultural models the church has struggled to become a witnessing community. In much of the Buddhist world a concept that one should witness to one's faith is completely foreign. Buddhism has always been a cultural religion with most equating being a Buddhist with being a Japanese, Thai, or Korean. All the years I lived in Buddhist countries no one ever witnessed to me concerning the tenets of Buddhism; I was never approached and invited to study about Buddhist teachings. The same can largely be said about the Hindu world: Christians living in a Hindu culture see no cultural examples of witness. Perhaps we have taken too much for granted, believing that once a person became a follower of Jesus Christ they would automatically begin to witness concerning their faith. But in reality, in much of the Buddhist and Hindu world only paid workers and global mission workers on a stipend are active in witness.

#6 Incomplete Instruction by Missionaries

Another factor that is part of the equation is the failure on the part of early missionaries to thoroughly teach the people they were winning to Christ that they now shared the responsibility to take the Good News to unreached and unentered regions. Too many Christians in too many parts of the world today do not sense any responsibility to engage in mission in the 10/40 Window. They still cling to the outdated notion that mission is a Western enterprise. The vital and dynamic Adventist Church in the southern hemisphere with several million from Central and South America and from the three African Divi-
sions sends few to the task of world evangelization. Few from those parts of the world go, few give, and few pray for the unreached. How is it that the two-thirds world church has been able to mature with no sense of responsibility for reaching the unreached? How have we failed to adequately inform and teach concerning the responsibility of each follower of Jesus Christ to take personal responsibility for world evangelization?

#7 No Mission Structure That Easily Allows for Engaging in the Mission Task

One more factor that impacts the will to witness is the makeup of the denominational structure. Present Seventh-day Adventist practices and policies in many parts of the world (especially the Central and South American Divisions and the three African Divisions) actually discourage their membership from going as missionaries to the 10/40 Window. Where are the structures and policies that would encourage the recruiting, training, funding, and sending of hundreds of young couples from those five divisions to the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese worlds of unreached peoples? How long will we allow policies to exist that can more easily discourage and deny permission to the youth of the world divisions to engage in mission than to actively recruit and promote missions?

Recommendations

So what is needed? How do we move the church forward and out of this dilemma where members in the West are too busy, too wealthy, too lukewarm, or too preoccupied with the good life to witness? How do we encourage the church members in the Buddhist and Hindu world who presently are not witnessing and who do not have a cultural background or model for witnessing to begin to engage in outreach? What needs to be done in order to allow for easy accessibility for missionaries from the Inter American, South American, and the three African Divisions to shoulder their responsibility for mission, witness, and world evangelization? I’d like to suggest four areas where improvement can be made and where action should be taken.
#1 Develop a Comprehensive Theology of Witness

The Seventh-day Adventist Church must develop a comprehensive theology of witness. This is not an option. Witness is vital if our church is to be faithful to its calling and prophetic purpose. Witness is vital if our members are to be drawn into an ever closer relationship with Jesus Christ. Witness is vital if we are to touch the lives of hurting, afflicted, suffering humanity in our communities. Witness is vital if we are going to make a difference in the Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Chinese worlds.

An Adventist theology of witness must begin to dismantle the many myths that have developed as to who is responsible for witness. An Adventist theology of witness must do away with the tendencies to centralize responsibility for witness and must teach clearly and biblically that each person, as they join the family of God, inherits a personal responsibility to witness both locally and globally (Acts 1:8).

An Adventist theology of witness cannot tolerate a situation where the various divisions could have many hundreds of thousands of members but no sense of responsibility for the unreached in the 10/40 Window. A theology of witness must stress the personal and individual responsibility for every member to witness and to engage in mission and world evangelization, even if presently the structure and policies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church do not encourage such participation. What would have happened to the members in Antioch if they had waited for policies and words of encouragement from the headquarters in Jerusalem before embarking on that first missionary journey (see Acts 13:1-4)?

Decentralization of the mission task will facilitate more effective mission in our church. Therefore, I would like to suggest that the Global Mission Issues Committee vote an official recommendation that a committee be formed to work on an Adventist Theology of Witness. I further recommend that within the next year that Global Mission organize a conference dealing with the issues raised by such a theology of witness.

#2 Hold Leadership Accountable for Personal Witness

Witnessing within Adventism suffers from the disease of everyone thinking that someone else should do it. One of the shocking things I observed after returning from working in Japan and Micronesia was that few pastors actually personally witnessed. Many pastors in the West often go for weeks and months
without teaching a Bible class to unbelievers or without personally witnessing. The same could be said for administrators, teachers, and seminary professors. Too many of us are not in the habit of taking any personal responsibility for personal witness.

In a recent book by Thom Rainer entitled Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them, it was found that 43 percent of the pastors of churches that were effective at reaching the unchurched had entered into an accountability relationship where they were asked weekly if they had been faithful in personal witness versus only 2 percent of the pastors of churches that had stagnated. Is it possible that one of the keys to lighting the fire of witness under our lay members might just be leadership, by example by pastors and administrators, teachers, and other denominational leaders? How can we expect widespread involvement in witness by the laity of this church if we as leaders never witness?

Thom Rainer, the pastor of one of the fastest growing churches in Pennsylvania, starts his Monday morning staff meeting with a time where all of the administrative staff share about their personal witnessing during the previous week. Those who have been too busy to witness then have an opportunity during the prayer time to repent. Perhaps some of us need the encouragement of a similar accountability system in order to get us out front in the area of personal witness.

#3 Adjust the Structure and Policies of the Church to Allow for Easy Accessibility

Adventists often refer to parts of the world field as sending divisions, and the rest would be perceived as receiving divisions. Decentralization of the mission task means that the Church must do away with such thinking and utilize the resources in all the divisions to support Adventist mission. The Secretariat of the General Conference should be encouraged to work with each of the world divisions to develop a set of policies that encourage and give permission to the members of each division and union to engage easily in the global aspects of witness. Today, in many parts of the world, if a dedicated couple went to the leaders in a union and told them that God was calling them to service in a part of the 10/40 Window, the union leaders would have no easy way to help the couple become involved. Present policies do not easily give permission
or provide a mechanism or structure for many to engage in witness outside of their local territories.

If the various divisions of the world church do not act to provide easy access the Church can expect to see many more supporting ministries established in order to provide those opportunities to serve. Supporting ministries are not an evil to be suppressed, but they do represent duplication of personnel and structure that diverts funding from front line mission.

Divisions should realize that one of the marks of a mature church is the recruiting, funding, training, and sending of their sons and daughters to share the Good News with those who have never heard. Adventist mission must begin to practice what it has been saying for the past forty years that missionaries are not just from the West, but from everywhere to everywhere.

Again, I believe that a recommendation from this committee requesting that the General Conference Secretariat work with each of the world divisions to write policies that will enable people from each division to easily engage in the task remaining would be very appropriate.

#4 Call the Church to Mission, Witness, and World Evangelization

Present practices, denominational structure, and the policies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have shaped and formed the habits and ways that Adventists around the world view their responsibility for mission, witness, and world evangelization. Nothing short of a call from the highest levels of the church will bring about change in the way Adventists approach mission. The millions of members in the Inter American, South American and in the three African divisions will not engage in witness and mission at the global level in the unentered areas of the 10/40 Window until and unless there is a challenge and a call from none other than the General Conference president to send their own missionaries to that region of the world.

If Dr. Paulsen would challenge the world membership of our church and would call for at least 1,000 new missionary couples to enter the unentered and unreached areas of our world over the next few years, I firmly believe that both the money to send them and the people to go would be readily available.
Decentralization to Facilitate Mission

Conclusion

Decentralization of the mission task will take effort to overcome the mindset and policies of the past, but the promise of full engagement by all unions and divisions of the Church will be well worth the struggle. When every division and every union takes seriously the Gospel Commission and sees that commission as also applying to territory outside its local boundaries, then this church will be moving in the right direction. When individuals take personal responsibility not only for witness in their local areas, but also at the global level, then our church will begin to see more and more unreached and unentered areas in our world evangelized. When we as pastors, administrators, and teachers realize that we too are personally responsible for witness, then just perhaps our role modeling will become a source of encouragement and help to our members. When every individual has an adequate theology of witness that teaches clearly the personal responsibility for mission, witness, and world evangelization, then the positive effects of decentralization of mission will be realized.

Reference List


Chapter 15

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2003 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor's Note: At the conclusion of each year's Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 2003 five recommendations were prepared dealing with baptism, the communion service, polygamy, the Church Manual, and mobilizing the Church for mission.

Baptism

Recommended 8 April 2003

In a world of underground churches, para-church structures, political and religious restrictions, burgeoning membership among illiterate and semiliterate people and isolated converts whose only contact with the world church is listening to Adventist World Radio, the question of who can baptize becomes increasingly significant and urgent.

Where the situation requires, we suggest that the appropriate church body recommend the ordination of pioneer workers as church elders in the conference or mission church. Such ordained elders can then be authorized to baptized in accordance with Church Manual guidelines.
Contextualization of the Communion Service

Recommended 8 April 2003

Recommended Addition to the Church Manual

2000 Church Manual p. 73, last paragraph: Since the Lord himself selected the deeply meaningful symbols of the unleavened bread and unfermented fruit of the vine and used the simplest of means for washing the disciples' feet, there should be great reluctance to introduce alternative symbols and means (except under truly emergency conditions or hardships) lest the original significance of the service be lost.

Commentary for Conference/Mission/Field Officers
Who Will Provide Counsel in Regard to Making Substitutions in the Communion Service

Church Manual p. 73: Except in truly emergency conditions or hardships, i.e., distance, economics, security, etc.

Church Manual p. 75: The symbols of bread and wine are full of deep meaning and are tied to the historic and biblical practice of communion. We want to encourage their practice. There are places and times where poverty, warfare, etc. cause there to be limited access to bread and grape juice. In such cases, churches should be allowed to adopt culturally appropriate, functional substitutes that fully capture communion's meaning.

Because the communion service is a sacred service, any substitutions made must maintain the meaning and symbolism of the emblems and lend themselves to the understanding of the spiritual significance.

Grape juice is meaningful because its color represents Christ's blood; its creation through the crushing of the grapes reminds us of the bruising and brokenness of Christ; and its sweetness ties us to the joy of salvation. Therefore, if any substitution is required through emergency or hardship, a substitute should be chosen that best represents blood, bruising or brokenness, and sweetness. See Luke 22:20.
The bread is meaningful because it was the staple of the diet and was broken when eaten, representing Christ's broken body as essential to our spiritual salvation and daily life. Therefore, if any substitution is required through emergency or hardships, it is best to use the staple food of daily life. See John 6:48.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Polygamy

Recommended 8 April 2003

This recommendation is based on a 1986 recommendation. See chapter 28, appendix F.

Introduction

It is clearly God's plan that marriage should be monogamous, one husband living with one wife (Gen 2:22-24; Matt 19:5, 6). Any other form of marriage lowers this standard that should govern human society and especially the church of Christ.

We affirm:

1. That the biblical account portrays and urges monogamy as God's best plan for mankind; and that the sacredness and inviolability of the family unit is an integral part of biblical teaching.

2. That we instruct members and adherents on the Christian values and relationships sustaining monogamy, and on the legal position in their societies that may protect them from polygamous relationships.

3. That we continue to witness by example and proclamation that the Christian marriage is monogamous, and that we uphold monogamy as the norm for marriage.

4. That every effort be made for monogamy to replace polygamy as individuals and families enter the church.

5. That we maintain a rigorous standard of monogamy for those who are entering into marriage after receiving the gospel.

6. Out of a deep concern for mission to: (1) specific people groups, tribes, or religious groups where there is an openness to the gospel for a relatively brief window of time, or (2) where there is resistance to the gospel, and (3) where
there is deeply entrenched legal polygamy including legal, tribal, and cultural strictures which cannot be modified without causing severe damage to individuals sharing in the polygamous unit;

It is recommended that divisions give careful study to the appropriate and sensitive salvific relationship that can be extended to such persons.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

**Adapting the Church Manual**

*Recommended 8 April 2003*

RECOMMENDED, To refer to the Church Manual Committee a recommendation: that in its work of preparing amendments for the next revision of the *Church Manual*, that due consideration be given to making the material in the *Church Manual* more culturally sensitive so that its universal acceptability and applicability will be enhanced.

RECOMMENDED, To ask the Global Mission Issues Committee to take the initiative to arrange for the preparation of a Handbook for Global Mission Pioneers which will outline the necessary steps that must be followed in establishing and operating a newly established church. The procedures outlined in this handbook must be in full harmony with the *Church Manual* but stated simply and generalized so that it can be easily contextualized.

*Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.*

**Mobilizing the Church for Mission**

*Recommended 8 April 2003*

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been called to be a witnessing community taking the eternal gospel to every nation, language, tribe, and people (Rev 14:6, 7). For this reason the Adventist Church has made the reaching of the billions not yet reached by the gospel its top priority.

We recommend:
1. That a task force be established to evaluate current policies and practices that impact on the ability of each division to engage in mission to the billions yet unreached and work out a process to facilitate:
   a. identifying unreached targets,
   b. recruiting and selecting missionary teams,
   c. training missionary teams,
   d. sending missionary teams,
   e. caring for missionary teams,
   f. funding and resourcing missionary teams,
   g. coordinating and partnering, and
   h. linking missionary teams to local churches and conferences.

A possible list of personnel for this task force might consist of Matthew Bediako (Secretariat), Mike Ryan (Global Mission), Ismael Castillo, G. T. Ng, Peter Roennfeldt, Barry Oliver, Pardon Mwansa, Don Schneider, and Bruce Bauer, with Lowell Cooper as Chair.

The committee is requested to prepare a comprehensive report with recommendations to the Global Mission Issues Committee of 2004.

2. To undergird the mission of the church at this critical juncture of its history, it is recommended that the chairman appoint a small committee of missiologists and theologians to formulate a theology of witness.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.
Chapter 16

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2004 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor's Note: At the 2004 Global Mission Issues Committee the entire time was spent on reviewing the recommendation for an additional fundamental belief entitled “Growing In Christ.” The new statement had been reviewed by the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) and by the Biblical Research Institute in preparation for its recommendation to the General Conference in session in 2005. The lengthy document contained history and the rationale for the new fundamental belief.

The Fundamental Beliefs and “Growing in Christ”: Proposal for a New Fundamental Belief

Recommended 6 April 2004

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to bring before you an invitation to initiate a formal dialogue that will hopefully reveal whether or not the Spirit is leading the church in the direction suggested here. In Adventist praxis the formulation of a fundamental belief is not something that happens in a particular office under the leadership of a group of individuals, but rather something that is the result of a consensus created by the Holy Spirit in the community of believers.
We should see ourselves as facilitators, as channels through which the Spirit can work in the expression of that consensus.

Consequently, what we are initiating cannot be pushed on the church, but must be a clear expression of where the church itself stands today. What we bring before you carries a disclaimer: We do not own it, neither do you. It should belong to the church; it should be, as already indicated, an expression of the thinking of the Spirit through the church. We bring this document to you to listen to your counsel as we seek to determine whether the perceived need of a new fundamental belief is real or not. After the discussion you may conclude that there is no need for a new fundamental belief or that it seems pleasing to all of us and to the Spirit to seek his guidance through the consensus of believers. At the present time some of us feel that this is pleasing to the Spirit, but this perception needs the external witness of the Spirit through the church.

This document contains four parts. The first is a summary of the process that brought us here today; the second is a discussion of the nature of the Fundamental Beliefs; the third is an analysis of our existing Fundamental Beliefs in order to see whether a new article is needed; and, finally there is a sample of what the new fundamental belief could look like. If it is concluded that a new statement is needed, then the sample will help in the formulation of the final draft.

Summary of the Process

Seventh-day Adventists have always had a well-defined biblical theology describing God's greatness and power. Bible study and prayer have always been fundamental Seventh-day Adventist values which facilitate having a relationship with Jesus. These beliefs are not new.

Adventism originated from a Western culture with deep roots anchored in the reformation. Bible study and prayer as a way of understanding God's greatness and accessing his power were so fundamental that much has been assumed through a verbal understanding.

Since the beginning of the church, mission has been seen as a primary responsibility. This message quickly spread across America. By the late 1800s the church's concept of mission extended to all the world. Over the past 120 years the Three Angels' Messages have spread to almost every country in the world and certainly to most major people groups. The pioneers met the challenge of
establishing a beginning and an infrastructure from which a much larger work
could be carried forward.

Today, national workers largely carry forward the mission of the church. This resource cannot be overestimated. In most places the church has been able to operate within the culture of the people and appeal to a much wider population. This movement is spreading to the 10/40 Window.

Over the past ten years a wide gospel appeal has been made by national workers in many of the 10/40 Window countries. The big view of finishing the work and the conversion of animists, Buddhists, Communists, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews has challenged traditional methods of evangelism. National workers having an innate sense for effective methodology have struck the core values of not only the religion but the culture. Here we confront two main areas of great concern for us among non-Christian religions, namely transcendental meditation and the power of demons.

Transcendental meditation is a search for contact with spiritual powers in order to enrich the individual. In place of that spiritualistic practice we offer them contact with God through prayer, Bible study, service, and meditation on the Word of God and his providential leadings. These subjects, as will be demonstrated later on, are hardly addressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. This deficiency has been pointed out by church members from different parts of the world.

All major world religions have borrowed from and have been affected by animism. More than 70 percent of the world's population lives in fear of evil powers and regards evil powers as the answer of choice when considering the metaphysical and epistemological question. Often, the first question asked front line workers is, How does your religion deal with the evil spirits in my life?

While Seventh-day Adventists have a strong biblical theology on good and evil spirits, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs does not compile the biblical evidence but rather relies heavily on an Adventist cultural understanding. Cultural understandings, when at some distance from the process used to establish a biblical truth or practice, can take on dimensions that extend well beyond the Adventist garden of theology.

Occasionally, when Global Mission Pioneers are asked by interested people how the new religion they proclaim would affect the evil spirits that controlled their lives, the answer has not been what would have been expected. We hear expressions like, "We must be cautious not to offend the evil spirits," or "We must not anger the evil spirits."
The Global Mission Issues Committee has discussed the issues surrounding good and evil powers. The Adventist external look says we have 70 percent of the world's population testifying of visible and physical evil spirit evidence in the context of our mission for a lost world. The Adventist internal look says that God will gather a huge harvest from all nations victoriously leading his people through the great end-time deceptions which will include a seemingly miraculous display of evil powers. Spiritualism will take control of the world in a way never seen before. We must do all we can now to prepare the world for that final deception.

While prayer, Bible study, service, meditation, and God's great power over evil are not new truths, a large growing church amid people traditionally controlled by evil powers is a growing reality for which we have long prayed. What brings us to this agenda? Mission—that every person might come to know Jesus and claim his victory over sin and evil.

The Fundamental Beliefs

The Fundamental Beliefs play a vital role in the life and mission of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are a rapidly growing movement with a presence in more than 200 countries, and the Fundamental Beliefs describe what Seventh-day Adventists believe. Thus they establish our doctrinal identity and help to keep us united.

As currently stated, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs dates from the 1980 General Conference Session held in Dallas, Texas. However, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs voted on that occasion was not intended to necessarily be the last word on the matter. The Fundamental Beliefs are a living document, not a creed.

The Fundamental Beliefs: A Living Document

The preamble to the 1980 Fundamental Beliefs states: "Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word."
This view of the living character of the Fundamental Beliefs really stems from the conviction of the pioneers that we are a people of "present truth" (2 Pet 1:12) who seek always to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit into deeper understanding of truth. Ellen White encouraged us to guard against the tendency to fossilize our beliefs into a creed. Among her many counsels calling upon us to be receptive to new insights, while maintaining the foundations, we find the following:

Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God's word, and discourage any further investigation of Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid discussion (Gospel Workers, pp. 297, 298).

New light will ever be revealed on the word of God to him who is in living connection with the Sun of Righteousness. Let no one come to the conclusion that there is no more truth to be revealed. The diligent, prayerful seeker for truth will find precious rays of light yet to shine forth from the word of God. Many gems are yet scattered that are to be gathered together to become the property of the remnant people of God" (Counsels on Sabbath School Work, p. 34).

The history of development of doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist Church shows growth in understanding and formulation.
1. The earliest list of doctrines appeared in the masthead of the Sabbath Review and Advent Herald in five successive issues, August 15-December 19, 1854. The "leading doctrines" were just five: The Bible alone, the law of God, the Second Coming, the new earth, and immortality alone through Christ.
2. In 1872 Uriah Smith wrote "A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists." The list had 25 doctrines.
3. In 1889 the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook for the first time published a list of "Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists." This list, based on Uriah Smith's list from 1872, contained 28 articles.
4. In 1894 the 1,521-member Battle Creek Church issued its own statement of faith. It had 31 elements.
5. The statement of faith that first appeared in the 1889 Yearbook was also included in the yearbooks for 1905, and from 1907 to 1914. According to Leroy
Edwin Froom, the statement was not included in the yearbooks 1890-1904, 1906, and 1915-1930 because of conflicting views over the Trinity and the Atonement (Movement of Destiny, pp. 412, 413).

6. In 1931 F. M. Wilcox prepared a statement of faith on behalf of a committee of four authorized by action of the General Conference Committee. This statement, titled “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” had 22 articles. Although it was never formally adopted, it appeared in the 1931 Yearbook and in all subsequent yearbooks. In 1932 it was printed in tract form. This was the statement that remained in place (with slight changes) up until the new formulation in Dallas in 1980.

7. The 1941 Annual Council approved a uniform “Baptismal Vow” and “Baptismal Covenant” based on the 1931 statement.

8. The General Conference Session of 1946 voted that no revision of the Fundamental Beliefs shall be made at any time except by approval of a General Conference Session.

9. In 1980 the General Conference Session made major revisions of the Fundamental Beliefs. Completely new articles were added on Creation; The Great Controversy; The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ; The Church; Unity in the Body of Christ; The Lord’s Supper; The Gift of Prophecy; and Marriage and the Family. Some existing articles were rephrased.

Observations Concerning the Fundamental Beliefs

Seventh-day Adventists throughout our history have formulated our doctrines without giving emphasis to a particular number. The number has varied greatly: from 5 to 31. We have simply designated our doctrines as “Fundamental Beliefs,” never as the “22 Fundamental Beliefs” or “25 Fundamental Beliefs,” and so on. This is still the case: the Yearbook simply lists our doctrines as “Fundamental Beliefs.” Only in more recent years has the tendency arisen to attach a number, as in the book Seventh-day Adventists Believe...: A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines (General Conference Ministerial Association, 1988).

In considering the new articles added in 1980, not one represented a new departure in doctrine. Each simply articulated beliefs already held and practiced by Seventh-day Adventists. It was felt that the time had come to incorporate these beliefs into the statement of Fundamental Beliefs.
The needs of mission have played a role in formulating our Fundamental Beliefs. We see this clearly as a factor driving the statement of Fundamental Beliefs that emerged in 1931. The General Conference Committee minutes of December 29, 1930, record the following action:

"STATEMENT OF OUR FAITH FOR YEAR BOOK"

A request was presented from the African Division that a statement of what Seventh-day Adventists believe should be printed in the Year Book, since they feel that such a statement would help government officials and others to a better understanding of our work.

VOTED: That the chair appoint a committee of which he shall be a member, to prepare such a statement for publication in the Yearbook."

Conclusion

Perhaps the time has come again when the needs of our global mission should cause us to revisit the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. This is not to alter what we already have in place since 1980, and which continues to serve us well, but to add an article that will enable us better to fulfill the mission. Billions of people live their lives in daily awareness, fear, and apprehension of spiritual powers. Large numbers view the religious life in quietistic terms, with transcendental meditation playing a key role. The Fundamental Beliefs in their present formulation do not seem to address these ideas.

Although the demands of Global Mission point to a possible addition to our Fundamental Beliefs, it seems likely that the entire church might benefit from the addition. Many people today, even in “developed” societies, feel threatened by evil which seems all pervasive and all powerful. For many, life is essentially meaningless.

At various times since 1980 some members have expressed surprise that the Fundamental Beliefs contain no reference to prayer, devotional life, and service. It may be possible to formulate a new article on Christian growth that meets the needs which have arisen from Global Mission and also to address the above lack. Significantly, the 1941 summary of Fundamental Beliefs did have a statement that highlighted the study of the Word, prayer, and the development of Christian character.

Any new article will not introduce new theology. As in the formulation of the Fundamental Beliefs voted in 1980, the new material will be merely an ar-
articulation of what we already believe as Seventh-day Adventists. Any addition to the Fundamental Beliefs will require widespread input, with dissemination well in advance of the 2005 General Conference Session. The whole church must "own" the Fundamental Beliefs.

Given the obvious need driven by mission, the question now becomes: Do the Fundamental Beliefs as currently formulated already address this need, so that we do not need a new article?

Back of that question is a more important one: Is the Holy Spirit leading his people today to revisit the Fundamental Beliefs formulated in Dallas, 1980?

**Content of the Proposed New Fundamental Belief and the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs**

The proposed new fundamental belief has two main purposes. First, it explicitly addresses Christian growth in order to exclude eastern transcendental meditation as a spiritual exercise that is incompatible with the gospel of salvation through Christ. Second, it proclaims freedom through Christ from demonic powers to demonstrate that seeking help and guidance from them in our spiritual growth is not only unnecessary but totally incompatible with the work of Jesus on our behalf.

The present Statement of Fundamental Beliefs does not explicitly address those doctrinal concerns. Some of the basic theological elements presupposed in the proposed new statement are briefly touched in some of the doctrinal statements, thus providing a link between this one and the rest of the body of beliefs. We will briefly look at the fundamental beliefs in which this link is found.

**Statements Addressing Demonic Power**

We read in Statement number 8, ("The Great Controversy"): "To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation." The new proposed statement will reaffirm the content of this sentence but will go beyond it by developing its thought in the context of a call to Christian growth in freedom from the controlling power of demons. In Statement number 9 ("The Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ") we find a sentence that comes very close to one of the main thoughts of the proposed new statement: "The resurrection of
Christ proclaims God's triumph over the forces of evil, and for those who accept the atonement assures their final victory over sin and death.”

However, it does not clearly state the present freedom Christians enjoy from the enslaving power of demons and neither does it set God's triumph over the forces of evil within the context of a constant Christian growth in Christ.

**Statements Addressing Character Development**

The Statement on “The Holy Spirit” establishes that, “He [the Holy Spirit] draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God.” The sentence describes a fundamental biblical truth but it does not develop the thought. In any case, it is not the purpose of that specific fundamental belief to deal with the phenomenon of Christian growth but to describe in a general way the work of the Holy Spirit not only in our sanctification but also in several other areas.

Concerning the “Experience of Salvation” we read, “Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God’s law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature.” The sentence deals very briefly with Christian renewal and spiritual growth but it does not address the indispensable elements in that growth. That is not the primary purpose of that fundamental belief.

We read in the Statement on “Christian Behavior,” “For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things which will produce Christ-like purity, health, and joy in our lives.” This sentence, like the previous ones, is quite general and does not include the importance of prayer, the study of the Word, meditation, and involvement in mission as God's instruments for character development. Neither this fundamental belief nor any of the others can be edited to include the concerns of the proposed new one without distracting from their primary purpose and making them excessively large and cumbersome. Our Fundamental Beliefs are usually short, dealing with a particular issue in a very concise form, summarizing a significant biblical teaching in a clear way. We should preserve that format.

**Conclusion**

We may need a new statement that will bring together the main ideas expressed in the statements we quoted and that at the same time will put the
emphasis on a daily walk with the Lord characterized by freedom from evil powers and on a devotional life characterized by prayer, Bible study, meditation on God’s Word and his providence in our lives, and participation in the gospel commission. This new statement will sharpen the Adventist understanding of the nature of a constant growth in Christ. This is indispensable at a time when some church members are more interested in theological discussion than in the spiritual impact of those doctrines in their daily lives.

Possible Content of the Proposed New Fundamental Belief Growing in Christ

By his cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during his earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus’ victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with him in peace, joy, and assurance of his love. Instead of evil forces, the Holy Spirit now dwells within us and empowers us. Committed to Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we are set free from the burden of past deeds and our former life with its darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of his character, as we commune with him daily in prayer, feeding on his Word, meditating on it and on his providence, singing his praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to his salvation, his constant presence with us sanctifies every moment and every task (Ps 1:1-2; 23:4; Col 1:13-14; 2:6, 14-15; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:18; 2 Cor 3:17, 18; Phil 3:7-14; 1 Thess 5:16-18; Matt 20:25-28; John 20:21; Gal 5:22-25; 1 John 4:4).

Comments on the Statement

1. The proposed statement combines two inseparables facts of the Christian experience, namely, freedom from demonic powers through the death of Jesus, followed by empowerment through the Holy Spirit to grow in Christ. The reality of the first one leads into the other.

2. The first two sentences establish the fact that throughout his ministry Christ was constantly confronting and subjugating evil spirits, but that it was at the cross that he defeated them once and for all. The second sentence rec-
ognizes the reality of the existence of evil powers by referring to them as “evil spirits.” That designation includes any of its particular expressions though occultism, spiritism, animism, and the spiritualism of the New Age.

3. The third sentence addresses our victory over those forces by grounding it in the previous victory of Jesus. The sentence implies that such victory is not limited to our personal struggles with sin but that it also includes the casting out of demons through the power of Jesus. Besides, the sentence expresses the thought that Christians can be victorious over evil powers in spite of the fact that the spirits constantly attempt to control or influence them. The implication is that we live in a world in which demons are still active.

4. The fourth sentence states that when the enslaving power of evil spirits is broken, the Holy Spirit comes and fills that spiritual vacuum enabling us to overcome them whenever they attempt to regain control over us. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit excludes the need for the role of the internal voice of spiritual guides in human experience, as taught for instance in the New Age Movement.

5. Sentence number 5 prepares the way for the second main element in the statement. Once we enter into a covenant with Jesus we are free from the “burden of past deeds.” These include freedom from karma, from our sense of guilt, meaninglessness and emptiness of life, and from the painful stigma of the past. This freedom brings true knowledge of salvation and dispels darkness and the ignorance that often led to superstitious beliefs.

6. Freedom from leads to freedom to. The sixth sentence attempts to define the indispensable elements in Christian growth. Instead of submission to demons and transcendental meditation, the Bible offers prayer, Bible study, and a meditation whose content is the Scripture and God’s providential leadings in our lives. Besides, praising the Lord through singing and involvement in the mission of the church are considered indispensable in Christian growth. Participation in the mission of the church is not optional for those who are growing in Christ.

7. The Christian life is dynamic and does not require a constant withdrawal from the world and our daily activities. This is emphasized in the last sentence. Our loving service to others takes place in the working place, the school, the street, the shopping centers, etc., as we take our Christian experience with us everywhere we go. Our awareness of the fact that God is always with us contributes and makes possible the sanctification of all we do according to his will. We should be constantly growing in Christ.
Growing in Christ

By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus’ victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaningless of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience (Ps 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Col 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; Luke 10:17-20; Eph 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:18; 2 Cor 3:17, 18; Phil 3:7-14; 1 Thess 5:16-18; Matt 20:25-28; John 20:21; Gal 5:22-25; Rom 8:38, 39; 1 John 4:4; Heb 10:25).
Chapter 17

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THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL

GORDEN R. DOSS

April 4-5, 2005

The year is A.D. 49, eighteen years after the cross and fourteen years after Paul’s conversion on the Damascus road. Paul’s first missionary journey is over and he is back in Antioch of Syria.

This is the place where the followers of Jesus Christ were first called “Christians.” At Antioch Christians had taken the momentous and risky step of entrusting the cherished name of their Savior, the Hebrew Meshia, to the ambivalent Greek word Kurios, Lord, with all of its baggage. Here at Antioch the Christians had commissioned Barnabas and Paul as missionaries, sending them off on their first missionary circuit.

And now Paul and Barnabas are back in Antioch where they would spend what is for them a long time in one place, perhaps as much as two years. Imagine how the believers felt when they heard of the signs and wonders and conversions from the first missionary journey. No doubt they heard much more than is recorded for us in Acts 13 and 14. How the Christians of Antioch must have reveled in the joy and delight of the expansion of the Christian church.

But this idyllic picture of preaching, teaching, and mission stories did not last for long because a delegation arrived from Judea, the birthplace of the church. The brethren from Jerusalem had a message: You folks who came in
under Paul's preaching are not good Christians. In fact, you may not even be saved. You are not even circumcised. Ever since Father Abraham's time, true worshippers of God have been circumcised. You must obey all of the laws of Moses.

Now, let us not come down too hard on the visiting brethren from Jerusalem. Let us give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that they are deeply converted Christians who live good moral lives and have no ulterior motives. They have good reasons to be concerned as they look out at the pagan world with its grossly immoral lifestyle. Pagan temples blend idolatry and immorality into a fearful brew. When Simon Peter extended membership to Cornelius and his household, apparently without circumcision, a lot of eyebrows went up. But that was only the beginning because now churches are being planted by Paul and Barnabas all over the place.

In the words of famed New Testament scholar, F. F. Bruce, "For many of them the church was the righteous remnant of Judaism, embodying the ancestral hope which all Israel ought to have welcomed, preparing itself for the impending day of the Lord: to countenance any relaxation in the terms of the covenant with Abraham, sealed in the flesh by circumcision, would be to forfeit all claim to remnant righteousness, all titles to salvation on the last day" (Bruce 1988:287).

F. F. Bruce identifies two main issues at the Jerusalem Council. The first issue was to define what were "the terms on which Gentile believers might be admitted to church membership" (282). What made this a difficult question was that the gospel was crossing cultural boundaries. Christianity always wears cultural robes, just as Jesus Christ was born into human flesh and human culture. Even Jesus Christ's perfect life was molded by his Jewish culture. His life style would have been somewhat different had he been incarnated into another culture. God's eternal, universal law applies to people in all cultures, but culture molds both human obedience and disobedience to God's law.

When missionaries carry the gospel into another culture they translate the gospel not merely into another language but into another whole culture. On their missionary journeys, Paul and his colleagues proclaimed the gospel in Greek (a language they already knew), but the larger part of translation remained to be done—translating the gospel into Gentile culture.

Cross-cultural missionaries must perform two tasks: first, they must exegete their own way of being a Christian to differentiate between God's absolutes and matters of cultural style in their own experience. This is not an easy task.
because religion and culture are fused in a person's understanding. Second, missionaries must exegete the other culture to discern its good, neutral, and bad elements and to facilitate the birth of authentic Christianity within a new culture. From the very start new believers have to participate in the exegesis of their own culture and they must be expected to gradually take over the leading role in that translation process.

Although cross-cultural diffusion of the gospel has been challenging and difficult from Apostolic times down to the present, what a blessing it has been. "It is in the moments of transition, the process of diffusion across cultural boundaries, the points at which cultural specificities change, that the distinctive nature of the Christian faith becomes manifest in its developing dialogue with culture. . . . As Paul and his fellow missionaries explain and translate the significance of the Christ in a world that is Gentile and Hellenistic, that significance is seen to be greater than anyone had realized before. It is as if Christ himself actually grows through the work of mission. . . . As he enters new areas of thought and life, he fills the picture" (Walls 1996:xvi-xvii).

The Jerusalem Council was to set a direction that persists to the present day—complete cultural translation. Paul Hiebert calls this process critical contextualization. As the Early Church grew beyond its Jewish cultural roots and imbedded itself within the hearts and minds of Gentile converts, it was performing the task of translation or contextualization. Some believers did not want to do any contextualization at all. They wanted to simply export Jewish Christianity, including circumcision and the ceremonial law, to the Gentiles. Other Early Church Christians were antinomians who favored an uncritical, anything-goes contextualization. The Jerusalem Council pointed the church toward full cultural translation or critical contextualization.

The second issue the Jerusalem Council struggled with was how social interaction "and especially table fellowship, might be promoted between Jewish and Gentile believers" (Bruce 1988:282). Fellowship between believers is a primary Christian doctrine. The church is called the body of Christ, and fellowship within that body is part of God's plan of salvation. Thus, we will see that the decisions of the Jerusalem Council take into account the feelings and convictions of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Christianity is a relational religion that seeks peace and harmony, even as it seeks truth.

Let's come back to this gripping mission story. The Antioch Church has been having praise sessions, but some visiting brethren have come in with bad news. "You folk aren't real Christians. You probably won't even be saved." Very
quickly fellowship has deteriorated into debate. "Yes we are! No you aren't!" "What shall we do next? Let's send Paul and Barnabas with some of our elders to Jerusalem for guidance."

On the way to Jerusalem those early Christians stopped at some other churches, and pretty soon those churches were full of rejoicing over the work God was doing among the pagans. God was visibly at work in his world, doing things that seemed utterly impossible causing the believers to be drawn to join the action.

In Jerusalem the apostles and elders welcomed the Antioch delegation warmly and listened to their reports. The Jerusalem Church was filled with joy, but the Pharisees had problems with the report. Extending membership to so-called Gentile converts who were uncircumcised was unthinkable. Furthermore, the Eucharist and other meetings were difficult because you never knew when certain so-called Christians might show up who would be ritually unclean.

After lengthy and heated debate, Peter stands up and signals for quiet. "Brethren, you know that God chose me to start work among the Gentiles. You know about the strange dream I had with the wild beasts. Then Cornelius came and was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. I was there and I saw it. Those Gentiles were filled with the Holy Spirit just like we were. And now God treats us all alike because we are all saved by grace. Now, why are you trying to lay a heavy yoke on Gentile believers that even you cannot bear? Don't you remember what Jesus said: "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt 11:29-30).

After hearing Peter, "The whole assembly kept silent, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles" (Acts 15:12). Direct witness of God's powerful deeds had a profound effect. Then James stood to speak: "My brothers, listen to me. You know that what Simon Peter and Paul and Barnabas have said is right. Furthermore, the prophets predicted in advance the very things we are seeing. Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood" (Acts 15:12-14, 19, 20) (emphasis supplied).

Although circumcision is not mentioned directly, it is omitted from the list of requirements. Gentile converts should abstain from things polluted by idols,
fornication, whatever has been strangled, and blood. I have found three interpretations of these requirements (Gallagher and Hertig 2004:196ff).

The first interpretation is that Gentile Christians should abstain from three cardinal sins, i.e., idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder. Things polluted by idols in this interpretation refers to idolatry. Some manuscripts omit “strangled,” leaving only “blood” and add the negative Golden Rule. Thus, abstaining from blood is interpreted as not committing murder.

Textual scholars say that the manuscripts used in this interpretation are later ones, and not authoritative. The problem with this view is that it seems to over-simplify the Jerusalem Council discussion. Something more was happening than simply saying, you don’t need to be circumcised but remember the second, third, sixth, and seventh commandments.

A second interpretation says to abstain from all aspects of pagan worship—abstain from idolatry. Animal sacrifices, sacred meals, drinking blood, and temple prostitution were all elements of pagan worship. Like the previous view, this one seems to leave out an important part of the Jerusalem Council discussion.

A third view is that the required abstentions amounted to diplomatic concessions for the sake of Jewish Christians to facilitate fellowship. This view interprets “fornication” as referring to certain laws of Lev 17-18 that refer to marriage between relatives and to gender relationships, things that fall short of the seventh commandment. Once again, we have an interpretation that seems incomplete.

Following is an interpretation that uses the Seventh-day Adventist distinction between moral law and ceremonial law along with principles we have already discussed. First, circumcision is the hot issue mentioned by the Jewish Christians and is a code word for the whole ceremonial law. The apostles’ word is short and pointed—don’t trouble Gentile converts with this yoke. Circumcision and the other ceremonial requirements of Judaism do not apply to Gentiles. Jewish Christians could continue their ceremonial observances as cultural features of their Christianity, but those cultural specificities need not cross over the cultural bridge to the Gentiles.

The magnitude of this judgment in the eyes of Jewish Christians may be hard for us to grasp. To detach the meaning of being in covenant relationship with God from the symbol of circumcision was difficult. Although the Judaizers apparently did not offer a rebuttal to Peter and James at the Council, some continued to push for circumcision and the ceremonial law.
Second, fornication is part of the apostolic judgment that is absolute. Sexual immorality was part of the fabric of Gentile society, not just a matter of personal failure. By living a pure moral life, Gentile Christians were being counter-cultural. Gentile Christians already knew about biblical morality, but the apostles were giving a pastoral reminder in the hearing of Jewish Christians who feared for the moral purity of the church.

Third, idolatry is another part of the apostolic judgment that is absolute. No doubt some new Gentile converts were continuing to feel the attractions of pagan worship and some were yielding to temptation. Gentile Christians already knew about biblical worship, but the apostles were giving another pastoral reminder.

Fourth, there were diplomatic concessions for Christian fellowship. Even if Gentile Christians had been set free from the idolatry and immorality associated with pagan worship, they should put aside the symbols of pagan worship for the sake of good fellowship with Jewish Christians. This interpretation would fit with Paul’s counsel that “food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow becomes a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you, a man of knowledge, at a table in an idol’s temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ (1 Cor 8:8-12).

Could Christians from Jerusalem, the birthplace of the church, be considered “weak”? Yes! New believers in newly entered societies have things to teach the churches that brought them the gospel. There is just a little more to the story. The Jerusalem Church accepted the apostolic decision, although the issues did not cease to be disputed by some Judaizers. A written statement was prepared and Judas and Silas, witnesses from the Jerusalem Church, were sent back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

“When its members read [the letter], they rejoiced at the exhortation. Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, said much to encourage and strengthen the believers. After they had been there for some time, they were sent off in peace by the believers to those who had sent them” (Acts 15:31-34).

What a good ending to a great story. In the history of our beloved church, this story describes a landmark, epoch-making, paradigm-setting event that has shaped and must shape the way we relate to gospel and culture.
In conclusion, notice the main features of this wonderful story: God was powerfully at work in the Gentile world in the person of the Holy Spirit and through missionaries chosen and sent by the Antioch Church. Gentile converts discovered the happiness and joy of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As the Spirit confronted Gentiles with the demands of God's eternal law, they repented of their sins, received forgiveness, were empowered by the Spirit, and commenced the pilgrimage of faithfulness. The expansion of the church was spontaneous and could be attributed only to the power of the Spirit. However gifted Paul and Barnabas may have been as missionaries, the fruits of their ministry far exceeded their personal qualities. The living Christ allowed his Body (the church) to take on the innocent cultural contours that made the church a place where Gentile Christians could feel at home. Established Christians in Judea were happy about the Gentile conversions but doubted their authenticity because the new churches did not adopt the innocent cultural contours of Jewish Christianity. When the Gentile Christians were confronted by the Judeans, they were upset and appealed to the church leadership. In this story, at least, all parties submitted themselves to the decisions of the apostles. The apostles were, themselves, Jewish Christians but they were guided by the Spirit to a deeper understanding than the Judaizers. The apostolic decisions were absolutely faithful to God's eternal, universal law and made room for innocent cultural elements. Although Jewish Christians thought that circumcision was at the very core of Christianity, the apostles saw that it was in fact a feature of cultural identity. Gentile Christians were given freedom in Christ.

What a wonderful pattern the Jerusalem Council gives us as we seek to emulate the faithfulness of the Apostolic Church.

Reference List


Chapter 18

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VARIATIONS IN ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONSHIP FOR SPECIAL SITUATIONS WITH “EMERGING SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS IN ‘CREATIVE ACCESS’ ENVIRONMENTS”

JERALD WHITEHOUSE

April 4-5, 2005

The Setting

Emerging spiritual movements within “creative access” contexts are a present reality, not a distant possibility. They exist within Faith Development in Context (FDIC) ministries in the Muslim world and in Buddhist areas such as Vietnam and China. They have been referred to in various ways: Insider Believer Movements, Insider Cell Group Movements, Underground Movements, or Parallel Structures. Each of these titles seems to have raised its own set of misunderstandings. Therefore, for purposes of this paper I will refer to them with the descriptive phrase, “emerging spiritual movements within ‘creative access’ environments.” While providing evidence of God’s broader mission activity and a reminder of the need to recognize that the primary purpose of structure is to support mission, these movements do pose certain challenges to the Adventist Church. Questions regarding unity of faith and mission, doctrinal orthodoxy,
quality of leadership, fiscal responsibility, and their role in a world movement, have been expressed. At the same time, if the church does not creatively lead on this critical issue, then it risks sharing responsibility in future failures in the area of orthodoxy, leadership selection, training, and accountability.

It is important to note at the outset that it is the desire of all of us to protect and foster the right of every person to hear the gospel. With this objective clearly in mind, this paper aims to provide suggested alternative relationships for discussion that would both meet the concerns of the church and provide for the distance and flexibility needs of the emerging spiritual movements.

**Definition of Terms**

*Emerging Spiritual Movements:* a descriptive phrase referring to the movements of increasingly large numbers of seekers in the non-Christian and even post-modern worlds which are moving to a biblically-based saving faith in God and salvation through Jesus Christ. These movements, for various reasons, are emerging within their respective contexts and are choosing or are required, because of the hostile environment to growth in faith, to remain within their contexts.

*Creative Access:* environments where traditional, open evangelism is not allowed or is severely constrained. Missionaries are not allowed access. Therefore, other ways of entry need to be devised to allow for the entry of the gospel. “Tent-making” is a common example of “creative access” into a limited access environment.

*Direct Access:* situations in which the gospel faces relatively few or no obstacles that would hinder its spread. The typical obstacles of religious prejudice, political obstructions, lack of religious freedom, cultural biases, and limited legal status are not present.

*Insider Movements:* in relatively closed religious or cultural contexts, spiritual movements towards saving faith in Jesus occurring with some degree “spontaneously” within a people group, are often referred to in this manner. Insider movements have been criticized by some as referring to movements that are too nebulous and undefined to merit serious consideration.

*FDIC (Faith Development in Context):* a descriptive phrase Adventist ministries are using to describe a strategy of working that uses critical contextualization to both communicate the gospel into a people group or faith system, and to work with the group to develop an expression of biblical faith as part
of the end-time Adventist prophetic movement that demonstrates and communicates the biblical life of faith accurately within that context. FDIC ministries rely on strong biblical teaching and study, small group accountability, and sensitive interaction with "outsiders" (outsiders from the movement inside the culture in question) of the Adventist faith to develop an expression of Adventist faith that they truly "own" and yet is true to an Adventist understanding of biblical faith.

**Muslim Background Believer (MBB):** a Muslim who, after coming to a biblically-based saving faith in Jesus Christ, chooses or is required to leave his cultural context and to some degree abandon his religious-cultural heritage. MBBs are often referred to as having been extracted.

**Muslim Believer (MB):** a Muslim, who, after coming to a biblically-based saving faith in Jesus Christ, chooses to remain within his religious and cultural context as a witness to his faith.

**Insider Believer Movements:** adding to the "Insider Movement" term with a clarification that these are, in fact, believers in a biblical saving faith.

**Insider Cell Group Movements:** again, building on the "Insider Movement" term with an emphasis on small unit accountability.

**Underground Movements:** used of spiritual movements which are to some degree secret and operate unofficially (in relation to government legal recognition) where the ability to function in a traditional church organizational manner is impossible or severely limited.

**Parallel Structures:** has been used, perhaps inaccurately, to refer to spiritual movements or ministries that have developed some viable, internal structure, to describe their relation to the organized Adventist Church. This term has some drawbacks in its symbolism of implying an equal parallel church, and of never converging or coming to organic unity, even though parallel also implies that the two will remain parallel and not diverge from each other.

For purposes of discussion, this paper will use the descriptive term "Emerging Spiritual Movements in 'creative access' environments (or contexts)."

**The Question**

What process or mechanism is possible to meet the concerns of the denomination for accountability, unity, and quality of spiritual life, in relation to these new ministries and yet provide the distance and flexibility necessary to
prepare God's people for his coming in areas where traditional structures are not possible or not conducive to mission?

Specific Needs

For the Unity of the Church

While not exhaustive these new emerging spiritual movements would need at least the following to maintain unity with the denomination: (1) guidelines for conduct of work which are approved by some church recognized body; (2) regular reporting of activities, use of finances, to a recognized church entity; (3) assurance of quality control in selection of leadership; (4) knowledge that at least the leaders of the movement are aware of their relation to the larger body of the Seventh-day Adventist movement; (5) assurance of theological orthodoxy with sensitivity to the spiritual growth process being evidenced in the movement; and (6) a plan to, at some point and in some way, be united with the larger church family.

For the Emerging Movements in Creative Access Contexts

Again, while not exhaustive the new emerging spiritual movements would need at least the following to allow growth and stability: (1) in most cases, no visible linkage with a Western or Christian organization, (2) local "ownership," (3) flexibility to develop organizational structures to fit the local situation, (4) guidelines that allow local "inside" leaders to arrive at Spirit-led solutions to local issues, and (5) assistance with training for spiritual leadership.

For Commitments Expected From the Emerging Ministries

Although the purpose of this paper is to discuss possible administrative relationships, it would seem appropriate to also note the main points of faith and mission commitment that can be expected from the emerging movements. Such commitments would include at least:

1. A commitment to worship the One God.
2. A commitment to the primacy of the Bible in faith and practice with reference to truth in other sources being subject to the biblical understanding.
3. A commitment to the biblical understanding of salvation by faith, the
death of Jesus, his divinity, his mediatory ministry, and his soon return.

4. A commitment to regular Bible teaching and study under the guidance
of the Holy Spirit for growth in faith and spiritual life, and as a “self-corrective”
for avoiding error.

5. A commitment to regular fellowship with other believers wherever pos­
sible, for mutual encouragement and accountability in the life of faith.

6. A commitment to the larger mission of God’s last day spiritual move­
ment, to prepare a people for Jesus’ soon return. This would imply an under­
standing by leaders of the movement of their relation to and role along with the
larger global body of God’s true believers, and an understanding that we are all
of one remnant people, one in faith and mission.

7. A commitment to the messages of the three angels of Rev 14 as guidance
for God’s end-time people including the sign of the seventh-day Sabbath and
the Day of Judgment.

Existing Policies and Guidelines Which Are Relevant
to Relating With Emerging Movements

1. General Conference Working Policy, 2003—2004, provides a beginning
reference point for a discussion of possible ways of relating with emerging spir­
itual movements in creative access contexts.

B 05 35 Variations in Administrative Relationships
1. For the purpose of fulfilling the mission of the church, division administra­tions are
authorized to recommend modified organizational structures and/or administra­tive relationships in situations which do not involve the resizing of unions, as out­
lined below in paragraphs a. through c., or to experiment with further modifications in territories where unusual economic, political, geographic, religious, or demo­
graphic circumstances, or strategic purposes make normal church organizational and administrative structures impractical or inefficient. In all cases where alterna­tive arrangements are implemented, the four constituent levels of church organization shall be maintained, and the following fundamental principles for Seventh-day Adven­tist organizational structure and relationships shall be preserved:

   a. All basic administrative units shall have a constituency voice (regular constitu­ency sessions).

   b. All administrative relationships shall be clearly defined (responsibility is ulti­mately held by an elected/appointed officer[s] who is accountable to an executive committee).
c. Constitutions and bylaws may be amended to provide for alternative administrative arrangements and the process by which such arrangements are continued or suspended.

2. Innovations in organizational structure and administrative relationships must be approved by the respective division committees and the General Conference Executive Committee and will be reviewed periodically by division administrations to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each arrangement. Division committees may grant constituencies the option to continue or discontinue the alternative administrative arrangement (General Conference Working Policy 2003-2004:48, 49, emphasis mine).

It would seem that the phrase "Variations in Administrative Relationships" would be the key phrase relevant to this discussion. The use of the term "parallel structures" has led to some misunderstanding that the church is being asked to initiate a separate, parallel, organizational structure. This is not the case. Rather, we are exploring what administrative relationships would best fulfill the mission of the church in these unique environments.

I have included in appendix A copies of five other General Conference Policies that are relevant for reference in the discussion. They include B 35 05 General Conference Constitution Expresses Unity of the Church, B 35 10 Representative Character of Church Organization, B 35 65 Attached Unions and Conferences, B 35 70 Attached Local Fields, and C 40 Conference or Field Church.

**Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission** is a document that resulted from the work of the Global Mission Issues Committee and has been approved by the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) as guidelines for engaging in Global Mission (see appendix B).

2. **Transitional Organizational Structures.** According to Matt 28:18-20, the mission of the Church has three major inseparable components: (1) the mission should lead people to Jesus as their Savior and Lord through conversion and baptism; (2) the mission is to incorporate a community of believers, the church, into an environment where they can grow in faith, knowledge, and the enjoyment of a universal fellowship of believers; and (3) the mission is to nurture and train members as active disciples who recognize and utilize their spiritual gifts to assist in sharing the gospel. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been founded and organized by the Lord to fulfill that gospel commission. The universal nature of the Church requires the existence of a basic and common organizational structure throughout the world that will facilitate the fulfillment of its mission.
Political and religious conditions in some countries could make it difficult or even impossible for the Church to function within its traditional organizational structure. A transitional organizational structure may be needed. In such cases the following guidelines should be employed to deal with the situation:

a. The transitional organizational structure would be justifiable under one of the following conditions:

1) When new initiatives need to be tested in the mission of reaching resistant or previously unreached peoples;

2) When regular church work and organization is not permitted due to local religious or political circumstances.

b. Church leaders at the division/union/local field where the transitional organizational structures are being set up should determine the nature of the transitional organization and whether it is appropriate to choose local leadership. They should also define the management of tithe and offerings within the transitional organization.

c. Workers who are providing leadership in the transitional organization should be personally committed to the doctrinal unity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to its worldwide ecclesiastical organization.

d. New converts should, as soon as possible, be made aware of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and that it has a particular message and mission to the world.

e. As soon as it is feasible, the transitional organizational structure should be replaced by the regular church organizational system.

Existing Examples of Dealing with Emerging Movements in Creative Access Environments

It can be noted that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has had “special arrangements” for years in situations where regular church organizational structure was not allowed or was severely constrained due to political realities or religious oppression. The present discussion deals with situations where both political and socio-religious constraints and biases prevent the church from working effectively through its traditional organization structure. Notice the following examples.

China

The China Union Mission, being responsible from the church administrative position for the work in China, has issued a position statement to clarify its special relationship with the Adventist Church(es) in China. Points 5-7 are included here.
5. The Chinese Union Mission is a regional church organization, one function of which is to exchange and share resources with Chinese Adventists worldwide in order to promote healthy growth. Such an approach is consistent with the Three Self principles of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation.

6. Our church respects the value system, and expectations of all local Chinese Adventist churches. If Chinese Adventists wish to utilize any help offered unconditionally by the Chinese Union Mission, all such resources can be contextualized.

7. The Chinese Union Mission has no intention to control and/or manage the internal affairs of the Adventist Church in China. Our church and Chinese Adventists are involved with exchange but based on the principles of mutual learning and the understanding that neither party is subject to the other (Ash 2004).

Vietnam

There exists a house church movement in Vietnam of approximately 100,000 members that has resulted from the Peace and Happiness radio broadcasts. A supervisory committee, the Peace and Happiness Coordinating Committee, was established by the Southeast Asia Union Mission (SAUM) in October of 2003. Members of that committee include the president of SAUM as chair, the speaker of the radio ministry as secretary, the Adventist World Radio (AWR) executive director, the secretary of the Southern-Asia Pacific Division (SSD), a representative from the General Conference Secretariat, and a representative from Adventist Southeast Asia Projects, a supporting ministry that is a major funding source for the house churches in Vietnam. The terms of reference for the committee are: (1) meet at least once a year at the time of the General Conference Annual Council, (2) approve an annual financial budget, (3) discuss strategies and approve training schedules, (4) maintain a liaison with Adventist World Radio and the Southeast Asia Union Mission, and (5) work toward eventual integration of the Peace and Happiness house church movement with the Vietnam Mission (Bauer 2005).

An Asian Muslim Country

With 8,100 members and direct access to approximately 150 million people, the director of this FDIC ministry reports directly to the division Global Mission director and division evangelist for Muslim ministry. There is a division Adventist Muslim Relations (AMR) coordinating committee which further oversees such ministries. The director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (GCAMR) is in regular contact with the director for this
ministry and has attended the annual camp meeting when possible (security issues have prevented this for the past two years).

An African Muslim Country

This ministry has 4,500 members and has direct access to approximately 1 million people. An Adventist lay member supervises the ministry and at present there is no formal oversight committee. The supervisor keeps the division administration informed regarding the ministry and involves division leadership in training workshops. The division is in the process of establishing a division level oversight committee. The director of GCAMR has made several visits to the ministry for training and field evaluations.

A Muslim Region

This ministry has over 2,000 members and has direct access to over 2 million people. The ministries in this union are directly under the supervision of the union Global Missions (GM) director who counsels with local union administration and other union personnel. Direct administrative responsibility lies with the Division AMR Committee which meets twice annually. Members of the Division AMR Committee are: the division executive secretary, chair; division GM director, secretary; the president of the division, the president of the union, the union GM director, and the director of the Christian Muslim Studies program at an Adventist college. Invitees include the union treasurer, union communications director, and the GCAMR director who has also met with this committee on several occasions.

Zelenika FDIC Consultation Guidelines
June 2004

In June 2004, an ad hoc group of FDIC leaders was convened for the purpose of developing a consensus regarding FDIC work by those intimately involved in it. In addition to reviewing the scope of FDIC work, the biblical basis for FDIC, and the history of how the denomination has arrived at our present position, the group worked on a set of guidelines for various areas of the ministry. These guidelines are intended to be reviewed by an official church body, pending further refinement and clarification of a process for review. The guidelines pertaining to relationship to the church are cited here:
1. Relation to Church Structure

a. We encourage linkage to the Adventist organization at a higher level from the local conference or mission where the local FDIC ministry is located.

b. Because of security issues, cultural differences, and the need for broad coordination of a rapidly growing movement, it may be necessary to pursue the development of an administrative structure dedicated to the global FDIC ministry. [It is understood that this arrangement would operate under guidelines developed by a duly constituted church committee.]

c. FDIC ministries need the church as a resource base to facilitate (1) the training of solid leaders who are thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures, Adventist faith, and practice, and (2) preparation of appropriate materials.

d. In the future, we see the possibility, as certain criteria are met and circumstances allow, for a closer linkage between FDIC and the church.

e. Criteria for a closer linkage in 10 years, with an evaluation visit suggested three years before the end of the 10 year period:
   i. Openness in Muslim countries to freedom of personal faith choice.
   ii. Willingness of church to receive the MBs in full fellowship and representation in church governance.
   iii. Broad understanding within Islam that Adventism is distinct from Christendom, qualifies as a “true People of the Book,” i.e., are “fellow believers.”
   iv. Adventism acknowledges the genuineness of a remnant within Islam in the form of the FDIC ministries.

2. People interfacing between FDIC ministries and the church need to be very careful because of security concerns (FDIC Guidelines 2004).

Why Is Any Relationship Necessary?

Some may ask why it is important for any relationship to exist between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the FDIC ministries. I suggest the following reasons:

1. The gospel commission is to all people.

2. The Seventh-day Adventist prophetic role is inclusive of all people.

3. The emerging spiritual movements seem to be God’s way of working particularly in creative access environments.

4. God’s larger “end-time people of true faith,” while exhibiting a diversity in expression are counseled to “press together,” to exhibit a unity of faith and mission. Engaging with FDIC ministries, even in a “modified” manner, offers
the only hope of including them in some manner in the larger body of believers that express a shared faith and mission.

5. The emerging spiritual movements are requesting input particularly in training and materials for more effective spiritual nurture, leadership, and outreach.

6. The emerging spiritual movements are a reality. The Adventist church has the choice of initiating some relationship mechanism that will provide specific inputs for nurture, leadership development, theological orthodoxy, and mission, or it risks forfeiting the opportunity to influence these movements in a positive way.

7. Adventist leaders who are presently relating with these movements need some recognized mechanism from which to relate with them.

The bottom line is we may chose to continue operating the same as we have in Muslim areas with the same result as we have had for a century. Or we have the opportunity to create a relationship that will have the potential of an enormous effect in the Muslim world. Seventh-day Adventists are not discussing these potentials so that certain individuals will have their own arrangements, but to provide the Muslim world the right to hear the gospel, to hear God's end-time message, and to prepare people in the Muslim world for the coming of Jesus.

Possible Solutions

These emerging movements in creative access contexts are committed to the same faith and mission as we in the formally organized Seventh-day Adventist Church. The movements, and those of us involved with them, desire some relationship in order to access expertise and resources to facilitate their spiritual nurture and mission and to participate as they are able in the larger global mission of God's end-time spiritual movement among all peoples. However, due to certain political, religious freedom, safety, and prejudice issues, this linkage must preserve some distance and anonymity. The following suggestions are therefore offered for discussion:

First, an important initial step would be to request the General Conference president to constitute a small team to develop a plan that stages the implementation of an alternative administrative relationship. The team would work with all entities involved to see the process accomplished. Such a team could chose to follow the subsequent suggestions listed below or those coming out of our
discussion, or change, adapt, or replace them with other plans as agreed on by all entities involved.

Second, a small duly authorized “oversight” committee could be appointed at the General Conference presidential level to oversee the relation with the various emerging movements. Such a committee would also interact with the division and/or union supervisory committees, and the appropriate Study Center staff. The planning team suggested above under number one could continue to function in this capacity or the committee could suggest another arrangement.

Third, at the division and/or union levels a supervisory committee with appropriate representation from the denomination and the emerging movement could be appointed. This committee could function at a division level for all “emerging movements” in their territory, or at a union level for a specific ministry. Local circumstances would influence the details of this group. This group could (1) assess the quality of the “change agents” or local movement leaders, (2) provide guidelines for leadership selection, training, and general conduct of the work, (3) provide guidelines for the use of tithe, (4) approve an annual budget, (5) authorize ordinations and set criteria for the functions of the ones ordained, (6) coordinate development of literature, media, and other resources, (7) provide general administrative oversight, and (8) coordinate with other similar committees/ministries in other locations.

Fourth, involve the appropriate Study Center director and other personnel of the Center in oversight, development of guidelines, regular monitoring, and the development of training and outreach materials. This person(s) would need to be responsible to a higher oversight committee such as the General Conference level oversight committee as noted in number two above.

Fifth, strengthen the specific Study Center involved so as to provide the needed training, materials preparation, and monitoring capacity to ensure that the guidelines agreed upon are followed.

Sixth, membership lists should, where possible without endangering members, be kept in some location so that the church recognizes these members as part of the larger body of believers (see appendix A, policy C 40: Conference or Field Church).
APPENDIX A

General Conference Working Policy

B 35 05 General Conference Constitution Expresses Unity of Church. As the Scriptures represent the church of Christ as one body, all the parts are members one of another, so our Constitution, adopted by the representatives of the worldwide sisterhood of churches, seeks to express the unity and oneness of all organizations that make up the General Conference, which represents the one undivided remnant church of God.

B 35 10 Representative Character of Church Organization. The truly representative character of our organization is thus set forth in the Testimonies: “Every member of the church has a voice in choosing officers of the church. The church chooses the officers of the state conferences. Delegates chosen by the state conferences choose the officers of the union conferences; and delegates chosen by the union conferences choose the officers of the General Conference. By this arrangement, every conference, every institution, every church, and every individual, either directly or through representatives, has a voice in the election of the men who bear the chief responsibilities of the General Conference” (8:236, 237).

B 35 65 Attached Unions and Conferences. For union or local fields which, because of war emergency or other special reasons, are not included in any division, the General Conference Executive Committee serves as division committee in all matters of division administration and counsel.

B 35 70 Attached Local Fields.

1. Criteria—When a local conference/mission cannot be conveniently included in an existing union organization, due to special circumstances, it shall be attached directly to a division organization and classed as an attached local field.

2. Special Provisions/Procedures—The election of officers, the representation on the Division Committee, the delegates to the General Conference session, and the tithe percentage remittances of an attached local field shall be governed by the following special provision/procedures:
a. Election of Officers—Officers and departmental directors of an attached local field (conference/missions) shall be elected in the same way as for a local conference/mission, with the division organization taking the place of the union organization in such elections.

b. Representation on the Division Committee—The president of the attached local field (conference/mission) shall be a member of the Division Committee.

c. Delegates to General Conference Sessions—Representation at General Conference sessions for fields attached directly to the division shall be in harmony with the constitutional provision.

d. Tithe Percentages—1) Attached local fields shall pass on to the division organization 10 percent of their tithe receipts, tithe sharing percentages, all mission offerings, and such other funds as may be called for by the policies of the division organization. 2) Union organizations consisting of only one local conference/mission which have not been passing on 10 percent of their tithe receipts to the division shall be required to follow the regular policy. Because this may require some financial adjustments, it may be taken into account by the division in the making of the yearly appropriations.

3. Special Wage Scale Provision—Because of the direct relationships between the division and attached local fields approved as unions of churches, and because the organizational responsibilities may be more involved than in a local conference/mission within a union, the percentage rates for officers and departmental directors of attached fields shall be approximately halfway between those of a local conference/mission and those of a union.

C 40 Conference or Field Church. Isolated members should unite with the conference or local field church, which is a body organized for the benefit of scattered believers who are otherwise without church privileges. Aged and infirm members who live adjacent to a local church organization should be members of the local church. It is the duty and responsibility of the local church to minister to such members. Such should not be transferred to the conference or field church, which is not designed to function in place of the local church. Although conference and field officers are the officers of their field churches, they should hold their membership in the church in the locality in which they reside.
The conference or field president shall be the presiding elder of the conference or field church, and the work normally carried by the church clerk and the church treasurer shall be handled by the secretary-treasurer of the conference or field. Any business normally conducted by a local church and its board shall, in the conference or field church for which in the nature of the case there is no board, be conducted by the conference or field committee. They shall also appoint the delegates from the conference or field church to attend their respective sessions.

APPENDIX B

Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission

NOTE: The following guidelines were developed by the Global Mission Issues Committee (ADCOM-S) and edited by the Biblical Research Institute. These are the first of a series of guidelines brought to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee for approval in June and July 2003. These guidelines are intended to be used, as appropriate, by church administrators, educators, and others when proclaiming the gospel in predominate non-Christian environments. As new guidelines are approved, they will be added in this section.

1. Use of the Bible in Mission Vis-à-vis "Sacred Writings"

In building bridges with non-Christians, the use of their "sacred writings" could be very useful in the initial contact in order to show sensitivity and to lead persons along paths which are somewhat familiar. They may contain elements of truth that find their fullest and richest significance in the way of life found in the Bible. These writings should be used in a deliberate attempt to introduce people to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and to help them transfer their allegiance to the biblical writings as their source of faith and practice. However, certain risks are involved in the use of these writings. The following guidelines will help to avoid those risks.

a. The Bible should be recognized as the teaching instrument and source of authority to be used in leading a person to Christ and to a life of faith in a society where another religion is dominant.
b. The Church should not use language that may give the impression that it recognizes or accepts the nature and authority assigned to the "sacred writings" by the followers of specific non-Christian religions.

c. Those using "sacred writings" as outlined above should develop or create a plan indicating how the transfer of allegiance to the Bible will take place.

d. The nurture and spiritual growth of new believers in non-Christian societies shall be accomplished on the basis of the Bible and its exclusive authority.

2. Transitional Organizational Structures

According to Matt 28:18-20, the mission of the Church has three major inseparable components: (1) The mission should lead people to Jesus as their Saviour and Lord through conversion and baptism; (2) The mission is to incorporate a community of believers, the church, into an environment where they can grow in faith, knowledge, and the enjoyment of a universal fellowship of believers; and, (3) The mission is to nurture and train members as active disciples who recognize and utilize their spiritual gifts to assist in sharing the gospel. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been founded and organized by the Lord to fulfill that gospel commission. The universal nature of the Church requires the existence of a basic and common organizational structure throughout the world that will facilitate the fulfillment of its mission.

Political and religious conditions in some countries could make it difficult or even impossible for the Church to function within its traditional organizational structure. A transitional organizational structure may be needed. In such cases the following guidelines should be employed to deal with the situation:

a. The transitional organizational structure would be justifiable under one of the following conditions:

1) When new initiatives need to be tested in the mission of reaching resistant or previously unreached peoples;

2) When regular church work and organization is not permitted due to local religious or political circumstances.

b. Church leaders at the division/union/local field where the transitional organizational structures are being set up should determine the nature of the transitional organization and whether it is appropriate to choose local leadership. They should also define the management of tithe and offerings within the transitional organization.
c. Workers who are providing leadership in the transitional organization should be personally committed to the doctrinal unity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to its worldwide ecclesiastical organization.

d. New converts should, as soon as possible, be made aware of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and that it has a particular message and mission to the world.

e. As soon as it is feasible, the transitional organizational structure should be replaced by the regular church organizational system.

3. Fundamental Beliefs and Preparation for Baptism

**Fundamental Beliefs and Non-Christians**

The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is an expression of the Church's message in language that is meaningful to Christian communities. The challenge is to determine how to make this statement meaningful to societies where Christians are a minority or non-existent. The mission to non-Christians will raise new questions which are not addressed in the Fundamental Beliefs, and relevant biblical answers should be provided. The following suggestions could be of help when addressing this particular issue.

a. The way the Fundamental Beliefs are presented and the language used to present them must be carefully studied and selected in order to facilitate the comprehension of the Church's message by non-Christians. The development of locally-prepared Bible studies and teaching instruments is to be encouraged.

b. The task just described should be done at the religious study centers, with the assistance of front-line workers and in consultation with the church community, theologians, missiologists, and administrators.

c. The religious study center directors should refer local questions and concerns not addressed in the fundamental beliefs to the Office of Global Mission of the General Conference for study.

**Baptismal Guidelines**

In the preparation of new converts for baptism and membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these sequential guidelines must be followed.
a. A candidate must give clear evidence of a personal experience of salvation by faith in Christ and of a clear understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist message.

b. A candidate must be guided by the local community of believers until the community can testify that the candidate has reached an adequate knowledge and experience of the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

c. The Baptismal Vow, as set forth in the Church Manual, must be taken as summarizing the minimum required beliefs and experiences for baptism.

4. Forms of Worship

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to come into contact with many different cultures in non-Christian countries, the topic of proper worship practices becomes very relevant. In those settings, deciding what is or is not acceptable in a Seventh-day Adventist worship service is important. Calling people to worship the only true God plays a significant role in the message and mission of the Church. In fact, in Adventist eschatology the central element in the closing controversy is the subject of worship and the true object of worship. The Church should be careful and prudent as it seeks ways to contextualize Adventist worship around the world. In its task it should be constantly informed by the following aspects of Adventist worship.

a. God is at the very center of worship as its supreme object. When believers approach God in adoration they come in contact with the very source of life, our Creator, and with the One who in an act of grace redeemed us through the sacrificial death of his beloved Son. No human being should usurp that divine right.

b. Corporate worship is God's people coming into His presence as the Body of Christ in reverence and humility to honor and give homage to Him through adoration, confession, prayer, thanksgiving, and singing. Believers come together to listen to the Word, for fellowship, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to all, and to be equipped for the proclamation of the gospel. Our faith invites wholehearted and highly participatory worship where the Word of God is central, prayer is fervent, music is heartfelt, and fellowship in faith is palpable. These elements of worship are indispensable in Adventist worship services around the world and should be part of any attempt to contextualize Adventist worship.

c. Humans are complex creatures in which reason and emotions play a significant role. True worship expresses itself through our body, mind, spirit,
emotions. The Adventist Church calls for a proper balance of the involvement of these aspects of our personality in worship. It is important to keep in mind that any element of the worship service that tends to place humans at its center must be rejected. The extent to which the body participates in worship will vary from culture to culture, but whatever is done should be done under discipline and self-control, keeping in mind that the central aspect of the worship service is the proclamation of the Word and its call to serve God and others.

d. Adventist worship should draw on the treasure trove of Seventh-day Adventist theology to proclaim with exuberance and joy the communion and unity of believers in Christ and the grand theme of God's infinite love as seen in creation, the plan of redemption, the life of Christ, his high priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary, and his soon return in glory.

e. Music should be used to praise him and not as a means to over stimulate emotions that will simply make individuals “feel good” about themselves. Through it worshippers should express their deepest feelings of gratitude and joy to the Lord in a spirit of holiness and reverence. Adventist worship is to celebrate God's creative and redemptive power.

If the need to contextualize the form of worship in a particular culture arises, the guidelines provided in the document entitled “Contextualization and Syncretism” should be followed.

5. Contextualization and Syncretism

Contextualization is defined in this document as the intentional and discriminating attempt to communicate the gospel message in a culturally meaningful way. Seventh-day Adventist contextualization is motivated by the serious responsibility of fulfilling the gospel commission in a very diverse world. It is based on the authority of the Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit and aims at communicating biblical truth in a culturally-relevant way. In that task contextualization must be faithful to the Scripture and meaningful to the new host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged by the gospel.

Intentional contextualization of the way we communicate our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it the Church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, adaptation has taken place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the Three Angels' Messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. This will continue to happen.
As the Church enters more non-Christian areas, the question of syncretism—the blending of religious truth and error—is a constant challenge and threat. It affects all parts of the world and must be taken seriously as we explore the practice of contextualization. This topic is highlighted by the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the great controversy between good and evil which explains Satan's mode of operation—distorting and compromising truth, not by denying it, but by mixing truth and error, thus robbing the gospel of its true impact and power. In this context of danger and potential distortion, critical contextualization is indispensable.

Since the effects of sin and the need for salvation are common to all humanity, there are eternal truths that all cultures need to know, which in some cases can be communicated and experienced in different and yet equivalent ways. Contextualization aims to uphold all of the Fundamental Beliefs and to make them truly understood in their fullness.

In the search for the best way to contextualize, while at the same time rejecting syncretism, certain guidelines must be followed.

a. Because uncritical contextualization is as dangerous as non-contextualization, it is not to be done at a distance, but within the specific cultural situation.

b. Contextualization is a process that should involve world Church leaders, theologians, missiologists, local people, and ministers. These individuals should have a clear understanding of the core elements of the biblical worldview in order to be able to distinguish between truth and error.

c. The examination of the specific cultural element would necessitate an especially careful analysis by cultural insiders of the significance of the particular cultural element in question.

d. The examination of all the Scripture says about the issue or related issues is indispensable. The implications of scriptural teachings and principles should be carefully thought through and factored into proposed strategies.

e. In the context of reflection and prayer, scriptural insights are normative and must be applied to the specific cultural element in question. The analysis could lead to one of the following results:

1) The particular cultural element is accepted, because it is compatible with scriptural principles;

2) The particular cultural element is modified to make it compatible with Christian principles;
3) The particular cultural element is rejected, because it contradicts the principles of Scripture.

f. The particular cultural element that was accepted or modified is carefully implemented.

g. After a period of trial it may be necessary to evaluate the decision made and determined whether it should be discontinued, modified, or retained.

In the end, all true contextualization must be subject to biblical truth and bear results for God's kingdom. The unity of the global Church requires regular exposure to each other, each other's culture, and each other's insights that "together with all the saints we may grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ's love" (Eph 3:18).

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Notes

1As an example, we have a current request from one of the spiritual movements in the Middle East for leadership training. They have identified the following areas in which they feel they need further training: (1) The core elements of New Testament light that explain God's plan for solving the problem of rebellion/sin and how this truth relates with the Old Testament. Further, to what degree these biblical understandings are reflected in the Qur'an; (2) Personal spirituality and spiritual formation; (3) Stewardship; (4) Membership nurture and accountability; (5) Strategic planning of their work; (6) Developing contextual forms for baptism, communion, marriage, funerals, and feasts; (7) How to lead others in spiritual growth, the psychology of teaching; (8) Risk management, security issues; and (9) Development of internal structure.

2www.adventist.org/beliefs/guidelines/main_guide7.html

3For example, there is a voted action by the Global Mission Operating Committee (October, 2004) to strengthen the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations with several additional personnel and to associate with it a number of field personnel focused on the preparation of materials and empowerment of ministries in the Arab world.
Reference List


Many of us are aware of the existence of Seventh-day Adventist-sponsored work among non-Christian believers that we define as "Faith Development in Context" (FDIC). The issues relating to such ministries among Muslim believers were highlighted at the symposium at Andrews University, 17-21 January 2005.

Dr. Jerry Whitehouse further defined the challenges and needs of FDIC in his Global Mission Issues Committee paper "Variations in Administrative Relationships for Special Situations." The concept is not limited to Islamic contexts, but includes ministries among Buddhists and others.

I have been asked by the General Conference Global Mission Office to address the topic of "Process for the Development of Special Arrangement Structures (Parallel)." Let me begin with a few comments on the title of my paper.

First, I confess that I am not fond of the term parallel for this situation, and I will explain why a little later.
Second, I think it helps if we make the title a bit clearer. Out of a multitude of terms for the phenomenon we are addressing here, we have agreed to consistently use Faith Development in Context (FDIC).

For these reasons, I have worded the title of my paper Special Arrangement Structures for FDIC Communities, while letting the process of development be my main concern.

I have many limitations in addressing this topic and approach it as a learner. While my experience of FDIC work is limited to reports about what is taking place in the Islamic context, I hope the principles I advocate may be useful in our work among other groups too.

We are considering a phenomenon with many names, as Dr. Whitehouse points out in his paper, and perhaps this is because it is a very complex thing of which we have short and limited experience. I refer to it generally as “FDIC Communities,” and by that I mean communities that were somehow initiated among non-Christian people groups, are “supported” and “monitored” by officially recognized Seventh-day Adventist Church employees, and are located where circumstances are such that any official church recognition of, overt link or cooperation with the ministry or community would lead to its termination. For practical purposes I have tried to distinguish between FDIC ministries as the mission initiative of the church and FDIC communities as the resulting fellowship that continues to sustain itself.

The issue before us is: What might be the best process for developing special arrangement structures for FDIC communities? Drawing on the terminology in the General Conference Working Policy B 05 35 (appendix), we could speak of “modified organizational structures,” “modified administrative relationships,” or “alternative arrangements.” The situations for which this policy was written, however, are essentially different from what we are considering here, and some of the conditions outlined in this policy could not be transferred to our dealings with FDIC communities. I therefore suggest that we need to develop a new concept which helps us address the crucial element of what kind of “faith” and “doctrine” the FDIC fellowship has in relation to the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The topic I have been given underlines the need for a process by which we develop the special arrangement structures. This suggests that a very careful and long-term view of the issue is desirable from the point of view of the Global Mission Office. The purpose of my paper is to make some suggested actions we can implement.
In his significant paper, "Variations in Administrative Relationships for Special Situations" that Dr. Jerald Whitehouse presented to this committee, he addresses our issue in eight main steps. I welcome his paper and believe it has merit to us. For the sake of discussion and as an introduction to what I will add later, I will begin by making some comments on each of the eight steps.

The Setting

Terminology

The paper opens by highlighting the present reality of what Jerald Whitehouse terms emerging spiritual movements within creative access contexts and points out that they are to be found "within Faith Development in Context (FDIC) ministries in the Muslim World and in Buddhist areas such as Vietnam and China." The author then mentions various names used to refer to these movements and says that "each of these titles have raised its own set of misunderstandings." His own choice of term for the purposes of his paper is: "emerging spiritual movements within 'creative access' contexts."

In response to this, I would first say that it is true that terminology is a challenge. It seems that every time we address this matter in the Adventist Church, we need to learn a new name for it. This may confuse those who are not frontline workers or experts but who need to understand and decide on the shape and form of church policy.

The new terms introduced in section one are defined in section two. I still ask myself what the distinction is between FDIC ministries and emerging spiritual movements within creative access contexts. Why isn't the accepted and general "FDIC ministries" sufficient? What does the term, emerging spiritual movements say that the traditional revivalist or awakening movements do not say? Is the term emerging to be associated with the concept of emerging church which seems to embrace a specific new kind of theology and spirituality and is now becoming popular among some evangelicals?

Does this imply a link between FDIC and the broader concept of church planting? Is this plausible link with an emerging church desirable for an Adventist and is it appropriate? I do not know yet. But I would hope that we do the theological analysis, thinking, and dialogue first and then move on to the practice. If not, the practice may run away based on undefined or loosely de-
fined concepts which could create unwanted challenges later on. These are just a few of the questions coming to my mind as I read this passage.

Evidence of God's Broader Mission Activity

The author says that these movements provide evidence of God's broader mission activity. But how do we as a church identify what is genuine evidence of God's activity in mission? We may hear and see things and, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit may intuitively understand that a certain phenomenon fits into God's work. But do we need clear criteria for evaluating a spiritual movement as being raised by God? I think so, because FDIC ministry leaders and church leaders need a common language. If we do not find that language, we will not understand each other. And lack of understanding of what we say to each other is one of the major threats to our mission.

The Primary Purpose of Structure Is to Support Mission

In his paper, Dr. Whitehouse says that these movements “provide evidence of the need to recognize that the primary purpose of structure is to support mission.” It is perhaps of minor importance to ask why and how these movements in particular “provide evidence of the need to recognize” this rule. Personally, as a simple marginal note, I would think that such evidence could be provided by every local church.

But the more important point here concerns, rather, the missiological doctrine that “the primary purpose of structure is to support mission.” No doubt mission is of primary importance to the church, as made clear by (1) the Great Commission, which serves as the highpoint of the four gospels in the Bible, (2) the message, structure, and purpose of the book of Acts, (3) the Three Angels' Messages, and (4) the Advent Movement and our historical position. But I suggest that mission is integrated with other aspects too. Thus, our church has tended to outline several reasons for structure, and we may need to bear these in mind as we make mission our main priority. For example, The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia says under “Development of Organization in the SDA Church”:

A system of church government or polity is essential for directing the affairs of the church in an orderly manner. Organization functions to preserve the identity of a church society, to maintain purity of doctrine, to discipline members, to direct
concerted efforts, and to care for the temporal as well as the spiritual existence of the church” (1976:1042 emphasis mine).

I agree with Dr. Whitehouse that “mission is the primary purpose of structure,” but maybe there are also other purposes that support mission and that should be integrated with the function of mission. Values like order, coordination, preserving identity and unity, and maintaining doctrinal faithfulness to the Bible, would, in my view, also need to be integrated with mission. If we apply a too simplistic concept of mission, the FDIC ministries may bring disorder, and the effort could become counterproductive. I am not at all suggesting that this would be the intent of Dr. Whitehouse’s paper, but the church needs to be aware of various factors that make mission possible.

We believe that the mission of God is the mission of the Church and vice versa. And this is based on our understanding of biblical ecclesiology. The Church is the “Church of God” (Acts 20:28) and Ellen White reminds us that “the church of Christ, enfeebled and defective as it may be, is the only object on earth on which He bestows his supreme regard” (White 1923:15). In our thinking, therefore, we should not keep the concept of “the church as an organization” in opposition to the concept of “the church as a spiritual movement.” Rather, we should seek to keep these concepts together in unison, and be willing to sacrifice our old views in order to allow for that unity to materialize not only on paper but in the life of the church and its mission.

Challenges

Dr. Whitehouse lists some of the challenges FDIC movements pose to our church: “Unity of faith and mission, doctrinal orthodoxy, quality of leadership, fiscal responsibility, and role in a world movement.” He adds that “if the church does not creatively lead on this critical issue then it risks sharing responsibility in future failures in the area of orthodoxy, leadership selection, and training and accountability.” My response to this is:

First, for the church to be able to lead anything, frontline workers (or practitioners) and church leaders need to communicate well. Both parties need to listen to each other. There needs to be a transparent language, honesty, and trust.

Second, the statement on the church’s responsibility to “lead” presumes that the FDIC communities are part of the Adventist Church. But that is what is
yet to be defined. A colleague of mine has said on this very point: “The church needs to be responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in these as in other things, but it is also possible to assume so much responsibility that not much is left to the Holy Spirit.” I believe we should not automatically assume, and certainly not with the knowledge available at this point, that the church should develop formal structures that make these groups part of the Adventist Church. What we may say today is, perhaps, that they are “affinity groups.”

Desire to Protect and Foster the Right of Every Person to Hear the Gospel

Here lies the key to our understanding of the rationale for FDIC ministries. People will not understand and be able to act on the gospel message, unless we share it in the forms and concepts of their culture. I assume we are all in agreement on this reason for contextualization in our mission. I refer here to my paper presented to the General Conference Global Mission Issues Committee on 14 January 1998 entitled “The Boundaries of Contextualization in Mission: How Flexible and Absolute Are They? What Principles Should Guide the Church?”

However, it has been pointed out to me that we should also ask ourselves where FDIC ministries are appropriate and for what reasons, and where they are not appropriate and for what reasons. One might otherwise conclude that we should encourage FDIC within Catholicism, Pentecostalism, secular philosophies, and so on. And this would compromise our identity, honesty, and public image.

Definition of Terms

I appreciate very much Dr. Whitehouse’s section on definition of terms. It is not only a necessary help to understanding the author’s reasoning, but it also gives us an insight into the nature of FDIC ministry.

Just a word of caution. A frequent introduction of too many new terms may create confusion in the communication process. We need to be careful in the choice of terms, since they may be taken from an original context that charges them with associations that we may not want to adopt. I think that church leaders at the General Conference and its divisions would be best served at
this stage by a very careful use of new terminology until we have agreed on the theology and guidelines that we want to adopt together.

I have already made some comments on the phrase that Dr. Whitehouse has adopted in his paper: “emerging spiritual movements in ‘creative access’ environments (or contexts).” The expression “emerging spiritual movements” is defined as “movements of increasingly large numbers of seekers in the non-Christian and even post-modern worlds, moving to a biblically based saving faith in God and salvation through Jesus Christ.” I do not understand why it needs to be said in this way. Are we not simply talking of a spiritual revival movement?

Jerald Whitehouse then goes on to say that “these movements, for various reasons, are emerging within their respective contexts and are choosing or are required, because of the hostile environment to growth in faith, to remain within their context.” Are not all revivals emerging from their respective context? And are they not, usually, remaining within their context (although they may spread to other places)? And could not hostile environment be not only Islamic or Buddhist, but even, in its own way, Roman Catholic (as in Poland) and the aggressive secular culture that we find in Sweden, where people are taken to court when they preach against homosexual marriages? So, in what way does the term used specify the matter we talk about here and why not simply stay with the general term of Faith Development in Context?

The Question

The question Dr. Whitehouse seeks to address also defines the purpose of his paper: “What process or mechanism is possible to meet the concerns of the church for accountability, unity, quality of spiritual life, in relation to the ministry and yet provide the distance and flexibility necessary to prepare God’s people for his coming in areas where traditional structures are not possible or not conducive to mission?”

Generally speaking, this is a good way of wording the issue. However, I think that when the Adventist Church discusses issues relating to FDIC ministries, it needs to be aware of how we define the “church.” And in the same way, the leaders of the FDIC ministries need to understand that their concern for recognition and distance from the church structure is conditioned by the same definition of “church.” In particular, I think we need to become more inten-
tionally aware of the distinction between the visible and invisible church, and I shall therefore come back to that theme later.

In addition, in wording the ultimate purpose of the FDIC ministries, Dr. Whitehouse refers to things that are “necessary to prepare God’s people for his coming in areas where traditional structures are not possible or not conducive to mission.” It is perhaps debatable if this suggested mission of our church covers all that we believe to be our mission. If we say that our mission is to “prepare God’s people for the Lord’s coming,” it may not require a unified world church organization. But if we define our mission as we have done in our mission statement, the situation is different: “The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages of Rev 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.”

Our mission statement perceives the preparation for the Lord’s coming as part of the task of nurture, while the two main purposes are “leading people to accept Jesus as personal Saviour” and “to unite with His church.” If our purpose is to bring people to unite with God’s world church, then what “distance and flexibility” can we have towards the FDIC ministries without neither including a strange element that does not really belong to the Adventist Church, nor keeping such distance and flexibility that they in fact become more different than similar to us?

Specific Needs

It is a very fundamental question that Dr. Whitehouse raises toward the end of his paper, namely, “Why is any relation necessary?” Perhaps it should be answered before one addresses the specific needs.

So, what does the Adventist Church need in the current situation? Whitehouse provides six points: (1) guidelines for the work approved by a proper church body; (2) regular reporting of activities and use of finances to a recognized church body; (3) assurance of quality control in selection of leadership; (4) knowledge that at least the FDIC leaders recognize relations to the Seventh-day Adventist Church; (5) assurance of theological orthodoxy with sensitivity to the spiritual growth process being evidenced in the FDIC ministry; and (6) a plan to, at some point and in some way, unite the FDIC ministries with the larger church family.
I would underline the need for a process of developing special structures which is based on a thorough theological preparation. To be more specific:

1. The church needs to define, (a) the nature of church and how the visible church relates to the invisible church, with a view to the relationship between spiritual movement and church organization, (b) the structured purpose of our mission and identity as organization, and (c) how our mission is integrated in the visible organization of the church.

2. The church needs to define criteria for membership of the world church organization that responds to the nature of the FDIC ministries. Is it enough to fulfill the “commitments from the emerging ministries” as outlined by Dr. Whitehouse, or do we need something more than that?

In view of these definitions, it should be possible to outline a list of the needs of the Adventist Church. I will make an attempt later in this paper in regards to Jerald Whitehouse’s proposal.

Dr. Whitehouse also outlines the needs of the FDIC ministries. These are: (1) usually, no visible linkage with a Western or a Christian organization; (2) local “ownership”; (3) flexibility to develop organizational structures to fit the local situation; (4) guidelines that allow local leaders to arrive at Spirit-led solutions to local issues; and (5) assistance with training for spiritual leadership.

This is helpful for the Adventist Church to know. However, what the Church does in response to these needs would depend on the theological definitions that I have suggested under the sections dealing with “The Setting” and “The Primary Purpose of Structure Is to Support Mission.”

**Existing Relevant Policies and Guidelines**

Dr. Whitehouse provides valuable information on existing policies and guidelines that we need to consider as we develop the process for FDIC communities. I agree that the concept of “variations in administrative relationships” provides a good tool and that the term “parallel structures” can be misunderstood and therefore should be avoided.

The guidelines in the “Transitional Organizational Structures” should perhaps form the point of departure for what we discuss today. However, they do not seem to fully comply within the FDIC ministries described by Dr. Whitehouse.

I may be mistaken, but I do not see that his description matches, as the policy puts it, the matter of “new converts being made aware, as soon as pos-
sible, of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and that it has a particular message and mission to the world.” I also ask myself if the matter under “e” is part of the FDIC ministries described in Dr. Whitehouse’s paper: “As soon as it is feasible, the transitional organizational structure should be replaced by the regular church organizational system.”

I get the impression, but I am still open to being corrected here, that the FDIC ministries are to remain within their context and that the transitional arrangement is to be considered as permanent. If that is the case, then we must ask ourselves if these groups are part of our Church or not. And if they are, then how are they part of our organization? But if they are not, then what are they and how do they relate to our Church in their different identity?

I ask myself: Can a Muslim FDIC community that “remains in their Muslim context,” be considered part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? I think not. But I believe it has to do with how I see “Islam” and how I define the “church.” I would not see “Islam” as a whole as teaching the truth. And I would consider membership in the “church” as requiring a theological and organizational unity with the visible church that I do not yet see in the FDIC communities. But, as I said, I stand to be corrected here.

Existing Examples

Here is another valuable collection of material covering various existing FDIC ministries in the world today. Dr. Whitehouse also includes the June 2004 Zelenika FDIC Consultation Guidelines which offer a first attempt to draft what we are looking for. These have not been adopted by any official church body. It demonstrates the urgency of the Church addressing the issues.

Why Is Any Relation Necessary?

Jerald Whitehouse gives seven answers to this important question. Obviously, our mission implies a commitment to “relate” to all people, regardless of language and culture. But the issue now is perhaps rather how we organize the FDIC work in relationship to our church organization. I would like to share my response to the seven answers as follows:
The Gospel Commission Is to All People and the Seventh-day Adventist Prophetic Role Is Inclusive of All People

These statements are of course true. But they underline the necessity of Adventist believers reaching out and being inclusive rather than the importance for the Adventist Church to build specific structural relations with organized FDIC ministries. The same statements could be used to support the position that the Seventh-day Adventist Church ought to have structural relations with a multitude of other groups and organizations. But I think we have found that we can still reach out and be inclusive in our prophetic role, even if we do not have any structural relations with other groups or organizations. This is particularly obvious in the area of ecumenical relations to other Christian churches.

The Emerging Spiritual Movements Seem to be God’s Way of Working Particularly in the Creative Access Environments

This answer leads me to ask: How do we know when God is working in a spiritual movement? Is he also working through the various Charismatic or Roman Catholic movements because they share many of our beliefs, and should we therefore build specific structural relations with them? What makes the FDIC ministries unique in this regard? I do not see an answer to that in Dr. Whitehouse’s paper. We need to define where and why FDIC ministries are appropriate and where they are not.

God’s Larger End-Time People of True Faith... Are Counseled to Press Together

My response to this would be: The first statement is of course true. But it also explains why we are faced with issues. While it is our calling as a church to be united in faith and mission, the point at issue is, what our calling would be when that unity in faith and mission cannot be fully accomplished. How many people or groups have left our fellowship in the past as a result of smaller divergences than the ones we are looking at here? Are the FDIC communities one with the Adventist Church in faith and mission? How do we determine that and who determines it?
In regard to the second sentence in Dr. Whitehouse’s fourth answer, I ask myself if we should even try to “include the FDIC groups in the larger body of believers” until we have carefully evaluated their faith and view of mission. Again, who will do the evaluation? The FDIC leader? Church leaders? Or both entities working together? And where are the limits for church membership and being integrated with our unity as a “church”? Is being part of the “invisible” church enough? Why do FDIC communities also need to be a part of the “visible” church? Can they not be dealt with in much the same way as we deal with faithful believers living in other Christian churches? Leaving the “coming out of her” to the eschatological “time of trouble”?

As I mentioned before, it has been pointed out to me in this context that we need to address the issue of where FDIC is appropriate and for what reasons, and where it is not appropriate and for what reasons. Why Islam but not Roman Catholicism or European secularism?

These Movements Are Requesting Training and Materials for More Effective Spiritual Nurture, Leadership, and Outreach

Here I would like to say that this is positive and we should, of course, respond generously to this. That is our mission. However, I do not see how this can serve as an argument for organized relations other than providing the necessary material and training.

These Movements Are a Reality. We Have the Choice of Initiating Some Relationship for Nurture, Leadership Development, Theological Orthodoxy, and Mission

I agree that “the opportunity to influence these movements in a positive way” is important for us and we need to do something about it. I consider this to be a weighty argument for some kind of relationship. But it is not an argument for seeing these FDIC communities as members of our church. We might as well see them as some kind of “affinity group” to whom our church is positive, relating positively as far as possible, but ultimately not responsible in terms of a mutually agreed on organizational relationship.
Those Working with These Movements Need Some Recognized Mechanism from Which to Relate to Them

I would also agree with this argument as being weighty, but with the same reservations as in my comments in the paragraph above.

In summary, I would see the last two answers as the most important arguments for a relationship, for taking opportunities to influence the FDIC communities in a positive direction, for the need to provide Adventist personnel to work with these communities, and for a mechanism that defines the nature of their work within the church. But I do not see any of these as weighty arguments for organizing these groups as part of the Adventist Church.

Possible Solutions

Dr. Whitehouse concludes with some possible solutions, divided into a brief preamble and five main points. In the preamble, three statements are made that provide the foundation for the kind of steps recommended:

First, it is stated that the FDIC ministries are “committed to the same faith and mission as we in the formally organized Seventh-day Adventist Church” (emphasis mine). Looking at the section “Commitments from the Emerging Ministries,” I ask myself: No doubt, they are close to us in faith and mission, but are they fully Seventh-day Adventist? I realize that Dr. Whitehouse intends these points to be not a full statement of faith but rather as a general description of the main points of faith. But I need to say here that, for example, I personally do not see in those main points a commitment expressed to some important convictions that we hold as a church such as listed in Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines (FD): (1) the Bible as the only creed and authoritative revealer of doctrines (FD 1); (2) the worship of the triune God as a unity of co-eternal Persons (FD 2); (3) the nature of man, especially as far as the woman is concerned (FD 7); (4) the Great Controversy including evil powers identified with all those who oppose Christ (FD 8); (5) the Church as universal, composed of all believers in Christ (FD 10, 11, 12); (6) baptism as entrance into membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (FD 14); (7) the gift of prophecy in Ellen White’s ministry (FD 17); (8) marriage as monogamous (FD 22); and (9) Christ’s heavenly ministry and the pre-advent judgment (FD 23).
I do not want to be understood as negative or critical of these groups. My knowledge is too limited to be able to pass judgment. But I do wish to indicate points of concern that I do not feel have been addressed to my satisfaction.

Perhaps we need to find a more nuanced language when identifying their faith and mission with ours. Clearly, we need to carefully study and monitor the doctrinal issues involved in the FDIC communities if we are to relate to them.

Second, it is stated that "they desire a liaison arrangement to access expertise and resources to facilitate their spiritual nurture and mission and to participate as able in the larger global mission of God's end-time spiritual movement among all peoples." I find this statement quite acceptable as an argument for having a special relationship with these groups.

Third, it is stated that "due to certain political, religious freedom and safety issues this linkage must preserve some distance and anonymity." This argument is acceptable in principle and has been implemented by the Adventist Church in past times. However, it is one thing to apply it when the groups involved share our faith fully and would not refuse a connection with the world church. It is slightly different when the groups do not fully share our understanding of the Bible and when the connection with the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church must be veiled to them. In my view, therefore, we cannot treat them as members of our visible church, but we need to see them as different groups that are close to us and that may, over time and by the leading of the Holy Spirit, grow to deeper closeness.

Based on Dr. Whitehouse's three basic assumptions, he then offers five points that could be used to define the linkage. I will discuss them in connection with my proposal later in the paper.

The Concept of the Invisible Church

From the previous survey, it is clear that we need a common understanding of what we mean with the “church.” Seventh-day Adventists define the church as both invisible and visible, as both universal and particular, and as both a spiritual movement and an organized body (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* 1976:302-304). Notice the following description of the invisible church:

*The visible church is God's church organized for service. It fulfills Christ's great commission to carry the gospel to the world (Matt. 28:18-20), and prepares people for His glorious return (1 Thess. 5:23; Eph. 5:27).*
The invisible church, also called the church universal, is composed of all God's people throughout the world. It includes the believers within the visible church, and many who, though they do not belong to a church organization, have followed all the light Christ has given them (John 1:9). This latter group includes those who have never had the opportunity to learn the truth about Jesus Christ but who have responded to the Holy Spirit and "by nature do the things contained in the law" of God (Rom. 2:14).

The existence of the invisible church reveals that worship of God is, in the highest sense, spiritual. "The true worshippers," Jesus said, "will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him" (John 4:23). Because of the spiritual nature of true worship, human beings cannot calculate precisely who is and who is not part of God's church.

Through the Holy Spirit, God leads His people from the invisible church into union with His visible church. "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen, I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd" (John 10:16). It is only in the visible church that they can fully experience God's truth, love, and fellowship, because He has given the visible church the spiritual gifts that edify its members corporately and individually (Eph. 4:4-16). When Paul was converted, God put him in touch with His visible church and then appointed him to lead out in the mission of His church (Acts 9:10-22). Just so today, He intends to lead His people into His visible church, characterized by loyalty to God's commandments and possessing the faith of Jesus, so they may participate in finishing His mission on earth (Rev. 14:12; 18:4; Matt. 24:14).

The concept of the invisible church has also been considered to include the united church in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:22-23) and the church in hiding during times of persecution (Rev. 12:6, 14) (Ministerial Association 1988:142, emphasis mine).

The article on the "Nature of Church" in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (1976:302-304) lays it out in more detail: First, it exposes the biblical concept that the church universal includes the whole family of God from Adam to the end of the world, while being distinguished from the particular sense of the Christian church established during Christ's incarnation.

Second, in defining the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it draws a distinction between "special movements" that God raises up in order to convey a particular message of warning or instruction, or to lead people to a more complete understanding of his will," and the practical need for organization in order to accomplish this God-given task: "The accomplishment of this task demanded more than the devotion of a host of Christians scattered among many denominations. It called for a united, organized body dedicated to a common task and working together in unison to achieve the goal described in prophecy" (303).

Third, it defines the visible church as "a body of people God calls out and commissions to accomplish his purpose at a given period in history," while the
invisible church is "the multitude of sincere and devoted men and women of all churches, or no church, who worship Him in spirit and in truth to the extent of their knowledge of truth" (303).

Fourth, while stating that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is, in a unique way, God's visible church on earth today, it also acknowledges that Seventh-day Adventists do not alone constitute the true children of God today, but that God works in and through all organizations that accept his divine guidance:

Seventh-day Adventists do not believe that they alone constitute the true children of God today. While they hold that the SDA movement is the visible organization through which God is proclaiming the last special message for the world at this time, they also heartily accept the words of Jesus, "Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold" (John 10:16).

Adventists believe that God works in and through all organizations whose leaders are willing to accept divine guidance in their decisions, and to the extent that they do so. They believe, also, that the message they as SDAs are bearing to the world—and which, indeed, gave rise to the SDA Church—was divinely ordained for this time, and that this sublime commission constitutes the SDA Church, in a unique way, God's visible church on earth today (303).

Thus, the idea that we may recognize people groups outside our organized Seventh-day Adventist Church community as being true believers is in keeping with our understanding of the Bible. These may be communities of believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior that are one or all of the following: (1) part of the church universal, while not being part of the particular Christian church; (2) part of a special spiritual movement raised up by God in a particular people group in order to bring a more complete understanding of his will at the end of time, a movement which may eventually need to be organized for practical purposes; (3) part of God's invisible church, while not being part of the visible church; and (4) part of God's true children, with true spiritual leaders, while not being part of God's visible church today, which we believe to be the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

We may also see such groups as spiritually and theologically closely related to us, as temporarily out of touch for us due to persecution or external conditions that render open contacts impossible, and as groups which God may eventually bring into full (even visible) fellowship with us, when the situation changes or when earth's history enters its conclusive phase.

All this lends increased weight to the need for us to understand how we should be linked, spiritually and formally, to such groups, particularly in other
religions. I find more attraction in the concept of “special affinity groups” than anything resembling “ministries within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

**Definition of FDIC Communities**

At the conclusion of the Symposium on Faith Development in Context at Andrews University in January, 2005, Lowell Cooper issued a statement with which I concur. I believe it has great merit in summing up the situation and providing guidance for where we go at this point in time. He said:

1. FDIC movements should be viewed by the SDA Church as expressions of the Holy Spirit's leading within a particular cultural/religious setting.

2. In certain situations (i.e., Islam and Buddhism) such movements will be compromised by an overt identification with Christianity. The Seventh-day Adventist Church should not develop formal linkages nor imprint these movements with denominational structure. These movements should be encouraged to develop their own organizational structures and accountability systems.

3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church should continue its informal encouragement of these movements.

4. The FDIC movements in some Muslim areas have enormous potential for growth. Therefore the SDA Muslim Relations Office is a necessary feature of our structure. It should be augmented so that relationships, as may be appropriate, are not solely dependent on one person. This would hold true also for whatever FDIC movement takes place among Buddhism.

5. There is a rather urgent need for the Church to address the matter of its relationship to these movements. Some very unrealistic expectations are developing that could bring serious consequences to the Church as well as to some of these movements.

In view of this statement and what I have said so far in this paper, I suggest the following definition of certain FDIC communities: FDIC communities that cannot openly be identified as Seventh-day Adventist, for whatever reason, should be understood as special affinity groups in the invisible church and the participants should be seen as God's true children. As such, they may be seen as part of a spiritual movement, led by God, and encouraged and supported by our Church as far as is deemed appropriate. However, since the doctrinal harmony of FDIC communities with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs remains to be
evaluated, since they may include certain elements that the Adventist Church has not endorsed from explicit Bible texts, and since they cannot be openly identified with our Church, there needs to be no formal linkages between them and the Adventist Church. The Church may view the FDIC communities as an attractive mission field, but not see them as integrated in the church family.

Rather, having defined where FDIC ministries are appropriate and why, the Church needs to ensure that those who function as Seventh-day Adventist leaders (mediators or bridge builders) have the necessary support and protection. The Church needs to establish procedures by which ongoing dialogue and counsel may be exchanged between FDIC leaders (in the church) and church officials. The advice given may follow the lines of my suggestions in the paper from 1998 regarding "Boundaries in Contextualization."

**Process of Development**

In view of my observations so far, I suggest that the Adventist Church establish a process of development for special arrangement structures relating to FDIC Communities that include the following.

*First, develop guidelines for theological preparation and evaluation.* The General Conference needs to initiate a process through its divisions to establish certain definitions and guidelines in the following areas: (a) the biblical criteria for determining "God's work" among FDIC ministries; (b) the nature of "church," particularly the relationship between the visible church and the invisible church, with a view to the relationship between "spiritual movement" and "church organization"; (c) the structured and mutually interacting purposes of our mission and our identity as organization; (d) the relationship between mission and church structure, showing how God's mission overlaps with the church's mission and how God's mission is integrated in the visible organization of the church; (e) define criteria for membership in the world church organization that responds to the nature of the FDIC ministries by clearly defining when these are mature enough to be integrated into our Church fellowship; (f) define the concept of "special affinity groups" and its appropriateness for FDIC ministries; (g) evaluate the doctrinal relationship between FDIC ministries and the Church; (h) define criteria for defining where and why FDIC work is appropriate or not appropriate; (i) evaluate the growing criticism in the world that some types of FDIC ministries in Islamic contexts are "deceitful" and "dishonest," and that they undermine the credibility of the Church (see a recent article
in the Danish paper *Kristeligt Dagblad*, 18 March 2005, where, among others, the supporting ministry Adventist Frontier Missions is being mentioned). It would help if this work could be concluded by the General Conference spring meeting in 2006.

**Second, develop a special arrangement structure.** The General Conference needs to approve a flexible special arrangement structure for FDIC communities so that divisions with FDIC ministries may implement that arrangement as of 1 July 2005. (See the provisional model outlined in the section titled Special Arrangement Structure below.)

**Third, further enable the General Conference Global Mission Study Centers.** These centers need to be reorganized and equipped to produce material and train the bridge-building agents who are to supervise and facilitate the work within FDIC ministries. The Study Center's work needs to be advisory, promotional, and educational, but not governing or administrative. Responsibility for the work remains with the properly constituted church body, which is responsible to a church constituency.

**Fourth, responsibility of the Church.** Divisions, unions, conferences, and missions where FDIC work is carried out are responsible for ensuring that church officials relating to this ministry are sufficiently orientated and knowledgeable concerning this kind of ministry. Special introduction courses for church administrators need to be on offer to church offices from the Global Mission Study Centers before 1 July 2005. Church officers in charge of the area where an FDIC ministry is in operation should provide an annual report of trends and issues to the division president and the General Conference Oversight Committee.

**Fifth, annual evaluation by the General Conference Oversight Committee.** The General Conference should establish a small oversight committee for FDIC ministries that meets once a year at the time of the Annual Council. This should involve a review of the practicality of having a 10/40 Window Committee, an Arabic Materials and Broadcasting Committee besides the Global Mission Issues Committee, and a Global Mission Operations Committee. The terms of reference for this oversight committee should include receiving reports from the fields, identifying current issues, and passing them on for action to the proper body. The committee should be small and be chaired by someone who can take an active, leading role in addressing theological and organizational issues faced in the fields.
Special Arrangement Structures

In view of my observations above and following the ideas presented by Dr. Whitehouse, I recommend the following special arrangement structures for FDIC work:

First, FDIC ministries should have the approval of the divisions. Before any new FDIC ministry work is initiated, the respective division needs to approve of it. The division will be responsible for establishing a process for how such decisions are taken and with those decisions recorded.

Second, responsibility for FDIC ministries should be given to specially designated persons. In order to carry on its informal encouragement of the FDIC movement, Seventh-day Adventist Church entities (division, union, conference or mission) may, where feasible, assign responsibility to an employee or employees to care for the way the church attends to the needs of the FDIC ministry. This person should have a minimum preparation of at least one year of study in the applicable area of expertise (such as diploma or certificate in Christian Muslim Studies).

Three, there may be differences in attitude between a church-sponsored FDIC ministry project initiative that seeks to establish a new community of FDIC believers and a FDIC community itself. In the former case, the Adventist Church may be more involved in supervision and voting budgets, while in the latter case the community needs to develop its own ways of managing its affairs with as little involvement from the Church as possible.

Four, there needs to be a supervisory committee. At the appropriate church level (division, union or conference, or mission), a supervisory committee should be established to care for all FDIC ministries in the territory. Reports from this committee need to be shared with the division president or a specially assigned officer at the division office, so that information may flow on to the General Conference Oversight Committee. The composition and terms of reference of this supervisory committee may vary according to local needs, but could include the tasks listed by Dr. Whitehouse in his paper. However, the committee should act on the understanding that the FDIC communities are not part of the Adventist Church but are closely related communities that may be served by advice and encouragement. I would suggest that at least the following functions be included:
Functions Related to the Church
Employed Project Leaders

1. Receive plans and reports.
2. Authorize travel and approve of equipment purchase.

Functions Related to Local Leaders in the FDIC Community

1. Provide guidelines for leadership selection.
2. Assist project leader with recruitment and assessment.
3. Approve of plans for training.
4. Develop guidelines that define biblical criteria for ordination.

Functions Related to Faith Development

1. Receive information regarding the theological teaching and its development in the FDIC community and issuing advice where feasible.
2. Give input on plans towards bringing the FDIC communities closer to the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

Functions Related to Material Production

1. Coordinate development of literature, media, and other resources.

Functions Relating to Administration

1. Provide general administrative oversight.
2. Coordinate work with other similar ministries within the same division.
3. Coordinate work with other similar committees in other divisions.

The areas of approving budgets, giving guidelines for using tithe, approving candidates for ordination, membership records, etc., seem to imply that the Adventist Church takes responsibility for the work as if these communities actually belong to our Church. The Church needs to leave many of these responsibilities to the groups, albeit providing counsel.
Small General Conference Oversight Committee

The General Conference should establish a small oversight committee for FDIC ministries that meets once a year at the time of the Annual Council. The annual meeting should involve a review of the practicality of having a 10/40 Window Committee, an Arabic Materials and Broadcasting Committee, besides the Global Mission Issues Committee and a Global Mission Operations Committee. The terms of reference for this oversight committee should include receiving reports from the fields, identifying current issues, and passing them on for action to the proper body. The committee should be small and be chaired by someone who can take an active leading role in addressing theological and organizational issues faced in the fields.

The General Conference Global Mission Study Centers

The various study centers, in reorganized form and significantly strengthened, could provide advice, training, and expertise to the Church (see above). As the work expands, it may be necessary for each division to have one person employed who functions like a field expert in this area.

Baptism and Church Authority

Baptism may be authorized for FDIC ministries as an act by which “we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify to our death of sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life,” “acknowledging Christ as Lord and Savior,” and “becoming His people” (see Ministerial Association 1988:180-193). However, the final element in our understanding of baptism, “being received as members by His church,” cannot be fully implemented in the present circumstances, at least in the sense that the Seventh-day Adventist Church cannot recognize the FDIC believers and they cannot recognize us. This experience linked to baptism must be put on hold, being made a subject of prayer. Adventists may have to look to the future to see FDIC ministries join the visible church.

The fact that the FDIC community is not officially recognizing the Seventh-day Adventist Church means that the Church has no right to exercise authority in church affairs over these communities. This can only be done by advice, encouragement, guidelines, training, providing materials, and praying for them as brothers and sisters that are not fully joined to us.
Appendix

B 05 35 Variations in Administrative Relationships

1. For the purpose of fulfilling the mission of the church, division administrations are authorized to recommend modified organizational structures and/or administrative relationships in situations which do not involve the resizing of unions, as outlined below in paragraphs a. through c., or to experiment with further modifications in territories where unusual economic, political, geographic, religious, or demographic circumstances, or strategic purposes make normal church organizational and administrative structures impractical or inefficient. In all cases where alternative arrangements are implemented, the four constituent levels of Church organization shall be maintained, and the following fundamental principles for Seventh-day Adventist organizational structure and relationships shall be preserved:

   a. All basic administrative units shall have a constituency voice (regular constituency sessions).
   b. All administrative relationships shall be clearly defined (responsibility is ultimately held by an elected/appointed officer[s] who is accountable to an executive committee).
   c. Constitutions and bylaws may be amended to provide for alternative administrative arrangements and the process by which such arrangements are continued or suspended.

2. Innovations in organizational structure and administrative relationships must be approved by the respective division committees and the General Conference Executive Committee and will be reviewed periodically by division administrations to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each arrangement. Division committees may grant constituencies the option to continue or discontinue the alternative administrative arrangement (General Conference Working Policy 2003-2004:48, 49).

Notes

1Reasons for this would be one or more of the following: (1) non-Christian doctrinal tenets deeply embedded in the local culture and religion, (2) prejudice against Christianity for various reasons, (3) legal restrictions in the country based on (1) and (2), (4) family codes of honor, and (5) religious/political fanaticism that results in acts of terrorism.

Reference List


Seven years ago this spring Bertil Wiklander presented a paper to the Global Mission Issues Committee on the topic of contextualization entitled “The Boundaries of Contextualization in Mission” (1998). It would be good for all of us to go back to that document and review the suggestions of that fine paper. Several of the suggestions have been incorporated into a document that was vetted by the Global Mission Issues Committee, the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM), and the Biblical Research Institute, entitled “Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission (2003). But several of the suggestions that Wiklander made have not been dealt with, so the issues are still present and need to be looked at again.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify some of the issues involved in the contextualization/syncretism discussion, to sharpen Adventist focus on the problems of under-contextualization, as well as over-contextualization, and then to suggest a balanced approach to contextualization, to highlight the ongoing challenges to contextualization within Adventism, and to list safeguards
for the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it approaches the task of mission contextualization.

Perhaps it is good to remind each other at the beginning of this paper that the only reason why anyone would ever put our church through the challenges of doing contextualization is that every person in God's creation has the right to hear a clear gospel presentation that is unencumbered by syncretistic cultural baggage. Much of the syncretism that is observed in our world is caused by poor contextualization, not over-contextualization, so it is important that leaders learn to do contextualization right.

**Definition of Terms**

**Definition:** Contextualization is the presentation of the eternal truths of Scripture within the cultural setting of a group of people.

God's messengers do not contextualize the message, rather they present the timeless message of the Scriptures by using the cultural forms, words, and symbols of a people in order to better present that timeless message. This is what makes cross-cultural communication of the gospel such a challenge, for it is not easy work. Witnesses must not only understand the biblical message well, but they must also understand the language and culture of a people group well before they can be effective communicators.

Some might ask why contextualization is important. But without careful contextualization the communicator of the gospel runs the risk of sending a garbled message, of misrepresenting the Good News, of creating non-theological barriers to the gospel and in reality making it harder for people to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

**Garble the message:** When the people who hear our message receive an impression that is vastly different than what we intended, we have garbled the message and true communication has not taken place.

**Misrepresent the Good News:** When people listen to terms and concepts that are clear in their meanings to us as we attempt to communicate the gospel to them, but if they end up with a skewed understanding of Jesus, forgiveness, salvation, and other biblical topics, we have misrepresented the Good News.

**Create non-theological barriers:** By not being culturally sensitive and not using culturally appropriate terms, witnesses could give the impression that Christianity is a foreign religion and not for the people they are making the presentation to. Gospel presentations could actually become a hindrance and
a barrier to the very ones they want to introduce to Jesus Christ if they do not do it in a contextual way.

The necessity of doing contextualization rests on four basic presuppositions. First, the Great Commission must be fulfilled and all people evangelized. Second, no matter how we may define world evangelization, it would include the idea that the people being evangelized have a right to an understandable hearing of the gospel. Third, contextualization must be true to the authority and message of the Bible. Fourth, contextualization must relate to the culture, language, and religion of the people being addressed (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:xi).

Definition: Syncretism is a word that also needs to be defined, for it is often part of any discussion dealing with contextualization. Syncretism is the "blending of one idea, practice, or attitude with another. Traditionally among Christians it has been used of the replacement or dilution of the essential truths of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements" (Moreau 2000:924).

Syncretism is also something that is much easier to see in others’ belief system than it is to see in our own. I have a lot of fun in my classes at the seminary by asking the international students what it is about the American Adventist Church that they find troubling. Some have responded that they have noticed a lack of community in the American church where the individual is emphasized to the exclusion of the family and the body of Christ. Does the American tendency towards rugged individualism and independence go against biblical principles of community and being our brother’s keeper? When the American Church holds such individualistic views in opposition to the principles of Scripture, is that syncretism?

At the Symposium on Faith Development in Context held at Andrews University in January 2005, Jon Paulien presented a paper entitled “Dealing with Syncretism in Insider Movements” in which he suggests that “in the process of conversion syncretism will always occur for a time” and “syncretism is always
the unintended consequence of a healthy desire to make the gospel relevant” (2005, 4). Then, a little later in the paper Paulien suggests, “Everyone who makes changes in their faith goes through at least a short period of syncretism” (2005, 13).

This suggestion, that in the process of introducing someone to faith in Jesus Christ everyone goes through a time where they hold a syncretistic blend of true and false beliefs, was troubling to Angel Rodriguez. In his response to Paulien's paper, Rodriguez stated, “Conversion has traditionally been understood as the action of leaving behind the old way of life and thinking in order to live for the Lord. It is not the blending of intrinsically incompatible ideas, but on the contrary the recognition or realization that they are incompatible. If the term syncretism is to be associated with the conversion process it will have to be defined in a loose way” (2005, 1, 2).

Perhaps an illustration can help us understand what Paulien was suggesting. I was teaching a Bible class to a group of Japanese college students. We had been studying together for several weeks and for that particular night I was teaching about sin. Towards the end of the presentation I made the statement, “We are all sinners, right?” and received a lot of blank looks. Feeling that perhaps they had not understood my question I asked it in Japanese, “Watakushi takushi wa minna sumibito desu ne?” But, instead of getting the agreement that I expected, they all shook their heads, “no.” I think we sang a song, and had a quick closing prayer. Then I started to explore how the Japanese understand the word “sumi” or “sin” in their language. What I found out was fascinating.

The typical Buddhist Japanese thinks of a sinner as someone who has broken one of the five sila, or moral precepts (Halverson 1996:59) by committing some terrible offense against a person such as rape or murder, who has been caught, and is now being led off in handcuffs to prison. That was the typical Japanese view of sin, so when I said, “We are all sinners, right?” they were totally confused. As soon as I understood the cultural definition of sin I then went on to pour the Christian and biblical meaning of sin into their Japanese word. I taught that the biblical concept included all that the Japanese concept of “sumi” entailed, plus selfishness, plus the idea of not measuring up to perfection, plus offence against a Creator God. What we ended up with was a subgroup of people who understood “sumi,” but not in the traditional Japanese sense. They had added biblical content to the word and now viewed the word in a broader sense with Christian meanings attached. For several weeks these people who were
coming to faith in Jesus Christ held a mixed concept or a syncretistic blend of old and new in their understanding of sin.

In this particular case what was needed was only an addition of Christian meanings to the traditional Japanese word for sin. However, in those situations where concepts must not only be added, but must also be removed from a word, symbol, or ceremony, the task is even more difficult and the chance of syncretism greater.

Take, for example, the term “Allah” as used by Arabic speaking Christians. Allah, to them, has had biblical meanings attached to the term, while on the other hand, the same word as used by Arabic speaking Muslims has Qur’anic meanings attached to it. In a conversion process an Arabic speaking Muslim would not only need to have biblical meanings added to his understanding of the term, but he would also need to have some of the Qur’anic meanings stripped from the word as he moves towards a biblical understanding. During that process of moving from a Muslim understanding of the term to a Christian understanding of the term syncretistic concepts are present.

This illustrates the hard work of teaching and changing the basic building blocks of a culture and its people. It takes time, but if it is not done, then the people witnessed to will not have a biblically shaped worldview and will not understand biblical values and principles. Conversion is always a process, and in that process people move from holding beliefs and practices that oppose biblical principles, to a blend of old and new, and then as the Word of God continues to impact their value system, they move closer and closer to having a biblically shaped worldview and value system. But, in the process of conversion there is the danger of syncretism—the blending of truth and error. For some groups that process may only take a few months, but for others the process leading to a biblically shaped worldview and value system may take several years. The important thing is that people continue to allow the Word of God to shape and direct them in the process. The danger is that people might stop in their spiritual growth before the process is completed.

What is the antidote to syncretism? How do we minimize syncretism in the conversion process? By doing intentional critical contextualization and engaging in good biblical teaching. Whenever the Good News is presented in new cultural settings there is the danger of syncretism as people move from the old ways to the new ways in Jesus Christ. The important point in this matter is to never be satisfied in leaving a process uncompleted so that people remain in a state of syncretism. Intentional critical contextualization and a strong emphasis
on the Word are the antidotes that will move people to a healthy understanding of biblical principles. I will share what I mean by critical contextualization later in the paper.

**Issues in Contextualization**

Throughout the history of Christian mission there has been a battle between those who see little need for contextualization and those who are so sensitive to culture that they allow culture to dominate the biblical message, and in the process distort that message. These two extremes have been called by various names. Hiebert has referred to these extremes in contextualization as "rejection of contextualization" where there is wholesale denial of the validity of the old cultural ways, where everything in a culture is viewed as evil, pagan, or unfit to be used to communicate the Christian message, and "uncritical contextualization" where cultural practices are accepted wholesale with little concern that the result is gross syncretism (Hiebert 1985:184, 185).

Hesselgrave refers to these two extremes as under-contextualization and over-contextualization (2004:5-7). Jon Paulien has adapted the contextualization model of Phil Parshall (1998:405) to reflect this idea that syncretism could result from two extremes: over-contextualization and under-contextualization. But, both over- and under-contextualization miss the ideal center point where healthy contextualization takes place (Paulien 2005:15).

**A Three-Part Contextualization Continuum**

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The "Ideal"
Over-Contextualization

Over-contextualization is largely lacking in the Adventist mission experience. In fact, I do not know of any instance where Seventh-day Adventist missionaries over-contextualized by accepting the traditional cultural ways almost in total into the practices of Adventism in a particular culture. Over-contextualization is something that Adventists often accuse other Christian denominations of. Over-contextualization results in chris-to-paganism, the watering down of Christian distinctives, the blending of Christianity, and the traditional religions with the result that the gospel is distorted and gross syncretism exists.

Those who practice what we would term over-contextualization are very concerned and sensitive towards culture. So, one redeeming factor for those who over-contextualize is that they do not have attitudes of cultural superiority or practice cultural imperialism by being insensitive or riding rough shod over the culture to which they are taking the Good News.

Over-contextualization overlooks the fact that there is good and evil in every culture. Sin is found in the cultural practices of every society, and for the Christian witness not to allow the Word to root out such practices goes against the very purpose of mission. The gospel calls men and women to a new life in Christ, which predisposes a turning from the evil of the past (Hiebert 1985:185).

Under-Contextualization

Under-contextualization occurs when the Christians introducing the Good News to a people group label most of the culture as pagan and unfit to carry the gospel message. In such situations the music forms, architectural styles for religious buildings, marriage and funeral ceremonies, dress, and a host of other cultural forms are rejected. Rejection is based at times on the ethnocentrism of the Christian communicator and at times on the sense that the form is too closely tied to the old cultural practices. Rejection of the local forms can also occur, because it is just easier to give new Christians in a new area the songs, Sabbath dress, architectural styles for churches, marriage and funeral ceremonies those forms and practices that the Christian communicator is used to and comfortable with from his home culture.

When whole areas of a culture are written off as not fit for use in the communication of the gospel, the results are often less than what was desired.
When under-contextualization is practiced three major areas of weaknesses surface (Hiebert 1985:184-5). First, there is a tendency, when taking customs and practices away from a people and in the process of labeling them as pagan, to create a cultural vacuum. Christian missionaries then try to fill the vacuum by giving the people substitute customs and practices from the missionary's home culture. This process often results in the church in that part of the world being viewed as foreign, strange, and dominated by foreign ways and practices. I will give examples of this below that illustrate why under-contextualization is such a barrier to gospel witness.

Second, under-contextualization causes many of the cultural practices of a people to go into hiding, to go underground, with the result that the people continue to practice many of the old ways in secret. This type of syncretism is caused by not dealing with the old ways and by not applying the principles of the Word to the issues in the culture. The result is syncretism as the old fears and beliefs exist underneath but with a veneer of Christian practice on the surface. There are countless examples of this happening in Adventism in many parts of the world, with a lot of such syncretism resulting from a lack of dealing with evil spiritual forces. There is also the sad example of some in the Adventist Church in Rwanda where issues of tribal allegiance were allowed to remain in syncretistic blend with biblical truth that resulted in Adventists killing Adventists.

Third, under-contextualization causes church leaders and missionaries to assume the role of policemen. When the local body of believers is not allowed to, or encouraged to, apply the principles of God's Word to their own culture, they learn to live by the rules given to them by the first missionaries. They never grow in their faith to the point where they can assume their proper role as part of the world hermeneutical community of believers who discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. Church leaders in such situations are the rule givers and the rule enforcers—the religious police.

Under-contextualization has been practiced for understandable reasons. Those who under-contextualize often have a deep desire to root out evil practices and beliefs associated with the culture of the people being presented with the Good News. There is a low tolerance for sin and evil in the culture. There is concern that the local forms are too tainted with evil to be used by God in communicating his message.

But Christian workers who are unwilling to work at communicating the gospel through the cultural forms of the people often are themselves tainted...
Avoiding Comfortable Syncretism by Doing Critical Contextualization

with the view that their culture is a “Christian culture,” whereas the culture to which they go is pagan. Cultural pride and ethnocentrism could be partially responsible for such attitudes. We must also admit that we can more easily see the pagan splinters in other peoples’ culture while we are blind to the pagan planks in our own culture. It is so easy to miss syncretism and sin in our own cultural setting. We must also remember that Adventist mission had its heyday during the age when “manifest destiny” and the “white man’s burden” were common expressions of Western imperialism and ethnocentrism. These are phrases that we find very offensive today, but the results of mission done under that mindset linger on in the form of under-contextualization.

**Examples of Under-Contextualization**

Under-contextualization has occurred in recent Adventist mission history because of unwillingness on the part of some of our evangelists to study and learn about the culture in which they preach. Examples from the 1990s in Russia are painful reminders that traditional evangelistic preaching that ignores the culture and religious practices of a people often leaves the local church with antagonism and hostility.

Evangelists that preach a traditional set message without seeking to understand the local needs, worldview, and values often baptize large numbers of people who retain a syncretistic blend of true and false because many of their areas of confusion and need were not dealt with in the sermons prepared for a Western audience. I am particularly concerned with organizations that send evangelists out with little if any understanding of the local situation. One size does not fit all when it comes to bringing people to Jesus Christ. There must be careful understanding of culture, beliefs, and worldview to allow the Word of God to root out the old and create a new set of beliefs and values.

Several years ago I taught at an Adventist College in the Caribbean. I noticed a very interesting thing about the singing on that campus. On Sabbath morning for Sabbath School and church, singing was done from the *Adventist Hymnal*, but much of the singing was lackluster, done without spirit and passion. Then on Friday evenings on the steps of the library the young people gathered to sing with guitars and to sing the music they had written about the themes of the Sabbath, the second coming, and Jesus their Lord. What a contrast! Is it possible that we have given the suggestion that for Sabbath School and church only North Atlantic church music is acceptable to praise God with? Are we perhaps sending the wrong message to Latino young people suggesting
that the music they have written is not good enough for church but can only be used on the steps of the library on Friday nights? Under-contextualization allows for foreign cultural domination and often results in a religious system that looks foreign to the local people.

When I first went to Japan I noticed that an imported custom caused a great deal of discomfort for the Japanese. On those Sabbaths when there was a baptism, the Japanese pastors followed the suggestion of the Church Manual exactly by having the candidate for baptism stand in front of the church while he read the thirteen articles of faith. The candidate stood alone, uncomfortable, feeling almost as if the whole group was involved in her interrogation. No attempt had been made to contextualize the procedure—just a blind following after the suggestions in the Church Manual.

It was more than I could take. The pain was too obvious, so I contextualized the procedure by having the candidate read the statement of faith followed by the whole congregation responding with “I believe that too.” The change of atmosphere was incredible. The person felt that she was a part of a group, that others believed like she did, and that these were people who would support her in her new faith. Under-contextualization can create non-theological barriers that often make it more difficult for people to come to faith in Jesus Christ, or that even prevent them from giving the gospel an honest hearing. The packaging of the gospel in foreign or Western forms is also syncretism, for it mixes culture, another culture, a foreign culture with the biblical message.

When I arrived in Cambodia, the previous administration was requiring the pastors to wear shirts and ties. Those of you who have been to Cambodia know that it is hot and humid, with mud and dust everywhere. Villagers viewed a shirt and tie as foreign, and they then assumed that the religion of those who wore the shirt and tie was also foreign. We made a change, giving the pastors an off-white shirt made with a Chinese collar. It was interesting to learn that village people recognized those who wore such a shirt as a spiritual teacher.

Singing, church ceremonies, and pastoral dress are little things, but they can impact how local people view the message about Jesus Christ. Under-contextualization can distort the message and cause syncretism just as over-contextualization can damage the Christian message. Adventists have under-contextualized in a multitude of areas by not dealing with issues such as fear of evil spiritual forces, dowry, house dedications, field dedications, harvest festivals, naming ceremonies, use of instruments in worship, and use of pictures and symbols.
Is it possible that much more damage has been done to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church through under-contextualization and its associated syncretism than through over-contextualization? The sad thing about this is that those who would become agitated by over-contextualization because of the obvious syncretism can feel very comfortable with under-contextualization. I have often heard church leaders say, “Isn’t it wonderful, you can go anywhere in the world and our Adventist members sing the same songs, have the same order of worship, and do things just like we do at home.” We are very comfortable with under-contextualization because under-contextualization often produces Christians who look and act just like we do, but with devastating affect in terms of those look-alike Christians being unable to witness effectively in their home cultures. Such Adventist Christians look foreign, feel dominated, and out-of-sync with the local culture of their friends and neighbors. Under-contextualization produces syncretism just as surely as does over-contextualization by mixing in Western cultural baggage and calling it part of the gospel. As the Global Mission Issues Committee grapples with the challenges of presenting the Good News effectively to the Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese worlds we must not remain comfortable with under-contextualization that also distorts the gospel and creates non-theological barriers that prevent people from hearing a clear gospel presentation. Just because we are more comfortable with the syncretism of under-contextualization should never allow us to complacently accept it.

**Critical Contextualization—The Process**

Paul Hiebert has suggested an approach to contextualization that has come to be known as *critical contextualization* (1985:186, 187). Critical contextualization is a four-step process that begins with a deep appreciation for the Word of God. People who are coming to Christ must be brought to a position where they are willing to deal biblically with all areas of their lives. This is a process that needs to be practiced by the Western church as well, as they hold up to the biblical norm issues such as TV and video viewing, dating practices, leisure time and activities, use of disposable income, simplicity, etc.

The second step is to lead the group in looking uncritically at the cultural item or practice. This step involves gathering information. Understanding is sought concerning the deep issues and meaning of the cultural practice.
The third step involves applying biblical passages and principles to the cultural item in question. What aspects of the practice are incompatible with principles of the Word? What aspects are neutral? What aspects are opposed to biblical principles?

The fourth step is the hardest for most church leaders to practice—to let the local people, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, join in the decision of what they can do and what they cannot do in the light of their understanding of biblical principles and the leading of the Spirit. This is an interactive process where local people are often challenged by the missionary or church leader to look at local issues in new ways and to see things they had never seen in their culture before. This is what the international students at the seminary do for the American church when they challenge us to consider our lack of community. When we are unwilling to let local groups of Christians have an interactive part in deciding such issues, we perpetuate a system that produces weak and dependent Christians who can only accept the rules and practices given them. Those who only live by the rules handed down will never become a full part of a community that reads and discerns the principles of God's Word for themselves.

Critical contextualization needs to be practiced in both the new areas of the world where the gospel is being heard for the first time, but also in the Western world where each generation of Christian believers needs to also hold up to the biblical norm the practices that their generation struggles with. Just last year the General Conference committee took hours going back and forth on a document dealing with music issues. Perhaps we would have a better impact on Adventists around the world if we would teach all age groups how to do critical contextualization.

Case study: A group of inner-city young people in Los Angeles were faced with the question of whether or not they could listen to hard rock music. Most of them were new converts from gangs and drugs and knew well the message and power of contemporary music.

Many Christian parents forbid their children to listen to rock music; they lay down the rule: there will be no listening to rock music in this house. What happens is that the children listen to the music at their friend's homes, or in secret, so in reality the parents end up being policemen. Other parents just give up and allow their children to listen to whatever they like with their children never learning the lesson of discernment but just accepting the ways of their culture.
The youth leader in the Los Angeles church used critical contextualization in dealing with the rock music issue. He had the young people bring all their CDs of rock music to a Bible study. After a discussion of the meaning of Christian lifestyles and the place of music in one's life he had the young people play each CD and evaluate it in terms of biblical principles. They destroyed those CDs that contained messages that went against the message of the Word, and kept the rest and listened to them without having guilty consciences. The next Sunday they brought their broken CDs and presented them to the church. There was no longer any need for parents or church leaders to monitor their listening habits. They had learned discernment for themselves (Hiebert 1985:190, 191). Perhaps we would do well to teach our members biblical discernment by learning how to do critical contextualization.

Ongoing Challenges to Contextualization Within Adventism

There are at least three areas where ongoing challenges exist that hinder the Adventist Church from being able to maintain healthy contextualization throughout its various levels.

Leadership Awareness of Missiological Issues

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church becomes more international and diverse, it is more and more important that leaders at all levels of the Church be given opportunity to understand cross-cultural issues and be trained to think missiologically. Why? They must have a clear missiological understanding of cultural issues. Without this widespread understanding what one leader builds up in developing a contextualized ministry, the next leader dismantles. It is much easier to destroy contextualized ministries in the Church today than it is to build them. Why? Again, because it is easier to and there is more comfort in syncretism at the under-contextualization level than there is at the over-contextualization level. It is comfortable to see people worshipping and dressing and doing things just like us. It is the rare person who works intentionally to help people become a hermeneutical community that grapples with how to live within a biblically shaped worldview. It is easier to give rules based on my cultural understanding of life than to do the hard work of understanding the culture of others and allowing the gospel to work through that culture. So what
is the solution? I believe the solution includes widespread education of leaders at all levels of the organization concerning the issues of ethnocentrism, how culture affects our perception of reality, and even our reading of the Word; it includes an understanding of the process of contextualization and training in cultural sensitivity issues.

Ministerial Training That Teaches on Cultural Issues

Seven years ago Dr. Wiklander suggested in his paper that "ministerial training programs need to offer balanced training" in the areas of contextualization. All of us on this committee know that to be effective in cross-cultural situations one must not only know the Word of God well, but must also understand the people to whom we wish to share the Good News with. Yet, as far as I know, Avondale College is the only place where a B.A. in Theology degree offered by any Adventist college requires students to do any study in cultural anthropology or in the area of missiology. Mission classes that stress topics like worldview, culture, contextualization, and that encourage sensitivity towards people of other cultures, ethnicity, and religions are usually only offered at the M.A. level. In many parts of the world, only a few Adventist pastors are trained to the M.A. level. Unless Adventists begin teaching cultural sensitivity at the B.A. level, they will perpetuate the current problem with future generations of Adventist pastors, leaders, and teachers, so that they, too, will have the same difficulties understanding why other people do things in different ways.

General Conference Documents That Model Contextualization

The General Conference has a responsibility to model a contextualized approach in its documents and guidelines. We have all sat on committees that have worked on long, complicated documents that spell out lifestyle issues and practices in great detail. It is easier to govern by edict, and it is easy to issue guidelines and policy papers that spell out how to live and act. But would it not be better to teach all levels of the church to do critical contextualization so that each segment of the Adventist Church could become a hermeneutical body of believers, applying the principles of God's Word to their cultural situations. I firmly believe that instead of more guidelines, more time should be spent
teaching the principles to guide each people group in doing critical contextualization. Perhaps more time of the General Conference should be spent in teaching principles to guide in decision making than sending down the line of command lists of guidelines on music, dress, eating, simplicity, etc. If we could inculcate the principles of critical contextualization in the hearts and minds of all people groups in our church we would have far fewer issues to deal with administratively. Perhaps we need seminars that teach and deal with the issues. We could start right here in North America teaching this generation of Seventh-day Adventists how to do critical contextualization with the cultural issues of Sabbath observance, dress and adornment, music, and simplicity. Other parts of the world would have other issues to grapple with such as life cycle rituals, funerals, weddings, birth ceremonies, liturgy, places of worship, dealing with evil spirits, charms, magic, and a host of issues that are non-issues for many in the West. But that is the point. We can never issue enough guidelines to cover all the issues. We would be better off teaching each group of people how to apply the Word to their situation.

We have mentioned the danger of over and under-contextualization, and we have suggested critical contextualization as the preferred approach; but what are some safeguards that can maintain doctrinal unity in our church?

**Safeguards for Contextualization**

Whenever contextualization is in progress there must be safeguards that act as a check and balance for those situations where the process leaves the center "Ideal Contextualization" area and begins to move into the dangerous, syncretistic, over-contextualization areas. Hiebert suggested three important safeguards: (1) the Word of God that is taken as the final authority for faith and practice, (2) the belief in the priesthood of all believers that assumes that the Holy Spirit is capable of guiding all Seventh-day Adventists in helping them apply the principles of the Word to their lives, and (3) the realization that the task of contextualization is not the work for a few individuals, but is a responsibility that the whole church should be engaged in. The church, from different regions of the world, has the responsibility to give counsel and advice to the church in other parts of the world. There is no room for lone rangers or people insisting on doing their own things without being willing to open the discussion to the larger hermeneutical community (Hiebert 1985:191, 192).
Conclusion and Recommendations

The topic of contextualization is relevant to this Global Mission Issues Committee because every person in God's creation has the right to hear the gospel in understandable terms.

It is normal for people to be ethnocentric, mono-cultural, see things only from their perspective, think that their way of thinking and viewing God and religious topics is the only correct way, and believe that their styles of music, worship forms, and order of worship are normative and the RIGHT way to do things. However, this "normal way," if applied to mission, results in under-contextualization leading to syncretism that creates non-theological barriers that keep people from accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

As we increase our mission activities in the Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist worlds, and as we bring an ever-increasing number of people from those areas of our world to faith in Jesus Christ, we must no longer westernize before we Christianize. Therefore the members of this committee, who are the leaders of the world divisions, should seriously consider what each of us could do to begin to change this situation. I offer the following recommendations as starting points:

1. Recommended that the Global Mission Issues Committee request General Conference leadership to commission a major revision of the Church Manual to reflect sensitivity to the issues facing a world church with much diversity and many cultures.

   There is a long-term member of this committee, Pat Gustin, who will be retiring in just a couple of months. Perhaps she could be commissioned to make an initial draft of what such a Church Manual would look like.

2. Recommended that the Education Department, Ministerial Association, and the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) (General Conference Working Policy 2003-2004:233-7) work to incorporate in the B.A. curriculum for religion and theology majors a course on Missionary Anthropology that will develop missiological skills, encourage cultural sensitivity, and teach the process of doing critical contextualization among the next generation of Adventist pastors.

3. Recommended that the Institute of World Mission be asked to conduct seminars for each division with two purposes in mind: (1) to train Adventist leadership at all levels in cross-cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and showing how culture can be used for God's glory in reaching unreached
peoples, and (2) to train trainers for each division to continue the education of all levels of leadership concerning the need for contextualized approaches.

Let us not be complacent and do nothing, for doing nothing continues the practice of under-contextualization that leads to syncretism, builds barriers that keep people from hearing a clear presentation of God's Good News, and in the end denies people the right to hear the gospel clearly in their own cultural context.

When the people of Russia or China or Turkey or Cambodia walk down the street and pass a Seventh-day Adventist church and hear singing, they deserve to hear music from their part of the world and not imported music from Europe or America. When people in the Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu world look at an Adventist church in their part of the world, they deserve to see a building that is culturally appropriate and not a replica of a church in Kansas. Animistic peoples from Asia, Africa, Oceania, Europe, and the Americas deserve theological answers to their questions, and not just answers to questions being asked in the secular West. We dare not allow under-contextualization to erect non-theological barriers that keep large numbers of the world's unreached people from having an understandable hearing of the gospel. If people reject Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, I want them to reject him because they do not want to obey and follow him, not because I mixed my gospel presentation with my foreign culture.

Reference List


Chapter 21

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GLOBAL MISSION—WHERE TO FROM HERE?

PAT GUSTIN

April 4-5, 2005

In the years leading up to the 1990 General Conference session at Indianapolis, the Adventist Church became increasingly aware of the challenge faced in the parts of the world that were as yet virtually unreached. God's blessing throughout 100 years of Adventist mission had created strong, vibrant churches in the former mission fields of Central and South America, most of sub-Sahara Africa, the islands of the Pacific, and a few pockets in Asia. But the reality of "the land that remains" was pushing the Adventist Church to begin to think of mission in new and innovative ways. As the concept of reaching the unreached grew in the hearts of many church leaders, the need to create new strategies to face this challenge became apparent. Adventists realized that the greatest challenge facing the church was reaching the areas of the world where there was previously little or no success—the Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, and secular/postmodern worlds.

To help meet this challenge, the office of Global Mission was established at the 1990 General Conference session with the special mandate to find ways to take the Three Angels' Messages to these unreached and hard to reach people, and where Adventists had not worked with any major success before.
Over the next few years, the Global Mission Study Centers were developed one by one. Each one had the mandate to work for one of the major unreached groups and to accomplish the following: (1) “to evaluate ongoing models, programs, and current literature with the purpose of refining and developing more effective models of evangelism, (2) to participate with . . . planning teams in analyzing specific people groups, developing plans, and evaluating results, (3) to facilitate field testing model strategies whose purpose is to ‘establish an SDA presence among selected groups,’ and (4) to communicate the strengths and weaknesses of past or ongoing models of evangelism” (Guidelines for the Religious Study Centers n.d., 1).

In summary, the centers were commissioned to evaluate current methods and strategies; to develop new and different methods; and to experiment and run pilot programs focused on reaching the various groups they represented. The Office of Global Mission also began the Global Mission Pioneer program, eventually sending thousands of minimally-trained, dedicated lay persons to work in unentered areas in their own countries, pioneering the work among the unreached. Since 1990, many new initiatives have been tried by the Global Mission Study Centers and Global Mission Pioneers. As a result, we have seen the Lord's blessing in many areas that had previously been resistant.

Almost immediately, however, questions began to arise about methods and materials that would be most effective. It quickly became apparent that many standard ways of doing evangelism would be impossible or virtually ineffective. The Global Mission Study Centers then began the process of experimenting with new approaches and methods that would enable them to reach the unreached groups. Out of this situation, a whole new set of mission-driven questions emerged, leading the Adventist Church to establish the Global Mission Issues Committee which met for the first time in January 1998 at the General Conference headquarters with Elders Jan Paulsen and Mike Ryan leading out. The Issues Committee has met yearly since then.

From 1997 to 1999 several significant papers addressing some of the pressing questions arising out of the work of the Global Mission Study Centers and the Global Mission Pioneers were presented by respected church leaders. In January 1998, Dr. B. B. Beach presented a paper entitled “The Church, Structural Organization, and Acculturation.” Dr. Jerald Whitehouse prepared two papers, the first of which was also presented at the 1998 Issues Committee entitled “Developing New Church Structures for More Effective Mission, Nurture, and Growth of New Believers,” and the second one was entitled “Critical
Contextualization and Beyond: How Shall We Move in a Pluralistic World?”

For the same January 1998 Global Mission Issues Committee, Dr. Bertil Wiklander, president of the Trans-European Division, presented a paper entitled, “The Boundaries of Contextualization in Mission: How Flexible and Absolute Are They? What Principles Should Guide the Church?” Then in 1999, Dr. Russell Staples presented a paper titled “Contextualization, Church and Confessions.”

In these papers church leaders grappled with the very challenging issue of the difficulties and limits of adapting methods, message, and organization to effectively reach and nurture those from cultures and religious traditions vastly removed from the Christianity of the West.


Before examining, in some detail, what has happened since 1998 and 1999, I would like to briefly review some of the major points made in the papers that were presented at those meetings.

The Necessity for Contextualization and Adaptation

One of the issues addressed in those early papers was why this discussion on contextualization and adaptation is so important. The core reason adaptations must be made was addressed by Dr. Wiklander. He stated, “In our discussions of the boundaries of contextualization . . . we must keep the practical realities of Global Mission in mind” (Wiklander 1998:2). “Our mission is completed only when the receivers have had a fair chance of hearing and understanding the message—on their terms, not ours” (Wiklander 1998:4). Wiklander went on to make a practical application of this principle by referring to the work of Paul with the Athenians:

How would these Greeks understand the Word of God? By their culture and views, they were extremely distant from the proclamation of the gospel. No Old Testament Scriptures, no Jewish tradition, no expectation for Messiah, no eschatology, no belief in the resurrection, but a rich Greek heathen tradition. Paul has to preach the gospel in a Greek “pagan” way. His boldness leaves me impressed.
First, he establishes a good relationship with the Athenians, which is a way of building trust. . . . Then he makes a connection with idolatry by referring to an altar and the inscription 'to an unknown God.' There is not a word of criticism or judgment against idolatry here. . . . If he wants to be understood and save them, he must disregard his own knowledge and operate at the level of the receivers. Nobody would accuse Paul of idolatry or apostasy, although in his proclamation he not only refers to altars and inscriptions of idols, but he also quotes a piece of Greek pagan poetry, written by the Stocist poet Aratos (310-240 B.C.) taken from a context where the words are referring to the pagan god Zeus. . . . He argues in their conceptual framework in order to make them hear and understand the word of God (Wiklander 1998:10).

Dr. Wiklander clearly stated that there is a need for a "totally different style of evangelism" (Wiklander 1998:2). The "why" of contextualization and adaptation in all areas is answered with the very practical answer that there is a necessity for receptor-oriented communication. This is essential.

**Different Organizational Structures for Special Circumstances**

One of the early papers given by B. B. Beach gave a rational for the need to consider a variety of organizational structures. Beech very aptly outlined the special circumstances that have historically been addressed by the church in creative and pragmatic ways.

There are special situations which can only be effectively met by special organizational approaches. This we have done in various ways. Where it has not been feasible to organize churches, we have organized companies. In some areas we organize districts, with district leaders. In some countries it has been felt that neither a conference nor a union conference fits the bill, and we have organized unions of churches. In other places we have "attached unions" or "attached conferences." Where local churches have not been permitted, we have had house churches. These do not fit into our regular structure, but the system works under the circumstances. Where it has not been possible to send missionaries or regular employed workers, "tentmakers" have been sent. Modified organizational terminology has been used, such as "field" or "diocese" instead of conference or mission. Other terms for president have been used where this term is not permitted. In places where our churches were closed, the people have met under trees. Where the use of banks, regular accounting and auditing were not permitted or caused a serious disadvantage for the church, these methods were abandoned. Where the church was banned, underground or secret churches, committees and cash transactions have been used. Much of this is not in harmony with the organizational policies of the church, but in harmony with pragmatic pursuit of the church's mission (Beach 1998:4, 5).
Security, Religious Liberty Issues, and Alternative Forms of Organization

Dr. Beach addressed a further reason for extreme flexibility in organizational practice under certain unique circumstances.

There are areas in the world where the church can function in a regular organizational way. There are places where in order to function, the organizational structures have to be adapted or changed. Then there are places where the religious liberty situation is such that the church cannot function in an organized way at all. Where this is not possible, Adventist pragmatism dictates that other approaches should and must be used (Beach 1998:5).

Dr. Beach leaves no question about the historical wisdom of our church in adapting in very practical ways to the various challenges that different situations, cultures, and political and economic realities have created.

The compelling question of security and religious liberty was further discussed by Dr. Jerald Whitehouse. “The issue of security for both the existing church and the new ministry for an unreached group who are generally hostile towards Christianity is also a factor in looking at new structures or even separate structures for certain groups” (Whitehouse 1997:2).

Working in Areas With Traditional Hostilities and Prejudices

The presence of local prejudices and hostile histories among groups within a country was an additional reason given for the need for alternative forms of organization at times. In this context, Dr. Jerald Whitehouse raises the question, “If that [local SDA] congregation for whatever reasons—historic prejudices, social class disparities, protectionism, ethnic hatreds . . . is unable to reach out to a large unreached block in its territory, what do we do” (Whitehouse 1997:2)? He then suggests that under such circumstances our best choice is to work through an alternative organization or structure.

The work being facilitated by the Study Centers is resulting in new believer groups which are not able for various reasons to integrate into the existing local church. This has resulted in the establishment of new structures in order to provide nurture and
allow for new growth among the new believers and to protect the existing church (Whitehouse 1997:1).

The existing [traditional] structures have simply been unable to effectively implement mission initiatives for the major non-Christian blocks. The reasons are many, (1) ethnic prejudices, (2) the identity of the established SDA Church with the West (considered to be totally corrupt, immoral, etc.), and (3) the identity of the SDA Church with the rest of Christendom (Whitehouse 1997:2).

Dr. Bruce Bauer addressed this same issue of security in a paper presented at the Faith Development in Context Symposium held at Andrews University in January 2005. In his paper, Dr. Bauer examined the work of the house church movement in Vietnam and the organizational structures that guide and monitor it. He began his paper, however, by reminding us of some of the challenges the Adventist Church has faced in working in other challenging areas.

More recently, in countries with predominantly Muslim populations, the Adventist Church has experimented with a contextualized ministry approach that encourages faith development from within the Muslim community. For security purposes it is vital that the Adventist Church members remain separated from the remnant believers who have grown in their faith within the Muslim context. Danger and the necessity for a safe place within Islam where interested people can explore the truths in Scripture have created a situation in which parallel structures exist side by side, with both groups sharing similar beliefs (Bauer 2005:1).

What Has God Wrought?

Seven years have passed since the Global Mission Issues Committee met for the first time, when the issues of contextualization and alternate organizational structures were presented and grappled with. The questions that can be fairly asked as we look back at the years since these actions were first taken, are the following: What has happened? Has the mission of the church to reach the unreached and apparently resistant peoples been more or less successful? Have we seen greater growth among some of these groups? Are those coming to faith in a more contextualized environment becoming stronger, more mature Christians over time, or are we seeing evidences of a weakening of church beliefs and standards and the inroads of syncretism? To answer these questions, we will look briefly at several specific areas.

The first group we will consider is the work among Muslims in three specific areas. Southeast Asia: In 1990 in one Asian country there were approximately twenty-two church members with Muslim backgrounds and only two
of these were active in church work. By 1997, after only a few years of following a more contextualized approach, the number of believers from Muslim backgrounds in that same country had grown to around 2,000. Today there are approximately 8,000 baptized believers who are able to continue living, working, and witnessing in their own communities.

**Africa:** In a strongly Muslim country there are approximately 4,500 believers from a Muslim background who have been baptized since 1998. In that same country, there is the potential for hundreds of thousands of additional Muslims coming to faith.

In another predominantly Muslim area of Africa where there had been less than ten baptisms of people from a Muslim background in the previous thirty years, approximately 2,500 new converts with Muslim backgrounds have been baptized in two separate movements in the last two to three years (Whitehouse 2005:1).

Other areas that challenge us organizationally are places with governments that are hostile to Christianity, with restrictions on evangelization, and in some cases even restricting meetings for worship.

**Asia:** In one Asian country, the official work of the church has been reduced to only six functioning churches, with only three of them being strong. The number of active members has dropped to around 700, although there are over 7,000 on the books. But the “secret” or “house church” movement in that country has been able to flourish. Though the official statistics are difficult to obtain for obvious reasons, we know of over 350 congregations meeting regularly in house churches and over 17,500 members who have either been baptized or are waiting for baptism (Duong 2005:1).

**Cambodia:** In this Asian country where the church has been planted quite recently, a more contextualized approach has been used extensively. Bible lessons, ceremonies, worship style, hymnody, church architecture, etc., are very different from those traditionally used in Western-style churches. But the growth of a strong church in such a short time has been exciting.

Finally, I will mention the work for Jewish people. Since the beginning of the Jewish-Adventist Friendship Center and the beginning of a contextualized approach for Jewish people that includes worship styles, music, ways and content of “preaching,” etc., the number of worship groups with believers from Jewish backgrounds both in Israel and in other parts of the world has increased dramatically. The statistics are as follows: **Israel:** Churches and members in 1998, 5 churches, 220 members; today, 29 churches, 950 members;
Worldwide: Contextualized Jewish-Christian synagogues before 1998, 2 or 3 in South America; today, 27 or 28 worldwide. Baptisms: Since 1998 approximately 1,000 people from Jewish backgrounds have come to faith through a more contextual approach (Elofer 2005:1).

There is no doubt that numerically the church has grown in each of these previously resistant areas during the last seven years. In humility and awe we can only say, “What has God wrought!”

What Are the Long-Term Benefits?

The next question we must ask, however, is what results (aside from numerical growth) have been achieved. We are all aware of the fact that numerical growth, in itself, is not adequate. We must also be concerned about quality and what happens over time. What about discipleship and nurture? What about ongoing spiritual growth? What about the witness of the new believers or the new community? What are the long-term results of these contextualized approaches and methods as well as alternative organizational structures that are definitely “outside the box” of normal church policy and structure?

All the evidence indicates that the contextualization of worship forms, methods, and even message, have made the Adventist faith “real” and meaningful both to converts and seekers who come from backgrounds so far removed and different from Christianity. New converts can pray, learn, and grow in a context that reaches their heart, and answers their life questions.

Converts have been able to maintain their identity within their local communities without either (1) committing cultural suicide and becoming so “other” that they cease to be effective witnesses, or (2) endangering their lives so that they have to be extracted from their communities for safety’s sake. This means that in hundreds of villages where these new believers live, they have been enabled to sustain a presence and a witness within their communities.

The potential for lasting life transformation has also been greatly increased by an approach that, more sensitively, answers their questions about life and religion. Contextualized approaches have been able to address people’s deepest questions with solid Adventist, biblical answers. In turn, this makes the message (1) more relevant to the hearers, and (2) much more likely to effect conversion at the worldview level. This level of change can only happen when we address the “heart” issues of the hearers.
Finally, these new believers and churches remain as a witnessing body. We must always remember that because our mission is to reach people in every nation, family, language, and culture, each Seventh-day Adventist Church has a multiple mandate: (1) to nurture believers, (2) to disciple and nurture new believers—those who have recently come to faith by providing a “home” in which they can grow and mature, and (3) to reach those in the communities who have not yet come to faith. A church that has lost touch with the local culture and has become totally “alien” may nurture old believers who have become accustomed to its foreignness, but that church will only appear strange and unattractive to new converts and unreached local people. Every Adventist church needs to ask itself on a regular basis what its appeal is to the unchurched, unreached people around it.

In summary, it seems clear that to meet all of these challenges, the more contextualized approach is proving effective. New converts coming out of religions and cultures that are totally different from Western Christianity are being nurtured and are growing in an environment that is familiar, comfortable, and sensitive to their challenges, their questions about life, and their concerns. At the same time, these churches are able to continue reaching out to those who have not yet come to faith. Their churches are easily recognized as places of worship and they speak a “language” that the average non-churched person in that culture can understand.

**Biblical and Historical Guidelines**

In his worship presentation, Dr. Gorden Doss reminded us of the first Global Mission Issues Committee, recorded in Acts 15 (Doss 2005). This general church meeting, driven by the needs and challenges of mission, is of extreme significance to us today. In Acts 15 several principles for mission today are emphasized:

1. The Gentile converts were not expected to commit cultural suicide to become believers. Even though Christians at that time were almost 100 percent Jewish, the leaders, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were able to see the necessity of allowing for diversity in many aspects of church life and practice.

2. The leaders determined that they should not lay heavy burdens on the new Gentile converts, but should make it as easy as possible for them to believe (Acts 15:19).
3. Nothing would be required that was not absolutely necessary to main­
tain the integrity of the church and the only things actually forbidden were 
those that would jeopardize the faith of the new Christians.

Looking back at history, it is possible to see that for various reasons the 
church has, at times, had to function in very “unorthodox” ways. For many 
different reasons, first-century Christians were loosely organized—in house 
churches which at times met openly and at other times in secret. Elders, dea­
cons, and overseers were eventually appointed, but the extent of their organi­
zational responsibilities is unclear. There was obviously some structure pro­
vided by the “mother churches” in Palestine and Syria, but travel, economics, 
distance, and eventually persecution made it impossible to keep the churches 
organized in a way we would recognize today. The survival of the church and 
its witness demanded flexibility.

During the times of the Waldensees, the early reformers, and even into the 
time of the Protestant reformation, the survival of the church required extreme 
creativity in organization and structure, and even the need for secrecy at times. 
In recent history our own church has adapted again and again to the necessity 
for alternate organizational structures. Russia, China, Burma, Hungary, Roma­
nia, Albania, and North Korea (to mention just a few) are whole countries that 
for years operated with virtually no structure. There are significant biblical and 
historical precedents for a variety of structures that allow the church to spread 
and grow in safe and meaningful ways. However, there are significant questions 
we need to address as we move ahead in this area.

Valid Concerns and Questions

Some concerns we must consider as we examine what has happened to 
date and what we must face in the future are: (1) What kind of believers have 
resulted from these new methods and structures? (2) How can the church as­
sess the results? (3) How can we be sure that new churches and converts are 
properly nurtured to prevent heresy and syncretism? (4) How can we monitor 
progress to improve biblical soundness and the quality of leadership?

Without a doubt these questions all need to be considered by the world 
church if it is to retain a unity of basic belief and essential practices around 
the world. The fact, however, that there could be potential problems does not 
mean that the contextualized approach and alternative structures are at fault. 
The success we have seen both numerically and in quality of converts cannot be
challenged. The difficulties we now face because of our “success” should simply challenge us to deal with them directly, rather than throw out the methods. To deal with these challenges, the following suggestions have been made in the past and should now be reconsidered.

**Guidelines**

The issue of parallel (or alternative) structures is one that has been discussed previously. Quite rightly it raised questions and concerns. The need to consider how to deal with such situations, however, remains obvious. In light of the practical realities that face the Adventist Church in many areas of the world, the challenge seems to be not “whether” the denomination should relate to these new realities, but how to do it well. Dr. Bertil Wiklander wisely stated, “The church needs to have a procedure for how and by whom the work of application is to be carried out. . . . The daily application of the ethics of social behavior and church life would rather be the responsibility of the local church where a larger degree of understanding of local cultural codes may exist” (Wiklander 1998:6).

As a guideline, I would suggest that the unity and diversity of the Church may be best preserved by (1) recognizing that the General Conference has the overarching responsibility for determining the core issues that constitute Adventism, but that this work needs to be carried out with flexibility and openness, through constant dialogue with Adventists in local cultures, and (2) that this interaction may be facilitated if the General Conference would focus on general principles of biblical theology and the theology of ethics that may then be applied locally in various forms in ethical behavior and church life. This approach would have an effect on the current shape of the Church Manual (Wiklander 1998:6).

In a paper presented at the symposium on Faith Development in Context, Dr. Bruce Bauer analyzed the various challenges that arise as the Adventist Church seeks to monitor, nurture, and maintain the church under alternative (parallel) circumstances. “Parallel structures, by their very definition, are committed to mirroring the beliefs of the SDA Church. Parallel means there is no divergence. But just as parallel train tracks need ties to keep them parallel, so also the emerging parallel structures need ties to the denominational structure to maintain unity” (Bauer 2005:9).
Bauer then suggested several possible ways to develop these “ties.”

1. A supervisory committee that meets regularly to help oversee the details of the work.

2. An administrative body (mission, union, or division) that recognizes the group and works directly with the supervisory committee.

3. Oversight by the Global Mission Study Center director dealing with that area.

4. Assigning of a General Conference vice president to continue to be a liaison person with the supervisory committee that deals with the movement to keep the wider church informed of events, challenges, and growth.

5. Development of literature specifically designed for both evangelism and nurture of the group.

6. Development of assessment tools to track and assess the movement on a regular basis.

7. Recording of members at some level (at a place and in a way that is secure for the members) to promote a sense of responsibility to them by the wider church (Bauer 2005:9).

Bauer then lists several key areas that need to be considered: (1) maintaining administrative linkage, (2) guiding leadership selection and ordination, (3) fostering accountability, (4) maintaining orthodoxy, (5) promoting honesty and integrity (Bauer 2005:9, 10).

To these I would add the daunting challenge of ensuring continuity when various entities work without the following: (1) sufficient coordination, (2) adequate training in cross-cultural and contextual guidelines and methods, (3) appropriate literature and materials for either evangelism or discipleship, and (4) long-range plans of how to sustain the work beyond the initial “church planting phase” after which funds frequently are withdrawn, leaving new converts without leadership and other support.

Where to From Here?

When looking at the biblical and historical precedents for alternative forms of church organization and structure, it seems clear that the Adventist Church should not turn back now. If Adventism is going to finish the work and reach the unreached parts of this world, it must be flexible. But Adventism must also find ways to ensure that syncretism and heresy do not creep in. Guidelines and safeguards need to be in place.
To begin with, if the Adventist Church wishes to avoid syncretism and heresy, it must continue to seek for ways to truly nurture new converts, no matter what their background, so that they become strong, Bible-based Seventh-day Adventists. To be truly effective such nurture must be unique to each of the various religious backgrounds from which these converts come, must be done in a fully contextualized way, addressing their worldview issues that are contrary to the gospel, and must answer the life questions growing out of their background, beliefs, and culture.

Adventist Church leaders need to continue to search for ways to put into practice the words of James at the Jerusalem Council: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19).

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2005 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor's Note: At the conclusion of each year's Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 2005 one recommendation was prepared dealing with guidelines for alternate organizational structures and administrative relationships.

Guidelines on Alternative Organizational Structures and Administrative Relationships

Recommended 5 April 2005

Background

General Conference Working Policy B 05 35 provides for variations in administrative relationships for the purpose of fulfilling the mission of the church. Under certain circumstances such variations may be called for by a need to experiment with modifications in territories where unusual economic, political, geographic, religious, or demographic circumstances prevail, or where strategic purposes make normal organizational structures and administrative relationships impractical or inefficient.
The provisions made by this policy, however, do not cater for situations where work among unreached people groups has resulted in the formation of communities of believers that, while sharing much or all of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, must be kept separate from the church organization, operating either as an underground fellowship, or as a fellowship that remains locked into its own cultural context.

The world church has established an office to study global opportunities and challenges affecting the church’s mission. In addition various study centers have been set up to facilitate a greater understanding of various people groups. These centers function in an advisory role to the infrastructure of the church.

The following guidelines provide direction on how church leaders may manage organizational structures and administrative relationships in such circumstances.

**Definitions**

A “special arrangement structure” (SAS) is a general term for the organizational structure and administrative relationships that involve non-traditional movements which seek full cooperation with the official Seventh-day Adventist Church, but which are prevented from doing so by external circumstances.

A “special affinity group” (SAG) refers to a community which sees itself as an “Advent movement” while possibly being unaware of the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The only way for such groups to survive is to remain in their context without an organizational link with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

**Process for Special Arrangement Structures (SAS)**

The processes identified here relate either to the initiation of a new SAS or to the acceptance of an already existing SAS. In both cases, the Special Arrangement Structure must function at a distance from the church, because normal operations would greatly restrict mission opportunities.

1. For a new SAS to be initiated by the church, the division needs to approve the venture based on the understanding of a new community as defined above.

2. The division should appoint a co-ordinator and a supervisory committee to look after the needs of the SAS community. The co-ordinator needs to
have special training for the task and will report to the supervisory committee chaired by a division officer.

3. The duties of the supervisory committee would include:
   a. Provide guidance for the operation of the SAS.
   b. Prepare guidelines for the organization of the SAS and monitor and supervise their implementation.
   c. Prepare guidelines for quality assurance of leaders and members to ensure faithfulness to the Bible.
   d. Prepare guidelines for financial accountability and the use of tithe.
   e. Prepare guidelines on administrative accountability at all levels.
   f. Coordinate development and production of literature, media, and other resources.
   g. Develop and implement a plan for an efficient leadership system that includes recruiting, training, ordaining, mentoring, and if necessary the dismissal of leaders.
   h. Progressively improve linkages with the church.
   i. Recommend the appointment of specific leaders to the division.
   j. Plan for integration with the church, when the time comes.
   k. Provide guidelines for communications.
   l. The coordinator will be responsible for the preparation of an annual assessment report for the division.

4. If possible, all basic administrative units in the SAS shall have a constituency voice.

**Process for Special Affinity Groups (SAG)**

The processes identified here relate either to the initiation of a new SAG or to establishing relations to an already existing SAG. In both cases, the Special Affinity Group must fulfill the criteria for a Faith Development in Context model, i.e., it remains in its cultural and religious context.

1. For a new SAG to be initiated by the church, the division needs to approve the venture based on the recognition that the new community will exist in an unreached people group or territory, and that it will contribute to the further spreading of the gospel there.

   2. The church may assign a liaison and a consulting body to look after the needs of the SAG community. The liaison needs to have special training for the task and will report to the consulting committee chaired by a division officer.
3. The duties of the consulting committee would include:
   a. Functions related to local leaders in the SAG:
      Suggest guidelines for leadership selection;
      Assist project leader with recruitment/assessment and training plans;
      Suggest criteria for ordination.
   b. Functions related to faith development:
      Receive information regarding the theological teaching and its development in the SAG community and issue advice where feasible;
      Plan for integration with the church, when the time comes.
   c. Functions related to material production:
      Coordinate development of literature, media, and other resources.
   d. Provide advice and guidelines to the liaison that may bring the organization and faith development in the SAG into the closest possible harmony with the Church.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.
The 1990 General Conference session voted to establish a mission initiative called Global Mission that challenged the Adventist Church to do mission where there had been few successes in the past, to work for those in the major world religions instead of largely winning people who were already Christian, and to enter unentered areas where there were few if any Adventists.

Global Mission also established five religious study centers to pioneer new approaches for sharing the gospel with Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and secular/postmodern peoples. The new approaches and challenges forced the Adventist Church to study and find solutions for many cross-cultural questions. In response to that challenge a yearly Global Mission Issues Committee was established where papers were read and recommendations made concerning current mission issues. *Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission*, vol. II contains the Global Mission Issues Committee papers from 2002-2005.