2008

What Do Boston and Huambo Have in Common? (The President's Desk)

Ron E.M. Clouzet

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The Adventist Theological Society (ATS) has grown considerably over the past 25 years. From a small group of scholars from Berrien Springs and Collegetad to a worldwide membership involving many local chapters, dozens of institutions, and thousands of Bible students at every level, the Lord has opened the doors wide for the society’s expansion.

The society’s constitution calls for an executive board to run its interests led by the president, four vice-presidents (Communications, General, Global Outreach, and Publications), an executive secretary, a treasurer, and a president-elect. The board meets every November, in conjunction with the Evangelical Theological Society’s (ETS) annual conference to read and discuss papers that are heard by Adventist as well as interested evangelical scholars. This often leads to further interest by evangelical thought leaders in the areas of research that Adventists pursue, and in some cases, to collegial relationships that have led scholars to a better understanding, and even acceptance, of Adventist theological positions. A Bible symposium is also planned every year and conducted in an Adventist church in the area where ETS and ATS scholars meet. Symposium attendance consists of ATS members and is open for any Seventh-day Adventist pastor, leader, or lay person interested in the subjects.

In 2008, these meetings will take place in the Boston area. On November 20, the ATS section of the ETS yearly conference will meet in Providence, Rhode Island, dealing with the subject of “Text and Canon.” Presenters will come from the Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University and from Wheaton College’s Graduate School. The papers will address issues in the books of Genesis, Numbers, Daniel, Ezekiel, 1 Corinthians, and Revelation, as well as one on the role of the community in determining the canon.

The Bible symposium will take place on Sabbath, November 22, in the Stoneham Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church, just outside of Boston. The theme for the presentations will be “The Spirit of Prophecy in Scripture and Adventist History.” The schedule of speakers includes Gary Swanson, from the General Conference (GC), Isaac Olutanji, from Oakwood University, Gerhard Pfandl, from the GC’s Biblical Research Institute, Merlin Burt, from Center for Adventist Research at the Seminary, and Jon Paulien, from Loma Linda University.

Presenters will answer questions from the audience in a panel discussion at the end of the program.

The mission of ATS is to be a theological resource for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Perhaps one of the most significant services rendered by members of ATS, then, has to do with the many Bible conferences and ministerial councils organized and conducted all over the world. In 2008 alone, ATS led in no less than a dozen symposia in eight world divisions, including meetings in the Dutch Antilles, Bangladesh, Zambia, the Czech Republic, Russia, Angola, Madagascar, Kenya, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Mexico.

In most cases, local divisions and unions team up to bring as many pastors, theology professors, and theology students from a designated union as is feasible, to meet for three or four days of theological meetings. Many presentations are followed with a time for questions, and a longer Q & A period is held on the last day. Pastors and church administrators often express deep thanks for the work ATS does, in bringing clarity, depth, and conviction to biblical and theological issues relevant to the Adventist Church.

As an example, a recent Bible conference was held in Huambo, Angola. Angola is a large country in southwest Africa with a comparatively small population, in part, due to a 30-year civil war that raged until 2002. The church there, however, is healthy and growing, with some 400,000 current members.

Drs. Moskala, Mueller, and Pfandl and I made the ATS team that traveled from the United States, via South Africa, to Luanda, the capital. After spending one night at Dr. Benjamin Paiva’s home, third vice-president of the National Assembly and a committed Adventist lay leader, the

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In an election year, religion in the U.S. becomes a very public matter. Every presidential candidate has professed faith in Christ, knowing that there is a sizable constituency of evangelical voters they cannot ignore. The theology that binds most of these evangelical believers together from many different denominations is called dispensationalism.

Dispensationalism teaches that the second coming of Christ takes place in two distinct phases. First, Jesus comes invisibly to remove His church (the secret rapture) prior to a seven-year period during which the rest of humanity must face the antichrist.

At the end of the seven years, which according to dispensational theology is the fulfillment of the last week of the 70 weeks of Daniel 9:24, Jesus will again return, but this time visibly to deliver those who became Christians during these seven years. This means those who were not taken to heaven at the time of the secret rapture get a second chance during the seven-year period. At the second, visible coming, Jesus also destroys the enemies of Israel at the Battle of Armageddon.

Foundational to the rapture teaching is the concept that God has two separate plans—one for the Israelites or Jewish people and another for non-Jews, or Gentiles. The plan for Israel is revealed in the Old Testament. However, when the Jews rejected the Messiah, the prophetic clock for Israel stopped and the Church Age began. When the Christian saints are taken to heaven in the secret rapture, the prophetic clock begins ticking again and God’s plan for the Jews takes its course. This means that the prophecies in the Old Testament are meant only for the Jews, not for Christians.

What makes this theology so appealing to conservative Christians is the fact that several events that dispensational theologians predicted...