

8-2016

# Truth, Love, and the Justice of God: An Interview with Jiří Moskala

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## Recommended Citation

Moskala, Jiří and Morris, Derek J., "Truth, Love, and the Justice of God: An Interview with Jiří Moskala" (2016). *Faculty Publications*. 198.

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/198>

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# Truth, love, and the justice of God: *An interview with Jiří Moskala*

**Derek Morris:** Many *Ministry* readers may not be acquainted with you personally, though they have perhaps heard your name in connection with being the dean of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Tell us a little about yourself.

**Jiří Moskala:** I was born in the heart of Europe, in the Czech Republic (the former Czechoslovakia), the country of the great fifteenth-century reformer and martyr Jan Hus (John Huss). My father was a factory worker who came to know God after World War II. My parents converted from Catholicism and became Adventists just two years before I was born. They were very devoted to the Lord and the church. It was complicated growing up in a Communist country, but it was beneficial for affirming and strengthening my faith, as I had to daily stand for my convictions. Because I did not attend school on Sabbath, which was obligatory, I experienced persecution. Nevertheless, I look back to this period of my life with gratitude to God, because He was teaching me from my childhood how to defend Christian principles and Adventist values. My father-in-law spent more than a year in prison for being a pastor.

The motto for my life reflects the biblical message: truth, love, and the



justice of God will prevail and, as I strongly believe, will conquer all and in the end be victorious.

**DM:** When did you sense the call of God to a teaching ministry?

**JM:** I always wanted to be useful for the Lord, to even witness about Jesus to unknown people in order for them to be eternally saved. I remember when I was 10 [years old] going to parks and speaking with elderly people about the second coming of Christ. I also wrote

God's promises on small pieces of paper and gave them to people so they could learn about spiritual values.

I felt God's call to ministry from a very young age and dedicated my life to Him. However, the first Adventist school I attended was the Bible seminary in Prague when I was 20 [years old]. I was only able to study there for one year before the atheistic government closed it. Therefore, on the recommendation of the Czechoslovakian Union, I continued my studies at the Comenius Protestant Theological Faculty (today part of Charles University). Upon completing the five-year theological studies program, I worked as a pastor for 11 years. I was also married during that time and had five gorgeous children. I did further theological studies in Prague and later also at Andrews University. I have written two doctoral dissertations: the first on the problematic authorship of the book of Daniel, and the second one on the validity of the distinction between clean and unclean food.

In 1995, I brought my family to Andrews University in order to finish my doctor of philosophy (PhD), which I had started several years previously. At the end of my studies, I was offered a full-time seminary faculty position. (During my studies I had been a contract teacher.) After fasting and praying with

my family and agonizing over the decision, as I wanted to return to Europe, God impressed me through His Word in Isaiah 48:17 that I should accept this call as it was His plan even though it dramatically changed my life and ministry. I have never regretted that decision as God's plans are always best for us. My ministry

of divinity program director at Andrews University. So I went through crucial steps of experiencing and understanding the importance of biblical theology and administrative work.

I believe that God gave me these previous service opportunities and challenges to prepare me for this assign-

**DM:** The seminary provides a unique graduate learning environment. What aspects do you appreciate the most?

**JM:** What I value the most is the opportunity to work with an incredibly gifted, dedicated, and godly faculty and staff. The faculty and staff are, first of all, a genuine Adventist community of faith that models how to live and work together in harmony and promote the beauty of the Adventist message. We may disagree and have different opinions on various matters but still respect each other. The focus of all on a balanced interpretation of Scriptures, a deep relationship with the Lord, a passion for spreading the gospel, and the second coming of Jesus Christ are convictions that are contagious and shared in the classroom.

I love the opportunity to encourage young pastors to anchor their hearts and ministry in the teachings of Scripture and help them deepen their spiritual life and Adventist identity. In this way, they can recognize and reject the ideas rooted in human speculations, tradition, or culture that are contrary to Scripture.

My role as a leader includes creating a space for my colleagues to prosper, and I rejoice greatly when they succeed. I direct an outstanding team that seeks to develop programs, curricula, and policy that is sensitive and relevant to the real issues of life so that our diverse student body can strive for excellence and be ready to serve God, His church, and humanity. I encourage everyone not to be satisfied with mediocrity. Adventism requires the whole person, the best minds and skills, being filled with God's wisdom and Spirit and demands close collaboration and teamwork.

A special joy for me is when I can hire new faculty members and offer them opportunities they were previously only dreaming about. The diversity of students we receive from around the world and the diversity of faculty match well in very concrete ways.

I am excited about the international scope of my work. I love being in personal contact with leaders around the world. It is a joy and thrilling experience



was tremendously broadened, which I could not imagine at that time.

**DM:** How did the Lord prepare you for your current assignment as dean of the seminary?

**JM:** God has worked in providential ways. He prepared me gradually for this kind of ministry. He gave me excellent theological training; I studied in two prestigious universities, the best in Protestantism and Adventism. I worked as a pastor, a lecturer of systematic theology and Old Testament studies, was dean of the theological seminary in Prague, director of the Czechoslovakian Union's Department of Education and Health, and the master

ment. I opened the seminary in the Czech Republic after the Velvet Revolution in 1989 when Communism fell and worked there as the first dean, which provided me with administrative experience and sharpened my skills. Additionally, through teaching in the seminary's Department of Old Testament (OT) for the past 15 years and being chair of the OT department for several years, I gained further familiarity with the seminary's operations. Moreover, by my involvement with the Adventist Theological Society and traveling around the world, God has given me the opportunity to work closely with church leaders and become well acquainted with the needs of the worldwide church as well as with diverse people and a variety of cultures.

to work with the leaders of the General Conference, divisions, unions, conferences, universities, colleges, and seminaries.

**DM:** Some people make a case for short-term in-ministry training programs rather than an extensive seminary curriculum. What are some of the benefits of both training options?

**JM:** A short-term training option provides a good intensive start for ministry. There are many wonderful motivational programs that give introductory skills in how to study Scripture, preach, do evangelism, and offer Bible studies. However, it cannot replace the in-depth engagement with Scripture and a broad understanding of ministry that equips pastors with a variety of needed skills in order to deal with problems, challenges, and new situations in our complicated world. It also helps prevent a routine approach to ministry or a quick burnout after three to five years, where they then leave the ministry. There are notable exceptions, but usually longer and comprehensive preparation provides enormous potential for growth and service. It is like in the field of medicine where various individuals assist a patient in different capacities. Volunteers, first-aid assistants, nurses, family doctors, surgeons, cardiologists, and so forth, are all needed in the care of a patient.

Similarly, when preparing for various ministries within the church, each training has a different purpose. For example, during the two-to-three-year MDiv program pastors build their biblical-theological understanding in a very systematic way over this longer period of time and develop a variety of skills. Spending several years rather than just a few months makes a vast difference in the absorption of the biblical material and in learning how to serve effectively. Remember the training Jesus' disciples received at His feet, and the time Paul spent in Arabia after his conversion. Pastors are dealing with matters of eternal life and death, and this immense responsibility cannot lead to less study than in medicine, economics, or law.



Each cutting-edge knowledge demands a comprehensive approach. We are encouraged by Ellen White to search for the truth as miners are digging for nuggets of gold.\* The study of the Bible and its theology takes time and focus for which we provide guidance through our more than 40 dedicated seminary professors, who have spent their lives seeking to apprehend biblical theology and a knowledge of how to apply it in our postmodern world. There is no better place in the world than to be trained by these experts in various fields in order to gain a practical knowledge of how to do ministry and share the gospel in today's world. We also offer an outstanding in-ministry study option, namely the masters in pastoral ministry, for those

pastors who are unable to devote full time to residential studies.

**DM:** What resources does the seminary offer for pastors who want to continue to grow spiritually, intellectually, and professionally?

**JM:** In addition to the books, articles, workshops, Bible conferences, symposia, and seminars provided by seminary faculty to our church or non-Adventist entities, the theological seminary offers six doctoral programs (doctor of ministry; doctor of missiology; doctor of theology; doctor of philosophy [religion]; doctor of philosophy [biblical and ancient Near Eastern archaeology]; and doctor of philosophy [religious education]), five

master's programs (master of divinity; master of arts [religion]; master of arts in youth and young adult ministry; master of arts [religious education]; and master of arts in pastoral ministry), six dual-degree programs (master of arts [religious education]/master of social work; master of divinity/master of arts in communication; master of divinity/master in public health; master of divinity/master of social work; master of arts in youth and young adult ministry/master of social work; and master of arts in youth and young adult ministry/master of science in community and international development), and a postdoctoral fellowship program. We now also have a strong chaplaincy concentration in the master of divinity (MDiv) program.

Let me highlight three activities that are probably most attractive for pastors:

- The DMin program helps experienced pastors who hold an MDiv or its equivalency to enhance their spiritual life and ministry and move it to the next level. It is designed for full-time pastors and professionals and is completed while they continue their ministry. The DMin's guiding vision is "Changing the People Who Change the World."
- The Seminary Distance Learning Center offers both free video lectures as well online master-level courses for credit ([www.andrews.edu/sem/sdlc/index.html](http://www.andrews.edu/sem/sdlc/index.html)). We are working toward creating a fully online MDiv program with different concentrations and already have a number of classes available. We are currently preparing a fully online MA (religion) program for international students.
- We are also providing many free online continuing education opportunities through the new Adventist Learning Community ([www.adventistlearningcommunity.com](http://www.adventistlearningcommunity.com)).

**DM:** What are some of the greatest challenges pastors face in the twenty-first century?

**JM:** People's thinking has dramatically changed in recent decades. Our world is rightly characterized as post-Christian, and believing in God is much less attractive than in previous years, because of (1) antagonistic and vicious neo-atheistic attacks on God's existence, the Bible, Christianity, and religion; (2) the dominance of empirical science and evolutionary theory above all other branches of knowledge; (3) the strong influence of naturalistic spiritualism in the public, films, video games, and music; (4) the attractiveness of Eastern religions; (5) the high quality of entertainment, TV, educational programs, music, and recreation that powerfully compete with the proclamation of the eternal gospel as expressed in the three angels' messages of Revelation 14; (6) the stress on the uniqueness of an individual emotional experience that makes everything relative; thus people think that there is no absolute truth, particularities are destructive, and exclusiveness is dangerous and harmful; (7) religious extremism (including terrorist attacks); (8) growing sympathy toward the papacy and its moral influence; (9) persuasive thinking that all religions are equal and they have the same basic idea to love; and (10) populist ecumenical tendencies among Christian leaders with merging theological thoughts.

These powerful facts lead to a very distorted picture of God in addition to a blatant antipathy toward organized religion. This makes evangelism and ministry to people, especially in an urban context, very challenging. Believers become secular. Temptations in personal life are more subtle, like immorality and pornography that steal spiritual vitality even among the clergy. The business of life leads away from the commitment to spend meaningful time with Jesus in prayer and studying His Word. To relevantly answer these intellectual and spiritual challenges, one needs to be rooted in the Bible and theology. Theology is essential and really matters.

On the other hand, postmodern people are hurting and deeply wounded

because of selfishness, injustice, abuse, wars, divorce, family tensions, violence, financial crises, and health issues. Studies show that people long for meaningful relationships and social bonds. This is what our churches should provide. They need to be safe spiritual oases for people so they may grow together in the knowledge of God and service to others.

**DM:** What words of counsel would you offer to pastors who long to be used by God in world-changing ways?

**JM:** I am convinced that the best years of our church are ahead of us. So let each pastor be ready in whatever capacity God calls him or her to serve. May they daily dedicate their lives to Him who is always faithful that He may lead them to fulfill His vision and mission through them.

To all pastors I would like to say, do all God has set before you today, perform it humbly, diligently, with love and joy, trusting that each day He will empower you with His Spirit to do His will. Never stop growing in your knowledge of Christ and intellectual capacities. Read widely, visit people, and listen to them carefully. This will provide you with a rich fountain of insights for your preaching, writing, discussions, further visitation, and reflections. Be in touch with people in order to know their thinking and respond in a meaningful way to their queries. Be available for them.

Search, love, preach, and share God's truth, but do not try to possess it. Never manipulate truth. Be honest with yourself, sincere, and transparent, and allow God be the Lord of your life and ministry. Let Him transform you. Bring God's presence with you everywhere you go. Remember that our God is a holy God, and serve Him with enthusiasm. Never forget that God's truth, love, and justice will prevail and ultimately conquer all. ✚

\* See Ellen G. White, "Candid Investigation Necessary to an Understanding of the Truth," *Signs of the Times*, May 26, 1890.

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