A Cross-Centered Evangelistic Preaching Strategy for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canelas, Portugal

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ABSTRACT

A CROSS-CENTERED EVANGELISTIC PREACHING STRATEGY FOR THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN CANELAS, PORTUGAL

by

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Title: A CROSS-CENTERED EVANGELISTIC PREACHING STRATEGY FOR THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN CANELAS, PORTUGAL

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Date completed: June 2016

Problem
The Bible reveals that evangelistic preaching must be Christ-centered and cross-centered (1 Cor 2:2). However, in recent years the evangelistic series in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas have been mainly of a doctrinal nature. As a consequence, my pastoral observation indicates that attendance, baptisms, and decisions for future baptisms at the end of the meetings are few. One of the factors that contributes to this condition is the lack of evangelistic preaching that focuses on the love of God revealed in the cross of Christ.

Method
A cross-centered evangelistic preaching strategy was developed in order to present the Seventh-day Adventist Bible beliefs in a Christ-centered and cross-centered
way. After a five-month preparatory period, a two-month series was held. A total of 24 meetings occurred on weekend nights in the church’s main auditorium. The efficacy of the project was evaluated by the attendance, numbers of baptisms, decisions for future baptism, and inscriptions for Bible studies.

Results

The implementation of the cross-centered evangelistic preaching resulted in a higher number of baptisms, and of decisions to study the Bible, when compared to previous evangelistic series. It especially resulted in a higher number of decisions for future baptism, and an increase in attendance. Through the broadcasting of the series in the internet, positive feedback also arrived from other places in Portugal and from other countries in the world. The testimonies of the attendees indicate that the Seventh-day Church of Canelas has been revived. The other churches that belong to the same pastoral district have shown interest in these meetings and experienced similar results.

Conclusions

Based on the results of the implementation of this strategy, a cross-centered approach to evangelism in the church of Canelas does seem to be effective in order to growth the attendance in the meetings, the number of baptisms, the decisions for future baptism, and the requests for Bible studies. This strategy also appears to have had a very positive impact on the spiritual climate of the church, and of other churches. Thus, centering evangelistic messages on the cross of Christ in the future of this church is recommended. Studying the possibility of implementing this strategy in other churches in Portugal and abroad is also merited.
Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A CROSS-CENTERED EVANGELISTIC PREACHING STRATEGY FOR THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN CANELAS, PORTUGAL

A Project Document
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Daniel F. M. Gouveia

June 2016
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Manuel Moral Date approved
To God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Their mysterious sacrifice at the cross never ceases to save and amaze me.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The present work is the development of an evangelistic preaching strategy for the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas, Portugal. This strategy consists of presenting the full body of Seventh-day Adventist biblical beliefs through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. In this introductory chapter we will look at the pastoral context in which this project was developed, the problem that motivated the project, the description of the task, the delimitations of the project, and the description of the project process.

Pastoral Ministry Context

Canelas is a parish with 13,459 inhabitants (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2011) located in the area of Vila Nova de Gaia, a city in the northern region of Portugal. It belongs to the district of Porto, the second largest city in the country. Due to its proximity to this larger city, this area might be considered suburban. Seventh-day Adventists have been present in Canelas since 1941, when the pastor O. Ide started holding some meetings in a private home. In 1942 seven people were baptized by Pastor M. Leal, and in 1952 the first Seventh-day Adventist congregation was opened. But the church grew so rapidly that a second larger building was opened in 1964 (Ferreira, 2008, p. 671).
Currently the church has 300 baptized members, of which more than 100 are below the age of 30. The weekly attendance on Sabbath mornings is between 280 and 300 people. A third of the members hold main, or secondary, leadership positions. Traditionally, on Sabbath afternoons, there are local youth meetings that are opened to attendants of every age. These meetings usually have about 80 people present, the majority being church families.

Actually, the Youth Department of this church is one of the most active ones. Two out of four Sundays a month there are several pathfinders’ activities all morning, or the whole day. In these activities about 75 young people are constantly involved. Another strong ministry is the Music Department, with three church choirs from three different age groups who have rehearsals every Sabbath afternoon before the other church meetings.

Every Tuesday at 08:30 p.m., on winter time, and at 09:00 p.m., on summer time, there is a prayer meeting that is attended by 40 to 70 persons.

This congregation gave birth to a new church in a nearby community called Pedroso. The new congregation started in 2001 with 39 members who moved from Canelas for a church planting project. Currently Pedroso has 63 members.

I visited Canelas’ church as a young pastor in the spring of 2006, having been invited to preach in a youth prayer-week. The members informed me that the normal attendance on Sabbath mornings was 300 people, but on weekday meetings it usually dropped to 50 or less. In that week of prayer the attendance increase to 200 people during week nights, and over 350 on the last Sabbath. In the summer of 2012 I was appointed
pastor for the congregations of Canelas, Pedroso, and Avintes, a third congregation located in a close small town, with 142 members.

In May 2010, I was the guest speaker for a one week evangelistic series at the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Avintes. In that same moment, evangelistic meetings were being held all over the country in Seventh-day Adventist congregations, sponsored by the Portuguese Seventh-day Adventist Union of Churches. When the Evangelism Department of this Union sent me the results of the series, I found out that the meetings in Avintes were among the ones that had the biggest numbers in attendance, visitors, and decisions.

With these positive past experiences, I was stimulated to find out about my new assignment as the pastor for this district in 2012. I longed to serve these churches the best way possible, using the gifts that I believe God has given me for public evangelism. This was also the year in which my studies for this Doctor of Ministry program initiated.

**Statement of the Problem**

The Bible reveals that evangelistic preaching must be Christ-centered and cross-centered (Acts 2:29-36; 1 Cor 2:2-4). Seventh-day Adventists claim that Christ and his sacrifice are the core of their beliefs (Knight, 2003/1957). However, in recent years the evangelistic series in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas have been mainly centered on a few biblical doctrines and presented in a theoretical way. As a consequence, my pastoral observation indicates that baptisms and decisions for future baptisms at the end of the meetings are few, especially when considering the potential of the church. I believe that one of the factors that contributes to this condition is the lack of evangelistic preaching that focuses on the love of God revealed in the cross of Christ.
Two church elders also shared with me the concern that in the previous evangelistic series, the whole body of Seventh-day Adventist biblical doctrine was not presented (J. Ferreira & J. Silva, personal communication, July 9, 2012). It had thus been a long time since the church was actively involved in a public evangelism effort that promotes the whole of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs in a Christ-centered way.

**Statement of the Task**

The task of this project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a cross-centered evangelistic preaching model that deals with the whole body of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs in the Adventist Church of Canelas, Portugal. This project was evaluated to determine its impact on the number of baptisms, the number of decisions for baptism, the number of the decisions for Bible study, and attendance, in the evangelistic series.

**Delimitations of the Project**

This project was developed and implemented in the Seventh-day Adventist church of Canelas, in Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal. The study of the problem concerning the thematic of the previous evangelistic series was limited to the evangelistic preaching that occurred from January 2009 to July 2012 in this church. The sole exception was the analysis of a national evangelistic event that occurred at Canelas’ Seventh-day Adventist Church in October 2001.

The evaluation of the cross-centered preaching model was limited to the attendance, number of baptisms, number of decisions for future baptism, and number of decisions for Bible study, during the implementation of the evangelistic preaching project.
Description of the Project Process

The current project will be presented in six chapters, the first one consisting in the introduction. In the second chapter, in order to develop a theological basis for cross-centered evangelistic preaching, the following three topics will be examined in both Scripture and the writings of Ellen G. White: (a) the central role of the cross in the story of redemption, (b) cross-centered preaching in Paul’s ministry, and (c) the divine call for evangelistic cross-centered preaching.

Current literature will then be reviewed in the third chapter, and this will include research on evangelistic preaching, biblical Christ-centered and cross-centered preaching, and Christ-centered appeals.

The fourth chapter will be composed by a more detailed description of the project process. It will start with an analysis of the themes and outcomes of the evangelistic preaching series that occurred in the last few years. It will then proceed with the description of the strategy that will precede the evangelistic meetings. It will also show how each evangelistic sermon will center on the cross of Christ, and provide a schedule for the whole evangelistic program.

In the fifth chapter the narrative of the implementation of the project in the church will be provided. In the sixth and final chapter, a summary of the whole work will be presented featuring the outcomes and learnings that occurred. Some final recommendations will also be made.
Definition of Terms

_Ecclesiastical Region(s)._ Refers to a region, or regions, that are a part of the Seventh-day Adventist Portuguese Union of Churches. This Union has five regions: Northern Region, Central Region, Lisbon and Tagus Valley Region, Alentejo and Algarve Region, and Madeira and Azores Region.

_Evangelism Department._ An office within the Seventh-day Adventist national, or local, Church that respectively coordinates national, or local, general evangelistic activities.

_Personal Ministries Department._ An office within the Seventh-day Adventist national, or local, Church that respectively promotes national, or local, initiatives to that empower the personal efforts made by church members to reach others with the gospel.

_Literature Department._ An office within the Seventh-day Adventist national, or local, Church that respectively coordinates national, or local, ministries that deal specifically with Christian literature.

_Music Department._ An office within the local congregations of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Portugal that coordinates music ministry.

_Evangelistic Preaching._ Biblical preaching that focuses in reaching human beings that are not yet converted to Jesus Christ with the gospel message (Burrill, 2014; Moyer, 2012; Richard, 2005). Due to the utmost centrality of this expression to this project, a more comprehensive definition is given in the third chapter.

_First Elder._ In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the first elder is the local lay leader elected every year, or every two years, by the congregation. He serves the church voluntarily, under the leadership of the pastor, in supporting the pastoral work.
Depending on the number of members, number of elders, and the pastor’s schedule, his/her functions may vary. However, he/she normally offers spiritual and administrative guidance to the church’s leadership and body in addition to, or in the absence of, the pastor (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist, 2010).

*The Gospel.* Greear (2011) defines the gospel as “the announcement that God has reconciled us to Himself by sending His Son Jesus to die as a substitute for our sins, and that all who repent and believe have eternal life in Him” (p. 5).

*Seventh-day Adventist Portuguese Union of Churches.* Administrative body of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that oversees all the local Seventh-day Adventist congregations and Ecclesiastical Regions in Portugal.

*The Cross.* The sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. Unless otherwise stated, or clearly shown by the context, this expression also comprises the resurrection of Christ and the power of his sacrifice to save humanity.
CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATION FOR
CROSS-CENTERED PREACHING

In order to establish a solid biblical basis for cross-centered evangelistic preaching, some of the core aspects in the Bible concerning the cross of Christ and the preaching of the cross will now be analyzed. First, the central role of the cross in the story of redemption will be studied. Secondly, the ministry and writings of the apostle Paul, who has greatly emphasized cross-centered preaching, will be examined. Finally, God’s call for cross-centered evangelistic preaching, especially in the last-days of earth’s history, will also be considered.

The Centrality of the Cross in Redemption

The emphasis on the cross throughout the Old and New Testaments is certainly indicative of God’s desire for Christians to keep the sacrifice of Christ as a priority in their approach to Bible-teaching and doctrine (Gen 3:15, 21; 22:8; Isa 53; Lev 17:11; John 1:29; 1 Cor 2:2; 15:3, 4). The story of redemption portrayed throughout Scripture is permeated with the central event of the cross.

cross” (p. 5). Stott (1990) shows, “all Scripture bears witness to Christ, especially to his
death, resurrection and world-wide mission” (p. 76). The serious study of both the Old
and New Testaments will lead to a conclusion similar to what Charles Spurgeon once
stated in a cross-centered sermon: “All theology sympathizes with the cross and is
colored and tinctured by it” (Wubbels, 1995, p. 100).

Even so, not all theologians sympathize with one another when they try to explain
the meaning of the cross. Historically, innumerous attempts have been made by Bible
scholars in order to express the theological complexities of the atonement made at the
cross. Let us now turn to a brief overview of the main theories in this domain.

The Center of Theological Debates

The fact that God offered his Son to redeem humanity is the most fundamental
truth transmitted in the Bible. However, it is not possible to explain it entirely through
human language. Verily, “the death of Christ is bigger than any definition, deeper and
more profound than any rationale” (Dederen, 1981, p. 315).

Beilby and Eddy (2006) show that the sacrifice of Christ has been generally
explained through three different paradigms: (a) the Christ victor paradigm; (b) the
objective paradigm; and (c) the subjective paradigm. The first paradigm “can be
described as Satanward in its focus” (p. 12). The emphasis is placed in the divine
controversy and victory against the devil. This view has been prominent in the church for
the first millennium of Christianity. A more specific and well known model of this view
is the ransom theory. According to this specific view, Jesus’ death was a ransom accepted
by the devil that ultimately destroyed his power.
All theories that fall into the second paradigm are “Godward” in their focus. This means that objective theories consider “the work of Christ as primarily addressing a necessary demand of God” (Beilby & Eddy, p. 14). The main theories that generally fall on this category are the satisfaction theory, attributed to Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109); the penal substitution theory, that finds its roots in the writings of John Calvin (1509-1564); and the moral government theory, introduced by Hugo Grotius (1583-1645).

The subjective paradigm theories “are held together by the common conviction that the primary focus of the atonement is humanward” and that the “first and foremost” purpose of the “atoning work of Christ” is “to effect a change in human beings” (Beilby & Eddy, p. 18). The most well-known subjectivist is Peter Abelard (1079-1142), father of the so-called moral influence theory. Faustus Socinus (1539-1604) has proposed still another interpretation of the atonement that falls into the subjective paradigm, known as the moral example theory. Although its origins go back several centuries, the subjective paradigm has found “a new appreciation” in “modern liberal theology” (p. 19).

In their work, Beilby and Eddy (2006) have managed to put together a dialogue between theologians who currently emphasize one of the previous three paradigms. Interestingly, another model is also presented, referred to as “the kaleidoscopic view,” and developed by the contributions of Joel Green. According to this view, “the wide variety of New Testament atonement images” leads “us to conclude that” none of the different paradigms “has a claim to priority… and that to emphasize only one is to misunderstand the atonement” (p. 21).
Similar conclusions had already been presented by Dederen (1981). For this author, in the New Testament, the cross is never “reduced to one comprehensive and final reasoning” but it conveys “a message of inexhaustible significance” (p. 315).

Substitution is “central” to the New Testament writers and “The cross… has an objective dimension.” At the cross “God actually does something” impossible for humans to do for themselves. Through the cross, repentant sinners are “accepted before God as if” they “had not sinned” (Dederen, p. 313).

But Jesus’ sacrifice brings “not only a rescue but also a cure.” It “is designed to kindle a loving response in the hearts of us sinners.” The cross permits God to enter the hearts of human beings and transform them “from within.” At the cross “the believer finds not only an objective atonement for sin but also deliverance from the power of sin. This is the truth in the subjective… theories of the atonement.” Dederen goes on to say that the major frailty of every attempt to explain the cross, even his own, is “the failure to represent adequately the demand of the cross. What Jesus did for us and what He does in us must be kept in proper balance” (p. 314).

Perhaps the difficulty that theologians find in properly setting forth these two dimensions of the cross is tied to the fact that they are sinners who struggle with these issues in their experiences of faith. Knight (2008c; 2008b) recognized that his publications on the subject developed primarily from his personal concerns and struggles. Human limitations, however, are also a good incentive to remember “the need of continually reverting from human theories to the original statements in Scripture itself, which… satisfy as nothing else can” (Dederen, 1981, p. 315).
The Roman “centurion and those with him” keeping watch over Jesus were so impressed by the *objective* death of Christ that something *subjective* took place in their minds and they exclaimed: “Truly this was the Son of God” (Matt 27:54). My personal conviction is that the proclamation of the cross through the *objective* statements found in the Bible concerning the death of Christ and its meaning will be able to prompt *subjective* responses in human hearers who chose to respond (Rom 10:17).

What was stated above does not mean that theological studies are not important. It is crucial to understand the statements of Scripture as they relate to one another in order to express the biblical message in the most clear and faithful manner. A more developed analysis of the specifications and major contributors to each theory of the atonement surpasses the limitations of this work. Moreover, it is difficult to adopt a certain view without being labeled with one of the theories that were shortly presented so far.

However, I personally consider highly valuable the contributions made by one author that has extensively dealt with the subject of the cross. In the writings of Ellen G. White, one of the co-founders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the cross is considered as the central reality in the divine plan of redemption, a plan triggered by the cosmic battle between God and Satan (Knight, 1997; White, 1903). This does not mean that she is to be identified with the Christ victor paradigm, or with any of the others.

The penal substitution view seems to be “the dominant theme in Ellen White’s thoughts about the atonement” (Whidden, 1995, p. 53), nevertheless “there is not one historic interpretation” of the cross “under which” her views “can be exclusively categorized” (p. 49). The great controversy story, so present in her theology, serves as

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1 Unless otherwise stated, all Bible quotes are drawn from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson.
background for the story of the cross and sheds light on the various aspects of the work of Christ. With her approach, Ellen G. White was able to bring out the best of each particular theological view about the cross (pp. 47-54).

Convictions drawn from years of personal Bible study and from the analysis of specific literature led me to conclude that the cosmic conflict lenses provide an excellent way, if not the best, to look at the cross. I believe that in order to understand the centrality of the cross in redemption it is crucial to trace its relevance in the story of the cosmic conflict between God and Satan, without forgetting the implications of this conflict for humanity. We will now turn to this fundamental Bible topic.

The Climax of the Cosmic Conflict

Early in the Bible the cross is foretold as God’s answer to sin. When Adam and Eve where tempted by the serpent and fell transgressing God’s law, thus becoming condemned to death (Gen 2:17; 3:1-6), God promised that the “Seed” of the woman would eventually “bruise” the “head” of the serpent. But this would not be done without suffering to the “Seed,” since the serpent would be permitted to “bruise His heal” (Gen 3:15). The Seed of the woman pointed to Jesus Christ and the serpent to Satan (Rev 12:1-4, 9). Consequently, the event foretold by God would bring liberation to humankind, suffering to Christ, and destruction to the devil.

This is why the prophetic words found in Genesis 3:15 can be rightly called a “glorious promise” (Hodgkin 2008/1909). Stanley (2010) comments that when humanity lost “a world we can only imagine to the world we know” these words offered “the promise of grace personified, grace that will one day enable us to reenter a world where sin is no more and death is undone” (p. 17). Richards (2005/1958) calls this promise,
“The first sermon that was ever preached” (p. 147). It was a sermon centered on the cross, filed with hope for humanity.

However, it also revealed that the event that would bring freedom from evil to humankind would also become the climax of the ongoing cosmic conflict between God and Satan. An overview of Lucifer’s rebellion will now be presented in order to reveal why the cross of Christ was the best response to it.

**Rebellion in Heaven**

Because of sin, humanity lost the power given by God to rule over planet earth (Gen 1:26-28; Luke 4:6). God’s Creation was somehow usurped by Satan who has become “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31). While still in heaven, Lucifer had begun a self-exalting rebellion against the Creator. Being a “covering cherub” created by God, this angel started to feel unhappy with his exalted position. He wanted more, and “became filled with violence” against God. Apparently, he strived to establish an alternative government for the angelic host, in which he was to become the center of adoration (Eze 28:16, 17; Isa 14:12-14).

According to Myers (2013), the Bible shows that prior to his rebellion Lucifer’s function in heaven was to protect the divine government by protecting God’s law of love. But when the covering angel revolted against God he “began to turn against the very law he was to protect” (p. 13). He started to believe and teach that holy angels were in no need of laws in order to be good. They were able to discern between right and wrong for themselves and to become like God (Ezek 28:14, 15; Exod 25:8, 9, 18-21; Rom 13:8-10; 1 John 3:4; Isa 14:12-14).
Knight (2008c) also showed that Lucifer’s attack on God implicated a direct assault on his law and that this has become evident to several other leading Bible scholars.

It is reasonable to think that the arguments against the law used by Satan on earth to deceive Humanity were similar to the ones used in heaven to deceive the angels. These were probably based on the idea that God was being restrictive, denying his creatures’ additional joy and knowledge (Gen 3:1-5). Lucifer strived to make the angels believe that there was a greater benefit in disobedience to God than in obedience. In his rebellion he managed to draw to his cause one third of the angels (Rev 12:4; Job 38:7; Dan 8:10).

**The Patience of God**

Knowing from the beginning where the insurgency would lead, God could have destroyed those who opposed him. However, given the nature of the rebellion, this would not be a safe course of action. Lucifer had placed doubts concerning the character and law of God in the mind of the heavenly beings. His tactic involved lying to represent God as being selfish and arbitrary. He sought to lead others creatures like him to conclude that it was possible to attain higher states of knowledge while disobeying the Creator (John 8:44; Gen 3:1-5).

If God had decided to destroy Lucifer and those who started to support him in heaven, the doubts raised about God’s character would persist in the minds of the other angels. They would be tempted to serve and obey God out of fear (White, 1911).

However, the nature of God and of his law is essentially love (1 John 4:8, 16; Matt 22:37-40). He would not have a Universe created out of love and living out of fear.
Destroying the rebels in the beginning “would have only spread the infection of fear, distrust, and disharmony that Satan had originated” (Knight, 2008c, p. 24). This is why God permitted the rebellion to continue and decided that prior to the destruction of all evil Satan’s character should be exposed before the whole Universe (Ezek 28:17-19).

This would not be done in heaven, although. The angelic rebels and their leader where not permitted to reside in God’s presence any longer. They were expelled from heaven and when Humanity fell the earth became their dwelling place (Rev 12:8, 9).

The fall of humankind, although tragic, became the perfect opportunity for Satan to reveal the outworking of the principles of his rebellion. Paul called Satan “the god of this age” (2 Cor 4:4), and Myers (2013) comments, “The devil was given an opportunity on this earth to show how he would run a kingdom if he were ‘God’” (p. 21).

**Being Like God**

The Bible gives evidence of the divinity of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, his active intervention in Creation, and the hatred that Satan has towards him since the beginning of the cosmic conflict between good and evil (John 1:1-3, 14; Col 1:15-17; Rev 12:4-7). The fact that Lucifer especially opposed Christ in heaven is encoded in Scripture in a way that the attentive reader may understand. It is interesting to note five occurrences in the Bible where the name Michael appears fighting the forces of evil (Dan 10:13, 21; 12:1; Jude 9; Rev 12:7).

Commenting on Revelation 12:7, where the Bible portrays the “war” that “broke out in heaven” between “Michael and his angels” and “the dragon and his angels,” Stefanovic (2009) writes, “The context indicates that Michael, the commander of the heavenly hosts, is Christ himself” (p. 395). The name Michael, from the Hebrew, mikā‘ēl,
means “Who is like God?” (p. 393). If we remember the inception of evil in Lucifer’s “heart,” his thoughts were “I will be like the Most High” (Isa 14:13, 14). So the Bible clearly shows that the cosmic controversy is especially about one person who is like God: Michael, or Christ; and one person who desires in his heart to be like God: the dragon, or Satan (Rev 12:9).

This aspect of Lucifer’s rebellion was distinctly brought to light by White (1890) who stated that the envy in Lucifer’s heart was directed to the position and power of Christ. This author also affirms that the creation of Humanity emerged from a decision by the divinity which had the final objective of filling the void in heaven following the expulsion of the rebel angels. After a period of “test and trial” God would “repopulate heaven with the human family, if they would show themselves obedient” (White, 1996, p. 287).

Furthermore, “the creation of the earth and its inhabitants” was to be a special occasion in which Christ would play a central role exercising “divine power.” This would affirm his divinity while also showing his loving submission to God the Father. In all his work Christ “would not seek power or exaltation for Himself contrary to God’s plan, but would exalt the Father’s glory and execute His purposes of beneficence and love” (White, 1890, p. 36).

**Hope for Fallen Humanity**

Adam and Eve were created as moral beings by a moral God. In Eden God’s moral law for them consisted mainly in a test of loyalty, trust, and love. The tree of which they were not supposed to eat was not so much a limitation to their freedom, but a clear evidence of that freedom. It provided an exit from the life given by God (Gen 2:15-17).
Since “God is love” (1 John 4:8), he would not force Adam and Eve to serve him, nor give them a law that would be impossible to obey.

But when Satan rebelled he affirmed that God’s law “could not be obeyed” and “that justice was inconsistent with mercy.” If the divine law was transgressed, it would be impossible for a just God to forgive the transgressor. And since the law could not be obeyed, God was a tyrant. When Adam and Eve sinned, Satan claimed that they could not be pardoned because each “sin must meet his punishment.” He had been banished from heaven, and Humanity should also “be forever shut out of God’s favor” because if God would forgive them he would not be just (White, 1898, p. 761).

However, Humanity was in a different situation than the devil and his angels. Lucifer, abiding in the presence of divinity, had sinned in full knowledge of God’s love and glory, but humankind had been deceived. There was hope in the possibility of drawing the love of Humanity back to God by a revelation of God’s infinite love for his creatures (White, 1898).

The fact that God offered his Son became the greatest evidence of his love, even for sinners. It also became the way to make them turn away from sin in repentance, sensing that the inexplicable love of God deserves their strongest, although imperfect, love (John 3:16; Rom 2:4; 8:32; 1 John 4:10, 19).

**The Vital Attraction of the Cross**

Referring to his crucifixion, Jesus said: “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to Myself” (John 12:32). In a sermon centered on this text, Spurgeon affirmed that “There is an attractive power about our Lord’s person, and about
His life, and about His teaching, but still the main attractive force lies in His death upon the cross” (Wubbels, 1995, p. 13).

This death offered by the eternal love existing in God’s heart should attract and make love spring in the human heart for everlasting life (1 John 4:10, 19). However, the sacrifice offered by the divinity at the cross had larger purposes than merely to redeem and attract Humanity.

Considering the context of Christ’s affirmation, when “certain Greeks” wished “to see Jesus” (John 12:20, 21), Kruse (2003) comments that his words pointed to the fact that through the cross “people of all ethnic backgrounds would put their faith in him” (p. 268). Although this view is biblically consistent (Eph 2:11-19), it is also limited. In John 12:32 the word “peoples” is supplied by the translator and it may induce the reader to confine to Humanity the application of what Jesus stated.

However, since Jesus was referring to Satan in the previous words (John 12:31), it is only logical to assume that he meant not only the attraction of humankind but also the attraction of heavenly beings. Satan was able to draw angels and humans into his violent rebellion through deceitfulness. This was a fatal attraction because finally those who joined him will be destroyed (Matt 25:41). But God, through the sufferings of Jesus, was able to draw humans and angels to him, the source of everlasting life (1 John 5:12, 20).

For these reasons, the cross can rightly be viewed as the climax of the cosmic conflict between good and evil. According to the apostle Paul, it was at the cross that God “disarmed” Satan and his angels (Col 2:15). A disarmed enemy is surely one about to be totally defeated.
The Revelator of Everyone’s Character

What we have seen so far about the cosmic conflict depicted in the Bible becomes helpful in concluding that the cross of Christ was a magnificent solution, although exceedingly costly, to the cosmic problems raised by sin. In the light that shines from the cross “the hearts of all, even from the Creator to the prince of darkness, are revealed” and eternal decisions are made (White, 1898, p. 57).

In preparing and undertaking the plan of redemption, God placed the cross as the center of attraction to all the celestial beings that wish to remain faithful to him, and to all human beings that wish to repent from their evil ways. But the cross would also become the death sentence to the ones that would persist in rebellion.

By voluntarily becoming human to live a life of obedience, Jesus showed that God’s law of love could be fulfilled in Humanity (Heb 10:5-7; John 15:9, 10; Heb 4:15). He also revealed that submissive obedience to God, even to death, brings life, joy and peace (Phil 2:8-11; John 6:38; 15:11-13; Ps 40:8; 119:165).

The cross demolished all of Satan’s accusations, and revealed his character by contrast to the character of Jesus. Christ, one with the eternal God, descended from the throne of divinity and revealed a loving character of meekness, humility, and sacrifice (Phil 2:5-8; Matt 11:28-30). He was the Creator, but humbled himself. Lucifer, a creature, strived to exalt himself to the throne of God and did not mind the consequences.

In this clear contrast the universe has really seen “who is like God” and who God is. Jesus even promises that he will share the throne of divinity with human creatures that become like him in character (Rev 3:21). In Christ, God is revealed like someone who is eager to share his blessings and not to withhold. The Creator will share his throne and
right to judge with human creatures who accept his grace. These will become the judges that will condemn Satan and his angels, since they know for experience the results of Lucifer’s rebellion (Ezek 28:17; 1 Cor 6:2, 3; Rev 5:8-10; 20:4).

The cross is a “mighty argument” showing to the universe that Lucifer’s deadly choices are “in no wise chargeable upon the government of God” (White, 1911, p. 500). In Jesus’ sacrifice God’s character was shown to be merciful and just. By mercy God forgave the sinner, and by justice he condemned sin in his own sinless Son, who carried Humanity’s sin (Ps 85:10; Heb 2:17; Rom 3:25, 26; 8:3; 1 Pet 2:24).

The cross reveals that God’s law of love is “immutable” or Jesus would not have to die as a substitute for human transgressors (White, 1911, p. 503). The cross is a revelation of the “holiness” of God who could not ignore transgression. He had to “inflict punishment or assume it. And He choose the latter course, as honoring the law while saving the guilty” (Forsyth, 1997/1909, p. 98).

This last affirmation prompts still another profound conclusion. In the cross God revealed to the whole universe that he was willing to suffer for others to the utmost. If possible, he would die in order for his creatures to live, and in a certain way he did. Referring to numerous examples, in his work on the cross of Christ, Stott (2006/1986) shows how “theologians ancient and modern, representing different traditions, have seen the necessity of emphasizing that God himself was there on the cross” (p. 152).

Obviously, the literal death of God is an impossibility since he is “immortal” (1 Tim 6:16). Nevertheless, the Bible teaches that God was in Christ when he lived and when he died. God was revealing himself through him (2 Cor 5:19; Col 2:9; Acts 20:28; John 1:18). Referring to this reality White (1903) comments, “The cross is a revelation to
our dull senses of the pain that, from its very inception, sin has brought to the heart of God” (p. 263).

Satan, on the other hand, showed that he would be willing to eliminate God, the source of life to the universe, if he had that opportunity. When God became man in Jesus, Satan attacked him and finally killed him (John 1:14; 13:2; Rev 12:4). By murdering Jesus, one without sin, the devil showed the injustice and evilness of his character.

But this cost him the “last link of sympathy” that heavenly beings could possibly nurture for him (White, 1898, p. 761). He was no longer able to accuse the faithful Christians before the angels of heaven, nor claim them as his possession (Rev 12:10, 11).

Through the cross, Jesus conquered to God the unswerving love and loyalty of human and heavenly beings. The destruction of Satan, that would have brought fear in the beginning, will become something that the entire universe agrees with and longs for. In the final moment before Satan’s destruction (Rev 20:7-15), the cross will be “revealed” in a “panoramic view,” along with the major scenes of the cosmic conflict. The devil’s character of pride, selfishness and sadism will be manifested in such clearness, that he will become “the object of universal abhorrence” (White, 1911, p. 670).

Through a vision of the cross every intelligent creature, even those who will perish, will finally bow down before Christ, admiring his irresistible character, and confessing his lordship for the glory of God (Phil 2:5-11; Ps 22:29). The devil showed all his malignity on the cross and “has been cast down.” Jesus showed all his love on the cross and “has prevailed” (Rev 12:10; 5:5).

The centrality of the cross in redemption is demonstrated by its centrality in Christian theology with its different views, and it is also evident in the cosmic conflict.
between God and Satan. Looking at the cross all intelligent creatures have a full demonstration of their Creator’s character. The knowledge of the cosmic reasons that led to the sacrifice of Jesus, and the realization of God’s love, is thus demonstrated as essential in successful evangelistic preaching. Only the cross can truly conquer to God sinful human hearts.

**Cross-centered Preaching in Paul’s Ministry**

The apostle Paul is one of the most prolific New Testament writers. In his epistles he emphasized, explained, and preached the significance of the cross. Gaffin (2004) shows that the cross is at the “heart” of “Paul’s theology” (p. 141). He also states that for the apostle, although “Historically distinct… from his death,” Christ’s resurrection is “inseparably connected” to it (p. 142). A view that I believe to be very consistent with his writings (Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:3, 4).

Morris (2006/1965) considers that for Paul the cross “was absolutely central… All that Paul was, and all that Paul hoped for centred on the action of God in the cross.” He “had come to see in the cross the centre of all things” (p. 181). Paul believed that Humanity, left alone, is eternally condemned. “That is why Christ’s work on the cross is so very important, and that is why the proclamation of the gospel is so urgent” (p. 182). Litfin (2015/1994) expressed similar ideas when stating that the cross “was central to all of Paul’s proclamation… Jesus’ death was the consistent centerpiece of his apostolic message (Rom 10:9-13) wherever and to whomever he preached it” (p. 224).
From Legalism to Cross-centered Preaching

The critical importance that Paul attributed to the cross was without a doubt linked to his own conversion experience. His encounter with Christ produced a radical transformation in his beliefs. He could now perceive a formerly unknown power in his life, and believed that power came from the cross. This experience was the driving force influencing his writings on the atonement (Morris, 2006/1965, p. 181).

“The radical message of the cross transformed Saul of Tarsus and changed him from a persecutor of Christians to a tender believer and an apostle of the faith” (Tozer, 2009/2005, p. 3). The cross became “the defining reference point from which all else” took “its cue” (Tidball, 2001, p. 184).

In his epistle to the believers in Philippi, Paul gives the reader a hint about what would have been his legalistic feelings prior to his conversion, and how he had abandoned them to focus only on the grace of God revealed at Calvary (Phil 3:4-11). Referring to those who were trying to make Christians comply with the Jewish rite of circumcision in order to be saved, Paul calls them “dogs,” “evil workers,” and “enemies of the cross of Christ” (vv. 2, 18). They were inducing Christians to trust in human merit and thus turning them away from Christ.

The words of Paul seem to indicate that he himself had been subject to such erroneous views, relying on his circumcision, nationality, tribe, religious sect, zeal, and outward obedience to the law. But discovering God’s plan of salvation through the cross of Christ made him consider all of these things “as rubbish” (v. 8). His hope was now placed in “the imputed, transferred righteousness from God,” which he received by his faith in Christ and was always willing to announce (Bridges & Bevington, 2007, p. 183).
Another of Paul’s statements on justification by faith that magnifies the cross is found in Romans 3:21-26; a passage considered by some theologians as central in the entire Bible (Carson, 2010b; Tidball, 2001). Fitzmyer (2008/1993) stated that this passage, also including verses 27 to 31, formulates “the essence of Paul’s gospel: salvation for all human beings by grace through faith in Christ Jesus” (p. 341). It speaks of “the need and impotence of humanity; and” of “the cross and achievements of Christ” (Tidball, 2001, p. 185).

Morris (2012/1988) considers that what Paul wrote in these verses “is possibly the most important single paragraph ever written” (p. 173). He also comments, “It is central to” Paul’s “understanding of the Christian way that no human merit can ever avail before God, but that the death of Christ on the cross changes all that” (p. 172). I believe that it is plausible to think that a man can only write such things when he is imbued in awe for what Christ has done on the cross. Legalism could not find any place in Paul’s heart because he was marveled by God’s grace.

Thus the cross was central in Paul’s theology and writings, central in his view of himself and of God (Gal 6:14). But it surely became central in his preaching also. Let us now look at one episode in Paul’s life where the preaching of the cross was exalted like never before.

From Athens to Corinth

Some have considered that Paul’s preaching in Athens, before traveling to Corinth, was a failure in view of the few conversions that took place (Acts 17:22-34). Commenting on this biblical passage, Peterson (2009) states, “Paul’s time in Athens was not a complete failure and the implication is that he left behind a small group of
believers” (p. 504). Even trying to be positive, there is a negative inference in this author’s words about the evangelistic endeavor of Paul at the Areopagus. However, others have looked at this event differently. Stott (1990) states, “it is inaccurate to dub Paul’s visit to Athens a failure” (p. 289).

The careful Bible-student will remember that Paul admittedly made himself “all things to all men,” in order to “by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22). Referring to his previous talks at Pisidian Antioch and at Lystra, Sanders (1999/1984) observes that Paul “constantly adapted himself to his audience” and that “addressing Greek philosophers” he met them where they were without compromising the gospel message (pp. 114, 115).

Sanders (1999/1984) also highlights the importance of the conversion of two distinct Athenians. He stresses the fact that we do not possess the entirety of Paul’s sermon, and that the apostle’s preaching was interrupted. For this author, the lack of conversions was not due to Paul’s failure in preaching, but to the Athenians’ failure to accept the message. Nevertheless, he admits “Paul was probably disappointed at the reception accorded his message by the majority” (p. 113). A true evangelist is normally not happy when the greater part of his hearers does not respond.

That is why it is plausible to assume that before entering into a new preaching agenda in Corinth, Paul made a self-evaluation about his evangelistic preaching ministry. White (1911) favors this view. She affirms that while in Athens, Paul “had sought to adapt his style to the character of his audience;” he used logic, science, and philosophy. But “as he thought of the time thus spent,” realizing that it had not yielded much fruit, “he decided to follow another plan of labor in Corinth” (p. 244).
This is how Paul arrived at a more firm resolution of relying on God’s power in preaching, a power that could only come from the cross. His own words say it bluntly:

“For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). Surely, Paul had reasons that surpass the above stated for expressing such a resolution. Still, his forceful words seem to reveal that a profound motivation led him to dwell more on the cross. He wished to set aside “the wisdom of men” so that his hearers could embrace “the power of God” (v. 5). “As a result, his labors were highly successful” (Nichol, 1980/1956, Vol. 3, p. 1024), if we compare them to the ones in Athens.

An apparently different view would argue that Paul’s decision “was taken because of the anticipated challenges of proud Corinth, not because of his supposed failure in Athens” (Stott, 1990, p. 290). But I believe that it is possible to speak of improvement in Corinth without speaking of failure in Athens.

A person like Paul was always trying to excel in his service for God (Phil 3:12-14) and a self-evaluation period can be something very positive for an evangelist. Paul did not fail in Athens, but on his way to Corinth he possibly arrived at the conclusion that he could do better with a different kind of approach, even if it was one that seemed much less popular for human reasoning.

From Human Wisdom to Divine Power

In his first epistle Paul dealt with several issues in the Corinthian church that required him to place the emphasis on the cross. There were “contentions among” the members of this church (1 Cor 1:11). They seem to have originated because of different socio-economic backgrounds and status; different opinions concerning knowledge;
confusion about spiritual gifts; lack of harmony when practicing “the Lord’s Supper and 
baptism; different views of authority—including Paul’s own authority; different views of 
the inherited law or Jewish traditions; and different understandings surrounding the 
resurrection and resurrected life” (Sancken, 2009, p. 63).

One of the major issues plaguing the believers was addressed by Paul in both his 
epistles to the Corinthian church. They “were constantly tempted to attach themselves to 
strong leaders and then to look down on others. Fascinated by the rhetoric of learned 
scholars of their day,” they felt “more impressed by form and show than by content and 

But in the beginning of the first letter Paul established a solid foundation for every 
Christian preacher. He placed the emphasis on “the message preached” (1 Cor 1:21), and 
not on the style of preaching. He tried to direct the Corinthians to Christ and his cross, 
rather than to their favorite preacher (vv. 12-17).

Paul showed that “the message of the cross” was a problem for the wise and 
elloquent in society’s standards. It would require believers to abandon their preference for 
human wisdom and to adopt something considered by “those who are perishing” as 
“foolishness” (v. 18). Morris (2008/1985) states, “the message does not please the 
perishing, any more than the simplicity with which it is presented” (p. 49).

However, for those who will escape perdition, “those who are called,” the only 
possible way to salvation is “Christ crucified,” who has become “the power of God and 
the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23, 24). That is why the cross must be prominent in 
preaching. The gospel is more than “good advice” or “information about God’s power. It 
is God’s power” (Morris, 2008/1985, p. 49). Furthermore, “The power in the cross opens
the way for the humblest to know God and to overcome evil, and that is a wisdom superior by far to anything the philosophers could produce” (p. 52).

The fact that Paul himself had some kind of struggle with self-exaltation is evident from his second epistle (2 Cor 12:7-11). But for him there was security in dwelling on the cross. He had already written to the Galatians: “But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). By the end of the opening chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, after exalting God’s power and wisdom in the cross, Paul expressed similar feelings (1 Cor 1:26-31).

The message of the cross destroys human pride and wisdom, while it exalts God’s power to save humanity in Christ. In the first five verses of 1 Corinthians 2, we see that Paul felt it was necessary to remind his loved ones of the essence of his preaching while he had been among them. Instead of alluring them with “excellence of speech or wisdom” he preached to them “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (vv. 1, 2). Morris (2008/1985) comments, “precisely because it was so simple and unpretentious its results convincingly demonstrated the power of God” (p. 55).

Paul chose to concentrate on the “great central truth” of the cross (Morris, 2008/1985, p. 56), and by doing so he was saving others from eternal death and saving himself from self-exaltation in eloquent discourses. Smith (2009) shows, “in ancient Corinth, listening to speeches was a popular form of entertainment.” A good speaker “was well respected in the culture” and “could find himself a very wealthy man” (p. 43). However, being perfectly familiar with their culture, “Paul opted for the simplicity of coming to them with Jesus alone” (p. 44).
This inspired example should definitely guide each evangelist today. As Carson (2004/1993) adequately puts it: “The message of the cross smashes the great idolatries of the ecclesiastical world: our endless self-promotion, our love of mere professionalism, our addiction to well-defined methods” (p. 40). In many occasions “the medium of preaching has replaced the message of the gospel” (Smith, 2009, p. 50). But there is hope for preachers who come humbly to the cross before they try to preach it. Before the power of God can be sensed in the pulpit it must be received in the heart of the one who uses it.

White (1915) comments, “Christ crucified… risen… ascended into the heavens” and “coming again, should so soften, gladden, and fill the mind of the” preacher “that he will present these truths to the people in love and deep earnestness. The minister will then be lost sight of and Jesus will be made manifest” (p. 159).

**The Divine Call for Cross-centered Preaching**

In the name of “God and the Lord Jesus Christ” Paul wrote to Timothy and commanded him to “Preach the word” (2 Tim 4:2). As it was demonstrated above, for Paul the central truth in preaching became “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2). If the Bible is to be preached, the cross is to be foremost in biblical preaching. The cross is the light that enables preachers to understand and communicate the Word of God.

White (1915) states, “in order to be rightly understood and appreciated, every truth in the word of God, from Genesis to Revelation, must be studied in the light that streams from the cross of Calvary.” She then continues by affirming that the sacrifice of Christ “is to be the foundation of every discourse given” by Christian preachers (p. 315).
The Prominence of the Cross in Christian Belief

In the New Testament, “the doctrine” of the cross is the center “of gravity in the Christian World” (Denney, 2010/1902, p. 56). Carson (2010b) shows that when it comes to literary genre, the Gospels are unlike every other category. They are “hard to classify” because, even if we consider them as biographies, none of the first century similar writings discloses that the main character was born to die. If we analyze more recent biographies, such as the ones of Einstein, Muhammad, or Buddha, it is possible to read something about “their deaths, but no one suggests that the purpose of their coming was to die” (p. 151). In the Gospels, however, everything drives “toward the cross and resurrection of Jesus” (p. 152).

The space dedicated in the Gospels to Christ’s last days, to his death and resurrection, shows that the authors were well aware of the fact that the cross was central to Jesus’ understanding of his mission. In “the three Synoptic Gospels” the cross absorbs “between a third and a quarter” of the narrative and John dedicates nearly half of his Gospel to the “Passion” (Stott, 1986/2006, p. 38).

As we have seen already, for the apostle Paul the death and resurrection of Christ were “matters of first importance,” and indeed “They are the basis of everything in Christian belief, conduct, and understanding. We have to get this right, or we have no part of Christianity left” (Carson, 2010b, p. 153).

Much More Than an Icon

The story of the cross has somehow entered in the way Christians see their faith and themselves. The highly symbolic image of the cross has become a cherished icon in almost every branch of Christianity. Apparently, its use as an identifying mark of the
Christian faith dates back to the second century. It testifies of the fact that Christians “wished to commemorate as central to their understanding of Jesus neither his birth nor his youth,” nor his “service” or teachings, “resurrection” or “reign,” neither “his gift of the Spirit, but his death, his crucifixion” (Stott, 2006/1986, p. 27).

Ancient Christians “revered Christ’s cross… They replicated the cross in humble homes and grand basilicas, on catacomb walls and stone sarcophagi.” This is seen today as something that actually “increased their devotion to Christ” (Couchman, 2009, p. 14). But these ancient believers did not only drew, carved, engraved and painted the cross, they “also made the sign of the cross on themselves or others” (Stott, 1986/2006, p. 27). Originally, this was done abundantly in everyday life “to identify and indeed sanctify each act as belonging to Christ” (p. 28). Couchman (2009) believes, “Exploring the art, uses and history of the cross can validate its centrality to the Christian faith” (p. 15).

However, the fact that a symbol becomes widely spread does not mean that its significance does also. In reality, when it comes to the Cross, the contrary might dangerously be true. Today, crosses adorn our churches and religious objects. This kind of images has become familiar and produces no horror. But in the first century the crucifixion was a terror-filed reality, one that is difficult for us to grasp. Somehow, we must bridge “this cultural distance” and “return again and again to the cross of Jesus Christ if we are to take the measure of our Christian living… service” and “ministry” (Carson, 2004/1993, p. 13).

In his work on crucifixion, Hengel (2011/1977) shows that for ancient Jews, Romans, Greeks and barbarians, “the cross was not just a matter of indifference, just any
kind of death. It was an utterly offensive affair, ‘obscene’ in the original sense of the word” (p. 22).

Tozer (2009/2005) calls the cross “the most revolutionary thing ever to appear among men,” and explains that its power consisted in its brutal destruction of its victims. After Christ death, “the apostles went out to preach His message, and what they preached was the cross” (p. 3). This preaching had power to change lives because the cross destroys the old sinful life of the believer and enables God to raise her/him to a new life. Unfortunately the “power” of the cross “departed when it was changed from a thing of death to a thing of beauty.” Today, the symbol of the cross is venerated “by millions who know absolutely nothing about its power” (pp. 3, 4).

Tozer (2009/2005) goes on to say that, in what relates to the cross, Christianity has shifted from “the standards of the New Testament” to such an extent that “a new reformation” is necessary in order to “restore the cross to its right place in the theology and life of the Church” (p. 5). Faithfull cross-centered preaching might just be one of the instruments that God can use in order to produce such a reformation. Actually, the first public sermon after the resurrection of Christ, one that produced a massive revival, was cross-centered. We now turn to the lessons we may learn with this occasion.

Cross-centered Preaching at the Pentecost

Preaching the Word of God is actually preaching Christ (John 1:1-3; Rev 19:13). Surely, there is more to preach about Christ than just his death. But one cannot correctly preach Christ while omitting his sacrifice. “The crucifixion is the heart of the Christian faith” (Morris, 2008/1985, p. 51). After Christ’s ascension, the apostles’ “preaching
centered on the eternally valid reality of the death of Christ and his resurrection… Christ crucified was their principal proclamation” (Bridges & Bevington, 2007, p. 75).

The first of these cross-centered sermons was proclaimed by the apostle Peter on the “Day of Pentecost” (Acts 2:1, 14-39). His sermon is a crucial Bible-evidence of the validity and power of a sermon centered on Christ, and especially on his death. Although we do not possess the entirety of his sermon (v. 40), Luke’s inspired account is filled with important principles.

Bridges and Bevington (2007) have shown that Peter’s discourse revealed the sinlessness of Christ and his substitutionary death. “The cross was planned from before the foundation of the world as the place where God would inflict his Son with the curse and wrath due redeem sinners as their sin was charged to him.” But since Christ was without sin, death could not hold him. He was the only one who “could fully atone for our sin and not be held by it forever” (p. 78).

After commenting on Peter’s mention of Joel’s prophecy (Acts 2:16-21) Stott (1990) comments on his testimony concerning Jesus and divided it in six sections: Christ’s life and ministry divinely “attested by God” (v. 22); Christ’s death “by lawless hands” and yet by divine “purpose” (2:23); Christ’s resurrection, foretold by the prophets and witnessed by the apostles (vv. 24-32); Christ’s exaltation and the outpouring of his Spirit (vv. 33-36); Christ’s offer of salvation through repentance (vv. 37-39); and Christ’s new community (vv. 40, 41).

Based on his findings, Stott (1990) presents some conclusions that he believes should guide the presentation of gospel in more recent years. He begins by saying that “we must focus on Jesus Christ” (p. 79) because “It is impossible to preach the gospel
without proclaiming Christ.” He then poses the question: “But how?” And gives the answer: “First, the gospel events, namely the death and resurrection of Jesus” (p. 80).

So Peter’s sermon was Christ-centered, and above all, cross-centered. And this is the first and foremost lesson to learn for those who desire to preach the Gospel. It was in Peter’s time, and it still is in ours. “The magnetism of the cross has by no means diminished with the passing of the centuries” (Nichol, 1980/1956, Vol. 3, p. 1,024).

In the third chapter we will revisit the issue of Christ-centeredness and cross-centeredness. However, it is worthy of note that the first Christian sermon ever preached after Christ’s resurrection was not only centered on the person of Christ, but more specifically on his death. The Christian church began with cross-centered sermons.

Cross-centered Preaching in the Last Days

After his death and resurrection, Jesus commanded his disciples to “preach the gospel” in the whole world (Mark 16:15). Previously, he had revealed to them that the preaching of the gospel “in all the world” would anticipate and become the major sign of his return (Matt 24:14). It is possible to find traces of the world mission that Christ gave his disciples in several books of the New Testament. But the evangelistic mandate is mainly portrayed in some key passages located at the end of the four Gospels and in the beginning of the book of Acts (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:44-49; John 20:19-23; Acts 1:4-8).

All of these passages disclose relevant aspects of the disciples’ work in announcing the gospel to the world. But in the gospel of Luke we can find the specific mention to what the disciples were to preach. After reviewing the prophetic writings of the Old Testament about his death and resurrection, Jesus taught that “repentance and
remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations” (Luke 24:47). Some have considered “that Luke does not see the cross as atoning” but “these words connecting forgiveness with the passion” stress something different, while also revealing the “Evangelist universalism” (Morris, 2008/1974, p. 361).

This same cross-centered universalism in evangelistic preaching is also seen in the heart of the last book of the Bible. Paulien (2009) shows “as we study Revelation, we discover that in many subtle ways the heart of the book is about Jesus Christ and the Cross” (p. 89). This is especially sensed when John describes the characteristics of the faithful believers in the end of times and the message they are to preach prior to Jesus’ second coming, the three angels’ message (Rev 14:6-12).

Seventh-day Adventists and the Three Angels’ Message

Seventh-day Adventists “have long understood” the three angels’ message as their divine call for evangelizing the world. They see it as their “theology” and “mission.” This message is “the reason” why “people become Seventh-day Adventists, members of this wonderful remnant church” (Wilson, 2012, p. 57).

In the beginning of this message we discover that Jesus Christ has not abandoned his desire to see the whole world reached with “the everlasting gospel” (Rev 14:6). Although the three angels present a final warning to those “who dwell on the earth” because of God’s “judgment” (vv. 6, 7), and a summons to obedience, this message is not an encouragement to legalism. The remnant believers “will keep their focus on Jesus. What He did on the cross will be crucial to them” (Paulien, 2009, p. 112).
White (1915) states:

Of all professing Christians, Seventh-day Adventists should be foremost in uplifting Christ before the world. The proclamation of the third angel’s message calls for the presentation of the Sabbath truth. This truth, with others included in the message, is to be proclaimed; but the great center of attraction, Christ Jesus, must not be left out. It is at the cross of Christ that mercy and truth meet together, and righteousness and peace kiss each other. The sinner must be led to look to Calvary; with the simple faith of a little child he must trust in the merits of the Saviour, accepting His righteousness, believing in His mercy. (p. 156)

White (1915) further states, “Theoretical discourses are essential, that people may see the chain of truth, link after link, uniting in a perfect whole; but no discourse should ever be preached without presenting Christ and Him crucified as the foundation of the gospel.” By preaching like this “Ministers would reach more hearts” (p. 158). “There is power in the exaltation of the cross of Christ” (White, 1946, p. 187).

Seventh-day Adventists believe that E. G. White, one of the Church’s pioneers, received the gift of prophecy, and consider her ministry and writings to be a continual source of inspiration. Burrill (2014) shows that according to her view, “Adventist evangelistic preachers are to be grace-centered” since “Adventism is a Christ-centered, Cross-centered movement (pp. 31, 32).

Although Seventh-day Adventists are bound by its very name to proclaim the return of Christ, nobody will be ready for the glory of the second coming without having accepted the cross of the first. “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” (White, 1898, p. 660).

And it is also the center of our motivation for evangelism. The great love of God revealed at Calvary will drive last-day believers to preach the gospel in a cross-centered way. They will feel the urgency of God’s love to hasten the coming of Christ calling all human beings to repentance (2 Pet 3:9, 12). Finally the time will come for everyone to
acknowledge “that in the sacrifice of Christ are found the spring and principle of every other mission of love” (White, 2011/1967, p. 319).

**Summary**

The cross is the center of redemption in all the Bible. In it God manifested his love, justice, and mercy, by objectively suffering the chastisement for all of Humanity’s sins in the person of Jesus Christ. Each human being that comes into contact with the sacrifice of Christ is being subjectively drawn to a loving relationship with God. The cross demolished all of Satan’s accusations and revealed to all intelligent beings that evil must be destroyed.

According to the New Testament, the cross was the emphasis in the ministry, writings, and preaching of one of the most gifted evangelists the world has ever seen. The apostle Paul learned that human wisdom and eloquence must hide themselves in the presence of “Christ crucified” (1 Cor 1:23).

The sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the foundation of Christian belief and it is urgent to recover its original significance in today’s pulpits. In its early days, cross-centered evangelistic preaching started a movement called Christianity. In the last days of earth’s history, the preaching of the cross will finish the mission of that movement.

The theological reflection upon these principles was instrumental in the preparation of the evangelistic sermons for this project. Each biblical theme was centered on the sacrifice of Christ so that the love displayed at Calvary could attract the hearers to a loving response. The sermons also had references to the cosmic conflict and to the death of Jesus Christ as the best argument for humans to be delivered from Satan’s
snares. Finally, the knowledge acquired concerning the importance of cross-centered preaching served as a motivational factor for the whole evangelistic team.
CHAPTER 3

LITERATURE RELATED TO CHRIST-CENTERED EVANGELISTIC PREACHING

In order to enrich the present investigation and develop stronger conclusions, a review of current literature on the topics concerning Christ-centered evangelistic preaching follows. First, the major ideas that current scholarship on evangelistic preaching is developing will be discussed. Secondly, some of the sources that specifically address Christ-centered evangelistic preaching will be analyzed, while trying to lay a foundation for a more specific focus of cross-centered evangelistic preaching. Finally, the importance of centering the evangelistic appeal in Christ crucified will be discussed in the light of the few sources available.

Evangelistic Preaching

In this section, a current scholarly definition for evangelistic preaching will be provided. The purpose for evangelistic preaching will also be analyzed in the light of recent studies. Some of the important aspects in an evangelistic sermon will be highlighted, as well as the contemporary evangelistic preaching challenges and possibilities. Specific contributions to these topics by Seventh-day Adventists will be presented.
Current Definitions for Evangelistic Preaching

Current trends in preaching literature show that evangelistic preaching means primarily to proclaim the gospel message publicly to people who have not yet accepted Christ as their personal Savior. Chapple (2000) defined evangelistic preaching as preaching that imparts the saving message of “the incarnation, death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus Christ to those separated from God in a way that denies them initial access to the kingdom of God” (p. 130).

Richard (2005) considers the effort “to get as many non-Christians” as possible in the audience one of the essentials of evangelistic preaching, and comments that it is “very difficult to evangelize believers” (p. 10). He defines evangelistic preaching as “the public proclamation of the Good News of eternal salvation found in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ so that any unbeliever may embrace him as the only God who saves sinners” (p. 73).

Robinson (2009) argues that, for public proclamation to become evangelistic, it must be delivered passionately, by a Spirit-filled person who loves Jesus Christ and the lost. The presentation of the gospel should be clear, “with the plan of salvation explained carefully” (p. 13). An invitation must also be given so that non-Christian hearers may receive Christ, repenting and confessing Him as “Savior and Lord” (p. 14).

In its essence, evangelistic preaching demands a decision from the hearer concerning the gospel message (Shivers, 2010). Even if there are Christian listeners in the audience, this kind of preaching should be so aimed at the unsaved that they would recognize the message concerns them (Moyer, 2012). Surely this should not be done in a
harassing manner. Richard (2005) summarizes, “the spotlight of the evangelistic sermon will, discernibly but not embarrassingly, focus on the unbeliever” (p. 76).

Murray (2012) also agrees with the previous authors, defining evangelistic preaching as the expository preaching of the Word of God motivated by the objective of reaching the unconverted. Finally, Burrill (2014) states, “evangelistic preaching is what preachers are doing when they open the word of God with the purpose of reaching lost men and women and bringing them into a saving relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ” (p. 8).

So the current voices stress the fact that evangelistic preaching is, essentially, preaching the gospel message to non-believers. However, as we shall see further below, the fact that this kind of preaching is primarily aimed at non-believers, or non-Christians, does not mean that the evangelistic sermon will not benefit the hearers that already have made a decision for Christ.

The Message

As to the content of evangelistic preaching, most authors seem to agree that there are some basic doctrinal truths which must be presented. Spurgeon (2010/1922) taught his students that they should not leave aside the gospel doctrinal truth in “special evangelistic services” but to proclaim it “rather more than less” (p. 16).

Packer (2008/1961) suggests that the gospel message has four main essentials and describes them as follows: (a) “The gospel is a message about God,” (b) “The gospel is a message about sin,” (c) “The gospel is a message about Christ,” and finally, (d) “The gospel is a summons to faith and repentance” (pp. 68-81).
Another similar way to preach the fundamentals of the gospel is recommended by Allison and Anderson (2003), who state that five points must be made clear, beginning with: (a) “creation,” and then (b) “our rebellion,” (c) “God’s love,” (d) “our price” (meaning the price we have to pay in following Christ), and (e) “eternal judgment and reward” (pp. 101-110).

Coleman (2011) also suggests that, to construct a definition of evangelistic preaching, it becomes necessary to define “a set of essential gospel truths” that every Christian, especially every Christian preacher, is called to proclaim to the non-believers (p. 134). He provides the reader with a five-point model of these truths defining them as: (a) “The Nature and Character of God,” (b) “The Law of God” (Ten Commandments), (c) “The Sinfulness of Mankind,” (d) “The Saving Work of Christ,” and (e) “Repentance and Faith” (pp. 134-141).

Moyer (2012) narrows these essentials to three by affirming that evangelistic preaching must provide the non-Christian with the knowledge that he is a sinner, that Christ died and arose for him, and that he must trust in Christ alone to save him.

Although implicit in what was presented so far, another key aspect of evangelistic preaching is its intimate relationship with the historical facts regarding Jesus, and with their meaning for humanity. Richard (2005) states, “evangelistic preaching centers on” the person of Christ “as the chosen God-Man and on his substitutionary work in his death, burial, and resurrection for human salvation” (pp. 74, 75). Those events “are both the substance and the catalyst for Christian preaching” (Coleman, 2011, p. 121).

However, in presenting Christ, the evangelist must not separate the historical Jesus from His cosmic saving work. The person of Christ and the doctrines of His
incarnation, atoning sacrifice, resurrection, and heavenly ministry must be presented together in a way that permits the sinner to make a personal application of the gospel message to his life (Packer, 2008/1961, pp. 72-78).

The Environment

This kind of preaching can take place in a church setting, in a public auditorium, on the street (which is not very common in Western countries), or in another context. Different settings will normally have different audiences. Nonetheless, if the evangelistic preaching event happens in a Christian community, the congregation is inevitably included in the content and credibility of the message given (Pope-Levinson & Levinson, 2000).

The way local Christians interact with each other, and the way they live their lives, is an essential aspect of an evangelistic event. If a church is known to be a place where the members love each other and are also active in the community’s social service, this will have a significant impact on the reception of the evangelistic message by the “wider society” (González, 2007, p. 24; Ford, 2007).

When thinking about the ideal environment for an evangelistic preaching event, it becomes necessary to remember that the main purpose of an evangelistic meeting is not to please non-Christians in all their desires. The evangelistic service should be first and foremost focused on the person of Jesus Christ and on seeking the presence of God.

However, the successful evangelistic atmosphere should be hospitable, presenting sermons and worship services adapted to the hearers’ culture. The unconverted must feel attracted to Christ through a friendly ambiance and through positive and enthusiastic greetings. An opportunity ought to be offered so that they may become a part of the
service, without feeling publicly pinpointed. This can be done by songs that are directly addressed to God and by screen images that provide them visual insights into the sermon. Finally, a good evangelistic atmosphere must be filled with reverence towards God, but devoid of formalism (Fasol, Fish, Gaines, & West, 2006).

A Unique Definition for Evangelistic Preaching

Evangelistic preaching has played a major role in the Seventh-day Adventist Church for decades. This is possibly a result of the unique understanding that Seventh-day Adventists have about their specific mission portrayed in Revelation 14:6-12. Having dealt briefly with the biblical foundations for this unique vision of evangelism in chapter two, we will now try to trace it in current literature.

Personally, I have not been able to find many Seventh-day Adventist academic publications that deal specifically with the theory of evangelistic preaching. A quick internet search will reveal that a considerable amount of practical evangelism manuals, and even complete evangelistic series, are available today from numerous Seventh-day Adventist official administrative organizations, or from supporting media ministries.

Literature from the past that deals specifically with evangelistic preaching also seems to focus on the content of the sermons and not in their rationale (Ministerial Association of Seventh-day Adventists, 1940).

A vast majority of Seventh-day Adventist publications are, in fact, another way of preaching the gospel to others, presenting the biblical views of the denomination. It seems that Seventh-day Adventists usually spend much more time preaching
evangelistically, and preparing for it in a practical way, than they do writing about how or why to do it.

Nonetheless, Norton (2005), a Seventh-day Adventist author, states, “Without evangelistic proclamation, there is no reason for the existence of the church” (p. 73). In a rare book that focuses specifically on Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic preaching, Burrill (2014) defends that from the 125 New Testament biblical references that he found dealing with preaching, “122 passages reference evangelistic preaching” and that this should lead us to give “high priority… to evangelistic preaching” (p. 12).

One thing that seems clear is that for Seventh-day Adventists evangelistic preaching is also aimed at non-believers and non-Christians in general (Burrill, 2014; Norton, 2005). However, the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of Scripture has produced in the denomination a strong sense that its unique message, outlined in Revelation 14:6-12, must be preached to every person on earth, including other Christians as well.

This message is proclaimed by a group of faithful followers of Christ in the last days called “the remnant” and “will bring a full and final restoration of the gospel truth” (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005, p. 192). Although acknowledging that “God has His children in all churches,” the message proclaimed by Seventh-day Adventists “is to restore His true worship by calling His people out of the apostasy and preparing them for Christ’s return” (p. 197).

Knight (2008a) outlines the missiological implications of such a view, describing how the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers refused to participate in an interdenominational movement for world evangelization fostered by the major Protestant denominations in the
beginning of the 20th century. Adventists believed that they had a message “all the world needed to hear” (p. 14). Knight argues that losing sight of such vision, drawn from the apocalyptic message of Revelation 14, may lead the denomination to forget its identity.

But apparently this has not happened yet. In a publication designed to prepare Seventh-day Adventist missionaries, the unique contribution of Adventism in world evangelization has been presented, featuring three major areas that spring from Revelation 14:6-12. The first is the emphasis in Christ’s literal, visible, and soon return. The second is the importance of obedience by love to the law of God and discipleship. The third is the message of a holistic restoration of the human being in Christ (Doss, 2009).

Other recent Seventh-day Adventist publications also present echoes of the belief that the message of the three angels (Rev 14:6-12) must be preached in the entire world before Christ’s return, and that this preaching is the distinctive calling of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Brunt, 2011; Burrill, 2014). The current president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists writes, “We have long understood our unique mission, and, in fact, our very character, to spring from Revelation 14:6-12… We are to preach and teach and live the precious three angels’ messages” (Wilson, 2012, p. 57).

The Purpose for Evangelistic Preaching

In order to define evangelistic preaching, it becomes crucial to address its purpose. Having done so partially in what was shown above, some important points still need to be stated and others emphasized.

The essential purpose for evangelistic preaching is to proclaim the gospel, presenting Christ to the sinner who does not know Him so he might repent and avoid
eternal ruin. The desired result of this kind of preaching is the conversion of fallen human beings to God through the cross of Christ. The preaching itself cannot produce conversion, for this is something that only the Spirit of God can do. But the aim of evangelistic preaching, clearly, is to provide the opportunity for conversion to take place and to invite it (Packer, 2008/1961).

The proclamation of the gospel must occur, however, independently of the desired result. Results are not the main indicator determining if the preaching is evangelistic or not. Defining evangelism, Stott (2008/1975) clarifies that its essence “lies in the faithful proclamation of the gospel. It is with a view to persuasion indeed… But it is still evangelism whether in fact men are persuaded to embrace it or not” (p. 62). These thoughts are in accordance with the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of a cosmic purpose for evangelistic preaching.

A Unique Purpose for Evangelistic Preaching

Seventh-day Adventists believe that the preaching of the gospel in the whole world is one of the major signs of Christ’s return. As noted above, they believe that their unique message must be heard by every human being, even those who already call themselves Christians. This does not mean that everyone will be converted to the gospel message. But it means that, in proclaiming the gospel, they are hastening the coming of Christ. The final proclamation of the everlasting gospel must call God’s children out of apostasy and prepare God’s people for an encounter with Christ (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005).
Knight (1999) shows that, after an awakening concerning world-mission in 1888, Seventh-day Adventists have become forever aggressive in their evangelistic efforts. In 1889, they created the Foreign Mission Board in order to “preach the three angels’ messages” in the entire world so “that the end might come” (p. 101).

The Seventh-day Adventist emphasis on this topic has become so strong that, writing on the denomination’s eschatological view, non-Adventist writers Bull and Lockhart (2007) stressed it in dramatic expressions: “The world contains the catalyst of its own destruction: the Adventist Church. The Second Coming will take place only when Adventists have fulfilled the gospel commission and realized God’s perfect ideals” (p. 68). Having preached and heard hundreds of Seventh-day Adventist sermons, I understand that the emphasis often placed on our evangelistic agenda may lead the hearer to this kind of vivid conclusions.

Other Christian denominations are also talking about the need to take the gospel to the world, but their spokespersons seem to emphasize much more the power of God in evangelism and less the role of humanity, even if affirming its importance (Packer, 2008/1961). The mission of proclaiming the gospel to the unreached is seen as something that is on the “heart” of God, something that God is “doing,” a place where He is “going” and, even if He does not need to do so, “He’s inviting us to walk with him as we share a role in his glorious plan” (Piper & Mathis, 2012, pp. 44, 45).

**Evangelistic Preaching in the Church Setting**

We have seen above that evangelistic preaching is primarily concerned with presenting the gospel to non-Christians. That must certainly be the reason why
contemporary writers have become aware of the apparent paradox of preaching the
gospel of Jesus Christ in a Christian environment.

In a not very recent, but significant, publication on evangelistic preaching,
Loscalzo (1995) considers evangelism a part “of the preaching task of pastors in local
congregations,” and alerts us about falling into two opposite tendencies. The first is to
preach only evangelistic sermons in order to evangelize the visitors that may be present.
The second is to never preach an evangelistic sermon “for the benefit of unchurched
visitors” (p. 13).

Shaddix (2003) sees preaching in the local church as a way to nurture the
members’ spiritual growth. While seeing evangelism as a priority in the church’s action,
he discredits the necessity of presenting evangelistic sermons as a main concern. For him,
church growth should be obtained through equipping the members for ministry and not
by adapting the preaching services to the culture of unconsecrated persons.

In a more recent unpublished paper sent to D. A. Coleman, Shaddix
acknowledges that the New Testament gives evidence to unbelievers being present in the
church gatherings, and to the occurrence of conversions in such moments. But he
maintains that evangelistic messages must be occasional, and not one of the main
concerns for the pastor today (Coleman, 2011). However, this lack of emphasis on the
need for evangelistic preaching in church settings is not shared by many of the current
voices who discern several benefits in it.

Allison and Anderson (2003) write that the “individual church as well as the
church as a whole” starts declining when it focuses on church life and not on the Great
Commission (p. 31). They present public proclamation as “a vital and primary means to
lead the lost world to Christ” and affirm that this kind of preaching works in large gatherings. But it “is just as effective in local church, conference or affinity-group settings” (pp. 13, 14). They further and more specifically state that, in the local church, evangelistic proclamation increases the “sense of purpose” by reminding “the church of the importance of reaching a lost world” (p. 81).

Norton (2005) sees evangelistic preaching as a means of “attracting people to the church” and defends that “churches should be evangelistic at heart,” transforming “their pulpits into lamps aiming the illuminating beams of the gospel to the darkened paths on which sinners walk” (pp. 73, 74). More recently, he has confirmed this same thought, affirming that a church pulpit is the place where members are motivated, but it is also the place where the everlasting gospel is communicated to visitors in a persuasive way (Norton, 2010).

Preaching evangelistic messages in the church provides Christians with a good opportunity to bring non-Christian friends and relatives who otherwise would not feel comfortable or specially addressed. Evangelistic preaching might also become a unique occasion for children growing in the church. They are reminded that they must deliberately accept Christ to be saved.

Another reason that sustains evangelistic preaching in the church is that, with time, even committed Christians become vulnerable to the risk of forgetting the depth of God’s grace towards them. They became less Christ-like and less concerned with praying for others who do not know Jesus. Evangelistic preaching can help prevent or remediate such danger, because it refocuses Christian life. When they hear the gospel frequently, Christians “are re-humbled, re-convicted, and re-minded of what they have been saved
from. They re-repent, re-believe, and re-kindle their first love” through passionate evangelistic messages (Murray, 2010).

Coleman (2011) also speaks about the benefits that evangelistic sermons offer for believers. Church members are given new insights of how to witness to the people around them. They learn the key references in the Bible, new illustrations, and motivation for reaching the unconverted. They are also encouraged in their faith and guided in a personal “application of the gospel” to their lives. That is why “evangelistic preaching in the context of the assembly of the local church must be a frequent part of a pastor’s pulpit ministry” (pp. 156, 157).

Moyer (2012) also agrees that the example of the pastor, when he preaches evangelistic messages, influences the members for the acquisition of an evangelistic mentality. He testifies of how evangelistic preaching has personally helped him become “a better speaker to anyone anywhere” (p. 19). In his view, evangelistic preaching is an instrument used by God to save human beings from an eternity without Him. He states that practicing this kind of preaching in a church setting is vital because there are many church attendees that have not yet accepted salvation as a free gift from Christ.

The Evangelistic Sermon

Evangelistic preaching targets a specific audience; one that is not acquainted with biblical truth, or that holds different religious views than the ones presented by the preacher. This is why evangelistic sermons need to be relevant in the content and attractive in the delivery. Secular people value enthusiasm in a speaker, almost regardless of what he says. However, the topics addressed must also respond to the needs of the hearers who “want to know the solutions to their problems and learn about things that
benefit their existence.” This kind of “preaching needs to start where these people are… and to carefully lead them to a full knowledge of the gospel” (Norton, 2005, pp. 64, 74).

**Overcoming Language Barriers**

The language used in an evangelistic sermon is also crucial for its success. The evangelist must remember that those listening are probably not familiar with the themes and expressions of the Bible. He must also remember that he is addressing an audience with different literacy levels. The successful evangelist will use a clear and simple language, striving to “eliminate theological intricacies and pulpit jargon” from his speech (Chapell, 2005/1994, p. 360).

Surely, important theological concepts should be conveyed in proper time and manner. Complex subjects can and should be explained, laying the foundations of every point in a way that will enable the uninformed listener to understand the message. Technical terms may even be presented sporadically, and this will possibly give “the speaker authority and respect among educated listeners.” But he must do so using “known synonyms” and trying to remove every communication barrier (Norton, 2005, p. 77).

Moyer (2012) shows that, in evangelistic preaching, the speaker must not assume that the listeners are familiar with the Bible or with Christian terminology. Non-Christians may not know how to handle a Bible. They might not even be familiar with famous Bible heroes, or with their particular stories. The best thing to do is to explain every specific term used, so “if we err, we err on the side of clarity, leaving less room for misunderstanding” (Moyer, 2012, p. 78).
Form and Illustrations

A definition of evangelistic preaching in the contemporary literature was presented above and the major doctrinal truths that current writers believe must form part of the sermons were stated. The form of presenting these sermons will now be considered.

Two major forms of evangelistic sermons are outlined in current literature: (a) the topical evangelistic sermon; and (b) the expository evangelistic sermon. As their nomenclatures suggest, the topical evangelistic sermon is driven by a topic originated in a Bible doctrine, or in a relevant life-issue. On the other end, the expository evangelistic sermon is based on a more detailed exposition of a particular Bible text.

Richard (2005) states that, while expository messages are best fitted “to reach people from Christian backgrounds,” for audiences that are not familiar with the Bible, or who are not experiencing “positive emotion toward it,” topical evangelistic preaching will be more appropriate. He maintains that the more distant an “audience is from a Christian worldview, the more topical preaching” we should use. Afterwards, when people embrace salvation, we should “nurture them with solid textual exposition” (pp. 124, 125).

Although these statements seem logical, when searching the recent publications on evangelistic preaching, I could find that evangelistic expository preaching is receiving more and more attention from scholars (Coleman, 2011; Fasol, Fish, Gaines, & West, 2006; Moyer, 2012). This probably indicates that evangelistic preaching is being studied more and more in relationship with Christian environments. The emphasized need for evangelistic preaching in church settings seems to give credit to this thought.
Another important aspect in the content of an evangelistic sermon is the need to prevent overemphasizing Bible texts or doctrine in the first sermons that are preached in evangelistic meetings. These starting messages may even not be doctrinal. People “should be introduced to the Holy Writings in a gradual and convincing manner, to first establish its relevance and authority” (Norton, 2005, p. 75).

The use of illustrations is also one of the most recognized key factors in an evangelistic sermon. But some contemporary writers are not just agreeing on the importance of illustrations in evangelism. They affirm that “the story of Jesus, which includes his life as well as the work of the cross and empty tomb, should be central in all evangelistic preaching,” and that “the majority of the content from which the propositions or biblical ideas flow” should be “story” (Allison & Anderson, 2003, p. 115).

Writing about evangelism in Europe, Kandiah (2011) shares his experience about shifting from presenting well elaborated, rational, and logic arguments about the existence of God, to the simple storytelling inspired in the Bible. He states that he spends most of his time “telling stories about Jesus or retelling stories he told to win people’s allegiance to himself” (p. 105).

One of the most recent and well-presented methods of sharing the gospel through the stories of the Bible was presented by Dillon (2012). The author shares how she chooses and adapts the biblical stories for each context, and how she normally follows a chronological order when telling them.

The subject of telling the gospel through story will still be addressed below, in the section about how to preach the cross to postmoderns, since it seems to be one of the
essentials in evangelistic preaching today. Meanwhile, many authors continue to present the classical approach to the illustration process in evangelistic preaching.

Richard (2005) sees illustrations as “a relief” for both the preacher and the audience “during the intensity of the proclamation” (p. 152). For this author, the illustrations must be clear and concise, “as short as possible to explain your point, to make yourself clear, and to accomplish your purpose” (p. 153). He also highlights the importance of using illustrations that are “correct,” whether they be theological or historical, since the listeners may check out the information. Illustrations should also be as “contemporary” as possible, for this will “break the communication distance between” the speaker and the audience, giving the sermon “immediacy and relevance” (p. 154).

The need for relevant illustrations that are drawn from current everyday life events is common to the thinking of several authors. The importance is stressed by the fact that human beings like stories. They are more likely to remember the story than the rest of the sermon, and will generally get bored with a presentation that is not permeated with illustrations. One of the best ways of illustrating evangelistic messages so that the hearers may be reached is to tell real stories of how the gospel transformed people’s lives (Fasol, Fish, Gaines, & West, 2006; Moyer, 2012; Norton, 2005).

**The Importance of Delivery**

The way the sermon is delivered in evangelistic preaching is vital for its success. Scholars have suggested several factors that contribute to an effective delivery when preaching an evangelistic sermon. A loving attitude, appropriate posture and body language, eye-contact, powerful vocal production, tact, brevity, urgency, energy, humor,
enthusiasm, and assertiveness are just a few (Fasol, Fish, Gaines, & West, 2006; Norton, 2005).

One concept that seems to underline the current thinking about biblical preaching, and especially evangelistic biblical preaching, is the need for authenticity in the speaker. The acceptance of the message by the audience will be strongly influenced by the way the presenter lives what is preached. The authenticity of the evangelist’s spiritual life will enable him or her, to preach “sermons that touch the soul” and give credibility to the gospel and the church (Norton, 2005, p. 73).

Nonetheless, in many cases the audience may only have access to the speaker in the moment of the sermon. In these scenarios a factor that plays a major role in revealing the preacher’s spirituality is to determine whom he or she, is trying to promote. Attracting the people’s hearts to him, or to her, may become tempting, but the true evangelist must exalt Jesus Christ. The “purpose of sermon delivery” that becomes “accentuated when we are preaching evangelistically” must be “to maximize the message and minimize the messenger” (Fasol, Fish, Gaines, & West, 2006, pp. 92, 93).

Smith (2009) has dealt with this issue in a very unique way, showing that it is not possible to honor the message of the cross and the Savior who died for our sins, while failing to die for ourselves in the pulpit. He explains that in much of the modern delivery, “the medium of preaching,” that is, the preacher and his or her, style, “has replaced the message of the gospel” (p. 50). Through his words, the path to excellence is reached by pursuing a different course, since he affirms that “as the preacher grows more proficient in his task, less of him will be visible” (p. 17).
Current Challenges and Possibilities

Presently, evangelistic preaching is facing unprecedented challenges and possibilities. Delafield and Gibbs (2009) sharply observed that when “it comes to public evangelism, you don’t have to go far to find an objection to it. There are as many reasons against holding meetings as there are demons who object to evangelism” (p. 12). One of these objections, and probably the greatest nowadays, is postmodernism. In the Seventh-day Adventist Church, different opinions are emerging about how to share the gospel at the present time.

Evangelism and Postmodernity

Paulien (2008) alerted his readers to the fact that postmodernism demands a new approach to evangelism. He states that public meetings, the “crucial factor” in traditional Seventh-day Adventist evangelism, are less relevant today. Preaching events may still play a role in the postmodern conversion process, but the emphasis must be placed on relational evangelism. Public evangelistic meetings will have little impact on postmoderns, who “are not usually comfortable” in such settings. When “working with secular people, Christians should concentrate much more in developing relationships that produce trust than on aggressive approaches that seek immediate decisions” (p. 123).

Paulien (2008) also describes two types of ministry, basing his thoughts in Matthew 5:13, 14. He states that traditional evangelism, like a “city” (Matt 5:14), seeks to attract people out of the world and into the church. But the kind of evangelism that will work the best with postmoderns is the “salt model” (Matt 5:13), in which the members go out into the world to mingle and reach the lost, without losing their Christian principles (pp. 121, 122).
However, in the same year that Paulien published these views, a major public event was organized with one of the denomination’s best known evangelists, Mark Finley. In an interview with Ministry magazine, Finley described how, since 1995, satellite broadcasting has allowed Seventh-day Adventists to spread the gospel to thousands, mainly through public meetings. He explained how the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been a pioneer in using this type of technology on a large scale.

Stressing the importance of full preliminary work with small groups, Bible studies, health seminars, and other outreach ministries, he speaks of evangelistic meetings as something every pastor should look forward to doing. Finally, he shared how the team of that particular 2008 evangelistic event would make the best use of contemporary technology to promote interaction between the speaker and the audience through the internet. When one of the interviewers asked if the team would podcast the event, Finley answered, “Yes, we’ll be podcasting, webcasting streaming video. Every bit of technology that we can use, we’re going to use” (Satelmajer & Hucks, 2008, p. 14).

This kind of program clearly associates relational evangelism, fostered by the preparation for the public event, with the evangelistic preaching meetings. It is interesting to note that, even when emphasizing relational evangelism as a biblical model provided by Jesus’ ministry, contemporary Seventh-day Adventist writers will use biblical examples that combine these two realities: “The disciples of Jesus were sent in pairs to all the towns and places where He was planning to visit and preach the good news” (Tavares, 2010, p. 3).

Norton (2010) recognizes that, normally, secular and postmodern people will not come to church, but he emphasizes the fact that Christians must take the gospel to them.
He also highlights that modern technology is one important way of penetrating new areas. New possibilities to preach the gospel appeared when the radio, television, the telephone, and the internet came on the scene. In Jesus’ day, He preached to about 30,000 people in three and one half years of public ministry. But through satellite broadcasting, in just one hour the modern evangelist can preach to 30 million people.

Norton (2010) also acknowledges the importance of relational evangelism today. He speaks about the need for the warmth of friendship in a time of cold technology, and shows how Jesus worked, producing chain reactions through friendship. Nonetheless, he places considerable emphasis on the *principle of attraction*, explaining that evangelism must draw people to attractive churches, that is, churches with attractive members, attractive preaching, and attractive services, placed in attractive buildings. He then goes on to affirm the use of positive persuasion in communicating the gospel message.

It can be concluded that, even if secular people will not feel naturally attracted to evangelistic preaching, the mission of the Church is still to bring them into contact with that preaching. This can be done by getting people to come to the meetings or offering them the possibility of hearing the message through new technologies. The need for friendship and trust is vital to the process, but this is probably the answer that reconciles Paulien’s views of the “city” and the “salt” ministries. When the church goes out in love, using several forms of outreach, strong relationships are produced and opportunities arise to invite people to hear the public proclamation of the gospel.
New Technology Means New Responsibility

Without a doubt, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is aware that new possibilities are calling for new responsibilities. “God is asking us to use every type of outreach possible to share His message with the world” (Wilson, 2012, p. 10). When C. D. Brooks, a veteran Seventh-day Adventist evangelist, was asked about the skeptical views of some young pastors who think that public evangelism no longer works, he replied that these negative ideas did not “come from God. The best days of evangelism are before us. We are going to see thousands baptized in a day” (Morris, 2012, p. 112).

Certainly, new technologies have a role in the fulfillment of this vision. On its website, Hope Channel, the official web television of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, presents more than a dozen live streaming channels in different languages, that seek to cover not only North America, but also South America, Europe, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific islands (see: www.hopetv.org). It is evident that the programming has evangelistic objectives. Major contributions to it have long been made by Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic preaching organizations like It Is Written (see: www.itiswritten.org), and Amazing Facts (see: www.amazingfacts.org).

Obviously, Seventh-day Adventists are not the only ones using the internet when it comes to evangelism. Christian denominations, in general, are increasingly active in this type of ministry. The community of Christian organizations known as Gospel.com (see: www.gospel.com) is one example of how evangelicals are aware of the importance and possibilities that new technologies are offering. Its webpage offers a wide list of links to internet ministries that share the gospel worldwide (see: www.gospel.com/ministries).
Another example is the former Internet Evangelism Coalition, recently turned into Need Him Global. The website for this coalition has recently shifted from an online resource center to promote web-evangelism to an evangelistic website designed to reach seekers (see: www.needhim.org). In the final report of a survey conducted to start measuring the results of this coalition, Brown (2007) states it “exists to stimulate and accelerate Web-evangelism within the worldwide Body of Christ” (p. 5). However, a profound study of these realities clearly surpasses the limitations of this work.

**Christ-Centered and Cross-Centered Preaching**

We now turn to the tendencies in current literature about preaching that focuses on the person of Christ as well as preaching that centers on the cross. It is a difficult, perhaps impossible, task to separate Christ from the idea and meaning of His death on the cross. As stated by Sanders (2009/1952), Christ’s “work is the unveiling of His person” and his “person makes His work divinely effectual” (p. 13). Writers can sometimes deal with the subject of Christ-centered preaching in a way that encompasses, or even signifies, preaching that focuses on the cross (Chapell, 2005/1994).

However, when carefully analyzing current literary trends, it can be said more accurately that the person of Christ is the center of evangelistic preaching, but the fact that he died on the cross and resurrected is the center of the center.

We will also look at what the modern thinkers are saying about the challenges of communicating the message of the gospel to a postmodern era.
Focusing on the Person of Christ

Jesus Christ and His saving work are the center of the gospel message, and must be the center of every sermon. When addressing the issue of sermons that are most likely to win souls, Spurgeon (2010/1922) counseled evangelists to preach “Jesus Christ… always and everywhere; and every time you preach be sure to have much of Jesus Christ in the sermon” (p. 99).

Happily, current writers are also emphatically highlighting this vital aspect of preaching: “A sermon that fails to preach Christ has failed” (Murray, 2011, p. 53). In their recent publications, evangelical Christians are stating more and more that the gospel is central in all the biblical doctrines, and has to become central in all biblical preaching.

Stott (2001) states that Jesus is “the center of history… the focus of Scripture” and “the heart of mission” (pp. 15, 16). Clowney (2003) declares that the Old Testament gives witness to Jesus Christ, and maintains that preaching must show the unity of both the Old and the New Testaments around Christ’s person.

Chapell (2005/1994) reasons that God’s grace culminates in the “person and work of Jesus,” and that this reality “unfolds in many dimensions” throughout the Bible. The biblical preacher must avoid innovations that attempt to identify “Christ in every text,” or to name Jesus in every message, “but to show how each text manifests God’s grace in order to prepare and enable his people to embrace the hope provided by Christ” (p. 279).

Interestingly, this shyness in proclaiming the gospel message that centers on Jesus without emphasizing the actual name of Jesus is not shared by every author. Specifically speaking about evangelistic preaching, Fasol, Fish, Gaines, and West (2006) motivate their readers to “intentionally focus on Jesus Christ” if they want to convert people to
Him. They hold that the evangelist must “speak the name of Jesus frequently,” because “there is something particularly powerful about the name of Jesus” (p. 6).

It is also relevant to note that evangelicals are not the only ones advocating the centrality of Jesus Christ in evangelism. In 2010, Pope Benedict XIV asked R. Fisichella, one of Rome’s assistant bishops, to lead a dicastery for the new evangelization of the Western world. After spending 30 years studying how to present the gospel message today, Fisichella speaks about the “centrality” of Jesus Christ, inspired by Hebrews 13:8. He also states that new evangelism “demands the capacity of knowing how to give a reason for its faith, showing Jesus Christ Son of God, the only savior of humanity” (Fisichella, 2011, pp. 59, 73).

Seventh-day Adventists are also highlighting the person and work of Jesus in their evangelistic endeavors. Norton (2005) shows that, in view of the “gospel’s centrality in Jesus,” the church is called “to not only develop a Christ-based approach to ministry, but also to proclamation, evangelism, and the contents of the message” (p. 82). Wilson (2012) states, “God has asked us to present the reality of Jesus, of salvation from sin and death, of Jesus’ soon coming, and to invite people to choose to serve Him” (p. 14).

In Portugal, one of the most prolific Portuguese Seventh-day Adventist authors published a book before his death, titled *A Verdade Cristã* [The Christian Truth]. Although published by someone 98 years old, this work is an interesting presentation of the majority of the biblical doctrines held by Seventh-day Adventists. Even with the limitations inherent to his age, the author has clearly written with an evangelistic perspective in mind. The novelty about these issues is that the themes are centered in the
person of Jesus Christ, and adapted to the Portuguese reader, who normally has a Catholic background (Ferreira, 2012).

Focusing on the Cross

As mentioned earlier, if evangelistic preaching must be centered on Christ’s person, the key figure of the gospel message, the center of the center in that preaching, is the cross of Christ. C. H. Spurgeon (1834-1892), is widely known as the prince of preachers. Talking about his success in converting souls, Spurgeon not only recognized that his sermons were “full of Christ,” but also that they were filled with “Christ and His cross.” He declared that, following the example of the apostle Paul, he had “determined not to know anything else save Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (Spurgeon, 2010/1922, p. 99).

Current trends on preaching literature are echoing these same sentiments. The present section of this work might be correctly summarized in the following statement, if we would apply it specifically to preaching: “True Christ-centeredness is, and ever must be, cross-centeredness” (Packer & Dever, 2007, p. 148).

Centering every evangelistic message on the cross is fundamental. The message of the cross is not just a basic doctrine to be learned in the early steps of one’s Christian experience. It “is the deeper truth. There is nothing deeper… In it lie the depths of the mysteries of God,” and “almost every subject addressed is enlightened by reference to the cross.” That is why “powerful preaching is usually cross-centered” (Farley, 2009, p. 17).

One can easily confirm that the cross is one of the major themes when it comes to recent Christian publications. It would be a difficult task to list all the significant works about the cross that surfaced even from 2011 to 2015, and to understand the different
tendencies each author finds himself echoing. However, narrowing down the search to
the cross at the center of preaching, and more specifically at the center of evangelistic
preaching, the task becomes considerably simplified.

**Evangelical Cross-centered Evangelism**

Christ, and “on his substitutionary work in his death, burial, and resurrection for human
salvation” (p. 75). Also, as we have seen above, Fasol, Fish, Gaines, and West (2006)
hold that the evangelist must focus on Jesus, even repeating His name often in the
evangelistic sermon. However, they also state that “throughout his sermon” the evangelist
“should focus on the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. He should talk about the
cross and the redemption that Jesus purchased for lost sinners” (p. 6).

Writing about the substitutionary work of Christ, Packer and Dever (2007) state
that the cross must become central in our “proclamation, catechesis, and devotional
practice” since it was “the heart of the apostles’ gospel,” devotions, and praises. From the
cross, we are to explain the whole human life and history, the complete story of the fall,
and God’s plan for salvation. It is the cross that must set the tone for Christian doxology
and piety. Christians, and especially pastors, must adjust their “thinking here and now to
the absolute and abiding centrality of the atoning cross in the Christian life here and
hereafter and to labor to express this awareness in all” their “preaching, teaching, and
modeling of Christianity” (pp. 148, 149, 151).

This work is the fruit of a series of meetings held each year, called Together for
Gospel (see: t4g.org), being designed by evangelicals as a resource for pastors. Other
works suggestively untitled resulting from those meetings were: Preaching the Cross
(Dever, Duncan, Mohler, & Mahaney, 2007), and *Proclaiming a Cross-centered Theology* (Dever, Duncan, Mohler, & Mahaney, 2009). These works do not specifically address evangelistic preaching, but they show that the evangelical world is renewing its interest in preaching that centers on the cross, and preparing their leaders for such preaching.

A similar movement is *The Gospel Coalition* (see: thegospelcoalition.org), also working for the renewal of faith among evangelicals and the reformation of ministry. Recently, some leaders of this movement have authored a book titled *The Gospel as Center* (Carson & Keller, 2012), where they present a development of their *Foundation Documents*, forming a confession of faith (pp. 273-278).

One of the objectives of the organization is clearly to affirm the theological truths of the Bible through Jesus Christ and His cross. In the sixth point of their Confessional Statement, it is said that “the gospel is not proclaimed if Christ is not proclaimed, and the authentic Christ has not been proclaimed if his death and resurrection are not central” (Carson & Keller, 2012, p. 276).

One evangelical that has succeeded in attracting large crowds is the Korean pastor Yonggi Cho. Although geographically distant from the evangelicals that embody the movements we have been analyzing and, in some ways, ideologically as well, he declares that one of the reasons for his success is Christ-centered and cross-centered messages. Sharing preaching secrets for church growth, he counseled preachers to center their messages and their own lives on Jesus Christ, as the planets center around the sun in our solar system.
But most of all, he encourages them to emphasize the meaning and power of Christ’s blood. He sees the blood that was shed by Christ in Gethsemane as the symbol of God’s power to redeem our disobedience and to give us the power to follow His will in our lives. The blood that Jesus shed in Pilate’s courtyard was for the redemption of our body and declares God’s power to heal us. The blood shed as a consequence of the crown of thorns lifts the earthly curse that was proclaimed by God to Adam and Eve in the beginning, and channels God’s blessing.

Yonggi Cho continues to say that the blood of the cross has redeemed us not only spiritually, but completely. Through the cross he preaches regeneration, the fullness of the Holy Spirit, divine healing, prosperity, the second coming of Christ, and the threefold blessing inspired by 3 John 2, which, in his view, proclaims that in Jesus people can prosper, as their souls prosper, and have health (Yonggi Cho, 2007).

In my personal view, Yonggi Cho (2007) overemphasizes temporal prosperity and healing, while applying biblical texts in a rather subjective way. Still, he also touches the current literary emphasis on Jesus and His cross.

An American evangelical example of evangelistic preaching that centers on the cross is a publication by D. McAllister. Being a successful radio evangelist, he authored a book entitled A Walk with Christ to the Cross: The Last Fourteen Hours of his Earthly Mission (2009). The interesting thing about this work is the model of conveying the message of the Scriptures in an evangelistic way through the last hours of Jesus’ life.

Unfortunately, McAllister does not present many of the biblical doctrines that I believe one can and must be preach through the cross. The connections he makes between the story of Jesus’ death and the other Bible passages are sometimes vague. He
also uses a tone I would describe as little rough and, when marveling at the love of the cross, evangelists cannot but be tender. However, the concept of this book presents similarities with what I believe to be one of the best ways to do evangelistic preaching.

In his book on evangelistic expository preaching, Moyer (2012) states that the “main thing” in “evangelistic speaking” is that “Christ died for our sins and rose from the dead.” He holds that this central fact is the message to be transmitted “regardless of what text we speak on to a non-Christian audience” (p. 116).

Another person who touched on this emphasis is not an evangelical Christian, but a renowned Catholic theologian named J. Ratzinger, also known as Pope Benedict XVI. As we have seen, Ratzinger has asked R. Fisichella to lead a team that would work on the new evangelization, and one of the starting points of the work has become “The Centrality of Jesus Christ” (Fisichella, 2011, p. 59). However, Ratzinger himself has started to adopt that principle through his writings. When publishing the second volume of his work on Jesus Christ, he devoted it completely to the last week of Jesus’ life, to His death, and resurrection (Ratzinger, 2011).

**Tendencies in Adventism**

Being a deeply Bible-based people, Seventh-day Adventists also hold that “Christ and Him crucified” is “the heart of the Advent message” (Knight, 2003/1957, p. 89). Voices from the past and present are calling on the denomination’s preachers to present Jesus and His cross.

H. M. S. Richards (1894-1985), an internationally known Seventh-day Adventist evangelist from the past, did a series of lectures to pastors in 1957, in Takoma Park, Maryland. These lectures were published in the form of a book in 1958, and reprinted in
2005. In the fourth chapter, the reader can find a serious invitation to preachers to present biblical doctrine in a Christ-centered and cross-centered way. “So our preaching must have a dominant theme and a dominant passion. We are preaching Christ crucified. We must preach it with a passion and love of Christ Himself for the salvation of man” (Richards, 2005/1958, p. 143).

More recently, in his two publications about evangelism, Norton (2005, 2010) also holds that evangelists must present the gospel in a Christ-centered way, one that especially exalts the cross of Christ.

Nonetheless, Knight (2000) has shown that, historically, Seventh-day Adventists have oscillated between emphasizing the distinctive biblical doctrines that separate them from other Christian denominations, and the message of the love of God revealed in Calvary. Later, this same author has recognized that Adventists seem to be having difficulties presenting their peculiar biblical views in the Western countries, especially their understanding of prophecy. Alerting us to the fact that this can become a major factor for the loss of denominational identity, he continues to hold that the preaching of the apocalyptic doctrines without the cross of Christ is harmful (Knight, 2008a).

Clearly, this is a difficult issue in Seventh-day Adventist evangelism. It is hard to find a true balance without shifting from one extreme to the other. Some authors present Seventh-day Adventist doctrines through prophecy and end-time events (Brunt, 2011; Finley, 2005). Although speaking about Jesus, about His death and resurrection, the emphasis is eschatological. Others focus on the love of God, and the cross, but do not clearly present the other biblical doctrines, especially those that deal with prophecy (Asscherick, 2010; Samaan, 2009).
These thoughts lead me to reinforce the underlying principle of this project. I continue to believe and wish to stress the fact that the evangelistic presentation of Seventh-day Adventist biblical doctrines, even those that deal with the last hours of the world’s history, are best presented through the story of the last hours of Jesus’ life on earth, and through the lessons that spring from that story. One cannot truly understand or preach Scripture without the cross-shaped key that unlocks its mysteries. It is not possible to be fully prepared for the glory of the second coming without the cross of the first.

Preaching the Cross to a Postmodern World

There are certainly many challenges when thinking about preaching the message of the cross to postmoderns. But recent publications are highlighting many interesting opportunities. Paulien (2008) showed that postmoderns normally reject the “meta-narratives” that offer explanations and solutions to everything (p. 65). But they are open to finding the truth in friendly communities and in the “telling of stories.” For Paulien, this is good news. They will lead the church to a more correct use of Scripture, since “the Bible is a collection of stories and poems and random personal letters” (pp. 63, 64).

As we have seen, some authors have been striving to promote the communication of the gospel through stories, and even modeling it (Allison & Anderson, 2003, p. 115; Dillon, 2012). If evangelistic preaching must center on the cross, the challenge for the postmodern evangelist is to find in each story of the Bible, and even in each personal story or current event, a road leading to the story of Calvary. This last thought is actually drawn from an ancient illustration but increasingly relevant for today’s hearers of the gospel (Spurgeon, 2010/1922, p. 99).
Paulien (2008) shows that postmoderns long for meaning and purpose for their lives. The biblical “idea that God has a purpose for each person’s life” is likely to touch them (p. 59). But the impact of this message will probably become more powerful when presented through the cross and the way everything in life relates to it. That is possibly why Keller (2011), writing to reach postmoderns, strives to bring back to life the ancient “Christian premise that Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection, form the central event of cosmic and human history as well as the central organizing principle of our own lives” (p. x). He wants to reveal to his reader the beauty of the life of Jesus and how His life brings sense to ours.

This way of reaching postmoderns seems less aggressive than the one suggested by Mohler (2008), who, in face of postmodernisms’ rejection of the Bible, meta-narrative, and God, states, “The task of preaching must be understood as an apologetic calling” (p. 123). Basing his thoughts on Paul’s sermon in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), he maintains that Christian preachers ought to feel provoked by sin in the postmodern era, proclaim the gospel evangelistically, and ask for decisions. Understanding the context of confusion in which we live today, they are to “preach Christ as the only answer” to the “hunger” postmoderns are feeling (pp. 123-128).

Analyzing the suggestions of Mohler (2008), the reader is led to conclude that the evangelist is to fight against the advances of postmodernism by a strong proclamation of the biblical truth. Christian proclamation to postmoderns begins with God’s nature, character, power, and authority; it boldly confronts error, and declares the totality of God’s saving purpose. The “center” of this “proclamation is Jesus Christ the Savior, who
was crucified for sinners,” His resurrection, and second coming in judgment (pp. 128-130).

But, if the preaching of the cross is the center, even when preaching to postmoderns, the message must surely lead us in the way we are to present it. That is why the ideas of Mohler (2008), although courageous, are perhaps a little limited when compared to the ones by Eswine, in his work *Preaching to a Post-everything World* (2008). Here the author drives the reader through a detailed journey about how to prepare sermons that connect with postmoderns.

It will require work to present the message of the Bible in a way that will capture the attention of this generation. A good starting point for each preacher is to ask what kind of presentation would have touched him/her prior to his/her conversion. The evangelist must preach to postmoderns with love and speak humbly, for this is the example of God. Unfortunately, Eswine does not make a strong link between these important realities and the cross. In my opinion, however, true humility, authenticity, and love can only come to the heart of the preacher, and to his hearers, through Calvary.

As mentioned earlier, Norton (2010) believes that preaching is still important in reaching postmoderns, but it must be a “magnetic” kind of preaching (p. 114). The evangelist must know his audience, and have the capacity to adapt to it. Norton also affirms that Christ, the center of Christianity, and His cross, have to be lifted up before the audience, and that this can only be done effectively by an evangelist that lives what he preaches.

As discussed in the above section on delivery, for the contemporary preacher, genuine honesty, humility, and authenticity are essentials that one cannot do without.
This seems to be an incredible value when preaching to postmoderns, since they will value these characteristics above attitudes of invulnerability (Paulien, 2008).

Some other interesting works that try to share the message of the cross to a postmodern generation, and that can be of assistance for the evangelist that wishes to communicate this central theme effectively, are: Proclaiming the Scandal of the Cross: Contemporary Images of the Atonement (Baker, 2006); Don’t Waste Your Life (Piper, 2009/2007); Death by Love: Letters From the Cross (Driscoll & Breshears, 2008).

**Christ-Centered Appeals**

The message of the cross is, without a doubt, the only one that can produce true repentance in a sinner’s heart. Christ crucified draws men and women by his love and offers them the power to live a new life as children of God. But the cross can only be preached consistently by someone who has deeply experienced its power, someone who is fully committed to glorifying God, attracting human beings to the feet of Christ.

These Bible-based thoughts are being more and more echoed by contemporary writers. They show that evangelistic proclamation is always accompanied by an invitation offering each hearer the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ as his/her Savior (Richard, 2005; Robinson, 2009). Moyer (2012) holds that the biblical view of evangelism consists of “information and invitation. Once the gospel is presented – Christ died for your sins and arose – non-Christians must be invited to trust Christ as their personal savior” (p. 191).

One of the most complete studies about the evangelistic invitation was made by Streett (2004/1984). In it, the author states that evangelistic proclamation “has no more
important function than the issuing of an effective invitation” (p. 152). He believes that the following four factors influence effective persuasion.

First, the evangelist must be himself fully persuaded that “the only way to salvation” is Jesus Christ. Second, he must include sufficient “personal pronouns” when carefully preparing the invitation. Each hearer must feel directly addressed. Third, the appeal must be, as much as possible, prompted by biblical “invitational” passages. And finally, the evangelist must be sure that his invitation “seeks to move the will” of his hearer. He must aim for “a favorable verdict on the spot” by appealing both to reason and emotion. The preacher should strive to lead the hearer to “embrace the truth of the gospel” and to bring his will “into submission to the Person of Jesus Christ” (Streett, 2004/1984, pp. 157-159).

However, Streett (2004/1984) also alerts us to the fact that, strangely, there is not a lot of material available that deals specifically with this issue. This is probably a consequence of the growing hesitation that many contemporary preachers feel toward public appeals (p. 152).

Robinson (2009) echoes this concern and shows that many pastors have ceased to make public appeals, or are opting for less compromising ways to do them. They can offer people the opportunity of responding if they will, scheduling later appointments, or ask people to simply check on cards provided by the church if they desire to be visited. The reasons for this are the lack of practical knowledge in the audience about how to come to Christ, a fear of offending people, or a distorted view of “God’s sovereignty” in evangelism that leads to leaving decisions up to God. Another reason may still simply be
the fact that the pastor does not know how to make an appeal or is afraid that nobody will respond (pp. 19, 20).

But the evangelistic appeal to sinners in the name of God and Christ is biblical, and evangelists have to understand their calling and responsibility. It “is better to err on the side of having our invitation rejected” than to not present it. A great “dose of humility, which all of us evangelists continuously need, can be received when inviting people to trust Christ, since it is quite possible that none will respond” (Richard, 2005, pp. 174-177).

Nonetheless, when evangelistic preachers make appeals with a certainty that people will respond, these responses tend to come more frequently. “An evangelistic appeal has power to draw men and women to Christ” (Finley, 1994, pp. 71, 72).

True Motivation for Repentance

Only God can produce true repentance in the human heart. However, evangelists must prepare to cooperate with the Holy Spirit the best way they can. Centering their preaching on the cross is the path to excellence, since it is through the message of the cross that God’s Spirit effects a change in humanity. The cross is the God-given motivation for repentance (Hedges, 2010).

Current literary trends present repentance as the response God wishes to see in sinners when they receive the knowledge of his love revealed on the cross. Repentance means the turning away from sin, and it always accompanies true conversion to Christ. It is not possible to receive Christ as Savior, and not as Lord, for that would be “nonsense” (Gilbert, 2010, p. 80).
When a sinner starts understanding his depravity through the message of the gospel, and starts approaching God, he sees his sin in a different way. The closer he is to God, the more he will “abhor” sin, feeling “less confidence in” himself, and thus becoming “more dependent upon Christ.” This experience will also help the sinner to discover and progressively “feel” God’s love. When he sees that Christ suffered for him on the cross what he should have suffered himself, he feels compelled to “repentant obedience” (Farley, 2009/2004, pp. 56, 67).

Real Power for a New Life

The Holy Spirit promotes and blesses preaching that centers in Jesus Christ crucified. Even when preaching about other biblical doctrines as the Sabbath, or even the state of the dead, Jesus Christ and His cross must be the center of the presentation. As shown above, this alone can generate true repentance (Richards, 2005/1958).

Contemporary evangelical publications mostly emphasize evangelistic preaching and evangelistic invitations as a means of offering sinners an opportunity to accept Christ as their personal Savior and Lord. “But rarely does the invitation following a sermon go beyond the basic call for salvation” and many times there is a need “to be more specific” (Edwards, 2009, p. 76). This is something crucial, especially for Seventh-day Adventist evangelists. Normally, they use appeals to obtain decisions that involve difficult and life-changing decisions and this is why centering each subject presented on the cross is vital.

A correct understanding of the grace of God must lead Seventh-day Adventists to see that, actually, each decision asked for, even if it deals with issues like diet, or tithing, must be made by a transfer of trust. The person who is invited to respond has to abandon his/her trust in his/her capacities and place it in Christ. Jesus is the only one that can
enable a human being to change inside out. And if the gospel message centers in Christ, and especially in Christ’s death, it becomes necessary that each appeal springs from a cross-centered presentation. Only the love and forgiveness of Christ can prepare the hearer to receive doctrines that lead to difficult decisions (Norton, 2005).

If the evangelist tries, for example, to lead his audience to the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath, he must not do it only on the basis of this being the right and biblical way to do it, but he must lead his hearers to the love of Christ. If people understand the decision they are called to make as a demonstration of their love to Jesus, they are more likely to make it (Finley, 1994).

Hedges (2010), an evangelical author, arrived at a similar conclusion. Writing about the gospel’s power for personal change, he shows that the love of God for sinners at the cross is the true motivation for change, and not the law. He also counsels readers to look to the cross in order to destroy the power of sin in their lives.

Similar views were also expressed by Carson (2010a). According to this scholar, contemporary Christians will recognize that true “Christianity is never merely a matter of rules and regulations, of public liturgy and private morality” but of transformed lives. Believers will want to love and please God “because of the grace secured by Christ’s cross.” They will “experience… a transforming moral imperative.” The sins they once loved they “learn to fear and hate” but “the obedience and holiness” they “once despised” they “now hunger for” (pp. 31, 32).

Although these authors do not specifically address evangelistic preaching or evangelistic appeals, the principles they state are certainly most inspiring when striving to call sinners to abandon sin. When preaching evangelistically, the preacher should strive
to construct his entire sermon, and especially the appeal for a change, around the love revealed at Calvary’s cross. Moreover, he should also center his entire life on that same love.

The Evangelist’s Testimony

In the section on The Evangelistic Sermon, under the heading “The Importance of Delivery,” we saw that current writers emphasize the importance of authenticity in the Christian preacher (Norton, 2005; Fasol, Fish, Gaines, & West, 2006; Smith 2009). We also saw in the section that deals with Preaching the Cross to a Postmodern World, that this is especially relevant for today’s audiences.

Finley (1994) shows that, for evangelists to appeal successfully to their hearers, they must first be touched by a “passion for souls” that springs from a “view of Calvary,” and not from personal ambitions (p. 92). He also says that, in order “to lead men and women to the cross, we must come to the cross and learn the terrible price for our sins” (p. 78).

When the preacher feels a passion for evangelistic preaching because he wants to glorify God and wants to lead people to Jesus, whom he loves, his passion “is valid, justifiable, and compelling” (Richard, 2005, p. 18). However, in order to appeal to men and women in God’s name, he must carefully consider the eternal consequences involved in such an act. Calling sinners to the cross is offering them the opportunity to receive eternal life. This must drive the preacher to a full-heart preparation in prayer (Fasol, Fish, Gaines, & West, 2006). An intimate connection with God will bring an authenticity to the evangelist testimony that nothing else can give.
Talking about “transparency” in the pulpit, something appreciated by postmodern listeners, Eswine (2008) remembers that the Bible commands us to preach Jesus Christ and not ourselves. Theologically, we are “ambassadors” speaking another person’s message, and throughout Christian history, preachers have considered a proof of ministerial integrity to abstain from referring to self “in the pulpit” (p. 87).

However, Eswine believes that it is necessary for preachers to share their testimony with their audiences and considers that there are biblical principles to guide them in this process. First, they must consider and present themselves not as the subject being preached, but as an “instrument by which Christ is preached” (p. 88). Second, preachers must exalt the power of God in contrasting it with their own weakness and vulnerability. Finally, true Christian transparency will arouse criticism, and the preacher must be ready for it. Evaluating and discerning from where criticism comes, he must continue to share his testimony, because contemporary hearers need it.

**Summary**

Evangelistic preaching means to proclaim the gospel of Christ and the major doctrines of the Bible to those who do not know them yet. But it may also mean preaching to those that already know the gospel, so they may be revived or discover new truths. When evangelistic series are held in church settings, the members of the congregation play a major role in the acceptance of the message.

Evangelistic preaching is essential so that unsaved people receive the opportunity of salvation in Christ. However, the specific evangelistic preaching of the three angels’ message (Rev 14:6-12) to the whole world precedes, and prepares humanity for, the second coming of Christ.
There are two major forms of evangelistic sermons. Topical sermons are normally more adapted to audiences with little knowledge of the Bible and, or, Christianity. Expository sermons work better with audiences that already have basic Bible knowledge. Evangelistic messages should be properly illustrated and may even be completely drawn out of Bible stories, especially the stories concerning Christ’s sufferings, death, and resurrection. In today’s postmodern world this makes more sense than ever.

Centring the evangelistic service, sermon, and appeal in Christ, and especially in his cross, is essential in evangelism. However, for the messages and invitations to be effective, the messengers must not only preach, but incarnate the meaning of the cross of Christ.
CHAPTER 4

DESCRIPTION OF THE CROSS-CENTERED EVANGELISTIC PREACHING STRATEGY

With the objective of implementing a cross-centered strategy of evangelistic preaching in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas, in Portugal, a more detailed description of the project process will now be presented. First, an analysis of the themes and outcomes of the previous evangelistic preaching series will be provided. Secondly, the intended preparation strategy for the evangelistic meetings will be described. Thirdly, it will be shown how each evangelistic message was centered on the cross of Christ. Finally, the schedule for the evangelistic meetings will be presented.

Adventist Evangelistic Preaching in Canelas

In the church of Canelas, a special evangelistic series with national and international notoriety was organized in 2001. From October 12 through 27, this church was the stage for an international satellite event called NET 2001- Peace for Life. Even if several years separate those series from the present project, it is relevant to examine the existing records since this was the biggest evangelistic preaching venture this church was ever involved in.
The featured speaker for *NET 2001* was a pastor-evangelist well-known in Portugal at that time, who shortly after this event became the pastor of Canelas’ church. His style of preaching is known to be kind and Christocentric. This series was broadcast by satellite and through the internet to various countries and communities around the world. Although I did not find information about the attendance at the local church’s auditorium, where the meetings were held, I personally remember having watched some of the messages in Geneva, Switzerland. The cameras showed a church filled to capacity.

In Portugal, 48 local churches hosted the event live, and 46 used recordings to host it a few days later. There were simultaneous translations into Spanish, Italian, French, English, and Romanian, and the event was officially hosted in Europe by France, Italy, England and Romania. In Africa the countries that hosted this series were Angola, Mozambique, S. Tomé and Principe, South Africa, and Tanzania. It was also broadcasted in North America, and in various countries of Central and South America. In Portugal there were 117 baptisms as a result, 2,000 in Angola and 1,250 in Mozambique.

The pastor who was the general coordinator for this event later became the director for the Evangelism Department of the Portuguese Union of Seventh-day Adventists. Looking back at this endeavor in 2001, he describes it as a “unique” experience, impossible to be repeated (J. C. Santos, personal communication, January 8, 2013).

This event vitalized the national church, and revived the faith of the congregation in Canelas, leaving it with national and international renown for several years (J. C. Costa, personal communication, January 9, 2013).
However, the analysis of the number and source of baptisms performed in Canelas that year, and in the few years that followed, has not shown a direct impact of *NET 2001* in the numeric growth. The following table shows data presented by the clerk of the local church, referring to the years between 2000 and 2012.

### Table 1

**Membership From 2000 to 2012**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Members Won</th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Vote</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td>Apostasy</td>
<td>Death</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
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<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Canelas SDA Church, Clerk’s Report, January 8, 2013 and March 30, 2015.

A brief look at this information will tempt the reader to consider the 18 baptisms in 2002 as a possible result of the evangelistic effort of October 2001. This question has led me to interview the member who was the church’s clerk at the time, and who currently is one of the church’s elders, having been the first elder for several years.

Interestingly, he stated to have no recollection of baptisms in Canelas as a result of any evangelistic event, not even the *NET 2001*. 
In his view the majority of baptisms in this church result from decisions taken by sons and daughters of church members, and a few baptisms that come through the members’ personal friendships. He further stated that the evangelistic meetings held in the last years have not really increased the number of baptisms (J. Ferreira, personal communication, January 9, 2013).

Analyzing the names of these 18 persons, the current clerk of the church confirmed that they were mostly sons and daughters from the members. She also stated that baptisms in Canelas are normally not related to evangelistic campaigns. However, when interviewing the persons who were baptized in 2001, and in 2002, who still are members of the church, she did find that five reported that the evangelistic series had a direct or indirect positive influence for their baptism (B. Silva, personal communication, July 20, 2014).

Evangelistic Preaching From 2009 to 2012

We now turn to the analysis of the themes and outcomes of the evangelistic series that happened in the church of Canelas during the last four years before the implementation of the cross-centered evangelistic preaching strategy. These are the most significant for this study since there are no church records for series done from 2001 to 2008.

Several evangelistic series were held by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canelas from January 2009 to December 2012. It has been possible to find relevant information interviewing the local evangelism coordinator at the time, who was also one of the elder’s during those years. All of these events took place in the auditorium of the church, except for a special evangelistic preaching effort done in 2011, where the
members were invited to listen to the messages in their homes, through the internet. In 2012 there were no evangelistic series.

**Evangelistic Preaching in 2009**

The only evangelistic preaching event held in Canelas in 2009 consisted in a local evangelistic campaign with six presentations. It was held from April 13 to 18, 2009 and the local pastor at the time was the speaker for the event. The general theme for this series was *Life for Lives*. Although the full content of the messages was not possible to find, the titles of the sermons seem sufficiently suggestive for this study.

The topics and key biblical texts of the sermons presented were:

1. The Most Important Choice: The Most Important Attitude in Your Life (Matt 19:27-29);
2. The Opportunity to be Transformed: The Transforming Power of God’s Word (Matt 8:16, 17);
3. An opportunity to be saved: The Extraordinary and All-embracing Gift of Salvation (Luke 8:18);
4. Choosing Your Destiny: What the Bible Says About Salvation and Predestination (Eph 1:3-5);
5. The Opportunity to Start Over: Baptism as the Symbol of a New Start (Marc 16:15, 16);

The meetings were held in the evenings from Monday to Friday, and for the last day the sermon was delivered as a part of the morning weekly church service. The event
was concluded with a musical concert that Saturday evening. The average attendance was of 115 people and there was between six to 10 visitors at each meeting, with a total of 15 different visitors during the series. There were no baptisms, nor requests for Bible studies (J. Silva, personal communication, July 17, 2014 [the 2009 local evangelism coordinator]).

**Evangelistic Preaching in 2010**

In 2010, evangelistic preaching in Canela was directly promoted by the Evangelism Department of the Portuguese Seventh-day Adventist Union of Churches. There were two evangelism initiatives recommended by this department, and every local Seventh-day Adventist church was supposed to participate in these actions. Both of them consisted in one week-long evangelistic series, the first being held in May and the second in November.

The first series was to be presented the first week of May in each church by the local pastor, or an elder, or a guest-speaker. The messages were prepared and made available for all speakers by two pastors that have cooperated with the Portuguese Union Evangelism Department. The general theme of the event was *The Way to Hope*. This was also the title of a reprint of the classic book *Steps to Christ* by E. G. White (1892), distributed massively in Portugal by all Seventh-day Adventist churches before the series. The themes of the sermons were supposedly drawn from the book.

At the time I was pastoring other Seventh-day Adventist congregations in Portugal and had access to the sermons provided. The messages were doctrinally very sound. However, they were also filled with innumerous biblical references and logical argumentations. They presented some illustrations, mostly in the appeals.
The first theme was *Fundamental Axioms of the Way to Hope* and it dealt with the existence and revelation of God. It briefly highlighted the climax of the loving revelation of God’s character in Calvary, and it also dealt partially with the creation account. This message was extensive and so were the majority of the others. The following themes dealt with repentance and confession, the power of human will, the importance of total surrender to God, the new life of the Christian, the law of God, prayer and service, the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

The church of Canelas participated in this program and the meetings were held in the week that had been programmed by the national Seventh-day Adventist leaders. In Canelas, the local pastor was the appointed speaker and the average attendance was of 90 people. The number of visitors during the meetings went from six to 10, and there were three requests for Bible studies.

The second evangelistic effort promoted in 2010 by the national Seventh-day Adventist church was a series of meetings that occurred from November 20 to 27. They were held in the Seventh-day Adventist Central Church, in Lisbon. These meetings were transmitted in the national Adventist Web TV (www.hopetv.pt) and each church was supposed to host the event transmitting the messages live from Lisbon.

The guest speaker was the speaker/director for *It Is Written Canada* at the time (www.itiswrittencanada.ca/pt). The general theme for these meetings was *Countdown to Life*. The first message was an introduction to the whole series highlighting the fact God loves us and wishes to give us spiritual prosperity. This prosperity is achieved when we practice the Bible teachings (Josh 1:8).
The following messages dealt with the reason for suffering and the great controversy between Christ and Satan; what the Bible says about death; Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 2); the signs of the second coming of Christ; the way Christ will return; forgiveness and the 2300 prophecy (Dan 8); and the certainty of eternal life in heaven.

These eight evangelistic messages were delivered in the evenings. However, on the last Saturday morning, November 27, there was a special broadcast. In this message, the speaker showed the validity of the Christian faith through the Old Testament prophecies that pointed to Christ’s life and death.

The church of Canelas embraced this evangelistic program. Nonetheless, technical problems prevented the series from starting the first evening. Having been granted access to the recordings of the messages, the church’s leaders decided to present the messages from November 21 to 28.

Although the exact numbers were not possible to find, on November 27, 2010, the local evangelism coordinator wrote an email to the Communications’ Department of the Portuguese Union of Seventh-day Adventists and stated: “we register the regular attendance of a good number of friends, some for the first time, listening to the valuable biblical messages.” This message also stated that 12 persons were going to be baptized that same day, and that “others” were “preparing” for baptism. However, when sharing this message with me he recognized that the decisions for baptism taken by these 12 persons were not “the result of the series.” The people were actually asked to wait for this special week in order to be baptized (personal communication by J. Silva on August 1, 2014).
Evangelistic Preaching in 2011

In 2011, similarly to what happened in 2010, there were no evangelistic series organized locally in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas. The Evangelism Department of the Portuguese Seventh-day Adventist Union of Churches planned a different kind of evangelistic preaching outreach, motivating the churches to adhere to a one week-long series that was to be received in the home of each member through the internet.

Each Seventh-day Adventist family in Portugal was asked to invite their relatives and friends for a meal, or for some time of fellowship in the evenings of that particular week. These visitors were then to be invited to watch a 20 minute message available in the national Adventist Web TV (www.hopetv.pt). These messages were presented from November 5 to 12, and the general theme was For a Full Existence.

The speaker was a female pastor with the ability to present Bible messages in a particularly tender and friendly way. The sermons were constructed around the Ten Commandments and highlighted the importance of obedience to these principles for a fulfilling human life (Exod 20:3-17). The importance of the cross, however, was, in my opinion, absent from these presentations. The morality of the law, its validity for Christians, and the benefits of living according to it were superbly presented. But the necessity of a Saviour was not stressed.

In Canelas, the Seventh-day Adventist Church embraced this national initiative and, out of the 36 homes that signed up to participate in these evangelistic meetings, 30 actually held them. The total number of persons that have watched the series in these 30 homes was of 164. Of these, 17 were not church members. Two were relatives of the
members, eight were neighbors, and seven were friends. There are no records of any request for further Bible studies, or for baptism as a result of these meetings (personal communications, J. Silva, July 14, 2014 [2011 local evangelism coordinator]; and M. Vieira, July 8, 2014 [administrative assistant for the Evangelism Department of the Portuguese Union of Seventh-day Adventists]).

Since there were no evangelistic series in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas in 2012, we now turn to the description of the cross-centered evangelistic preaching strategy, which is the focus of this project.

**Description of the Cross-centered Preaching Strategy**

The implementation of the cross-centered preaching strategy was to begin by presenting to the church board a seven-month evangelistic program. The members of this board were to receive information regarding the objective of this plan, the methods of preparation, and the essence of the evangelistic sermons presented at the end. They would also be informed that this strategy was being developed as a result of my doctoral project.

The support and favorable vote of the church board would be asked for, stressing the importance of the program for the members of the church, for the souls they desired to reach for Christ, and for the hastening of the coming of Jesus (2 Pet 3:12).

If the church board voted in favor of the program, it would then be presented to the church in an administrative meeting, where all the baptized members would be invited to participate. The intention was to provide the church with the information given to the church board and practical insights about how each person would be able to
participate in the evangelistic process. An appeal was to be made in order to gain the sympathy and involvement of the largest number possible of church members.

From the beginning of the evangelistic process until the moment for the evangelistic series, the weekly prayer meetings should be used to train the members for evangelism. Several seminars were planned to be offered stressing the importance of the personal effort from each church member. The seminars would highlight the significance and implications of evangelism, how to intercede effectively for souls in prayer, how to give Bible studies, family evangelism, door-to-door outreach, creative ways to do evangelism, and visiting with former Adventists.

Evangelistic Action Groups

It was also planned that several evangelistic action groups would be formed, choosing one or two leaders per group to organize and motivate the members that wished to participate. This would be done with the cooperation of the local church Evangelism Department.

The first group should be organized for prayer ministry. The leader would have the responsibility of organizing and motivating a group of members to pray during the whole seven-month program for the success of the evangelistic effort. Prayers would be offered for the work of the Holy Spirit, the mobilization of the church members for action, the preparation of the sermons, the consecration of the speaker, the work done by other action-groups, and the receptivity in friends, coworkers, relatives and all the persons that would be invited for the series.

In addition to this, the prayer-group leader and the pastor were to offer weekly appeals on the Sabbath mornings, and Tuesday evenings, for intercessory prayer during
the seven-month program. The intention was to motivate the church members to pray for those whom they wished to invite for the series. The prayer group would also deliver a major contribution during the realization of the evangelistic series, as it will be shown below.

The second action group was planned to focus on Bible studies. Two leaders should be chosen in order to facilitate the organization and execution of a weekly Bible study group with all the persons who would be interested in studying the Bible, in preparation for baptism. The members who had friends, or relatives, that would be interested in studying the Bible were going to be motivated to come and bring these persons to the study meetings.

A third group was to be organized for the distribution of literature, in close association with the local directors of the Literature Department and the Personal Ministries Department. Under their leadership, the members that wished to participate in this special group would have the responsibility of organizing missionary exits in order to distribute Christian literature and also seek for people who might be interested in studying the Bible.

A fourth group was also planned for social beneficence and health-based evangelistic ministry. Since the local church already had a strong presence in the community regarding social and health assistance, the members who were responsible for these ministries would be encouraged to seek for creative ways to interact with the persons they serve in the community and draw their attention to spiritual issues. In order to do that, the goal was to organize seminars on topics related to mental health in the
church’s social facilities and emphasize spirituality. Finally, the attendants should be invited to the evangelistic series that were to be held at the church.

A fifth group would be organized and prepared to visit the members that had ceased to attend church and former Adventists. The priority of this group should be to reestablish contact with these persons, trying to reconnect emotionally and spiritually with them. If they would respond, the group members should invite them to the series and prepare to receive them. The intention was to have this action-group organized and directed by the local Personal Ministries team.

A sixth group was planned to organize and guide the work of small groups. The church members who wished to cooperate would be divided in groups of six to eight persons. They would then be motivated to gather weekly to worship together and pray for friends, relatives, colleagues from school, and co-workers they wished to invite to their small group meetings. They would also be instructed to have Bible study sessions if they started to have non-Adventists among them.

Under the leadership of the local Youth Department, a creative witnessing group would be organized for the young people. This group would take the responsibility to have one or two initial brainstorm meetings in order to come up with creative ideas about witnessing. The purpose of these meetings was to provide the group with evangelistic activities that were interesting and challenging for the youth.

Finally, the plan was to invite all church members to participate actively in one of these groups, according to their preference and gifts.
Organizing the Preaching Event

In association with the local church Evangelism Department, an evangelistic team would be organized in order to prepare the church for the evangelistic series that should take place in the last two months. The prayer group that had started to work in the beginning of the seven-month program, was now to prepare for special meetings of prayer before and during each evangelistic sermon. Two gifted church members, a female and a male, would be selected to serve as hosts for the event.

The intention was also to choose one or two leaders per group, among the members of the church, to coordinate the following teams: (a) publicity, (b) decoration, (c) hospitality and registration, (d) auditorium, (e) stage, (f) sound and image, (g) internet, (h) public relations, (i) children’s ministry, (j) music, and (k) visitation and follow up.

The evangelistic series would then be held during the weekends of the last two months, three nights a weekend, during eight weekends.

Development of Cross-centered Evangelistic Messages

As a result of the research done in the Bible and in current literature, a cross-centered evangelistic preaching model was developed. The messages were constructed in a way that enabled the evangelist to present all the 28 Seventh-day Adventist beliefs in 24 evenings. Nonetheless, each doctrine was to be presented in its relationship with the cross of Christ. The goal was to have “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2) as the starting point, the central truth, and the basis for the appeal in each sermon presented. A brief explanation of why and how this objective should be achieved is presented.
Why 24 Sermons and How

As it was shown in chapter one, currently Seventh-day Adventist evangelism faces the challenge of having to reduce the number of meetings in evangelistic series. Contemporary life makes it difficult for people to attend church several days a week. This poses a problem for evangelists, since Seventh-day Adventist doctrines are encompassed in 28 beliefs.

Considering the target-audience at Canelas, composed mostly of persons with a Christian background, some of these beliefs can be presented together in just one sermon. One major example is the second, third, fourth, and fifth fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. These deal with the Godhead, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit.

However, there are other doctrines that call for a single presentation, or even for more than one, as is the case for the doctrine concerning the remnant church and its mission (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005). This is why Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic preaching efforts, in order to effectively present the full body of Seventh-day Adventist doctrine, cannot easily be limited to one or two week-long series.

After studying these beliefs, I came to the conclusion that it was possible to present them in 24 sermons, and that a logical sequence could be used, as it is shown in Appendix A. I also found that some of the messages would become more relevant if presented without many days of separation between them. But how would it be possible to present 24 evangelistic messages to a contemporary audience?

One possibility was to present the messages during weekend evenings, since people are more available. Using three evenings per weekend (Friday, Saturday and
Sunday evenings) would offer the opportunity to present three related topics in a close sequence. Dividing the 24 messages by sequences of three it became possible to present them in eight weekends, that is, two months.

Finally, to have four evenings each week without evangelistic meetings would allow for an important work to be done. The goal was to have the members of the church in Canelas visiting with the persons that would be coming to the meetings. The members would be encouraged to use the evenings of the week with no meetings to offer friendship, encouragement, and biblical instruction.

24 Cross-centered Messages

After dealing with the questions of why 24 sermons, and of how to preach these sermons in a reasonable timetable for a contemporary audience, we now turn to the way the sermons were constructed. The 24 topics presented should deal with all of the 28 fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005). In Appendix A, the reader will find a summary of each sermon. There it is shown how each topic was drawn from the central theme of the Cross, or strongly related to it. It is also revealed how each Seventh-day Adventist belief fits into the 24 messages.

However, in this section the title of each topic, and the beliefs that it covered, will be listed. Each topic presented below became the theme for each evening. Considering that Portugal was facing a deep economic crisis, and that the target-audience was mostly of a Christian background, the general theme for the series was “The Love of Christ” and the subtitle “Good News in Times of Crisis.” Each topic had the introductory expression “Good News,” then the title itself, and finally a subtitle.
Topic 1. *Good news, God exists: He is close to you and wants to help.* No specific Seventh-day Adventist belief addressed.

Topic 2. *Good news, God has a bestseller: You can read it and understand it.* Beliefs number one and nine.

Topic 3. *Good news, you are not here by chance: You were created with love to love.* Beliefs number six and eight.

Topic 4. *Good news, evil will really come to an end: Today’s tears are tomorrow’s joys.* Beliefs number eight and four.

Topic 5. *Good news, you can start over: Jesus Christ died for you.* Beliefs number nine and 10.

Topic 6. *Good news, forgiving was never this easy: God thinks about you with forgiveness and hope.* Beliefs number nine and 10.

Topic 7. *Good news, there are still loving families: Yours can be one of them.* Beliefs number two, three, four, five, and 23.

Topic 8. *Good news, God wants you in his family: That’s why Jesus made the Church.* Beliefs number 12, 14, and 17.

Topic 9. *Good news, Jesus Christ is coming back to this planet: And we can be ready.* Belief number 25.

Topic 10. *Good news, disappointments can be good: God always has something better for you.* Beliefs number 13 and 24.

Topic 11. *Good news, there is a righteous court of law: And we have a friend there.* Belief number 24.
Topic 12. Good news, you will become a new person: God will place his love in you. Belief number 19.


Topic 14. Good news, it is possible to change: We do not have to repeat our parents’ mistakes. Beliefs number 13 and 18.

Topic 15. Good news, we do not need to be deceived: God is always clear. Belief number 13.

Topic 16. Good news, the dead are sleeping: And Jesus Christ is going to wake them up. Beliefs number seven and 26.

Topic 17. Good news, God wants to give us health: The Bible offers secrets to a better life. Belief number 22.

Topic 18. Good news, you can make a difference: Little details are very important. Belief number 22.

Topic 19. Good news, God loves to listen to you: You can always talk to him. Belief number 11.

Topic 20. Good news, there is one reliable bank: You can open an account today. Belief number 21.

Topic 21. Good news, you can tell everybody that you love Christ: Just dive into the love of God. Belief number 15.

Topic 22. Good news, God remembered us: Jesus wishes us to remember him. Belief number 16.
Topic 23. Good news, you will be able to ask questions: God has set aside 1,000 years to answer. Belief number 27.

Topic 24. Good news, God will make everything new: And he has a place just for you. Beliefs number 28 and 18.

Scheduling and Presenting the Evangelistic Series

Although the doctoral studies for this project initiated on July 2012, the best period of time to its implementation seemed to be the last few months of 2012, and the first and second trimesters of 2013. Although the reasons for this choice were numerous, the major arguments will be stated next.

First, in 2012 I was appointed pastor of the Canelas’ Seventh-day Adventist Church and in my past pastoral experience I have learned that when it comes to evangelistic preaching, the members of a church are more easily mobilized if the speaker is a novelty. Since they were the ones that should bring their friends and family members to these meetings, they should feel motivated to come. Promoting, implementing and becoming the speaker of an evangelistic event in the first months of my ministry in this church appeared to be a good way to stir up the interest.

The option of having another speaker that would use the messages developed through this study, or that would use the principles stated in this work when developing his own sermons, was considered. This would possibly allow the meetings to be held later, thus providing the church with more time for preparation. However, the church board and I have felt that this project would not be as motivating for another speaker as for the one who was designing it.
Secondly, as stated in the first chapter, the church’s head elders had shared with me the necessity of such an event not only for the persons that the church desired to reach with the Bible message, but also for many of the members who were young in the faith, as well as for the youth. The elders thought that these groups of believers were not sufficiently grounded in the knowledge of the biblical doctrines sustained by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Thirdly, the Portuguese Union of Seventh-day Adventists had an administrative assembly in April 2012, and national evangelistic plans were laid out with an emphasis on evangelistic meetings scheduled for 2014. These meetings would take place at the Seventh-day Adventist central churches of Lisbon and Porto, the two largest cities in the country, and would be organized by the surrounding Seventh-day Adventist congregations. Since the church of Canelas is in the Porto area, to plan for a local evangelistic series in that year would probably conflict with the leadership’s national and regional plans.

For these reasons, this project’s evangelistic event was scheduled for April and May of 2013. The meetings would begin in April 5 and end on the May 26. They would be held on weekends, as was stated above, and in each weekend three messages would be delivered (Friday, Saturday and Sunday nights). The five-month preparation period would thus begin in November 2012.

**Summary**

The analysis of the international, Christ-centered, evangelistic preaching event that occurred in Canelas in 2001 indicated that this kind of preaching has a greater potential than the evangelistic series that were held in this church from 2009 to 2012.
Even if the number of baptisms was not high, given the dimensions of the church, some seem to have been directly influenced by the series in 2001, while some of the 18 baptisms that occurred in 2002 were also positively influenced by this series in 2001.

The evangelistic series from 2009 to 2012 where essentially doctrinal and not sufficiently rooted in the grace of God revealed at the cross. They were also short in length, and did not cover all Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. An evangelistic program was thus developed in order to prepare the church for evangelistic meetings that would cover all Seventh-day Adventist beliefs in a cross-centered way.
CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CROSS-CENTERED
EVANGELISTIC PREACHING STRATEGY

The present chapter is a narrative of the implementation of the cross-centered evangelistic preaching strategy developed and described in the previous chapter. It starts with the preparatory period, in which the church was informed about the project and motivated to embrace it. It then proceeds to the organizational phase, during which the evangelistic team was recruited and organized. Finally, it addresses the actual implementation stage, describing the practical process that was followed during the evangelistic meetings.

At each step, what really took place during the whole implementation process will be reported, even if it differed from what was initially planned.

Preparing for Evangelism

Before organizing the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas for the implementation of the evangelistic preaching strategy, I sought to have the support of the most influential lay leaders in this church. After securing that support, I presented the program to the church board in order to sense if it would be welcomed and supported by a larger group of leaders. I also presented the program to the whole church, with the church board’s support.
Gaining the Support of Influential Lay Leadership

In July 2012, just after being assigned as pastor for the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas, I consulted with two of the most recognized lay leaders in this church, to find out about the needs and desires of this congregation. Both of them had been in the position of First Elder for this church in recent years and shared a high level of commitment to the church.

As I mention in the first chapter, these elders informed me that in terms of public evangelism there was the need of having meetings that would cover the whole body of Seventh-day Adventist Doctrine. According to them, this type of series had not been done for a long time and it was necessary both for visitors and members.

After further discussions and the analysis of the contents and results of the evangelistic series in previous years, I suggested to them the idea of having an evangelistic preaching series that would deal with all the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, but with Christ and his cross at the heart of each message. These elders immediately welcomed the project offering their full support.

Presenting the Program To the Church Board

After sharing the idea for this project with the First Elder of the church, and with another influential elder, I also shared it in personal conversations with other church elders, and with several other lay leaders in the church. Sensing that the initiative was well viewed by them, I presented the project to the church board on September 1, 2012.
Before mentioning the project to the members of the board, I shared with them that, according to the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2010), the most important item on the agenda for every church board meeting should be directly linked with evangelism (p. 126). I also mentioned that in my previous pastoral experience I had found that when churches are motivated and engaged with a well-planned evangelistic program, there are less conflicts and more sense of fulfillment in the congregation.

I then asked for a vote to be taken so that the first item on each church board agenda from that point onward would be evangelism. The vote was taken and passed with unanimity.

After several other agenda items were successfully dealt with, I shared with the board openly that I was pursuing a Doctor of Ministry program, and that after conversing with the elders of the church, and after analyzing their previous evangelistic experiences, I had developed an evangelistic plan. I then asked permission to present it and since all seemed interested I continued.

I mentioned that this project would be undertaken partially as a result of my studies, but also as the result of my pastoral responsibility. I shared my vision and passion concerning this outreach program and acknowledge that, even if I were not studying for a Doctor of Ministry, I would definitely be promoting a similar program for this church since I felt this was the direction the church should go in terms of public evangelism.

I also revealed that, historically, evangelistic preaching in the Seventh-day Adventist Church has oscillated between the emphasis on specific doctrines and Christ-
centeredness (Knight, 2000). I then revealed that this particular evangelistic preaching strategy would permit us to present each Seventh-day Adventist Bible-belief with a strong emphasis on the love of Christ, revealed on Calvary.

I have also informed the church board that the project’s process would have several stages, as presented in the previous chapter. An evangelistic team would be recruited and five months of preparation, starting in the beginning of November 2012 and up until the end of March 2013, would be followed by two months of evangelistic meetings, starting in the beginning of April 2013 and ending in the end of May 2013. The meetings would be held on weekends, in the church’s main auditorium, and no meetings would be held during the week, except for the customary prayer meeting on Tuesdays.

The reactions to my presentation where all positive and every member of the church board supported this project. After a brief period of discussion with questions and answers, a unanimous vote was taken to implement the project. The meeting was then closed with several prayers offered to God for his guidance in the preparation for this evangelistic program, in the motivation of the whole church, and in the outreach initiatives in order to attract the biggest number possible of visitors.

Motivating the Whole Church

Having obtained a favorable vote and the support of the church board, I proceeded to search for the best ways to introduce the project to the whole church. In my experience as a pastor I was aware that, typically, once a project is presented to the church board, it does not take long for the rest of the church to hear about it. However, ministering in a new pastoral district with three churches presented it challenges.
In the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Portugal, the months of September, October, and November are normally dedicated to several meetings with the objective of nominating and electing the church leaders for the following ecclesiastical year that begins with the actual calendar year. Although I made my best to delegate the direction of these meetings, the church’s elders felt that my presence was important since this was the first time I was pastoring these congregations. My schedule was highly charged and I felt constantly divided between focusing on the project’s implementation and the other urgent needs. Through it all, I managed to advance.

On October 20, 2012, I shared the vision for this project with the whole church in a Sabbath morning service, motivating the church for evangelism. I shared that the board had voted unanimously the implementation of this evangelistic project and invited the members to unite with the board in praying for the project and for me. I also asked the members to pray in order that the Holy Spirit might help them to be available to actively participate in the project, since I believed that it would only be fruitful if every member was engaged.

I informed the church that I would meet with the local Evangelism Department leaders in order to develop plans that would permit the members to become involved according to their different gifts. I also shared that I was developing an evangelism seminar in order to help each church member to become active in reaching friends, relatives, and coworkers with the gospel. I told the church that I was planning on presenting the seminar on Tuesday nights, during the prayer meeting hours from November 2012 to March 2013.
Even if the project had already been voted by the church board, which normally has authority to decide what evangelism program the church must adopt every year, I still asked for the church to manifest itself embracing this project as its own, or I would not pursue it. Publicly and privately the members informed me of their support.

After this first presentation I invited the elders to join me in motivating the church constantly for evangelism, and specifically for the upcoming event in which the cross-centered evangelistic preaching strategy would be implemented. For five months the church was motivated to pray for the project, for the team that was organizing the event, and for the members’ relatives and friends that would be invited for the preaching series.

The members were also motivated to pursue genuine friendships with non-members who would be potential visitors to the upcoming evangelistic meetings. This constant motivation was done in private conversations mingled with intercessory prayers, but also publicly on Sabbath mornings and Tuesday nights, from the beginning of November 2012 up until the end of March 2013.

**Evangelism Seminar on Tuesday Nights**

After securing support from the lay leadership, the church board, and the whole body of the church for the cross-centered evangelistic preaching event, I started a program to motivate and equip the church members for personal evangelism. This evangelism seminar took place on Tuesday nights, on the hour normally dedicated to the prayer meeting. A presentation of 40 to 45 minutes was followed by 20 minutes of intercessory prayer.

The general theme for this seminar was “The Joy of God,” underlying the fact that God and his angels are happy when sinners repent and are converted to Christ (Luke
The themes presented were: (a) the biblical basis for evangelism; (b) intercessory prayer for the persons we desire to reach with the gospel; (c) how to successfully give Bible studies; (d) evangelism in the family; (e) small groups; (f) visiting members who no longer come to church and: (g) door to door witnessing. Typically, each theme was presented in several nights.

I had also planned for one other presentation on creative witnessing, but due to the limitations of my schedule I was not able to perform it. The church members that came to the meetings, however, shared their enthusiasm about the presentations, and the attendance at the prayer meetings increased about 20%.

Organizing for Evangelism

After motivating and preparing the church for evangelism, I started to organize for the implementation of the cross-centered evangelistic preaching strategy. Some obstacles arose and I was not able to recruit the members for the evangelistic team as quickly as I desired. However, the implementation advanced with the selection of a general coordinator for the evangelistic program, the selection of the leaders for each action-group, and the organization of meetings for guidance, prayer, and planning with the evangelistic team.

Choosing the General Coordinator

On October 20, 2012, after presenting the project to the whole church in the morning, the subject was again brought to the church board and a search began for a person who could coordinate the evangelistic program. The local Evangelism Department coordinator was not sure if he would continue in that position the next year. The members
of the church board and I felt that the best person to coordinate the project would be the evangelism coordinator for 2013, since the evangelistic meetings would be held that year and a great deal of preparation would still be done in its first three months.

In the following weeks a new coordinator for the local Evangelism Department was elected for the year of 2013. He had been the first elder for this church in recent years and had worked in close connection with the Evangelism Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Portuguese Union of Churches. Besides being a well-respected leader in the local church, he was a personal friend of mine. He seemed to be the most obvious choice for the general coordination of this kind of a project, especially one in which I was so much involved in.

Unexpectedly, however, in the week just after his election he received an invitation to work as a missionary for a Seventh-day Adventist relief agency in Mongolia. It was his and his family’s dream to become missionaries in a foreign country; so he accepted that job offer.

I received the news with joy and with anxiety. A friend had just received the opportunity to serve Christ according to the dreams and prayers of a lifetime. I was anxious to see how God would respond to my prayers, and to the dreams he had placed in my heart. I started praying more intensely for the project, and God’s answers did not take long to appear.

A new coordinator for the local Evangelism Department was elected. Although he should officially start to serve the church in this position in January 2013, I met with him several times in the months of November and December, 2012. Before other team members were chosen, we decided to invite a female member of the church to organize
and lead a prayer group that would focus solely in praying for this evangelistic project. The local Evangelism Department Director also suggested that we would invite a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Pedroso to become the general coordinator for the evangelistic event.

I feared for the success of the project. Two months had already gone by and, because of the difficulty in the election of the local Evangelism Department coordinator, and also because of an intensification in my pastoral duties, I observed that we were behind schedule. We had not yet found the leaders for the evangelistic action groups I had planned for, except the intercessory prayer leader. Now we were choosing a general coordinator only three months away from the beginning of the evangelistic series. But the church seemed motivated and I thought that stopping the implementation would not be positive.

The general coordinator chosen for the organization of the preaching event was a public college professor for Social Sciences. However, he had worked with the Evangelism Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Portuguese Union of Churches in the organization of several evangelistic events. He was a member of one of the churches that belonged to the same pastoral district and it became easy to contact him and recruit him. His passion for evangelism and his excellent leadership skills became one of the factors that made the implementation of this project move forward rapidly.

Gathering Funds and Support

Once the general coordinator was recruited, in January 2013, he started to work on a budget for the meetings. On a meeting held on February 17, he presented to the church board an estimate of 1,270 euros. However, he mentioned that he was planning to
secure the majority of the funding from private donors and that he would only ask for 635 euros from the church. The board voted to supply him with the amount he was asking but also to secure the rest of the expenses in case the donors would not cooperate.

Being a well-known person in the other two churches under my pastoral care, the general coordinator also asked me to visit the boards of these churches and ask for their support.

The churches of Avintes and Pedroso are geographically very close to Canelas, and many of the members in these three churches are connected by friendship or family ties. Since I was going to be intensely involved in the meetings to be held in Canelas, I had already notified the church boards of Avintes and Pedroso about this project. When the members of these boards learned about this project, they expressed the desire to be a part of the evangelistic effort.

Partly, I feared that their involvement would compromise the outcomes of my study. On the other hand I sensed that denying them that opportunity would cause more harm than good, especially in a period in which I was trying to gain their confidence as a spiritual leader. When local churches promote well organized evangelistic meetings in Portugal they always invite the nearby churches to participate. So I eventually accepted the general coordinator’s suggestion of asking for support in the church boards of Avintes and Pedroso.

The members of these boards decided to support the project financially. But they also confirmed their desire to cooperate with the leaders of the event in its organization and implementation. As we will see below in the final chapter of this work, this has
become one of the major factors that contributed to the success of the meetings in the opinion of the volunteers who were involved.

Worthy of note at this point is that at the end of the meetings the expenses amounted to a value significantly higher than the general coordinator had planned for at the beginning. The total cost for the event was of 5,384.23 euros. But all the additional funds came from private donors to whom he made personal appeals.

Creating an Evangelistic Team

After the selection of the general coordinator, I met with him and with the director for the local church Evangelism Department in order to select leaders for the different action-groups that would be preparing and undertaking the evangelistic event. We had already asked a member gifted with intercessory prayer to organize and lead a prayer group. She was also asked to join me and the elders in motivating the whole church for intercession. So people were already praying for the event while we were selecting and inviting the leaders that would be engaged.

Three Local Churches Uniting

The leaders for each different group, or department, of the evangelistic team that organized the event were chosen among the members of the Church of Canelas. However, as mentioned above, the churches of Avintes and Pedroso decided to support the project. The local evangelism director and the general coordinator suggested that it would be wise to choose some associate leaders from these two churches also.

We started contacting several persons and inviting them to be a part of the evangelistic team that would organize the event, letting them know what would be their
responsibilities. In the majority of the cases each leader selected accepted to cooperate immediately.

On the second half of February, and in March of 2013, I had the strong feeling that these three churches were uniting because of a common goal. Many members were excited about the meetings and about working together. In just a few weeks, a team of about 30 leaders was established and ready to act in recruiting and motivating others. We now turn to a brief summary of the different functions of each leader.

**Leaders’ Functions**

The persons who were invited to work in the preparation and implementation of this evangelistic effort, even the general coordinator, A. Ribeiro, were baptized members belonging to the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas, or to the Seventh-day Adventist churches of Avintes and Pedroso. They were all volunteers and received no money in return for their work.

A member from Canelas, responsible for the Personal Ministries Department, was chosen to lead a group that would visit three different kinds of persons: Former Seventh-day Adventists, visitors, and persons interested in studying the Bible, or in having someone to pray for them. The local evangelism director worked in close connection with him, offering leadership for several church members who united in this work. The persons visited were warmly invited to come to the meetings. A member from the church of Avintes, and another from the church of Pedroso, did a similar work.

The first elder of the church of Canelas, was chosen as responsible for all public contacts with the authorities of the parish. Another member, also from Canelas, was given the responsibility of leading a team for general marketing and communications. As
the speaker, I had the responsibility of supplying images and illustrations that would suit
the theme, and that would be used for billboards, scenarios, flyers, commitment cards,
and prayer request cards. I should also supply the team with summaries of the messages,
with Bible references for those who wished to further their study. But the marketing team
should use those images and summaries, and supply the copies needed.

A member from Canelas and two members from Avintes were chosen to lead the
team that would be in charge of the sound, image, video, and streaming. A member from
Pedroso was given the specific task of promoting the media-ministry, managing the
Facebook page, the YouTube channel, the email account, and surveilling the streaming
process.

A professional sign language communicator was invited to join our team for a
special effort in reaching the deaf through media. She was a member of the Seventh-day
Adventist Church of Espinho, but when the general coordinator contacted her and told
her about the meetings she volunteered to help with no charge.

A member from Canelas was chosen to organize and lead a team to prepare a
program for children. Her responsibility was to prepare an evangelistic series for children
to take place while the parents were attending the meetings for the adults. She was also to
coordinate the safety procedures to which parents and children should comply.

A member from Avintes and another from Pedroso were chosen to support the
prayer leader from Canelas and consolidate the prayer ministry team. They promoted
daily intercession during the preparation for the meetings, organized special moments of
prayer each week for the members, and prepared a special week of prayer with meetings
at 6:00 a.m. taking place in the sanctuary of the church were the series were to be held.
This week of prayer was scheduled for immediately before the commencement of the series. They also organized different groups of members to be ready to pray during the evangelistic meetings for the preacher, the members, the visitors, and for prayer requests.

A member from Canelas and a young couple from Avintes were chosen to coordinate a reception team that had the responsibility of greeting warmly all the people coming to the meetings, assisting them with their specific needs, guiding the parents who wished to have their children attend the children’s program, and keeping an accurate record of visitors, and all persons attending. The leader of this team, a member of Canelas’ church, was also responsible for having Bibles and evangelistic literature available to offer to the visitors.

Two members were selected to lead a team for the organization of the auditorium. This team helped each person finding a seat, going to the restroom, and exiting the auditorium. The members of this team also helped the hosts and speaker in moments when special cards, or literature was distributed.

One member out of each of the three churches was chosen to lead a team to decorate the room each week. Two members from Canelas were chosen to manage all the entrances and exits on the platform.

The directors for the Music Department of the Avintes and Pedroso churches were also chosen to cooperate in the music ministry, which was led by the Canelas’ Music Department director. They were responsible for the initial moments of praise before the beginning of each meeting, for the songs of appeal, and for the good performance of each singer and musician. They were also to organize a concert with the participation of the
three churches prior to the beginning of the series, so that the members of the three churches could invite their friends and let them know about the upcoming meetings.

A male member from Avintes and a female from Canelas were selected as hosts for the series. They were supposed to greet the audience with enthusiasm and care, give important information about the event, introduce the theme of each night, summarize the messages at the end, and invite the audience for the next meetings.

Three Special Occasions

After the selection of the leaders for each group, the general coordinator and I were constantly available to offer guidance and support to all the leaders by phone, personal interviews and meetings. We organized two meetings with the whole team of leaders to pray, go over the whole program, explain the responsibilities of each leader and their team, and how each department would have to function in harmony with the others. We also prepared three special events prior to the beginning of the series.

A Special Concert

As mentioned above, the music team was to organize a concert with the participation of musicians and singers of the three churches that were coming together for this evangelistic project. This idea actually came from the leader of the team, the director of the Canelas’ Music Department, and again gave evidence of the desire that the members of these churches were experiencing to work together.

She wished to give the members of these churches an opportunity to invite their non-Adventist friends and family to an occasion that would serve as a foretaste for the meetings. The idea was welcomed by the leadership of the three churches, and by the
general coordinator of the series. We all wished to see how the team would work together and this concert was scheduled for March 23, 2013, in the afternoon.

The program was simple, well prepared and Christ-centered. After the participation of several choirs, musicians and singers, I shared a brief personal testimony, which was linked to several Bible passages and to the cross of Christ. I also invited all the persons attending to be present at the meetings. There was a reasonable number of visitors present, although the team did not count them. However, several members of the three churches approached me amazed with what they considered to be the attractiveness of the program, and the beauty of seeing the three churches working in such harmony.

A Special Week of Prayer

The general coordinator for the series had the idea of promoting a prayer week at 6:00 a.m. with the specific purpose of praying for the evangelistic meetings. It would take place from March 28 to April 4, 2013, just prior to the commencement of the evangelistic meetings. We asked the prayer leader and her team to organize this week of prayer meetings. But I could not have anticipated what I saw during that week.

Members from the three churches came. Two of them, belonging to the same church, had both approached me weeks earlier to complaint about each other. However, after just a few days of these early morning gatherings for prayer I saw them embracing each other and entering the sanctuary with expressions of happiness.

Another surprise was a non-Adventist lady attending. She was the mother of one of the volunteers who decided to accompany her son to these early meetings. She liked them so much that she became an answer to her own prayers. She attended all the series becoming one of the first baptisms that we had as a result.
The evangelistic team was so motivated by this week of prayer that we also decided to have special prayer meetings during the series on Sunday mornings, from 7:00 to 8:00 a.m., at the auditorium of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Avintes.

A Special Tuesday Night

Another key event was the Tuesday night prayer meeting of April 2, 2013. The team decided to have an exceptional meeting that would serve as a rehearsal for the series. Although the attendance that night was not very large, the majority of the evangelistic team was present, and practically all took part in the rehearsal. Errors were made and corrected, the lights, image projection, sound, video cameras, and streaming devices were adjusted. We had a meeting with the team at the end to talk over some important details and pray.

Everything would have been normal in a situation like this, but a few things impressed me. I had been doing the best I could so that the meetings could be held successfully, working many times 15, or 16 hours a day. However, I was not the only one. The decoration of the room, the amount of investment made by the church in technical material, the organization of the team, the sympathy of the members, everything was expressing a high level of commitment and anticipation.

As I invited the members to pray after my short sermon, I joined one of the prayer groups. One of the local church’s elders was also present at that group and prayed last. She started interceding in a very touching way for her non-Adventist mother whom she had been inviting to come to the meetings starting that Friday night. With tears and intensity she also prayed for all of the team, the visitors, the members of the church, and for me.
I left the church that night deeply moved, and with a bittersweet feeling. Everything was ready, but I knew I was not. Normally, whenever I preach with visual illustrations I like to prepare the images and presentations using software that enables me to have a very satisfying final result. I had prepared some images for this rehearsal and, with the help of a friend who is an excellent graphic designer, I had done the images for the scenery, billboards, posters, flyers, and for the first slide of every different theme (the reader will find some of these in Appendix B).

However, due to an increase of many pastoral commitments and duties, at that time, not one slide was yet made for the body of the 24 evangelistic messages. I had much material written already, many ideas and illustrations on my mind, but no graphics. Typically it takes me six to seven hours preparing the graphics for one sermon. My anxiety levels were rising, but I decided to do whatever necessary not to disappoint the persons who were working so hard to make this event a reality. After two nights with little sleep, I managed to have the graphics for the first message ready.

**Cross-centered Evangelism**

True evangelism involves a cross of suffering for the evangelist (Matt 10:16-39; John 15:18-20; Acts 20:17-25). The implementation of this project brought me joys and also tears. Since the first weekend of meetings until the last one I have experienced great amounts of stress, anxiety, fatigue, and feelings of discouragement. Nonetheless I also was greatly encouraged and uplifted by numerous testimonies of church members and visitors. Different factors contributed to the success of the meetings, although the kind of success was different than what I had anticipated.
As scheduled, the evangelistic series took place at the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas from April 5, to May 26, 2013. The meetings were held on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. The hours for the meetings were from 8:30 to 10:00 p.m., and the evangelistic team was required to be present at 7:00 p.m. for preparation and rehearsals. The doors of the church opened each night at 8:00 p.m. for the public. Typically the majority of the team would arrive at 7:30 p.m., since many Portuguese people work late. However, this would still give us 30 minutes until the public started to arrive.

From the first night, with rare exceptions, at 7:30 p.m. I would ask all the team members present to unite with me in prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. I would then do a brief test to see if my PowerPoint presentation was working well. F. Reis, responsible for the media-ministry, would kindly read all my presentation for each night before that moment and ask me to do some last minute changes if necessary. Since I was working on the graphics each day with Adobe Photoshop, sometimes it would take me up to 10, or 15 minutes, to correct one or two slides.

As soon as I finished testing the presentation, I would exit the platform and spend the rest of the time available in the prayer room, where the prayer leaders and team members were interceding. This was a highly rewarding experience since each night, before going out to preach, I would go in to pray for others and have others praying for me. Whenever I had the time, I would still go over the key points of the message for that evening with the sign language communicator, so that her work could be simplified.

After preaching the sermon and offering the appeal, I would then meet with the leaders of the evangelistic team, under the leadership of the general coordinator, on the
first two nights of each weekend. Every Friday and Saturday at 10:15 p.m. we would meet for evaluation and debriefing. Many of these nights I would arrive at my house around 11:00 p.m., or later. But in order for my mind to relax and stop thinking about all the details of the event, I had to wait for one or two hours before I went to sleep.

The general coordinator showed a strong commitment in supervising all the different leaders of each group so that I could focus on the preaching. Still, I was the district pastor of the three churches that were working together and I had administrative duties which were impossible to delegate. Nevertheless, I was not the only one sacrificing for the successful preaching of the gospel during the series.

A Global View of the Meetings

On the nights of the meetings, when the doors of the church were opened at 8:00 p.m., all the different groups of the evangelistic team were up and running. The persons who approached the church would see an enormous outdoor banner with the image and title of the meetings. The extremely well presented receptionists greeted the members and visitors warmly, guided them through a brief, optional, inscription, presented them with literature and cards on which the persons could write their prayer requests, guided them to a team member working with the children’s department, if needed, and helped them find a room assistant to guide them to an available seat.

From 8:00 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. the sound and image team presented calm music, accompanied by relaxing nature videos, to help create an atmosphere of peace in the room that was decorated with beautiful flowers and colorful tissues. The children’s team had an excellent program running for two hours (8:00 p.m. to 10:00 p.m.). The children
received a biblical message in tune with the adults’ service through stories, music, and creative activities.

At 8:30 p.m., three or four members of the music team would enter the platform to guide the congregation in a Christ-centered song service for 15 minutes. Between 8:45 p.m. and 8:50 p.m. the hosts entered the platform to greet all the attendants, offer important information or gifts to the visitors, and introduce the theme for that evening with well elaborated dialogues. Around 8:55 p.m. a special introductory song was performed by a singer, or a small group of singers.

A half a minute introductory video would go on the air at 9:00 p.m. and I entered the platform. After greeting the audience in a minute or two, I started the sermon and had 55 to 60 minutes to finish it. I mainly used images with biblical texts, but also with another interesting information that would help me build the different topics. The thematic for the sermons followed exactly the plan laid out in the fourth chapter. In all the messages, Jesus Christ, and especially his sacrifice, was the main emphasis.

During the sermon, the person in charge for media ministry would interact each night with people around the country, and around the world, who were watching online, asking for information, presenting prayer requests, and motivating the team with encouraging words.

This interaction would actually continue during the week, not only through the Church’s webpage (www.iasdcanelas.org), but also on the Facebook page (www.facebook.com/asboasnoticiasdoamordecristo) and on the YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/channel/UCEzfK31P6jHr_aQ7gkODNSg) created specifically for the event.
Four cameramen were recording and two other team members were guiding the streaming and recording process. Three other members were surveilling the illumination, image, and sound, to make sure everything was going as planned.

At the end I would offer an appeal for the attendants to accept the message and act on it. The physical manifestation that I would ask for would vary. I have used standing calls, kneeling calls, hand raised calls, altar calls, and cards. I have made an appeal in every sermon and I never had a night without positive responses.

A special song was also offered by a talented singer at the end of each sermon. I started the appeal and the singer performed at a specific, pre-arranged, moment. After she, or he, was finished, I concluded the appeal and finished with prayer. Immediately after that I exited and the hosts entered for a final word of dismissal, with the introduction of the following topic. The parents, or guardians of small children were reminded to pick them up using the identification cards that were offered to them at the beginning.

Each movement in and out of the platform was coordinated by the detail oriented leaders assigned to that function. Keeping themselves in touch with the sound and image booth they would instruct us how and when to enter and exit the platform. The general coordinator was also normally always present at the backstage offering leadership and support. Every participant felt that every detail was taken care of. During all this time, a prayer group was asking God for his intervention.

Opening Weekend

The first weekend of meetings was possibly the most stressful for every team member. The first night, April 5, 2013, was definitely the most difficult for all of us, since we felt the weight of the responsibly increasing with every member and visitor
entering the auditorium. The commitment of the team was so high that nobody wanted to fail. Small groups of team members were seen praying backstage. I was so nervous that I started doing pushups on the floor before entering the platform in an attempt to calm down and make the people around me decompress.

When I started preaching, my lapel microphone was not working. One of the sound members had to come on stage to help. During the sermon I felt that my message was too long. I had made too many graphics for my style of preaching. However, I did not manage to cut much of it and preached for one hour and 15 minutes. I also looked at the upper camera that was recording near the sound both in the balcony. The team later informed me that I was supposed to look to another camera that was down at the auditorium.

On one of the occasions that I looked up, I saw the number 160 in red on a screen. The team was trying to communicate something with me, but I failed to grasp it. Later, they also tried to help me showing the time I had left. I was so nervous that I did not mind any of that information, and just strived to finish the best I could.

In the evaluation meeting we had at the end, the team was highly motivated by the results, but we all acknowledge that many things still needed to be adjusted. I apologized for preaching so long but the team was extremely supportive.

There was also an error when counting the attendance. Initially the leader for the receptionists gave the team leaders the number of 400 persons attending. This was obviously not the case, since such a number would not possibly fit in the auditorium. An estimate was made and the team came up with the number of 253 in attendance, without being completely sure. However, we had 162 connections on the church’s webpage
(www.iasdcanelas.org), from people who were watching via streaming and sending feedbacks on the internet. So in reality we had more than 400 persons listening to the message and watching the meeting. The number 160 that I saw in red referred to that.

One of the leaders responsible for managing the auditorium came into the meeting saying that she had just been with a young man who saw our great outdoor banner while passing on the street and felt the desire to change his life. He came in and stayed for the whole program.

One number that the receptionists did not miss was the quantity of visitors. We had 30 visitors attending the first night. This was a tremendously good sign, since the numbers of visitors for a single night in an evangelistic meeting in Portugal, even for national events, is around 10 to 20. This was a local event and we were thrilled to have so many visitors attending.

On the second night, April 6, 2013, we had 307 persons attending, 31 visitors, and 125 connections on the internet. I managed to cut down my time of preaching to one hour and three minutes, and we had no sound flaws this time. The team was radiant at the end.

These visits served not only to motivate me, but the whole evangelistic team. We knew that people from the whole country were watching. The meeting with the team at the end was a series of testimonies about how God was blessing us.

One of the hosts said emotion caught up with her. She got all confused with her dialogue because she saw her non-Adventist mother present in the audience for the second time, after she had initially refused her invitation.

On the third night we had 41 visitors, 282 in attendance and 140 connections on the internet. My time of preaching was practically the same as the previous night. There
was a very pleasant feeling running through the team at the end. Many were praising God for answered prayers. On these first three nights the meetings had been a success. Every person in the audience responded favorably to the appeals made at the end. We knew our work was just starting, but we were happy since it was starting so well.

Keeping the Passion Burning

After the first weekend I really wondered if it would be possible to maintain the interest until the end. I had the idea of doing some small, one minute videos, announcing the themes for each weekend and motivating people to come, or watch on the internet. The videos were posted on Facebook and on YouTube by the middle of the week, and shared by many.

On April 12, 2013, after our fourth meeting, a church member, who was cooperating with the prayer team, approached me and said: “Pastor, if a bomb would fall here and you would die, all of this would have been worth it, you know?” I was unsure of what he meant, so he continued: “I came to the prayer meetings at 6:00 a.m. and I am participating in the prayer ministry. I can see now that a Christian cannot live without prayer.” I expressed some joy and agreement. Then he said: “Now I pray for many, and when I finish praying I feel that I had not prayed everything I needed.”

The conversation went on for a couple of more minutes, and finally he told me: “Pastor, I train dogs as a part-time job. Someone just offered me a lot of money for my best dog. I will give it all to the Lord. I arrived to the conclusion that I have not been as faithful as I should.” These words did not tell me if my preaching was being effective, but they gave me courage and strength.
On the next evening, April 13, 2013, after preaching a sermon about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, his forgiveness, and righteousness by faith in him, I invited all those who wanted to receive Christ as their personal savior to come forward near the platform. We had 288 persons attending that evening, and 30 visitors. When I made the call at the end, only eight persons had the courage to come forward.

I knew that altar calls specifically aimed at the visitors are becoming very rare in Seventh-day Adventist churches in Portugal. But still I ventured to do it since in the five previous meetings, the whole congregation had responded promptly to the invitations to stand, and raise hands. The meager results left me a little discouraged, since I was expecting for more people to respond. I was also afraid the number of visitors would drop, after an appeal like that.

Arriving at my car that night, one of the visitors approached me. She started sharing that five years prior to that date she had lost a baby. She developed a serious illness and always felt guilty until that evening. She was not among those who came forward but she told me: “What you said in there today was for me.” This brought to my mind the conviction that our work was important, and that we should continue.

I also received a message via Facebook that night from a young Seventh-day Adventist woman living in the city of Setúbal, near Lisbon. She shared with me that her whole family was watching the meetings online, and that her father, a non-Adventist, was very receptive.

The next evening the attendance dropped to 241. However, the visitors increased to 35, and the person who had contacted me the night before via Facebook sent me another message saying that her father had decided to study the Bible. And the meetings
went on weekend after weekend with similar experiences. Many times I would feel defeated by my shortcomings, or by the lack of response. But every weekend night the team would receive positive feedback from many different persons.

Even during the week days, messages of appreciation would arrive from different parts of the country, and even of the world, recognizing the excellence of the program and the effort that the whole team was doing. The evaluation meetings were many times spent sharing testimonies about the receptiveness of the series by many.

Attendance and Visitors

On our eighth meeting, April 20, 2013, the general coordinator told me that about 15 members of the local Catholic Church were attending and commenting: “Our priest is not teaching the Bible. This pastor is different. When we come here we really learn.” That same evening, the first elder of our church also wanted to speak to me. He said: “I have witnessed many evangelistic series, but nothing ever like this. The involvement of our members, the number of visitors, everything is outstanding. Praise God!”

On the night of April 21, we had 44 visitors, and 264 persons attending. The team shared with me that around 100 different visitors had already came to the meetings, and that although half of the visitors each night were not regular, a group of about 15 visitors were coming regularly every night. Table 2 shows the numbers of attendance, visitors, new visitors each night, and Internet connections throughout the whole series.
Table 2

Attendance, Visitors, New Visitors, and Streaming Connections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Visitors</th>
<th>New Visitors</th>
<th>Connections</th>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>April 7</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>140</td>
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<td>36</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>150</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>73</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>103</td>
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<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>130</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
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<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 4</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>70</td>
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<td>24</td>
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<td>65</td>
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<tr>
<td>May 12</td>
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<td>28</td>
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<td>70</td>
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<tr>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>110</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>100</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 26</td>
<td>250</td>
<td>22</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data provided by the general coordinator for the evangelistic series, A. Ribeiro, on June 20, 2013.

There is certainly a slight decrease in the numbers towards the last weekends. The fact that the meetings extended for a period of two months was one of the challenges that the team discussed from the beginning. We did everything possible in order to keep the
people coming, offering a program that would satisfy the members and attract the visitors.

Near the end of the meetings one of the elders of the church of Avintes expressed to me his feelings with the following words: “Pastor, I really admire you. There was never a pastor that would maintain the interest in an evangelistic campaign for so long” (J. N. Silva, personal communication, May 15, 2013). However, even if I appreciated his words, I knew that this had been a team effort. Any success was due to the work of many and not only to my preaching. I was thankful to God that we could keep the fire of the passion for Christ and his work burning.

Disappointments and Surprises

On the fifth weekend of meetings I presented Bible doctrines that are preached almost exclusively by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, emphasizing their connections to the cross of Christ. On the evening of May 3, 2013, I presented a sermon about the seventh-day Sabbath. The next evening about the Remnant Church, and the next about the eschatological prophecies of Revelation 13. At the end of the third meeting, the member of our team who was in charge of media ministry shared with me: “I never saw a pastor in Portugal preaching on this subject so boldly. This was a very good sermon.”

A young Seventh-day Adventist woman visiting from another city sent me a message via Facebook that same night saying: “I was praying and I cried because at the end the visitors were saying that they liked the presentation.” Another lady, who started attending our Bible study classes on Saturday mornings said: “I will never miss another Sabbath.”
Nonetheless, I was concerned about the outcome. I knew that the majority of the visitors were Catholic, or came from a Catholic background. Even if I did my best to center the messages on the love and sacrifice of Christ for our sins, I did not restrain from presenting the traditional Seventh-day Adventist interpretation of the prophecies of Revelation 13 and 14. It would not be easy for them to accept such a message. In fact, a member of the receptionist team informed me that some of the visitors did not return after those messages.

No Baptisms

Another difficult issue was that, during the last few weekends, the general coordinator brought up the question of baptisms. Initially, I had planned to have a baptismal ceremony at the end of the meetings. The members of the Church had been asked to visit the persons who they were bringing to the meetings and help them prepare for baptism. The visitation team was also asked to do this work, or to support it. However, during the two months of the series, the emphasis of the project was so much placed on the meetings that the private visits seemed to have been overlooked. Apparently, nobody was ready for baptism.

On the evening of May 19, 2013, I preached about the biblical baptism, relating its meaning to the cross and resurrection of Christ. Strangely, in the decision cards, only one visitor had taken the decision to be baptized, and six others to study the Bible. The lady who asked to be baptized had such a strong desire to experience that ceremony that she did not wished to wait any longer. She was present in 23 meetings out of 24, and she had studied the subject of the night she missed. However, the opinion of some members of the church board was that only two months of attendance was not enough for baptism.
I did not agree, but kept my opinion for myself. Visiting with this lady I tried to help her wait patiently until the members of the Church got to know her better. She agreed and we scheduled the baptism for the month of August.

There were also 12 other young people, sons and daughters from the members of the church, who wished to be baptized even though they did not sign any cards. Some of them were children of the members of the evangelistic team. The parents expressed several concerns. Some were afraid that their children would be driven by emotion and not conviction, or conversion. Others were afraid that the church would think that we were forcing people to be baptized. So the team thought it would be best to wait a few more months.

There were also two visitors brought by the members of the Church of Avintes who desired to be baptized. Their baptisms occurred at that church two weeks after the meetings were over. One visitor brought by the members of the same church desired to study the Bible, and four visitors brought by members of the church of Pedroso also wanted Bible studies.

**Some Baptisms**

We had scheduled the baptism, of the first lady who requested to be baptized, for August 24, 2013, and apparently that would be the only baptism that year at our church. In the month of July I was absent because of my studies. However, on August 3, the mother of a church member, the lady who had come to the prayer week at 6:00 a.m., and to the evangelistic meetings, approached me and said: “Pastor, I want to be baptized.”

She explained that the she watched the last messages of the series via the internet, since she was visiting her daughter in Switzerland. Then she mentioned that she had been
a devout Catholic and said: “I had been deceived for my entire life.” She asked me to
baptize her by the end of the year. Her daughter and son in law had joined her in
watching the meetings in Switzerland and were planning to be in Portugal on vacations at
the time of her baptism.

On August 17, 2013, a member of the church met with me and informed me that
another lady, and a gentleman, two former Seventh-day Adventists that came to the
meetings, and whom he personally visited with, were ready to be rebaptized. Since the
church board knew these persons well, their rebaptism was approved unanimously a few
days later. But before finishing the conversation, that member told me: “And there are
still many more fruits of your meetings. They will come with time.”

The afternoon of August 24, 2013, arrived finally. The first fruits of the meetings
in terms of baptisms were three souls: a non-Adventist, and two former Seventh-day
Adventists. I prepared a baptismal program that involved a review of the major beliefs of
the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and an appeal made with the participation of an
excellent singer who would interpret the Via Dolorosa. After the baptisms I invited all
those who wanted to be baptized to come forward and 15 persons responded. Among
them were the lady who had been in Switzerland, the 12 young people who already said
they wished to be baptized, a young single mother, and another young man.

I baptized the lady who had been visiting her daughter in Switzerland on
December 28, 2013, together with a young man who testified that the meetings were
important for his decision to be baptized. Eleven other young people told me the same in
personal interviews near the moment of their baptism on February 8, 2014.
More Than Baptisms

During the year that followed the end of the meetings I continued to receive positive feedback from several persons. As I have done so far in this chapter, I will mention the testimonies that stand out the most among many that I could choose.

The young man who passed by on the street and decided to come in just by looking at the outdoor banner really changed his life. He stopped smoking, drinking, and using drugs. Although not baptized yet, he keeps frequenting the church on a regular basis and says that he only feels safe there, near his spiritual family.

Two young Seventh-day Adventist pastoral families in Portugal shared with me that their young children, of ages between 3 and 11, never missed a meeting online (the adult program) and were frustrated when the meetings were over.

A few days before her rebaptism, a former Seventh-day Adventist shared with me: “Honestly, I never knew a Pastor who would have the courage to say the things that you said in these talks, things that we need to listen” (R. Machieira, personal communication, August 20, 2013).

The son of a church member, showed the YouTube channel to his fiancée. She chose to watch first the message concerning the biblical principles on finances. But the message was so centered on the love of Christ that she was moved to tears and testified that she felt much better after watching that video than before. N. Mendes was so touched that he decided to mention the YouTube channel in an article that a local newspaper asked him to write about religion (personal communication, May 8, 2014).

A former member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canelas called me from Switzerland. He shared that exactly 23 years before that precise date he had left the
church and started smoking and drinking. But he had known about the meetings through family members and was watching them on YouTube. He said: “I spend entire nights watching and I started to read my Bible again. Please pray for me” (L. Conceição, personal communication, May 16, 2014).

Two Seventh-day Adventist radio stations from Lisbon contacted me and asked me to broadcast the messages.

Finally, I also felt inspired to prepare a Bible study guide with the themes and emphasis of the messages I shared on these meetings. Since I had a person who was interested in studying the Bible with me in September, 2014, I took the first set of this Bible study to our first meeting.

I was not familiarized with this person and only knew that he was the father of a young man that I had baptized previously. However, this man informed me that he knew me from the meetings that were held at the Church of Canelas in April and May, 2013. He had been present at a few of them, and watched all the others online. We started a special friendship in which I constantly strived to help this man to trust and surrender fully to Christ. He had already studied the Bible with the two previous pastors who had served in this Church, but never had the courage to take a decision for baptism.

After several months of Bible studies, he started to ask me persistently to be baptized. On August 1, 2015, the day I left the Church of Canelas, to embrace a new pastoral challenge, I had the privilege of baptizing six persons. Among them was one more fruit of cross-centered preaching. The total number of baptisms directly influenced by the cross-centered series was of 17.
The young single mother mentioned above, who responded to a cross-centered message and appeal at the end of the first baptismal ceremony, also studied the Bible and was baptized with the youth that had attended the series. So it is reasonable to conclude that the series had an indirect impact on her decision and we could reach to the number of 18. However, the spiritual force of the testimonies that these people shared with me has become more important than any number.
CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION AND LEARNINGS

In this final chapter a concise summary of the project will be provided. Next, we will look at the description of the method used to evaluate the intervention, and the measurable outcomes. Lastly, the major conclusions of this work will be presented.

Summary of the Project

This project was an attempt to revive the evangelistic efforts and outcomes at the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas, in Portugal, through the construction and presentation of an evangelistic sequence of sermons centered in the sacrifice of Christ. This Church was motivated for evangelism by direct appeals from the pulpit, by personal interviews with the leaders, board meetings, and business meetings. An evangelistic team was created in order for initiatives to be taken to secure a good number of non-Adventists and former church members in the audience, and to prepare the evangelistic series. The 28 biblical beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were divided into 24 themes conceived with the cross of Christ as the foundation from which all else would flow. The evangelistic meetings were held on weekend nights at the church’s sanctuary in the months of April and May of the year 2013. The attendance, number of visitors, and number of baptisms directly linked to these meetings, outnumbered all the evangelistic series done in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas in previous years.
Description of the Evaluation

To evaluate this project quantitatively, an investigation was made to find out the numbers of attendance, visitors, and baptisms in the evangelistic series done at the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas in previous years (see fourth chapter). With the exception of an international event held at that Church in 2001, this investigation focused on the evangelistic series that took place in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas from 2009 to 2012.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to find accurate records of these previous meetings. However, the testimonies gathered from the leaders in charge of organizing those series were helpful in determining the impact of the cross-centered meetings. Below, the reader can find a summary of the numeric records available.

Numbers in Previous Series

Although the large event in 2001 was not a local initiative, five persons of this church reported that it had some sort of influence in their decision for baptism.

The evangelistic meetings in 2009 were held only for a week. They had an average number of 115 people attending, and six to 10 visitors per night. There were no baptisms, or requests for Bible studies.

The evangelistic meetings in 2010 consisted of two separate weeks of meetings, one in May and another in November. In the meetings of May, the average attendance was of 90 people, and the number of visitors was again six to 10 per night. There were three requests for Bible studies. In the meetings of November, the attendance records were lost, but 12 persons were baptized at the end of the meetings. Nonetheless, these 12
persons had decided previously to be baptized and were already prepared for baptism before the meetings started. No requests were made to study the Bible, or for baptism.

In 2011, the evangelistic meetings were held in 30 homes of the members. There were 164 members involved and 17 visitors. No requests were made for baptism, or for Bible study. In 2012 there were no evangelistic meetings that were held in the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas.

Data Collection

The collection of the numeric data in the cross-centered series was done by the team of receptionists. The leaders of this team reported the numbers of attendance, visitors, new visitors, and internet connections every night. The reports were presented orally on the evaluation meetings, at the end of the two first evenings of each weekend of the series, and also in written for every single evening to the general coordinator, who in turn reported them to me. His reports were made orally, by email, and in written PDF documents.

Outcomes

As shown in the previous chapter, the numbers of attendance, visitors, baptisms, and requests for Bible study in the cross-centered evangelistic meetings were significantly higher than the numbers in the previous evangelistic series. The average number in attendance was 253 persons, the average number of visitors was of 29 persons. We had six requests for Bible studies at Canelas, and 17 people who were baptized in this church, recognizing that the preaching event played a major role in their decision for baptism.
One could argue that the support of two other local churches has influenced the outcomes, and partially that may have happened. However, my personal observation, and the observation of the evangelistic team leaders, has lead me to the conclusion that 80 to 90% of the numbers in attendance were Seventh-day Adventists and visitors from Canelas.

Besides, it is very current that members from other churches will appear at the evangelistic meetings held in this Church, mainly because the building has conditions that are superior to the other churches in the area. Although in the previous evangelistic series that were studied from 2009 to 2012 there was not a joint effort of the three churches belonging to this pastoral district, the attendance was without a doubt composed of members from other churches too.

In addition to these numbers, we also had an average of 96 connections via streaming that could represent a much larger number of people watching the program, something that the other events never had. And when it comes to numbers of viewings on YouTube, these have not stopped growing, even though the team did not focus on a particular strategy to make them popular.

It is also interesting to look at the numbers provided by the Church’s clerk concerning the membership at the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas for years that go from the year 2000 to 2014. This is the content of Table 3.
### Table 3

**Membership From 2000 to 2014**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Baptism</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>Transfer</th>
<th>Apostasy</th>
<th>Death</th>
<th>Transfer</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>0</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>297</td>
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<tr>
<td>2011</td>
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<tr>
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<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>315</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Local church data provided in personal communication by the church’s clerk, B. Silva, on July 16, 2015.

It is interesting to note that the two highest numbers in baptisms were obtained in the years that followed the organization of two major evangelistic events. In 2001, an international evangelistic event took place and the following year 18 baptisms occurred. In 2013, a local initiative with national and even international repercussions, happened, and in the following year the church reached exactly the number of 18 baptisms once more, after 12 years had passed.

However, the study of the existing data concerning the series in 2001 shows that the results of the cross-centered evangelistic preaching seemed to have resulted in an improved number of baptisms for the church of Canelas, since 17 persons testified that the series had a direct impact in their decision for baptism. Concerning the series made in
2001, only five said that the preaching event had a direct or indirect influence in their decision for baptism.

It is also worthy of note that the cross-centered series has obtained unprecedented numbers in baptisms, attendance, and visitors when comparing the results with the previous locally organized evangelistic meetings from 2009 to 2012.

**Conclusions**

As one of the initial parts of this investigation, the second chapter has shown that the sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the fundamental message of the entire Bible. At the cross, Christ shattered Satan’s accusations, paid for humanity’s sins, revealed the love of God, and conquered the loyal service of human and angelical beings. Paul’s ministry testifies to the power and importance of keeping the cross central in Christian ministry. The first evangelistic sermon proclaimed at the Pentecost by Peter was cross-centered, and the evangelistic sermons on the last days of earth’s history will also emphasize the meaning of the cross.

In the third chapter of this work we have seen that current literature on evangelistic preaching defines it as a way of bringing the message of the cross to those who did not yet surrendered to Christ, so that they may have the opportunity to repent and be saved. But the believers in Christ can also benefit from evangelistic sermons in multiple ways.

The evangelistic sermon should be a channel to convey the major Bible doctrines in a cross-centered way. Jesus Christ and his sacrifice must be the foundation of the evangelistic message, appeal, and entire service. It must also be the foundation of the character of the believers who seek to attract others to Christ, especially of the evangelist.
New technology brings new responsibility in evangelistic preaching. It is now possible to reach much more people with much less effort. Reaching the entire world with the message of the cross is the purpose of Christianity. For Seventh-day Adventist Christians, reaching the entire world with the cross as the center of their distinctive doctrines will become a triggering event to hasten the coming of Jesus Christ.

The fourth chapter has shown that it is still possible to present the full body of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs as 24 cross-centered evangelistic sermons. It has also suggested that one of the best ways to do it is using the weekend nights, when people are usually more available.

With the available data from chapter five, and after briefly reviewing the major conclusions of chapters two, three, and four, the following four overarching conclusions can be drawn.

First, centering every message on the sacrifice of Christ is a non-negotiable when it comes to evangelism. Doctrinal speeches that are not filled with a strong emphasis on the love of God revealed on the cross are not in accordance with the biblical model for evangelistic sermons, and do not produce impacting results. The cross of Christ is the God given token that attracts attendance to meetings, and decisions to eternity. Seventh-day Adventists have many specific Bible doctrines that can and should always be presented in their relationship to the death and resurrection of Jesus.

Secondly, a successful evangelistic event that covers all of the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs may still be promoted in a Portuguese church setting, but it must be prepared with sufficient time to deal with unpredictable circumstances. The design of a strong plan, the necessary motivation of the church, and the organization of a solid team
will require more than a few months. A pastor that cannot sufficiently liberate himself from pastoral and administrative responsibilities will struggle to be the speaker of an event of this nature, and to have his messages ready.

Thirdly, the results of a cross-centered evangelistic series may not be seen immediately. A sufficient amount of time must be given for persons to respond to the work of the Holy Spirit. The fact that the attendants do not respond immediately does not mean that they will not do it latter. Jesus compared the word of God to a “seed” (Luke 8:11).

Finally, unexpected events are not always bad when it comes to evangelism. God can use persons that we did not anticipate to efficiently perform specific tasks. He may prompt churches to work together. He may multiply the imperfect efforts of humanity in order to reach hearts with the message of the cross.

**Personal Transformation**

Praying for, devising, organizing, promoting, writing, and living out the current project has been a tremendously educative process. I will state three different reasons why, although there are many more.

First, my personal faith in the love of God for me was revived. It is a rare thing for a Seventh-day Adventist Portuguese pastor to have the opportunity to pursue a doctorate offered by an Adventist school. In my early teen years I envisioned starting to work right after finishing high school, never to study again. Looking back today I see this opportunity as the culmination of a series of miracles of God’s grace in my life. Furthermore, to be able to do evangelism in a scale that I had only dreamed of taught me
that God knows about my aspirations, and this led me to trust him more in times when my dreams for ministry seem not to be coming true.

Another benefit that I believe to have gained was a closer walk with Jesus Christ. This project has permitted me to pray over and contemplate intensely the biblical notions of evangelism, the cross, and preaching. One cannot think of evangelism without thinking about the main character of the gospel. It is also not possible to think biblically about Christ without thinking about his sacrifice. And it is impossible to contemplate his sufferings with sincere prayer and not feel a deep desire to communicate him. These three aspects have become an intimate part of my pastoral vision for ministry. I can no longer see myself without them.

Finally, I was also humbled by the discovery that God has given me gifts for public speaking, and that I live in an age where media can be a channel to multiply our evangelistic efforts. The achievements linked to this project made me aware of what are my personal strengths for ministry, and determined to find a way to use them more efficiently to the glory of God.

**Recommendations**

The completion of this project led me to a number of recommendations about important work to be done to strengthen a project like this, and about the need of specific research on the areas encompassed by Seventh-day Adventist cross-centered evangelistic preaching.

In many ways, the organization of the cross-centered evangelistic series mobilized the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas like never before. However, so many resources were invested in the preparation of the preaching event that the personal effort
in accompanying the visitors through visitation and Bible study was overlooked. I recommend that in a future project like this one, a considerably larger amount of time and attention be given to personal ministry.

I have prepared a series of Bible studies that flow from the systematization done in the sermons. These can be used by Bible workers, or skilled members who wish to study the Bible with the visitors. I also plan to write a book underlying the same cross-centered messages but with different nuances. This book can serve as additional reading for the visitors.

Even if this project was seen by many as a successful one, I must acknowledge that two months of meetings is a long time. There is a strong risk of losing the visitors and the members attending. Since in Portugal the visitors are normally not welcomed to be baptized as soon as the evangelistic series end, it would be interesting to prepare a cross-centered series of meetings with fewer sermons. These meetings could serve as a starting point for the enrolment of the visitors in weekly sessions where the full body of doctrines would be dealt with, or as the starting point for Bible studies.

The literature review also showed scarceness in studies about cross-centered evangelistic preaching. Although it may seem self-evident that to speak about evangelistic preaching involves speaking about the cross of Christ, when searching for material that teaches how to preach the message of the cross to non-believers there is still much to explore. This becomes much more so if we consider Seventh-day Adventist literature. I was not able to find specific studies on the issue, neither on how to preach the specific beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church through the cross of Christ.
Finally, I would recommend a closer look at the importance of centering Christian sermons in the sacrifice of Jesus, since “The mystery of the cross explains all other mysteries (White, 1911, p. 652). The focus of this work has been evangelistic preaching and some encouraging results were attained in terms of conversions and baptisms. However, the revival that I witnessed among the members of the churches of Canelas, Avintes, and Pedroso, makes me believe that “All the congregations in our land need to learn more of Christ and Him crucified” (White, 1946, p. 350).

My desire is that these words may lead Christian speakers to excel in presenting him who was “A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief” (Isa 53:3).
APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF THE 24 CROSS-CENTERED EVANGELISTIC SERMONS
The Love of Christ
Good News in Times of Crisis

Topic 1
Good News! God Exists: He is Close to you and Wants to Help

This first message was an introduction to the whole series. Even if it did not deal specifically with any of the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, it provided the basis for the presentation of them all by dealing with the existence of God.

This message showed how one of the strongest evidences for the existence of God is the life and death of Jesus Christ. The impact that this first century Jew has had on world’s history, and some of the Old Testament prophecies concerning his death, were used to stress the validity of the Christian claims about the existence and love of God (Bible-references: Isa 41:10; 49:15, 16; Ps 22:1, 16; 53:2-4; 145:18; John 4:23; Matt 27:43-46; Heb 13:5; 11:6).

Topic 2
Good News! God has a Bestseller: You can Read it and Understand it

As the first, this second message was foundational for the rest of the series since it dealt with the written revelation of God. It covered the first fundamental belief of Seventh-day Adventists, relating to the Bible as the Word of God, and also dealt partially with the ninth, concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Some of the most relevant historical facts about the Bible were presented. Its unique success as the biggest bestseller of all times was linked to the fact that it conveys the biggest love story of all times, that is, the story of the cross. The prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the life, death, and resurrection of Christ, lightly mentioned in the first sermon, were presented in greater detail, as well as their fulfillment in the New Testament.

The revelation of God in Christ, and especially in his sacrifice, was shown as the central theme running through the Bible from Genesis to Revelation. The Bible was presented as a book of salvation intimately connected with Christ, the Saviour of humanity (Bible-references: Matt 24:35; John 1:29; 3:16; 5:39; Isaiah 28:10; 50:3, 6; 53; Ps 22:17, 18; 119:105; 2 Tim 3:14-17; 2 Pet 1:21; Matt 7:24; Rom 15:4).

Topic 3
Good News! You are not Here by Chance: You Were Created With Love to Love

The third message dealt with the doctrine of the Creation of the world, which is the sixth fundamental belief of Seventh-day Adventists. It started with the presentation of some of the major weaknesses found in the Darwinian Evolution Theory. It then continued with the presentation of some of the most significant arguments for Intelligent Design.
The story of the origins of humankind as it appears in the first chapters of Genesis was presented as something that Christ himself believed. Humanity was revealed as the masterpiece of God, designed to reveal his love. A brief introduction to the cosmic conflict between God and Satan was also be provided. Christ’s death as the solution revealed for sin since the fall of Adam and Eve was shown as central in Christianity. The compromise between Darwinian and Creationist theories was exposed as dangerous, since it destroys the meaning of the atonement provided in the cross (Bible-references: Ps 19:1; Gen 1:1, 26, 27, 31; 2:7, 8, 15-18; 3:21; Isa 59:1, 2; Matt 19:3-8; 1 John 4:16; Rom 5:18; 2 Cor 5:21; Heb 11:3).

Topic 4
Good News! Evil Will Really Come to an end: Today’s Tears are Tomorrow’s Joys

In this sermon, the great controversy between Christ and Satan, theme of the eighth fundamental belief of Seventh-day Adventists, was presented in the light of the Bible. The rebellion of Lucifer in heaven was displayed highlighting his envy of Jesus Christ and his deity. Thus, this message also dealt partially with the divinity of Christ, a subject presented in the fourth fundamental belief and further developed in the following sermons.

The self-centered character of Satan, a creature who strived to occupy the throne of the Creator, was contrasted with the character of Christ who, being God, volunteered to take the position of a servant, became human, died for others and finally offered them the throne of God. The cross of Christ was revealed as the convincing argument that secured the destruction of Satan and the victory of God over evil (Bible-references: Rev 3:20; 12:7-9; Ezek 28:14-19; Isa 14:12-14; Gen 3:1-6, 15; Phil 2:5-11; Heb 2:14, 15; John 12:31, 32; 1 Pet 5:8, 9; Ps 30:5; Nah 1:9).

Topic 5
Good News! You can Start Over: Jesus Christ Died for you

This topic covered mostly the content of the ninth and 10th fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists. It dealt with the life, death and resurrection of Christ in their relationship to the eternal salvation offered to every human being.

As in the previous sermon, the divinity of Christ was addressed but now in a way that amplified the dimension of his sacrifice and supplied the foundation for its validity. The most significant details of the life of Jesus from the manger to the cross were stressed, focusing especially on the crucifixion scenes. The intense physical torture that Jesus had to undergo was revealed as merely indicative of the emotional and spiritual agony occasioned by humanity’s sin.

Finally, the importance of repentance and confession was explained in the light of the cross and were shown as the best human response to the revelation of God’s love in Christ (Bible-references: John 1:1-3, 14; 8:11; Isa 9:6; Heb 2:17; 4:15; Luke 2:51, 52; Acts 10:38; Matt 15:30, 31; 27:26-31; John 7:45, 46; Luke 2:44; Ps 22:15; 51:10; 1 John 1:8, 9; 2:2; Gal 2:20; Eph 2:8-10; Jer 17:9; Rom 3:23, 24; 2 Cor 5:17).
Topic 6
Good News! Forgiving was Never this Easy: God Thinks About You with Forgiveness and Hope

This message focused on the importance of forgiveness, as it was revealed on Calvary. It basically dealt with the same beliefs that the previous message, but it stressed two central factors. First, the reality of the atonement as something supernaturally achieved by God was shown through the prophecy of the 70 weeks found in Daniel 9. This prophecy was introduced with Jesus’ challenge to Peter about forgiveness (Matt 18:22), and was used to fortify the faith of the hearers in Christ’s death for them.

The second emphasis flowed from the certainty given by prophecy about God’s forgiveness to the murderers of His Son (Acts 2:36-39). It dealt with the importance of receiving God’s gift of forgiveness with a tender heart and with willingness to extend this forgiveness to others. The presentation of the 70 week prophecy also helped to set the stage for other prophetic presentations in the series (Bible-references: Luke 3:1, 21-23; 17:3-5; 23:33, 34; Matt 6:14, 15; 18:21, 22; Dan 9; Num 14:34; Ezek 4:6; Ezra 7:8; Acts 6:7; 7:54-60; 10:38; Mark 15:38; Eph 4:32).

Topic 7
Good News! There are Still Loving Families: Yours can be one of Them

In this sermon, fundamental beliefs two to five, and 23 were covered. The Biblical ideals of marriage and family were presented as created by a loving God, but also as a reflection of His triune nature. God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit were presented acting together in the epic moments of the story of salvation. The creation of the world, the incarnation and baptism of Christ, Christ’s death and resurrection were revealed as the united work of the three persons of the Godhead. God’s nature of love and unity within the Trinity was thus presented as the supreme model for the human family.

Jesus’ sacrificial love towards his mother at the cross was also revealed as the perfect example for every family relationship that faces moments of crisis (Bible-references: 1 Tim 5:8; Gen 1:1, 2, 26, 27; 2:18, 21-24; Matt 5:23, 24; 19:3-9; Mal 2:15; Eph 5:21-6:4; 2 Cor 5:14, 18, 19; John 1:1-3; 3:16; 10:17, 18; 19:25-27; 1 John 4:8, 10; Col 1:12-17; Luke 1:35; 3:22; 6:31; Heb 9:14; Gal 1:1; 2:20; Rom 1:4; 5:5; 8:11; 15:30; 1 Pet 3:18).

Topic 8
Good News! God Wants you in his Family: That’s why Jesus Made The Church

This sermon covered the thematic of Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs 12, 14, and 17. The Christian Church was presented as God’s family on earth, since Christians become children of God. The Church was also shown as Christ’s way of nurturing his followers, and attracting new ones, through the relationships of love, the reality of personal growth and the dedication to mission.
The unity of the Church was displayed as flowing from the love of Christ but also as rooted in Scripture, which contains the best doctrinal revelation of that love. Jesus’ sacrifice of love was presented as the foundation of the Church as a loving community, and as the origin of spiritual gifts and ministries (Bible-references: John 13:34, 35; 14:6; 15:13; 17:17, 20, 21; Gal 4:4-6; Eph 2:19, 20; 3:10; 4:8-16; Ps 89:7; 111:1; Luke 24:53; Matt 18:19, 20; 24:14; 25:40; Heb 10:24, 25; Col 3:9-14; Acts 20:35).

**Topic 9**

**Good News! Jesus is Coming Back to this Planet: And we can be Ready**

This message would deal with the 25th fundamental belief of Seventh-day Adventists, concerning the second coming of Christ. Daniel 2 and Matthew 24, two of the major prophecies in the Bible concerning this event were presented in the light of historical and recent events. The death of Christ on the cross was highlighted as the reason why each Christian can anticipate with joy the day of Christ’s second coming (Bible-references: Dan 2; 1 Cor 10:4; Matt 24; Rev 11:18; Heb 9:28; 2 Pet 3:9; John 14:1-3).

**Topic 10**

**Good News! Disappointments can be Good: God Always has Something Better for you**

In this presentation, Seventh-day Adventist fundamental beliefs 13 and 24, which concern the biblical doctrines of the remnant church and the heavenly sanctuary, started to be addressed. The disappointment experienced by the disciples when Christ died helped to illustrate the great disappointment lived by the Millerite Adventist believers in 1844. The 2300 year prophecy of Daniel 8:14 was then presented in connection with the biblical doctrine of the sanctuary.

The joy of Christ’s first followers in the day of the resurrection was also linked to the joy of the believers that found new truth concerning Christ’s heavenly ministry (Bible-references: Luke 24; John 20:20; 1 Cor 15:6; Col 1:23; Daniel 12:4, 9; Rev 10:1, 2, 8, 9, 11; 11:18, 19; Dan 7:9, 10, 13, 14; 8:14; 9:24, 25; Num 14:34; Ezek 4:6; Matt 24:36; Exod 25:8, 9; John 1:14; Matt 27:51; Heb 4:14-16; 8:1, 2; 9:24).

**Topic 11**

**Good News! There is a Righteous Court of Law: And we Have a Friend There**

In this message the theme of Christ’s ministry in the heavenly sanctuary continued to be exposed. The injustice of human courts and the unfair process of Christ’s trial on earth were contrasted with the justice of God’s divine judgment. The role of Christ as defendant on earth was contrasted with his role of divine judge. However, the judgment of God was presented as good news for those who love Christ.

Satan was revealed as the accuser of the children of God. The heavenly angels were presented as the witnesses in the divine judgment. The law of God was displayed as the law by
which every human being will be judged, and Jesus was revealed both as humanity’s judge and advocate. The pre-advent judgment, as well as the importance of true repentance were presented in the light of the doctrine of the sanctuary (Bible-references: Isa 53:7, 8; Matt 26:62-64; Dan 7:13, 14; Acts 10:42; Rev 10:12; 22:12; Matt 18:10; Jas 2:12; John 5:22; Heb 7:25; 1 Tim 2:5; 1 John 2:1, 2; Prov 18:24; Rom 14:10, 12; Dan 8:14; Lev 16:16, 29, 30; John 5:6, 14).

**Topic 12**
**Good News! You Will Become a new Person: God Will Place his Love in you**

In this presentation Seventh-day Adventist belief number 19, concerning the law of God, was dealt with. The essence of the divine law was shown to be the essence of the character of God, which is love. Christ’s death was presented as the ultimate price paid by God Himself for human transgression. It was also revealed as the outmost expression of divine love, and as the power that stimulates and enables the believer’s obedience (Bible-references: 1 John 4:16; Matt 5:17, 18; 22:37-40; Ps 40:8; John 8:46; Gal 3:10-13; Deut 10:1, 2; 27:26; 31:26; Exod 20:3-17; 25:16; 31:18; Col 2:14; Rom 1:5; 3:20-26, 31; 5:21; 6:1, 2; 13:10; Dan 7:25; Ps 111:7, 8; Phil 2:8; Heb 10:16, 17).

**Topic 13**
**Good News! The Children of God Have a Sign: Love, Peace and Rest**

With this sermon the 20th Seventh-day Adventist belief was addressed. The biblical seventh-day Sabbath was presented as the special sign of Christ as Creator and Redeemer. The argument presented by many Christian thinkers who sustain Sunday observance because Jesus rouse from the grave on the first day of the week was shown erroneous. The rest of God in the seventh-day of the week at Creation was linked to the rest of Christ in the tomb during that same day, when He died for our redemption. The main biblical arguments for the seventh-day Sabbath observance were also revealed (Bible-references: Gen 1:31-2:3; Exod 20:8-11; Isa 56:6, 7; Neh 13:19; Mark 2:27, 28; Matt 12:12; Luke 4:16; Matt 24:20; 28:1; Acts 13:14, 42-44; 17:1-4; Col 2:16, 17; Rev 7:2, 3; 13:16, 17; 22:4; Isa 8:16; 66:23; Rom 4:11; Ezek 20:12, 20; Deut 6:4-8; Heb 4:10; 13:8).

**Topic 14**
**Good News! It is Possible to Change: We do not Have to Repeat our Parents’ Mistakes**

In this message, Seventh-day Adventist belief number 13, dealing with the remnant church, started to be addressed. The great deception that should rise in Christianity was presented through the prophecies of Daniel 7, and Revelation 12-14. Through the prophecy of the 1260 prophetic days, the papacy was identified as the persecuting power revealed in Daniel 7 and Revelation 13. The Seventh-day Adventist Church was shown to sustain the principles of the faithful last-day remnant depicted in the Bible, and the three angel’s message of Revelation 14:6-
12 was introduced. Belief number 18, concerning the gift of prophecy, was also partially addressed.

An appeal was made for every hearer to consider the price paid by Christ to redeem His followers from an “aimless conduct received by tradition” (1 Pet 1:18). The loving attitude of the apostle John who remained near the Savior in his last hours, and near the cross when he died, was used as an example for those who wish to love Christ, even when to do so is not popular (Bible-references: Dan 7:2-8, 25; Num 14:34; Ezek 4:6; Rev 12:6, 14, 17; 13:5; 14:6-12; 19:10; Eccl 12:13; 1 Pet 1:18, 19; John 19:26).

**Topic 15**
**Good News! We do not Need to be Deceived: God is Always Clear**

In this session, belief number 13 continued to be covered. The three angel’s message introduced in the last message was now explained in greater detail. It was presented as a final warning against last day deceptions, a warning based on the everlasting love of God revealed on Calvary. Some of the greatest discrepancies between the claims of the papacy and the truth of the Bible were exposed. The first and second beasts of Revelation 13 were identified as the papacy and the United States of America, respectively. The observance of the seventh-day Sabbath was once more shown as the sign of loving obedience to the Creator in the last days.

The significative reference to the sacrifice of Christ in Revelation 13:8 was used as the basis for a cross-centered appeal for the hearers to be loyal to Jesus (Bible-references: Rev 13:1-3, 8, 11-18; 14:6-12; 17:1-5, 9; 2 Thess 2:3, 4; Deut 17:16, 17; 1 Kgs 10:14; Matt 6:19; Dan 7:25; Matt 15:4-6; 16:16-23; 23:8, 9; 1 Pet 2:4; 1 Cor 3:11; Eph 2:20; Ezek 20:12).

**Topic 16**
**Good News! The Dead are Sleeping: And Jesus Christ is Going to Wake Them up**

This session covered the content of the Seventh-day Adventist beliefs number seven and 26. Biblical truth about the human nature, the state of the dead, and the resurrection was unveiled. The fallacy of spiritualistic beliefs was exposed. Christ’s teachings on this subjects and the events surrounding his death and resurrection were highlighted, giving a special attention to the story of the repentant thief (Bible-references: Rev 14:13; Gen 1:24; 2:7, 16, 17; 3:4, 5; Eccl 9:5, 6, 10; 12:7; Ps 146:3, 4; 1 Kgs 2:10; Ezek 18:4; Deut 18:10-12; 1 Sam 28:13, 14; Acts 12:15; Heb 1:14; Rev 16:14; 2 Cor 11:14; Matt 24:24, 26, 27; 1 Thess 4:13-18; John 5:28, 29; Luke 23:42, 43; John 20:17).

**Topic 17**
**Good News! God Wants to Give us Health: The Bible Offers Secrets to a Better Life**

In this lecture the Seventh-day Adventist belief number 22, concerning the proper behavior for Christians, started being addressed. This message focused on the love of God and his
consequent desire for his children to take good care of their bodies, which are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Christ’s example of self-control under the supreme torture of the cross was emphasized. Since Jesus refused to take the sour wine that was offered to him in order to have his sufferings diminished, true Christians should carefully consider their health choices (Bible-references: 3 John 1:2; 1 Cor 6:19; 10:31; Rev 14:7; Gen 1:29, 30; 3:18; 7:2; 9:4; Dan 1:8, 11, 12, 20; Lev 3:17; 11; 1 Tim 4:3-5; Prov 6:6; 17:22; 20:1; 23:20; 25:27; Matt 27:33, 34).

Topic 18
Good News! You can Make a Difference: Little Details are Very Important

This sermon continued to dwell on the topics presented by the 22nd fundamental belief of Seventh-day Adventists. Jesus was exalted as an example of purity, simplicity, and power. The fact that Jesus folded the linen handkerchief that covered his head when he raised from the dead, and his appearing to Mary Magdalene, even before his first ascension to God the Father, were shown as evidence that Christ gave attention to small details.

It was shown that choices regarding dress, movies, television, books and magazines, friendships and places of amusement may seem unimportant but they are essential to the development of a Christian character (Bible-references: 1 Pet 2:21; John 20:1-18; Matt 5:14; Col 3:2, 14; Rom 12:1, 2; 1 Tim 2:8, 9; 1 Pet 3:3, 4; Eph 5:3, 4; Phil 4:8; 2 Cor 3:18; Matt 28:9, 16, 17; Mark 16:9).

Topic 19
Good News! God Loves to Listen to you: You can Always Talk to him

In this sermon the theme of the 11th Seventh-day Adventist belief, which deals with Christian growth and victory over the powers of darkness, was covered. Prayer, personal Bible-study, and personal testimony were presented as the factors that strengthen the faith of every true Christian. Finally, Christ’s victories over the power of Satan in the wilderness and on Calvary were displayed as powerful secrets for the believer’s victory (Bible-references: Matt 4:5-10; 6:6-13; 26:38-41; 27:39, 40; Ps 11:24; 17:6; 50:15; 55:17; Exod 33:11; Phil 4:6, 7; Mark 1:35; 1 Thess 5:17; 1 John 5:14; Josh 1:8; John 16:13, 33; Luke 4:1-4; 11:13; 23:46; Rev 12:11).

Topic 20
Good News! There is one Reliable Bank: You can Open an Account Today

This message addressed the theme of finances from a biblical standpoint. This is the main subject of the 21st Seventh-day Adventist belief. In this sermon, the biblical truth about tithes and offerings was presented in the light of the generous gift of God in giving his Son to die for humankind. Jesus Christ was displayed as the richest gift that could ever be offered in the Universe. This truth was used to promote generosity and faithfulness in the hearers, as well as an entire surrender of their gifts and lives to God (Bible-references: Col 1:16, 17; 2:2, 3; 2 Cor 8:9;
9:7; Matt 6:19-21; 23:23; Gen 14:18-20; 28:20-22; Lev 27:30-32; Num 18:21; Mal 3:8-10; 1 Cor 9:14; 16:2; Phil 4:19; Ps 24:1; Prov 13:11; 22:7, 26, 27; Rom 13:8; 1 Tim 6:17-19; John 12:1-8).

**Topic 21**

**Good News! You can Tell Everybody That you Love Christ: Just Dive into the Love of God**

This topic covered the 15th Seventh-day Adventist belief, which addresses the biblical truth about baptism. The message focused on the biblical significance of baptism when seen through Jesus’ baptismal experience and through his death and resurrection. The story of Peter’s public denial of Christ was used to show the importance of publicly confessing the name of Jesus. An appeal for baptism was made to all the hearers that still had not been baptized according to the biblical model, or that, having been baptized, have departed from their faith (Bible-references: Luke 3:21-23; 22:33, 34, 59-61; Matt 10:32-38; 28:19, 20; Mark 16:15, 16; John 3:23; Matt 3:15; Rom 6:4, 11; Acts 2:36-39; 8:30-38; 19:1-5; 1 John 4:16).

**Topic 22**

**Good News! God Remembered us: Jesus Wishes us to Remember him**

In this sermon the content of the 16th Seventh-day Adventist fundamental belief was reviewed, a topic that deals with the Lord’s Supper. This cross-centered ritual was presented as a token of Christ’s sufferings for humanity. When celebrating this special supper the believer renews his/her commitment to Christ, his/her faith in his atoning work, and he/she expresses his/her faith in his second coming. The foot-washing ceremony was also highlighted as something important to create an atmosphere of repentance, forgiveness, and love among Christians (Bible-references: Luke 22:14-16, 19, 24; Exod 12; John 1:29; 6:48-64; 13; 1 Cor 5:7; 11:26; Mark 14:22-25; Heb 9:28).

**Topic 23**

**Good News! You Will be Able to ask Questions: God has set Aside 1000 Years to Answer**

In this message the biblical truth about the millennium, which constitutes the theme of Seventh-day Adventist fundamental belief number 27, was addressed. The doctrinal truth about the 1,000 year period revealed in the Bible was presented with an emphasis on the love, justice and mercy of God.

The Bible reveals that the righteousness of God, and the supremacy of Jesus Christ will be acknowledged by every intelligent being before the final destruction of evil. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul links this universal recognition of the justice of God to the death of Christ. The vision of the Cross will ultimately lead the cosmic conflict to an end (Bible-references: Ps 22:29; 37:10, 20; Rom 14:11; Rev 20; John 5:28, 29; 14:1-3; 1 Thess 4:16, 17; 2 Thess 1:7, 8; 1 Cor 15:51, 52; Jer 4:23, 25; Phil 2:5-11; Mal 4:1; Jude 7; Luke 12:47, 48; Isa 24:17-22; 25:7, 8).
**Topic 24**  
**Good News! God Will Make Everything new: And he has a Place Just for You**

In the final message of this series, the theme of the 28th fundamental belief of Seventh-day Adventists, dealing with the new earth created by God at the end of the millennium, was covered. The theme of the 18th belief, that deals with the gift of prophecy and that started being addressed in the 14th message, was also further developed.

In this sermon, the biblical insights about the joys of the new earth were unfolded while emphasizing the sacrifice of Christ, which made them accessible to the believer. The writings of Ellen G. White, a person in whom the Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes the gift of prophecy, were used to present beautiful visions about Heaven. The Bible and this inspired author’s writings were shown to support the idea that the everlasting delightful study of the saved about God will be cross-centered (Bible-references: Eccl 3:11; 1 Cor 2:9, 10; 2 Pet 3:7-13; Rev 12:17; 14:12; 19:10; 20:9; 21:1-5, 21-24; 22:1-5; Zech 13:6).
APPENDIX B

VISUAL ILLUSTRATIONS
Image Used for the General Theme
O AMOR de CRISTO

DATA:
5 de Abril a 26 de Maio

HORÁRIO:
Todas as Sextas, Sábados e Domingos pelas 20h30

LOCAL:
Igreja Adventista do 7º Dia
Rua Delfim de Lima, 2068
4411-701, CANELAS

BOAS NOTÍCIAS
Em Tempos de Crise

Palestras Públicas

www.iasdcanelas.org
Samples of Cover Images
For the Sermons

AFINAL DEUS EXISTE
Ele está perto de ti e quer ajudar-te

DEUS TEM UM BESTSELLER
Podes lê-lo, e compreendê-lo
"No verão de 1947, o mero acaso levou à descoberta dos textos mais antigos até agora existentes.

1 semana = 7 dias
70 semanas = 490 dias
490 dias proféticos = 490 anos

$70 \times 7 = 490$
Um novo mandamento vos dou: Que vos ameis uns aos outros; como eu vos amei a vós, que também vós uns aos outros vos ameis.

João 13:34

E vi um novo céu, e uma nova terra. Porque já o primeiro céu e a primeira terra passaram, e o mar já não existe.

Apocalipse 21:1
REFERENCE LIST


Knight, G. R. (2008a). *The apocalyptic vision and the neutering of Adventism.* Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald.


VITA

Name: Daniel F. M. Gouveia

Date of Birth: July 4, 1979

Place of Birth: Caldas da Rainha, Portugal.


Education:

2012 – 2016 DMin (Doctor of Ministry) in Pastoral Ministry, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI

2010 – 2012 Professional Master in Theology: Adventist Faculty of Collonges-sous-Salève, France

2000 – 2004 Master in Adventist Theology: Adventist Faculty of Collonges-sous-Salève, France, with honors

Ordination:

2011 Ordained to the Seventh-day Adventist Gospel Ministry

Experience:

2015 – Present Senior Pastor of the Fresno Hispanic Seventh-day Adventist Church

2012 – 2015 Pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Canelas, Avintes, and Pedroso

2009 – 2012 Pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Portimão, Lagoa, Lagos, and São Teotónio/Evangelistic ministry in local radio and prison

2008 – 2011 Spiritual leadership and general coordination of the Seventh-day Adventist Evangelism Youth-camp in Portugal (Impacto)

2004 – 2009 Pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church of Beja and Moura/Host for Sabbath-school video programs: Evangelism Department of the Seventh-day Adventist Portuguese Union of Churches