et al.: Adventist Responses to Witchcraft
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The Fourth Adventist Mission in Africa Conference was held in the seminary chapel at Andrews University from October 13-15, 2016 with the theme “Biblical Responses to Witchcraft in Africa.” The overall aim of the conference was to engage Adventist leaders in a serious discussion concerning the causes, fear of, and biblical responses to witchcraft with the goal to reduce fear and dual allegiance among Adventist members in Africa. Many of the articles in this issue of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* were presented at that conference.

Recently in an African country a local Seventh-day Adventist church dropped 300 people from membership because of their involvement in a witch-cleansing ceremony. Pardon Mwansa’s article also highlights additional case studies of Adventists who continue to allow the fear of witchcraft to warp their futures and rob them of hope. He also mentioned the sad case where several successful Adventist businessmen were found to carry charms and amulets for protection from evil spiritual forces. These stories highlight again that the discipleship process used in bringing people into the Adventist Church has been incomplete at best and many times has sought for quick evangelistic results instead of grounding people firmly in the protection and hope of Jesus Christ.

Two articles deal with people groups. Bruce Bauer’s article titled, “Needed: A New Metric to Assess Adventist Mission” was first presented at the Global Mission Issues Committee on April 6, 2016 in Silver Spring, Maryland. That committee subsequently voted to begin using people groups as the metric of choice to better gauge the success or failure of Adventist mission. The official action in this regard is also incorporated in this issue. Benjamin Lopez’s article titled, “Mission within Societies: Revisiting the People Group Methodology” stresses the importance of doing mission with a focus on people groups.

One additional bit of information you can help others learn about is that the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* is now available on-line in full text with no password or subscription needed. It can be accessed at http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jams/
Cultural Foundations for Fear of Witchcraft in Africa

Introduction

In recent years hundreds of people have lost their lives after being accused of being a witch. In Limpopo Province in South Africa alone more than 600 people were killed between 1996 and 2001 after being accused of being involved in witchcraft (ter Haar 2007:4). This is not just a South Africa problem since throughout sub-Saharan Africa (see Akrong 2007; Bongmba 2007; Okon 2012) lynchings, exile, and ostracism are typical responses aimed at those accused of witchcraft activity. Such violent responses are indicative of the fear witchcraft imposes on much of the population of Africa.

This article seeks to answer questions concerning the cultural foundations that produce so much fear that people are willing to lynch and exile family members and other accused witches, fear that allows otherwise committed Christians to carry protective devices obtained from diviners and other religious practitioners, and fear that causes so much disorientation and disequilibrium among African Traditional Religionists, Christians, and Muslims alike.

Definitions

Before getting into the paper it is important to define several terms that will be used throughout.

Witchcraft: Witchcraft is not an easy term to define, for it has both negative and at least neutral connotations. “Witchcraft is often associated with supernatural activities that are believed to bring about negative or evil consequences for individuals and families. There is an equally strong view about witchcraft that defines it in terms of a benign supernatural power” (Akrong 2007:53). Asare Opoku also defines witchcraft as “the
exercise or employment of esoteric power for a definite purpose, good or evil” (in Dovlo 2007:67).

**Positive Mystical Power:** Power used “for curative, productive or preventive purposes,” and is the reason why some “Africans wear, carry or keep charms, amulets, and other objects on their bodies, in their fields or homesteads. Medicine men or diviners are the manufacturers, dealers, and distributors of these articles of medicine and power” (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014:10).

**Negative Mystical Power:** Power that “can eat away the health and souls of their victims, attack people, cause misfortune and make life uncomfortable. Practitioners of these mystical powers are witches, wizards, sorcerers, evil magicians, or people with an evil eye, employing their power for antisocial and harmfulacidities” (10).

**Sorcerer/sorceress:** “A man [or woman] with magic powers, who is helped by evil spirits. . . . A Sorcerer or sorceress uses evil spirits to cause ailments or misfortune to those targeted for attack” (Manala 2004:1496).

**Cultural Foundation Concerning Witchcraft in Africa**

There are a number of cultural assumptions concerning witchcraft that impact most African people and therefore are factors that contribute to the fear of witchcraft. Tragically these cultural assumptions are found not only among African Traditional Religionists, but also among the professed followers of Jesus Christ.

**African Views of Causation**

One of the core worldview assumptions among many Africans and especially among African traditional religionists is the belief that “everything is caused by some other person in a direct way or through mystical forces” (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014:11). Nothing just happens. There is always a cause, and usually a witch or sorcerer is believed to be the one causing the problem (Manala 2004:1498). This witchcraft mentality blames misfortune, barrenness, accidents, snakebites, brake failures, sickness, untimely deaths, and almost every kind of problem on witchcraft (Akrong 2007:59). “It is not uncommon to hear people exclaim in dismay in the face of problems: ‘Who is doing this to me?’ instead of ‘What is causing these things?’” (60). If a tire blows out as a mini-bus is going around a curve just before a bridge with the result that the bus plunges into the river killing all 20 people on board, people ask, “Who sent a curse?” From a rational perspective one could reason that the tire was old with no tread left, but from an African perspective the question is who caused it to “burst at that
specific place and time? Why not before or after the bridge? Therefore, someone is responsible for the accident to occur right ‘there’” (St-Arneault 2014).

Witches are believed to cause serious diseases like stroke, tuberculosis, AIDS, and many other illnesses by “pointing a finger at their victims, through food poisoning, [and] by mixing some magical potions with the soil on which their victims footprints are made to inflict pain on them” (Manala 2004:1494). Natural causes are not considered and are unthink-able—women are barren because someone has put a curse on them; unemployment does not have a natural cause—someone else got the job so the person who did not get it is bewitched (Achola 2005:10).

It is believed that every misfortune is caused by humans or spirits. There might be exceptions when it comes to global catastrophes, but personal or family problems are always caused by someone. If the individual or the clan can't find personal faults that would justify a correction from the ancestors, witchcraft or magic are suspected. The offender is someone known because these powers don’t function anonymously. There has to be contact between the witch and the victim. (12)

Such a view of causation also has theological significance since it offers answers to why bad things happen. Witchcraft offers an explanation of why one person gets sick while the neighbor does not, why one person’s cow dies while the neighbor’s does not, and why wicked people prosper and good people do not. “Belief in witchcraft is thus an attempt to explain the inexplicable and to control the uncontrollable” (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014:14).

Belief That Witchcraft Places Limitations on Life

Even though many Africans believe that there are positive mystical powers in the world, most view witchcraft as threatening and negative. Witchcraft is often believed to be the cause of untimely deaths, the inability of a wife to conceive, failure in important school examinations, and many other areas where witchcraft limits what a person can do or achieve (Bongmba 2007:114).

Witchcraft disrupts, interferes with, and hinders the development and growth of individuals and families. In Ghana there is the “belief that witches can tamper with one’s destiny, given at birth by God. This can bring about confusion in the life of an individual, usually expressed in acute immoral acts and social disorientation” (Akrong 2007:59).

Even within Christian communities and churches witchcraft beliefs
and the fear associated with them often keep pastors and members from living the abundant life Jesus intended. The suspicion that others are out to harm and that evil spiritual powers are present everywhere coupled with fear among pastors and members alike severely limit the effectiveness of the Christian message in countering the witchcraft mentality.

One of the saddest facts coming out in recent research among Adventists is that even pastors have so much fear of witchcraft and evil spiritual powers that they often refuse to discuss this topic in public for fear of attracting attacks from the evil one on themselves or their families. Let me share a few stories to illustrate this limiting force.

When a Doctor of Ministry student from West Africa was preparing his proposal for his doctoral project, he planned to team up with the religion faculty from three Adventist universities in presenting seminars on the dangers of dual allegiance and involvement in witchcraft practices. He found that the professors were willing to talk about the topic one-on-one, but they were not willing to stand in front of church members to present on witchcraft or evil spirits. Why? They feared that they or their families might be attacked, so they chose not to get involved.

Another student from an African tribe known for its witchcraft practices had been a pastor for many years and taught at an Adventist university before coming to Andrews University to work on his PhD. He told me that until he had spent several years at Andrews researching biblical and Spirit of Prophecy responses to evil spiritual powers he was always fearful of speaking openly about the topic with church members.

I have talked with other well-educated, committed Adventists who have indicated that one of the reasons they do not want to return home to work after completing their degree in the West is because they do not want to submit their family to witchcraft practices and curses. They continue to fear the power of evil spiritual forces, thus depriving the church of well-educated resources.

If pastors, church leaders, and religion teachers are themselves fearful in this area, what are the chances that the average lay person in Africa would have a biblical perspective on witchcraft and spiritualism? Joseph Ndisya’s PhD research documents that church members and even church leaders live in such fear of the occult that many visit diviners and fetish priests in order to get protection from curses and witchcraft (2014). Their cultural worldview assumptions and values have not been transformed by biblical truth so even though they know it is wrong their fear of witchcraft is stronger than their fear of sinning by going against biblical principles.

In these examples, witchcraft assumptions and the fear associated with them limit the ability of many pastors and members to be light and salt in their communities. Their fear and compromising practices destroy the
beautiful message of Scripture concerning the protection of Jesus for his people. Thus, the very leaders and members who should be catalysts in changing the worldview assumptions that cause so much pain in Africa are limited by their unconverted worldviews.

In addition to limiting Christians in their witness and work, the fear of witchcraft also places limits on the general population on the continent by inhibiting people from undertaking any productive activity in areas where this is often most needed. As a result, ambitious young people will move away and start businesses elsewhere, while outsiders, who traditionally cannot be affected by witchcraft, will take their place and profit from this situation. This is the case, for example, in Tanzania. Equally, in South Africa witchcraft accusations are often made against those who initiate development projects or otherwise try to improve their conditions of life. In other words, the witchcraft mentality thrives on fear. . . . It encourages a culture of passivity that leads to the development of a mentality of dependency, with lack of creativity and initiative as its by-product. (ter Haar 2007:18)

Positive View of Witchcraft Powers

One of the African worldview assumptions that allows Christians to continue to seek the help of diviners and witchdoctors is the view that witchcraft powers can be used for good in society. This view suggests the possibility that positive mystical powers can continue to be helpful in protecting those who have supposedly made a total commitment to Jesus Christ. This belief causes some Christians to continue to wear charms and amulets, take medicine, or have the prescribed concoction rubbed into their bodies (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014:10). Some also continue to keep dry bones, snakes, and birds on the rooftops of their houses, or place marks on private parts of their bodies (15). Such dual allegiance among some Christians is grounded in African religious thought that regards the metaphysical world as “a-moral. Spiritual forces, traditionally, were seen as intrinsically neither good nor bad, although their power could be channeled for moral or immoral purposes” (Ellis 2007:46).

Thus, in addition to the side of witchcraft that is feared because of its evil impact on people, there is also the associated belief that witchcraft can provide supernatural power to “enhance one’s ability to perform extraordinary feats” (Akrong 2007:53). This view holds that witchcraft powers can be used for personal improvements, social advancement, gaining of wealth, protection from sickness and danger, and giving people the ability to reveal secrets and see into the future (Bongmba 2007:114; Danfulani 2007:145-147; Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:24).
Operates among Acquaintances and Blood Relatives

Another aspect of witchcraft that has such a negative impact on communities, families, and even within the church is that most witchcraft accusations are aimed at blood relatives, work associates, classmates, and acquaintances. In Ghana it is believed that the “witchcraft spirit can only operate among blood relations. It is for this reason that witchcraft accusations are very common within families” (Akrong 2007:57; Danfulani 2007:153).

According to Kisilu Kombo, witches are motivated by jealousy and act against those who excel or stand out in society or those who are economically successful. Those who do not stand out are believed to face fewer attacks so the witchcraft mentality can actually have a negative impact on creativity and the desire to get ahead in life (2003:77, 78).

When family members accumulate wealth that is not shared with the extended family or when personal advancement or educational achievement lifts a person above the average, suspicions of witchcraft are aroused. “In such cases, witchcraft accusations are used as a levelling mechanism that does not allow for the success of the individual to undermine the kinship structure and its associated values” (Akrong 2007:57).

This also fits with the theory of limited good where in many traditional societies people believe that there is a limited amount of good to go around, therefore the amount of land, wealth higher education, etc., is finite, so when one person gets ahead or has more of something the rest of the people have less (Limited Good 2015). When jealousy and envy are added to the mix of a belief in a limited good, witchcraft accusations are often the devastating consequence that tears apart the fabric of family, friends, associates, and members of a church.

Personal Identity Embedded in Others

John Mbiti is famous for his dictum: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am” (1970:141), thus clearly indicating that the personal identity of the African is deeply embedded in the family, the clan, the tribe, and the community. Individualism as known in the West is rarely practiced in Africa. With one’s identity wrapped up in such tight group consciousness one’s fortune or misfortune is also believed to be closely tied to the influences and activities of others in society. There is always someone in society who can be pointed to or accused for whatever evil may happen to a person.
From the perspective of those with a “witchcraft mentality,” witches are the source of all evil. Instead of looking for reasons and explanations for particular events, they look for a witch as the cause of their problems. The consequences of such a mentality is that it absolves people from taking responsibility for their own actions. The usual explanation is that the victim has done the right thing, but that a witch has intervened to turn a well-calculated and well-intended act into something dangerous and harmful. (Akrong 2007:60)

Many of the African Initiated churches and Pentecostal churches have accepted this concept and developed their theology around the premise of a gospel of wealth and health where every individual is to enjoy success and prosperity. When those ideals are not achieved it is because witches and evil spirits are at work and others are to blame for failures and lack of health and success in life. Such a mentality results in a loss of personal freedom, the blaming of others for personal problems, and the creation of fear that others are always out to harm and inhibit one from achieving the good life (61).

Psychological Issues and Witchcraft

Some skeptical Westerners question even if there is such a thing as witchcraft, largely as a result of their secular, enlightenment worldview. Some among early missionaries to Africa held such views, believing that as Africans encountered Christianity the fear of occult powers would die out. Gerhardus Oothhuizen illustrates how early missionaries to Africa ignored the importance and key role that a witchcraft mentality played.

Witchcraft and sorcery have been largely ignored by the missionaries in Africa because of their deep-seated westernized disposition on these matters. Their highly intellectualized disposition on witchcraft, sorcery, magic, spirit possessions and the reality of demons (with the exception of Satan) has made them turn a blind eye to these forces, which are considered to be out of bounds to any one associated with Christianity and thus to be totally ignored, whatever their influence may be. (In Bongmba 2007:118, 119)

However, for Christianity to ignore and play down the role and impact of witchcraft in Africa has resulted in many Christians attending church on weekends but turning to diviners and fetish priests for protection during the week. Such dual allegiance saps the strength and vitality of Christianity and renders it ineffective and powerless in the face of core African values and assumptions.
Missiologists would argue for the need to take seriously the beliefs and fears of a people as the first step in allowing the Word of God to speak freedom and peace into the areas of cultural need. To argue, as some do, that the witchcraft mentality is just psychological and not grounded in fact is to totally miss the core issue: many African people believe it is real so Christianity and the church must deal with it.

Etim Okon acknowledges the psychological side of witchcraft that continues to impact the life of many in Africa:

Belief in witchcraft provides a pseudo-psychological explanation for misfortune. Even lazy people trace their failure to witchcraft attack. It is common knowledge that indecision, or procrastination can cause frustration. People, who find it difficult to accept responsibility for their action, or inaction, rather find it very simple to pass blame on witches. Thus there is an idea of spiritual manipulation. . . . It is very likely that once a sick man is told that a witch is after his blood he will believe that his death is inevitable. He gives up all hope of recovery. And so the will to live, which plays such an important part in recovery from illness is missing. (2012:72, 73)

This psychological impact of witchcraft helps explain why some sicknesses and ailments cannot be diagnosed by medical science, and why people who believe their lives have been invaded by a witch are “rendered totally hopeless and helpless. The desire . . . to live and prospects of prosperity are shattered beyond restoration” (Manala 2004:1500).

These psychological underpinnings of the fear of witchcraft in many African countries result in witchcraft not being a topic of conversation. Victims do not want others to know what measures they have taken to protect themselves, thus inviting fresh attacks using additional means. Discussions of witchcraft are also rare in some places for the people fear that talking about occult power gives it additional power, “therefore the best way of protecting oneself is not to mention it” (Burnside 2010).

Distrust of People Impacts African Social Life

The cultural assumptions concerning witchcraft listed above have a devastating impact on social life and how families, relatives, and acquaintances relate to each other. The witchcraft mentality causes social dislocation, suspicion, and fear to dominate the lives of many. Interpersonal relationships are weakened through witchcraft induced fear of what someone might be doing to them.
The belief that somebody can give you a gift that contains witchcraft substances makes parents warn their children not to receive gifts from old people especially. When people are sick, they will not stay near their home because it is believed that witches can strike at short range but cannot attack someone who is far from home. (ter Haar 2007:107)

Witches are believed to cause death, sickness, epidemics, barrenness, failure at school and at work, catastrophes like floods, fires, crop failures, and draughts on both individuals and the larger community (Bongmba 2007:114; Danfulani 2007:147, 151). With so much of life believed to be under the control of evil spiritual powers many go through life with constant suspicions that someone is out to destroy them, harm them, and inhibit them from living life to the full. That accused someone is usually a family member or close friend.

The Impact of Personal Experience or Knowledge

Personal experience and knowledge concerning witchcraft makes it a reality for many. “Mystical power is known or experienced by nearly all Africans who have grown in a traditional environment. They will have witnessed magic, divination, witchcraft or other mystical phenomena” (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014:9). Whereas a non-African may see natural causes many Africans believe in the reality of evil spiritual forces at work. Most Africans have witnessed the devastating impact of witchcraft in their communities. They have either seen people who have been bewitched or cursed or they have heard horror stories that are equally effective at communicating the idea that witchcraft is real. Often all it takes is for someone to point a finger at a person and say, “You will see,” to effect the person involved but also the whole village as they watch the person suffer and waste away with no medical explanation.

Rose Galadima and her husband, Bulus, tell of a Christian university student who lived in fear of witchcraft. The young man related two incidents he suspected were responsible for his nightmares: once he took a motorbike taxi and because he didn’t have change, the motorcyclist left him, saying, “You will see.” Another time he bought some defective batteries. The Muslim store owner accepted the return, but told him, “You will see.” The young man worried that these people would use witchcraft to attack him. Although he was a student of modern science, he lived under a threatening cloud of evil forces. (Agang 2009)

Thus, a basic core value of many African worldviews is that witchcraft is real, is everywhere present, is known through personal experience, and
is the assumption that has the most influence in the lives of too many people.

Summary

Witchcraft in Africa is rooted in at least seven basic worldview assumptions: (1) the belief that almost every problem or evil that affects people is caused by evil spiritual powers, (2) witches limit human development and enjoyment of life, (3) witchcraft powers can be used for good purposes to ward off evil and sickness, (4) personal identity is so closely intertwined with family and community that it becomes the basis for suspicion and fear that close associates are the source of bewitching curses, (5) witchcraft beliefs have powerful psychological influences on personal well-being, (6) people cannot be trusted because they might be trying to cause harm, and (7) witchcraft powers are viewed as real because of personal knowledge or experience.

Recommendations

In view of these seven worldview assumptions concerning witchcraft and evil spiritual powers I offer the following recommendations.

1. It is time for the church to stop its silence on this topic. The question whether or not witchcraft is real or not is the wrong question. The belief in witchcraft is present among university professors, politicians, church leaders, illiterate farmers, and most Christians and Muslims. Almost nobody doubts that it is real (Achola 2005:17). The witchcraft mentality “cannot be legislated or banished into oblivion” (Dovlo 2007:87). Therefore, the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to place it on the table for open discussions, allowing biblical principles and teaching to impact the fear it holds on so many.

2. Many African Seventh-day Adventist pastors have received little if any training in Adventist schools on how to deal with this important topic. They have been trained in Adventist theology from a Western perspective that does not take seriously the worldview values and assumptions concerning evil spiritual powers. This leaves them ill-prepared to deal with “the anxieties, fears, and insecurities that African converts face regarding witchcraft” (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:25). Therefore, all undergraduate theology programs in Adventist colleges in Africa should include courses on African Traditional Religions and biblical responses to witchcraft, the occult, and evil spiritual powers.

3. Biblical themes such as how Christ has “disarmed the rulers and authorities” and “made a public display of them” (Col 2:15 NASB) need
to be emphasized along with what it means for the believer to have the in-dwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 John 4:4). The biblical narratives that reveal the power and protection of angels must become much more prominent in Adventist teaching. Church members need to take seriously the fact that Jesus has given power and authority over evil spiritual powers to his followers until the end of the age (Luke 9:1; Matt 28:20). Finally, Adventists need to understand the issues of the Great Controversy so clearly that they will never look to evil spiritual powers for help but will stay true to their commitment to make Jesus and his ways first and last in every aspect of their lives.

Works Cited


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What Attracts People to Occult and Witchcraft Practices?

Introduction

This article does not research the topic of witchcraft. For this reason, you will not find in it different perspectives about witchcraft and references to what this or that author says. Rather this work reflects what I have seen and experienced about witchcraft in Africa and what attracts people to it. More specifically, the paper explores the following questions: What are the definitions of the occult and witchcraft? Why are people attracted to witchcraft, in spite of strong biblical teaching against it? What kind of people are most attracted to witchcraft? What are the fundamental reasons why people seek help from witches? Why are people from Africa in particular attracted to witches? Why are people, including Christians, turning to witchcraft for solutions to their daily challenges of life?

In 2005 eleven bodies were taken to a mortuary in a small town in Zambia after a 22-wheeler truck ran over them. When the bodies were identified, we learned that three of those were Adventists. It is not because they were Adventists that caught my attention, rather it was what was found on their dead bodies. When they were undressed, it was discovered that all three were wearing pieces of animal skins inside their outer clothes that were wrapped around their waists with some small horns hanging around those pieces of skins. After enquiring from those who lived in the area what this was all about, I was told that all three of these young men were businessmen who had turned to witches from Tanzania in seeking power to make wealth. All three were involved in very thriving businesses. The question that bothered me was why these, apparently faithful Adventists, were attracted to and even had taken to magic to make wealth.

In another story an Adventist woman whose six daughters died within a period of three years decided not only to find out why her daughters had died, but also to seek protection from witches for her life and that of her...
only living son. In spite of the counsel given to her by church leaders, family, and friends, she went ahead with her plans to consult a witch doctor. The question that lingered in my mind was why this lady failed to listen to the biblical counsel that was given to her and instead went to seek help from witches.

Before I leave these stories, let me share one more. My wife and I, during our first two years of marriage, could not have a child even though we wanted one. In the first year, outside pressure was manageable. But in the second year pressure mounted to the extent that people, both church and non-church members, began talking to my wife and me separately about the situation, suggesting that we seek help from witches. We resisted. Pressure mounted to its highest peak when my Adventist mother-in-law approached me and said she had found someone who was willing to help us get a child, the only condition being that they would name the child. The text that came to my mind was, “Is it because there is no God in Israel that you are going off to consult Baal-Zebub, the god of Ekron?” (2 Kgs 1:16). I refused to consult witches or any such powers in spite of being told things like, “Pastor, there are things that are beyond your training and belief as a pastor and you need to listen to elderly people.” I will share the end of this story in my conclusion.

The Bible is very clear that believers should not approach or consult witches. “As for the person who turns to mediums and to spiritists, to play the harlot after them, I will also set My face against that person and will cut him off from among his people” (Mic 3:7); “Do not turn to mediums or spiritists; do not seek them out to be defiled by them. I am the LORD your God” (Lev 19:26); “There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer” (1 Chr 10:13). And yet, in spite of these commands believers and non-believers go to mediums, spiritists, and witches to seek their help. Why?

Definitions

Witchcraft refers to the use of powers by magical skills or some supernatural means to control and influence things. For the purposes of this article, I have defined witchcraft as belief in the idea of attributing bad things or good things to be outcomes of acts by individuals referred to as witches who are believed to have control and influence over things in this world by use of supernatural or mystic powers. Witches are therefore people who appear to possess magical skills or powers that are supernatural and as such are able to control or influence things, to bring about certain results such as healing, killing, predicting the future, control events, etc.
The term “attract” in this paper is used to mean “inclined to believe” or “prone to turn to” as opposed to the notion that people want to be witches or people love witchcrafts.

**African Worldview about Witchcraft**

Let us turn now to the question why people are attracted to witchcraft. People’s behaviors have roots. While we may not believe in evolution of a human being having evolved from a monkey, there may be truth in evolutionary behavior. It is important for me to make sure that I do not come out as supporting evolution. The intent of the point here is to observe that the behavior of people is copied from their ancestors and people tend to solve problems in the same way, to a large extent, as their ancestors did.

Evolutionary psychologists tell us that people imitate or carry forward in their lives those ways that their ancestors used to solve their problems. Evolutionary psychology is founded on several core premises (Buss 2015):

1. The brain is an information processing device that produces behavior in response to external and internal inputs.
2. Different neural mechanisms were specialized for solving problems in humanity’s evolutionary past.
3. The brain has evolved specialized neural mechanisms that were designed for solving problems that occurred over long evolutionary time.
4. Most contents and processes of the brain are unconscious; and most mental problems that seem easy to solve are actually extremely difficult problems that are solved unconsciously by complicated neural mechanisms.
5. Human psychology consists of many specialized mechanisms, each sensitive to different classes of information or inputs. These mechanisms combine to produce manifest behavior (Buss and Kenrick 1998).

One of the leading behavioral psychologist, Mark Leary, argues: “Evolution is important to understanding certain mysterious of human behavior because, in some cases, a behavior that is difficult to understand in modern times makes sense when we consider the possibility that the puzzling behavior evolved to deal with a particular problem that our ancestors faced during the distant evolutionary past” (Leary 2012:5).

There are certain beliefs that are embedded in the African mind. Some of these include: (1) belief in evil powers that prevail everywhere and bring evil to people, (2) belief in the existence of the spirits of the dead, and (3) belief that witches have power to control and influence things and to bring about certain results. Let me illustrate some of these concepts.
A woman whose wealthy husband died was made an administrator of the late husband’s estate. Her husband had willed everything to her and her three children. However, in spite of what the will clearly stipulated, the husband’s relatives demanded that she surrender the wealth to them or else face the consequences of losing her children. In spite of the fact that the law was on her side and she did not need to fear, she feared that she and her children would be bewitched; therefore she surrendered all the wealth to them. Her basis for this behavior was purely the historically carried-over fear that was reinforced through tales and experience that witches have power to control the future.

Another story may reinforce this motif. A 16-year-old grade 12 girl approached me, telling me that she was going to fail her grade 12 exams because her mother had cursed her. I had known this girl to be the most intelligent student in this school. When she approached me, she shared that her mother, after visiting T. B. Joshua in Nigeria came back with a drink that she and her siblings had to drink. When the daughter refused to do so, her mother told her that she was cursed and was causing the curse to affect the entire family. The girl believed the curse on her was real and told me that in spite of being very intelligent, she would not pass her exams because she was cursed. I will tell the end of this story in my conclusion.

Additionally in Africa, belief in the presence and works of evil powers, especially witches, is pervasive. Most African traditions conceive of the universe as alive with spirit powers and a place in which evil is hyperactive. As a result, misfortune that emanates from natural causes is made worse by the belief that witches, with their supernatural powers, are the real cause of anything and everything that happens.

The belief in the immortality of the soul continues to perpetuate belief that the dead can and do engage in the activities of the living and that witches have powers to manipulate and control the spirits of dead people. It is not uncommon in Africa for living people to bless their children by using common expressions like, “May the spirits of your ancestors bless you and watch over you in your life” or “May the spirits of the dead go ahead of you.” Because this belief is so strongly held by many and because it is stamped on the minds of people to such a degree, witches are strongly associated with the spirits of dead people with the result that it becomes easy for most Africans to consult witches for help.

The main points that has been made in this section is that in the African framework of thinking, the African worldview, belief in supernatural powers, belief in the immortality of the soul, and belief in witches, make it easy for Africans to turn to witchcraft for power, protection, and even sustenance of life.
Driven by Human Needs

Another thing that explains why people are attracted to witchcraft is the quest to find answers to human needs. People have needs that have to be met and in meeting these needs, people will turn to anything that will help them to meet those needs. With the evolutionary behavior that Africans have grown up with, one of the believed sources of meeting needs is witchcraft.

Behavioral psychologists identify, among other needs, the following four: the need to live and not die, the need to protect oneself against enemies, the need to love and to be loved, and the physical needs such as to have food to eat (Staub 1999).

First, the need to live. No one wants to die. People will resist death or attempt to avoid death at any cost. Abraham’s behavior may illustrate this point. When Abraham sensed danger and death because of the beauty of his wife, he told lies (Gen 12:10–14, 20). People in general, if they perceive some threat to their lives, will seek after almost anything that will give them life. If they have grown up knowing that witches have powers to protect them from death, they will go there. King Saul did just that (1 Sam 28:7–20).

Second, the need to protect against enemies. People do not want to be hurt by those who may be more powerful than they are. Elijah is a typical example. When Elijah sensed danger to his life from Jezebel, he ran away (1 Kgs 18). Elijah had options as a believer in God. Ellen White states that Elijah could have remembered that the same God who had given him power to perform at Mount Carmel, the God who had used him to put to death over 400 false prophets, the God who had taken care of him for the three years there was no rain, could easily take care of Jezebel. But at that time, faith in God failed him. He ran away like a crazy man (White 1943:160–162).

When King Asa faced a military threat from King Baasha of Israel, Asa panicked and faith failed him. Instead of relying on God who had earlier delivered him from the Cushites and the Libyans, he went to Ben-Hadad, King of Aram for help. The word of the Lord came to Him, “Because you relied on the king of Aram and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Aram has escaped from your hand. Were not the Cushites and Libyans a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen? Yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him. You have done a foolish thing, and from now on you will be at war” (2 Chr 16:7–9).

Third, the need to love and be loved. Everyone has a need to be related
to someone. People do not want to be rejected or fall out of love. Leah did everything she could to stay in love with her husband Jacob and if it meant manipulating him by purchasing her son’s mandrakes, she did it (Gen 30:14-16). When Sarai was not able to conceive a child, she gave her maid to Abraham to be his wife and Abraham accepted that solution (Gen 16:1-5). When Leah realized that she was not loved by her husband, and perceived that the only way she could be loved and appreciated was if she gave him more children, she offered her maid Zilphah to Jacob (Gen 16).

These stories illustrate human behavior when certain needs are not met. In the African context in which people have roots in a belief that witchcraft can help them meet needs, to turn to witches for help becomes the most obvious thing to do.

How is the matter of human needs related to witchcraft? In their quest to find answers to their needs, people will go to the source they believe is able and has power to help them meet those needs. When threatened by sickness and when people cannot find answers to their needs elsewhere, they will go back to witchcraft for possible answers. When they are scared of being destroyed by their enemies, they will seek help from witches to protect them. When they need wealth and they cannot find it, they will turn to witches to help supply their needs.

Prayer and Faith

In this section of the article, I suggest how the Bible and God addresses the issue of meeting human needs and how God appeals to his people to be people of faith.

The Bible is not silent about how God addresses human needs. The Psalmist states:

Praise the Lord, my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits—who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles. (Ps 103:1–3)

The Psalmist describes a God who addresses different human needs including human sickness and threats to life.

Jesus demonstrated his concerns for human needs and demonstrated his ability to address human needs through the miracles that he performed. When he calmed the tempest tossed waters, he demonstrated his ability to protect his children from threats to life; when he raised his hand towards the demon possessed man from who the disciples had run away, he...
demonstrated that no power can penetrate his protecting hand; when he fed the five thousand men and told Simon to lower his net in daylight with the result that there were so many fish in the net that it started to break, Jesus demonstrated his ability to supply the daily needs of his people; when entire villages celebrated the freedom from diseases because Jesus had healed “all the sick” in those villages, he demonstrated his ability to heal all manner of diseases; and when he raised Lazarus from the dead and Jairus’ daughter from the dead, Jesus demonstrated his ability to give life even after death had occurred.

The real issue then is that of trust. Do God’s children trust God enough to put their faith in him in all these areas of life? Notice what James states:

Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you ill? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being, even as we are. He prayed earnestly that it would not rain, and it did not rain on the land for three and a half years. Again he prayed, and the heavens gave rain, and the earth produced its crops. (Jas 5:13–18)

Ellen White put it well when she said: “The disciples were to have the same power which Jesus had to heal ‘all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.’ By healing in His name the diseases of the body, they would testify to His power for the healing of the soul. Matt 4:23; 9:6” (1940:821).

They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover. This world is a vast lazar house, but Christ came to heal the sick, to proclaim deliverance to the captives of Satan. He was in Himself health and strength. He imparted His life to the sick, the afflicted, those possessed of demons. He turned away none who came to receive His healing power. He knew that those who petitioned Him for help had brought disease upon themselves; yet He did not refuse to heal them. And when virtue from Christ entered into these poor souls, they were convicted of sin, and many were healed of their spiritual disease, as well as of their physical maladies. The gospel still possesses the same power, and why should we not today witness the same results? (White 1940:823)

Christ feels the woes of every sufferer. When evil spirits rend a human frame, Christ feels the curse. When fever is burning up the life current,
He feels the agony. And He is just as willing to heal the sick now as when He was personally on earth. Christ’s servants are His representatives, the channels for His working. He desires through them to exercise His healing power. (823)

**The Holy Spirit**

The impression that one is left with after reading the book of Acts is that God, through the acts of the Holy Spirit has power over all authorities on earth and no human being or power can conquer God.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, God enabled people to speak languages they were not taught, heal all manner of diseases, be protected from all attacks by their enemies, and see the dead raised to life. Acts 1:8 clearly states, “And you share receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you.” In Jesus’ long parting speech in John 13-17, Jesus repeatedly promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to take his place, stating that “I will not leave you as orphans.” And Peter made it very clear that the gift of the Holy Spirit was not restricted to one general area when he said, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39).

The promise of the Spirit is not appreciated as it should be. Its fulfillment is not realized as it might be. It is the absence of the Spirit that makes the gospel ministry so powerless. Learning, talent, eloquence, every natural or acquired endowment, may be possessed; but without the presence of the Spirit of God, no heart will be touched, no sinner be won to Christ. On the other hand, if they are connected with Christ, if the gifts of the Spirit are theirs, the poorest and most ignorant of His disciples will have a power that will tell upon hearts. God makes them the channels for the outworking of the highest influence in the universe. (White 1900:328)

**Where Do We Go from Here?**

God is sufficient for his people. Just as God provided for the children of Israel in the wilderness he is capable of doing so today. He is Provider, Protector, Healer, and Life-Giver. The church must prove to its members and those in the community that God is a more reliable source to fulfill all their needs than any other source. He is sufficient. How can that happen? I propose two things:

First, the church needs to develop and teach its members the doctrine
of prayer and faith in line with the teachings from James. When my wife and I could not have children the first two years of our marriage, I resolved that I would talk to God in prayer and I did. God heard me as he heard Isaac of old (Gen 25:21), and he gave us a miracle child and afterwards, two more children.

Second, the church needs to explore a clearer understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the context of mission. The examples of the New Testament church after they received the Holy Spirit is that of a vibrant church that does not only teach propositional statements of truth such as the true day of worship or the state of the dead. The church in Acts, under the ministration of the Holy Spirit, is a vibrant church that teaches the truth and meets the needs of people. It is a church that emulated everything Jesus did when he was on earth. He was a Healer, he was a Provider, and he was a Life-Giver.

My wife and I waited upon the Lord, trusted him, and refused to consult witch doctors contrary to the advice we were given. After much prayer, God gave us Paul our first born and we dedicated him to God. I shared this personal story and other Bible stories with the very intelligent grade 12 student and asked her to repeat this text every day before she went to bed and again when she woke up: “Don’t be afraid,” the prophet answered. “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them” (2 Kgs 6:16). She is well. She did well in the exams. Our God is sufficient if we trust him.

Works Cited


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Introduction

The topic for this article, “Relationship between Social and Economic Status and Witchcraft in Africa,” presupposes the existence and practice of witchcraft in Africa that works to influence social and economic life. However, a number of questions need to be asked to test this presupposition. Is witchcraft in Africa a reality or an imaginary phenomenon? Does witchcraft really influence, for example, how people pursue higher education and create wealth or is it a claim that has no significance whatsoever?

The purpose of this paper is to describe the relationship between socioeconomic status and witchcraft in Africa in order to show how this relationship affects how people create wealth and pursue their ambitions. Finally, I will offer a brief critical analysis of the insights gained in the article and draw a conclusion. It is hoped that the insights gained from this study will contribute to helping the church respond to the challenge of witchcraft in Africa and elsewhere.

Before I do so, I first need to define the word *witchcraft* as it is used in this study. What is witchcraft? Witchcraft refers to at least three different phenomena. According to Moreau (2001:1279), the first phenomenon refers to a person using magical means to bring harm or provide benefits. Such people have been found in every culture in the world; some of them practice witchcraft on an individual basis, while others have institutionalized it in the form of religious sects, for example, Voodoo, Santeria, Macumba, etc. The Bible strongly condemns this type of witchcraft (Deut 18:10; Mic 5:12; Gal 5:20). The second phenomenon is what is referred to as “diabolical witchcraft.” It has been documented that accusations about this particular type of witchcraft arose in the medieval era, and it continues to this day. Basically, this type focuses on a witch as a person who consciously aligns with Satan (Moreau 2001:1279). The last
phenomenon involves the so-called neopaganism mainly found in Europe and the United States, which came about as a result of the 20th-century revival of magical thinking, including Wicca\(^4\) (1279). In this paper, I use the first definition of witchcraft provided above, which broadly defines it as the ability to use supernatural powers or techniques to harm others or acquire wealth. This definition seems to better serve the purpose of this study because it touches on the relationship between socioeconomic status and witchcraft.

**Witchcraft in Africa: Reality or Imaginary?**

Witchcraft has been more often dismissed by scholars as an imaginary or unreal phenomenon (Geschiere 1997:2, 20). Because of its complexity, some people have concluded that the language used to describe witchcraft and sorcery is actually a coded language that means something else. In other words, witchcraft is not real. So, is witchcraft in Africa real or an imaginary phenomenon? Do people use this terminology to make Africa look diabolical and backward, or is witchcraft part of a general African cultural phenomenon? If it is real, then what is its function in society? A brief overview of a number of studies conducted on the continent of Africa in the past 20 years give evidence of witchcraft beliefs as a cultural phenomenon that is still alive and well in many parts of the continent.

Witchcraft beliefs are still held and practiced in many parts of Africa south of the Sahara, and they do not seem to lose salience even after more than half a century of postcolonial self-rule (Evans-Pritchard 1937; Ashforth 2002; Miguel 2003). In his study, “Poverty and Witch Killing,” Edward Miguel (2003:5) mentions a number of African countries where witchcraft beliefs are still practiced. In a recent study, which was based on a 2008–2009 survey conducted by the Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion and Public Life in 19 sub-Saharan African countries, Gershman (2016:183) concludes that witchcraft beliefs are still held in these countries. The countries surveyed represent 75% of the total sub-Saharan population.

Even though most studies have focused on sub-Saharan Africa, there is evidence of the presence of witchcraft beliefs in North Africa as well (Spooner 2004:316). In other words, people who hold witchcraft beliefs in one way or another exist throughout Africa as a whole, regardless of their religious affiliation, political ideology, or geographic location. The presence of witchcraft beliefs in Africa in the 21st century is made clear by the many reports of witchcraft confessions and accusations and even witch killings in many countries (Miguel 2003:5; The Daily Mail 2015).

In recent years, there have been shocking reports of attacks on accused witches and witch killings all over sub-Saharan Africa. Thousands of
people, primarily women, have been either attacked or killed in West, East, South, and Central Africa (Miguel 2003; Kgatla 2007). The results of witchcraft accusations, which include witch killings and destruction of their property, should be taken as a cry for help. In the past four decades, thousands of people accused of witchcraft have been killed throughout Africa. More than 50% of people interviewed in sub-Saharan Africa indicated they personally believed in witchcraft (Radford 2010). This shows that witchcraft beliefs on the African continent are not an old, imaginary phenomenon, but rather a present reality. This fact brings us to the relationship between witchcraft and socioeconomic status in Africa.

**Relationship between Witchcraft and Socioeconomic Status**

Anthropologists have established a close link between the belief in witchcraft and the social, political, and economic life of some people (Geschiere 1997:2–5). So, what is the nature of the relationship between witchcraft and socioeconomic status in Africa? Does witchcraft influence the social and economic development of the people of Africa? Here, the paper attempts to show that witchcraft beliefs influence how people view and participate in social and economic development in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Witchcraft and Socioeconomic Status**

Witchcraft influences people’s socioeconomic status in a direct way. This means that the state of the economy of a particular society is determined by the level of witchcraft beliefs held, which in turn determines the socioeconomic status of families and individuals (ter Haar 2007). In such societies, witchcraft and socioeconomic status are so closely linked that one defines the other and vice versa.

The term *status* as used in this paper should be understood as the position or rank of a person or group within a society. On the one hand, one can earn social status through achievements, which may include hard work, skills, etc. This type of status is called achieved status. On the other hand, one can inherit a position in the stratification system. This type of status has nothing to do with achievements. Therefore, it is called ascribed status (Brym and Lie 2009:88). Socioeconomic status is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person’s work experience and of an individual’s or family’s economic and social position in relation to others, based on income, education, and occupation (Woolfolk 2007:160).
In traditional environments where people hold cultural beliefs in witchcraft, they see any ascendancy to a higher social status as the result of witchcraft and magic (Geschiere 1997:137–140). This belief has implications for other aspects of social and economic life, including law enforcement, aid donations, and even public health. As a result of this attitude, “witch doctors are consulted for almost every affair of life, from healing diseases to placing curses on rivals, as well as for personal, political, and financial gain” (Radford 2010). Generally, this practice makes some Africans’ lifestyle more or less grounded in witchcraft beliefs. People make development decisions based on their understanding of what witchcraft might mean to them in the short and long term.

Many ethnographic case studies conducted in Africa show that witchcraft beliefs can have a direct adverse effect on interpersonal relationships, cooperation in society, as well as on diverse aspects of socioeconomic development (Gershman 2015; Harries 2010). This happens as a result of increased fear of bewitchment and the fear of witchcraft accusations, whose punishment is severe and brutal in most parts of Africa (Hund 2000:366–367).

These two fears, namely the fear of bewitchment and the fear of witchcraft accusations, occupy the minds of many people most of the time. As such, witchcraft mentality in general and its implications in particular influence people’s social and economic plans from start to finish. Whether or not some people will be willing and enthusiastic to participate in social or economic activities depends on the level of their belief in witchcraft and their fear of its possible implications. These two fears have generated another problem in African societies—the erosion of social capital (the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively). Studies show that communities that are infested with witchcraft beliefs become distrustful, suspicious, and non-cooperative (Gershman 2015). Suspicion and lack of trust interfere with people’s confidence and freedom to work together for the development of their communities. They are not free to help each other or support one another even in the projects that require people to cooperate and work together as a community. This mindset applies to other facets of life as well, including education, farming, business ventures, and women’s or youth development programs (Gershman 2015). Trust and confidence have the power to drive people into working together for their development and socioeconomic prosperity. In societies where witchcraft beliefs are widespread, the spirit of collegiality and brotherhood is diminished because of the erosion of social capital. When mistrust is common among the people, there is a tendency to want to maintain their status quo.

In such communities, people’s success or lack thereof is thought to be closely associated with witchcraft and magic. If a person succeeds, they
are accused of using witchcraft to become wealthy, highly educated, or politically influential; if they fail in their endeavors, it is thought that somebody else has cast a spell on them in order to put them down. If they are accused of witchcraft, they run the risk of being mercilessly killed (BBC News 2009). If they choose to underperform or do nothing for fear of witchcraft accusations, they run the risk of living in abject poverty thus failing to reach their God-given potential. Whatever their socioeconomic status, they pass that on to their children. In short, witchcraft beliefs contribute significantly to Africa’s poverty and underdevelopment (Gershman 2015). Some may even choose to leave their communities altogether and relocate at a faraway location (ter Haar 2007:1–5).

The Salience of Witchcraft in Africa

In the previous section, I attempted to show the close relationship between witchcraft and socioeconomic status in Africa. I argued that witchcraft beliefs can deeply influence people’s ambitions in almost every aspect of life. However, this raises the question of why witchcraft is such a powerful force among some people on the continent of Africa. To answer this question, I would like to suggest and discuss at least two reasons. The first sees witchcraft as serving an explanatory function in society and the second has to do with the theory of limited good.

Witchcraft as an Explanatory Tool

Witchcraft in Africa is so widespread because it serves to explain the mysteries of life, most of which otherwise would remain unexplainable. These mysteries can be divided into two categories: (a) misfortune and tragedies, such as sudden deaths, illnesses, crop failure, businesses problems, etc., and (b) good fortune and upward social mobility, which may include getting wealthy, acquiring higher education, success in politics, etc. People, who hold such beliefs are convinced that no death or sickness occurs without a malevolent agent behind it. They equally believe that no one can become wealthy or well educated without recourse to witchcraft. This view of witchcraft gives it an explanatory function (Horton 1972:21–23).

Not all scholars who have studied this subject agree that witchcraft has this function. Some see it as a symbolic personality standing for moral failings (Middleton and Winter 2004:107). Other have insisted that witchcraft as part of African Traditional Religion simply fulfills no explanatory function (Horton 1972). Practically speaking, there seems to be more evidence to the contrary. The fact that many people in these societies use witchcraft beliefs to make sense of things that occur in their communities,
good and evil, is enough evidence to see these beliefs serving an explanatory function (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014:5–6). As an explanatory tool, some people see witchcraft as a necessity in society. Some have argued that there is good witchcraft and bad witchcraft. The work of a witch doctor, for example, is considered essential and therefore good, to the point that some of them are accepted as witnesses in courts of law (Geschiere 1997). They are considered to be doing their part for the common good of the entire society.

**Witchcraft and the Theory of Limited Good**

The theory of limited goods was introduced by George Foster. His article “Peasant Society and the Image of Limited Good” drew a lot of responses, both critical and supportive (Kennedy 1966; Ginzberg 2014:20). The theory states that the progress of any person in this world is seen as a threat to the rest of the people in the world. What one gains in life is at the expense of others (Foster 1965:296). Therefore, if one person becomes wealthy in a community, it is because he or she has taken a bigger share, and the result is that some people in the same community will be poor. If one person earns more academic degrees, it is because they have taken the share of other members of their society. This worldview, some believe, drives the witchcraft mentality in Africa, because those who are perceived to take more than their share get bewitched as a warning to them and to the rest of the society. Therefore, witchcraft is seen as a means to regulate the acquisition of goods and influence to ensure equal redistribution of the limited resources available (Grinker, Lubkemann, and Steiner 2010:274).

However, while this worldview may seem to be the driving force behind witchcraft activities and attacks, it has also been established by experts that, in reality, it is envy and jealousy that play a major role in the practice of witchcraft (Harries 2012:132–133; Gershman 2015). Because of envy or jealousy, people who enjoy higher socioeconomic status become the targets of witchcraft (Harries 2012).

**Conclusion**

This paper has looked at the relationship between witchcraft and socioeconomic status in Africa. It has established the fact that witchcraft beliefs, as a cultural phenomenon, are still alive and well throughout the continent of Africa. More than 50% of people interviewed in one study of some societies indicated that they personally believed in witchcraft, which means that one in every two people in Africa may hold some sort of witchcraft belief. The influence of witchcraft on the socioeconomic status...
of many Africans is a matter of great concern. This cultural phenomenon seems to impact the social and economic status of more than a billion people living on this continent.

Now, what does this mean to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa, where the Adventist membership is the largest in the world? This reality means a number of things:

1. The Seventh-day Adventist Church as one of the fastest-growing churches in the world in general and Africa in particular (Zylstra 2015:18), interacts with a large number of people who hold witchcraft beliefs, whether the church knows it or not. This also means that many people who convert to Adventism come from families and communities that hold witchcraft beliefs.

2. When the church plans out-reach and in-reach programs, including major evangelistic campaigns, it must do so with the understanding that a significant number of the people who attend those meetings may be influenced by witchcraft and sorcery.

3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church cannot afford to be naïve enough to believe that every person who converts to Adventist Christianity from witchcraft backgrounds is fully converted and would never think of either going back to their former beliefs and practices or playing the dual allegiance game while holding church membership (Dosunmu 2011). This also means that some people who call themselves an Adventist may be holding witchcraft beliefs.

4. Christianity has half a billion followers in Africa and has been operational in Africa for nearly 200 years. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, with a membership in Africa of 8 million, has been on the continent for over 100 years (Mwashinga 2013), and yet witchcraft beliefs are increasing instead of decreasing. Where has the church gone wrong?

Witchcraft beliefs in Africa were a challenge at the dawn of Christianity and in the middle of the 19th century, and they remain a challenge now in the second decade of the 21st century. Their evil influence still drives millions of people into poverty and misery. Fear of bewitchment and witchcraft accusations has defined the socioeconomic development of many Africans for so long. It seems that the future of the African continent depends on the success of the Christian project in replacing this fear with saving faith in Jesus Christ. Looking for a biblical solution to the problem of witchcraft could mean looking for an effective way of bringing the Gospel of Jesus Christ to these people and liberating them from the shackles of sin. Then, and only then, will the evil relationship that exists between witchcraft and socioeconomic status in Africa be forever broken.
Recommendations

1. In order to remedy the situation addressed both in this paper and in this conference, I suggest that the church should come up with a clear strategy on how to effectively address the challenges posed by beliefs in witchcraft. This document should be biblically sound, theologically coherent, and culturally relevant and be disseminated to all Seventh-day Adventists in Africa, in the major languages spoken. This document should address any objections that might arise in relation to witchcraft beliefs and practices.

2. The church should be intentional and constant in teaching its members and other people biblical faith without ignoring the fact that witchcraft is real. The church must not wait until the time of crisis to teach or warn people. People should be taught biblical principles of living a joyful, victorious Christian life. They should be encouraged to live without fear because in Christ, Christians are more than conquerors (Rom 8:37).

Notes

1Voodoo is a black religious cult practiced in the Caribbean and the southern United States, combining elements of Roman Catholic ritual with traditional African magical and religious rites, and characterized by sorcery and spirit possession.

2Santeria is a pantheistic Afro-Cuban religious cult developed from the beliefs and customs of the Yoruba people and incorporating some elements of the Catholic religion.

3Macumba is a Brazilian cult incorporating the use of fetishes and sorcery and deriving largely from African practices.

4Wicca is a religion that is characterized by belief in the existence of magical powers in nature.

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Witchcraft Accusations: Destroying Family, Community, and Church

Introduction

Timothy Stabell wrote an article entitled “The Modernity of Witchcraft” in which he stated that “witchcraft continues to be a topic that stirs passions and fears in many places around the world” (2010:460). This is particularly true of Africa where the belief in witchcraft is so pervasive that it can be viewed as a commonplace feature of many African spiritual beliefs (Ellis and ter Haar 2004:27). From a traditional African perspective, there is an undeniable connection between the material and spiritual worlds. This worldview supports the idea that there are spiritual reasons for ordinary everyday occurrences. Because sacred and secular realities are inseparable in African traditional beliefs, it is a common practice to attribute the misfortunes that happen to people to supernatural powers (Mbiti 1990:151; Akrong 2007:55; Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:23).

Witchcraft is generally defined as the ability of a person or group of people to cause harm to others by use of supernatural powers (Hutton 2006:211). Generally speaking, witchcraft is any type of evil that negatively affects the fulfillment of human life (Akrong 2007:59, 65). In many African contexts, there is often a very thin line between the ideas of evil spirits, magic, sorcery, spell casting, curses, and the idea of witches or witchcraft (Quarmyne 2011:477). Because witchcraft is directed against others, it is generally perceived as “the anti-social crime *par excellence*” (Mencej 2015:112; Dovlo 2007:68). Witchcraft is believed to be against the preservation of life, which is the most central precept of African life. Therefore, fighting against witchcraft is considered a moral imperative for all those affected by it (Magoola 2012:99-100). As a result of the perception people hold on witchcraft, they treat with the greatest cruelty those suspected to be associated with it, even wishing to physically eliminate them from society (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014:9; Akrong 2007:65).
Witchcraft beliefs and accusations negatively impacts family relationships as well as other networks of social relations (Akrong 2007:58; Harries 2012:130); therefore this paper will focus on the impact of witchcraft accusations and offer some recommendations as a Christian response to the phenomenon.

**Witchcraft in African Cosmological Thought**

The belief in witchcraft is a strong and widespread phenomenon on the continent of Africa (ter Haar 2007:1). Belief in supernatural powers and witchcraft are well-known components of the worldview of many Africans across all social lines. It is no longer only a village affair, but is a belief held by people of diverse education and religious affiliation in rural as well as in urban settings (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:23; Quarmyne 2011:482; Dovlo 2007:67). It can therefore be argued that in Africa, the belief in witchcraft is a religio-cultural phenomenon. Elom Dovlo notes that “although the belief in witchcraft is part of traditional religious belief, Islam and Christianity in their development have accepted the worldview that supports the belief system by providing preventive and curative measures against witchcraft attacks and by neutralizing supposed witches” (2007:66). Asamoah-Gyadu argues that the emergence and the popularity of the prosperity gospel in Africa is reinforcing not only the belief in witchcraft but is also validating the practice of witch-hunting in many parts of Africa. Because the prosperity gospel preachers instill in their congregants stresses that God has met all human needs of health and wealth through the suffering and death of Christ, believers invoke acts of bewitchment to explain their negative life experiences (2015:25).

Throughout Africa it is still widely believed that all forms of misfortune, such as crop failures, poor spending, barrenness, addiction, sicknesses, accidents, and death, are caused by witchcraft (Nyabwari and Kagema 2014:11; Hill 1996:338; Quarmyne 2011:480; Dovlo 2007:68). Since everything experienced as inimical is attributed to witchcraft, some refer to this phenomenon as the “witchcraft mentality,” which is a constructed interpretive scheme that attempts to account for misfortune, or anything inimical to a person’s well-being, as traceable to the activities of witches. In this scheme of interpretation all causality is deemed to have originated primarily from the spiritual realm; the material causes are considered secondary, or seen as the medium through which the primary spiritual causality finds its expression. Such an interpretation tends to discount a material causal explanation of events, focusing attention on external agents, usually witches. This then creates a mindset that attempts to account for misfortunes not in
the actions, behaviour or attitude of the victim, but rather in the activities of an enemy or malefactor. It is not uncommon to hear people exclaim in dismay in the face of problems: “Who is doing these things to me?” instead of “What is causing these things?” (Akrong 2007:59-60)

In the African traditional mindset, witches, sorcerers, ancestors, or other supernatural beings are considered the primary causes of life misfortunes; however, the attribution of a misfortune to ancestors and other supernatural beings does not mean that they themselves directly caused it. It means that because of an offense done against them, they have simply withdrawn their protection from the offender so that he/she became an easy prey for witches, workers of curses, and sorcerers (Sanou 2015:41). In the case of death through a certain illness (e.g., typhoid, malaria, snake bite, etc.) witchcraft is used to explain how this death happened and the bereaved family usually seeks a metaphysical answer for why their loved one died. A consequence of this causal ontological perspective on misfortunes is that every misfortune has a spiritual origin caused by a witch acting as a personal agent.

Witchcraft is usually believed to be inherited or learned (Akrong 2007:54; Nyabwari and Kagema 2014:12; Quarmyne 2011:480). Witches are thought to use supernatural powers to cast spells, curse individuals, or use charms to harm others. Through supernatural powers, a witch is believed to be able to operate via evil spirits to enter someone’s body and force the individual to suffer symptoms of a certain disease (Quarmyne 2011:480). Because witchcraft is shrouded in secrecy, it is believed that unless under coercion, no one ever willingly admits to being a witch. As such, witchcraft accusations are based on suspicion, rumor, or gossip that circulate within the community whenever its members are faced with a tragedy. In many instances, when misfortunes are experienced, traditional healers and diviners are called upon to determine and explain the source of the misfortunes and also reveal the identity of the offending witch. The belief is that diviners can detect the terrible smell carried by witches (Quarmyne 2011:480, 481).

**Typical Victims of Witchcraft Accusations**

Witchcraft accusations are pervasive in many African communities and an alarming element of such accusations is the killing of suspected witches (ter Haar 2007:1; Akrong 2007:65; Dovlo 2007:72). Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as HelpAge International (n.d.), AgeUK (2011), and Amnesty International (2009) estimate that thousands of witchcraft-related banishments or killings occur in Africa each year. For some strange reasons, the face of witchcraft is feminine and juvenile in the...
majority of African contexts. Although in most cases women, especially older women, constitute the vast majority of those accused of witchcraft (Quarmyne 2011:476; Akrong 2007:59), children are increasingly becoming victims of such accusations (ter Haar 2007:1; Schnoebelen 2009:14-17).

On this basis, AgeUK concludes that “it is usually the most discriminated against and marginalised who are accused of witchcraft because they are least able to defend themselves or because they are considered of little value to society and therefore a burden to it in times of hardship.”

People are often accused of witchcraft based on particular characteristics such as old age, poor health, red or yellow eyes, wrinkled skin, missing teeth, or a hunched-backed stance (Quarmyne 2011:479; Cimpric 2010:2; Schnoebelen 2009:14-17; Dovlo 2007:68). Children likely to be accused of witchcraft fall into different categories: orphans who live with step parents or extended family with financial difficulties, children with any physical disability or abnormality (e.g., autism, Down Syndrome, swollen belly, red eyes), twins (associated with the occult or the anger of the gods), children whose birth is considered abnormal (premature children, awkward position during delivery), and children with albinism. Albinos are accused of witchcraft but also sought out because of the magic powers supposedly contained in their organs, hair, skin and limbs (Cimpric 2010:2; Schnoebelen 2009:15, 17). Dovlo rightly notes that “the great variety in marks of identification [of witches] means that people intent on accusing others of witchcraft can always do so” (2007:68).

Witchcraft accusations can also be triggered by other factors such as tragedy, economic wellbeing, and strained relationships among community members (Dovlo 2007:69; Mencej 2015:114). It is reported that witchcraft accusations increase in times of social instability (Hill 1996:325). Witch-hunts have been prompted by health crises such as HIV/AIDS, cholera, Ebola, meningitis, tetanus, and many other epidemics (Schnoebelen 2009:19; Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:23; ter Haar 2007:1).

Strained relationships are also known to contribute to witchcraft accusations. It is often common for rivals to accuse each other of witchcraft practices. This is commonplace in many polygamous marital relationships where jealous relationships between co-spouses or between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law often maliciously accuse each other of witchcraft as part of competition for either the husband or the son/husband figure (Quarmyne 2011:479).

The same level of rivalry is also often observed between professionals, business people, political leaders, and even religious leaders. Because economic wellbeing can be attributed to witchcraft, witchcraft accusations are ways of either getting rid of one’s rivals or a way of justifying their success (Stabell 2010:461; Dovlo 2007:69). In other instances, tensions already exist
between people before accusations of witchcraft occur. In these instances, the main function of the accusation is to provide people with a means of expressing and channeling the tensions as well as providing an outlet for repressed hostility, frustration, and anxiety. In the event of a misfortune, the suspected is “first and foremost sought among those neighbours with whom victims had already been in problematic relationships before the misfortune occurred” (Mencej 2015:114).

The Impact of Witchcraft Accusations

Whether in the context of the family, community, or church, witchcraft accusations generate a lot of apprehensiveness in interpersonal relationships (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:23; Schnoebelen 2009:2). In this section I will review six main negative impacts of witchcraft accusations on individuals and the community at large.

Killings or Forced Exile

In some contexts, witchcraft accusations lead to the killing of alleged witches. It is reported that in Tanzania alone, “around 3,000 people were killed after being accused of being witches” (BBC News 2014). Those who escape lynching are displaced through forced exile or by their personal decision to flee from the threat of harm (Schnoebelen 2009:2; Mgbako and Glenn 2011:389). In the northern part of Ghana, for example, special communities generally referred to as “witch camps” have been established as a refuge for alleged witches for the purpose of “de-witching” them. It is well documented that only a small fraction of the suspected witches in those camps are men (Dovlo 2007:72, 75).

Coerced Confessions

Once alleged witches arrive at the camps, the gambaraan (a witchdoctor) performs a ritual to determine their culpability. When a person allegedly found to be a witch denies the accusation, he or she is given a concoction to drink by the witchdoctor along with the explanation that death would be the outcome if they drink it knowing that they are guilty. The thought of possible death causes many people to confess that they are a witch. When the accused person accepts being a witch, she or he is forced to go through a “de-witching” ritual by drinking and bathing with an herbal preparation. This ritual is believed to exorcise alleged witches of their evil potency, rendering them powerless forever. Theoretically the “de-witched” women can return home since they no longer pose a threat
to society. Unfortunately, this is rarely the case (Dovlo 2007:75-76; see also Cimpric 2010:1).

Life-long Stigmatization

As indicated above, the innocence verdict or the ritual cleansing does not remove the stigmatization brought about by witchcraft accusation. Once suspected, people are always perceived as guilty (Mgbako and Glenn 2011:389). Since witchcraft accusations stigmatize and marginalize for life, they are in some sense mini death sentences as they leave many accused destitute with no possibility of survival without dependence on others. Witchcraft accusations are a traumatic experience both for the accused and their relatives, especially in contexts where witchcraft is thought to be inherited (Akrong 2007:54; Nyabwari and Kagema 2014:12; Quarmyne 2011:480). This leads to the stigmatization of other members of a family when one of them is accused of being a witch.

The consequences on children resulting from an accusation of witchcraft have long-term negative effects on a wide range of areas. “Once accused of witchcraft, children are stigmatized and discriminated [against] for life” (Cimpric 2010:1). Their ordeal starts in the way their parents and religious leaders subject them to inhumane treatment to try to extract confessions of witchcraft or force the spirit of the witch out of them. They are likely to be denied access to medical treatment, as some medical personnel often refuse to treat children who are considered to be witches. Their right to education is denied as many parents refuse to send their children to a school attended by a child believed to be a witch. In some cases, teachers refuse to accept children accused of witchcraft in their classes. They are also denied access to their family or community life, as they are rejected or abandoned by their family and community. Their abandonment by both family, church, community, and even some government systems causes such children to roam the streets where many of them fall victim to drug and alcohol addiction, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV infection, or trafficking for forced labor or sexual exploitation (Secker 2012:26-28; Cimpric 2010:1).

Disruption to Social Life and Structure

Witchcraft accusations are disruptive to social life and the African sense of community and relationships (Ntloedibe-Kuswani 2007:205). Because of the belief in some contexts that witches work harm on neighbors or kin, rather than strangers, they are considered a serious threat to other members of a shared community (Hutton 2006:211; Dovlo 2007:81; Nyaga 2007:257;
Kgatla 2007:269). This belief generates a high level of apprehension in interpersonal relationships even among close friends as “people would usually seek culprits responsible for their misfortune first and foremost in their immediate environment” (Mencej 2015:113; see also Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:23). Worse still, this belief causes people to perceive even close family relations and those on whom they are intimately dependent on to be viewed as potential sources of their misfortune (Asamoah-Gyadu 2015:23). There are reported instances where people went as far as attacking or even killing the parents whom they suspected of being responsible for their misfortunes (Dovlo 2007:72).

Witchcraft accusations clearly contribute to the disintegration of African families. Since the accused, the majority of whom are women, are driven from their communities when they escape or survive lynching, their husbands sometime divorce them out of fear of being taken for their accomplices and then remarry. The effects of the accusations are known to go far beyond what happens to the alleged witches and often include the immediate families even after the punishment has been meted out to the supposed witches. Children of alleged witches are very often seen as either witches or potential witches and thus become socially stigmatized. Considering the fundamental role of African women in parenting, when they are accused of witchcraft and exiled from their community, their role as a parent is revoked since they are no longer able to socialize their children (Dovlo 2007:81, 82).

Since older people are a vital part of the learning institution in African communities for younger generations, witchcraft accusations levied against old women and their subsequent marginalization leaves many communities without mentors for younger women or caretakers for orphans (Quarmyne 2011:483).

Promotion of African Traditional Religion

The perspective of some Christians on witchcraft and witchcraft accusations helps promote not only the belief in the power of witchcraft over that of God but actually helps promote the tenants of African Tradition Religion (ATR) in general. African Independent Churches (AIC) and charismatic movements strongly uphold the African traditional worldview in their approach to witchcraft. It is reported that in many contexts, the credibility of preachers and pastoral caregivers is measured by their ability to detect and ward off demons believed to be sent by witches. In some cases, Bible texts such as Micah 5:11, Acts 8:2-5, and Revelation 9:20-21 are used to justify the physical eliminations of people accused of practicing witchcraft (Baloyi 2014:1, 7; Dovlo 2007:80). Some
preachers not only acknowledge the existence of witchcraft, but go as far as insisting that its power can be used for good purposes and should therefore not be condemned as totally evil (Dovlo 2007:81).

The most alarming practice is that in the event of suspected witchcraft practices among Christians, witch doctors are sometime invited to help detect alleged witches in Christian congregations (Onongha 2014; Bongmba 2007:129). Such a practice clearly undermines the power of God and downplays the role of the church and its witness in society. Because in such instances some Christian leaders indirectly elevate the power of ATR over that of the gospel, weaker members of their congregations “become less committed to their Christian faith and instead reconsider traditional African faiths” (Magoola 2012:98, 103). Some Christians stop trusting that the power of God alone is enough to prevent witches from attacking them (Bolayi 2014:8). This is one of the reasons why dual allegiance and syncretism continue to be a major challenge to Christian mission in Africa.

Impact on Economic Development

Since good fortune is also often attributed to witchcraft, some people are fearful of excelling in their studies or in their professions for fear of being accused of witchcraft (Stabell 2010:461; Amoah 1986). In other cases, people may be afraid to either face challenging tasks or increase their economic status for fear that their success would attract witchcraft attacks (Nyaga 2007:258; Baloyi 2014:4; Dovlo 2007:83). Because of the forced exile of alleged witches, valuable human resources are lost, thus depriving communities of important assets that can contribute to growth and development. The marginalization of elderly women also affects productivity since they are often the ones who tirelessly provide free baby-sitting so that younger people can engage in economic activities (Dovlo 2007:82; Quarmyne 2011:483). This type of attitude in response to the fear of witchcraft clearly undermines people’s initiatives in productivity and socio-economic development. In some contexts, people fear building nice houses, buying good means of transportation, or even dressing better than the average. Among the younger generation, some avoid returning to their village once they move to and succeed in urban centers (Nyaga 2007:258).

As the result of forced exile, those accused of practicing witchcraft lose their social and economic status. When a witch is accused they are usually forced to leave their homes in such a hurry that they barely have the time to take anything with them and in many cases their homes are burned down and their businesses looted (Mgbako and Glenn 2011:389; Daily Mail 2015).

The fear of either witchcraft or that of being associated with its practices
clearly undermines people’s initiatives in productivity and socio-economic
development in Africa as “the economically able and socially active are
often restricted by witchcraft accusations to develop their potential to
the full. The weak may use the weapon of witchcraft accusations in order
to stop the powerful from broadening the development gap that exists
between them” (Kgatla 2007:270).

Conclusion

The belief in witchcraft and its destructive powers remain a social real-
ity in the life and thought of many Africans across all social lines. Witch-
craft accusations and their subsequent consequences on the accused and
their relatives is a crucial violation of human rights as well as a disruption
to social life, good interpersonal relationships, and economic develop-
ment. The church cannot afford to remain silent when the majority of its
members live in such contexts.

Recommendations

In the face of the severe consequences of witchcraft accusations, what
should the church do? The contributors to Mission in the 21st Century out-
line five essential marks of effective mission: (1) proclaim the good news
of the Kingdom, (2) teach, baptize, and nurture new believers, (3) respond
to human needs by loving service, (4) seek to transform unjust structures
of society, and (5) strive to safeguard the integrity of creation and sustain
and renew the life of the earth (see Walls and Ross 2008). I suggest this
framework be adapted in addressing issues related to witchcraft accusations.

Following are three recommendations the church can initiate to begin
to reduce the problems associated with witchcraft accusations:

1. In the process of teaching and nurturing believers, a special em-
phasis should be placed on worldview change (see Onongha 2014) and
a well-balanced approach to the truth, allegiance, and power dimensions
of Christian discipleship taught (see Sanou 2013). Worldview is the un-
conscious frame of reference people operate from. Since most African
converts to Christianity are from an African Traditional Religions (ATR)
background, when they come to Christ they are likely to interpret the
Scriptures through the filter of an ATR worldview. Unless their conver-
sion is followed by a worldview transformation, their Christian life will
remain influenced by the values and core assumptions of the ATR world-
view especially in times of crises (Bauer 2013:85). Africa is a power-or-
ented mission context. Change of worldview must also be accompanied
by demonstrations of God’s power in conjunction with coherent biblically
based arguments. Converts need a visible demonstration that the God of the Bible is more powerful than the powers of witchcraft. Unless converts from an ATR background experience, at the worldview level, a truth-filled and power-filled Christianity, many of them will “continue to seek out the old power sources to satisfy their fears and needs” (Bauer 2008:342). Because we believe in the reality of the Great Controversy, there should be a steady and systematic discussion on witchcraft and the power of God to conquer evil powers in training programs both for church leaders, seminarians, and church members.

2. Because the violence, marginalization, and ill-treatment of people accused of witchcraft is a breach of their human rights, church leaders should be involved in community education on human rights as well as lobbying for justice for the harm done to victims of witchcraft accusations. This can be a powerful tool for deterring community and church members alike from engaging in witch-hunting.

3. Through a partnership with the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), church entities should promote and participate in the rehabilitation, integration, and counseling of exiled alleged witches to help them return to their families and communities. Efforts should be made to work toward the empowerment of those who cannot return to their communities with income-generating activities so they can support themselves.

**Works Cited**


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African Pentecostalism and Its Relationship to Witchcraft Beliefs and Accusations: Biblical Responses to a Pernicious Problem Confronting the Adventist Church in Africa

Introduction

The subject of witchcraft accusations once used to be a major discourse all around the world; especially in Europe and its colonies in North America (Jennings 2015:1). During that era, which curiously continued through the period of the Enlightenment and the Reformation, notable men like Martin Luther and John Calvin are reported to have believed in the existence of witches and spoken forcefully in support of their extermination (Kors and Peters 2001:262-262). Indeed, Luther is reported to have stated concerning witches, “There is no compassion to be had for these women; I would burn all of them myself, according to the law, where it is said that priests began to stone criminals to death” (263).

In the succeeding centuries this phenomenon was eclipsed by the success of the missionary endeavor, which resulted in Africa, Latin America, and Asia emerging as collaborators on the global mission stage. However, in recent times, the subject of Witchcraft accusations has again resurfaced on the missions radar to the extent that the American Society of Missiology (ASM) dedicated an entire track of its annual missions conference to discussing this emergent phenomenon. Besides the ASM conference, the International Bulletin for Missionary Research (IBMR), in 2014 devoted an entire edition of its widely-read journal to articles on this same theme, highlighting reports from various regions of the world faced with this problem. In addition, mission scholar, Robert Priest and several mission colleagues...
from Africa have over the last three years or so engaged in research and presentations seeking to unravel this pernicious problem ravaging parishioners, congregations, and ministers in just about all the regions of the African continent. For instance, in the country of Central African Republic one out of every four cases in the courts of Bangui, the capital city, and between 80-90% of all the cases in the rural courts were concerning witchcraft accusations, resulting in 70% of prisoners in the central prison being there as a result of this (Gifford 2014:123). These statistics are indicative of the situation in several other African countries regarding the subject of witchcraft beliefs and accusations.

Definitions and Explanations

Witchcraft is a phenomenon associated with “supernatural activities that are believed to bring about negative or evil consequences for individuals and families.” It is also regarded as “benign supernatural power that can enhance one’s ability to perform extraordinary feats” (Akrong 2007:53). Witchcraft is considered to be a power inherent to an individual that can be employed for good or evil—when linked with men it is considered good witchcraft, but when connected to women it is regarded as evil (Dovlo 2007:58). In their classic, Understanding Folk Religions, Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou explain that the belief in witchcraft is universal, and among the greatest fears people who believe in its reality can ever have (1999:148-149). Witchcraft accusations are prevalent in societies where misfortune or evil is always blamed on a human cause, or agent, and in closely-knit communities where severe environmental or societal stress is experienced (151).

The belief in witchcraft serves the purpose of providing a worldview explanation for the causes of anything or everything that could go wrong in the life of an individual or a community (Kunhiyop 2008:378). The concept of mystical causality—“the belief that occurrences in the physical realm are predetermined and influenced by supernatural forces” (Quampah 2014:43)—which underpins witchcraft beliefs in Africa, not only serves as an explanation for its pervasiveness, but also answers why such beliefs may not disappear any time soon. Indeed, it is considered that belief in witchcraft is “a serious philosophical attempt to deal with the question of evil” (Kunhiyop 2008:377).

Worldview Foundations

Widespread among almost all African people groups is the belief that nothing of its own just happens (Asamoah-Gyadu 2007:145). Behind
every misfortune, evil, trouble, or trauma is a causal agent. This could be malicious or malevolent spirits, believed to populate the African cosmos (Okorocha 1992:173); mistreated or neglected ancestors; enemies who collude with sorcerers to cause harm; or witches who possess inherent powers to wreak havoc. To the African there is always a spiritual or human causal agent behind every effect; it is therefore incumbent that the causal agent(s) be identified; whoever they may be. Even when there may appear to be a rational, natural explanation the spiritual/human dimension is always deemed liable. As has been observed, it is the norm to hear those confronted by personal trials ask "Who is doing these things to me?" instead of 'What is causing these things?' (Akrong 2007:60).

There is hardly an African tribe or people without its stories and myths regarding the existence, exploits, and experiences of witchcraft in that community. These stories are transmitted from generation to generation and learned from childhood. Such stories accentuate the powers of witches, describing how they fly at night, demonstrate out of body experiences, possess animal familiarity, exhibit the ability to mutate, consume their victims, and gleefully leave a trail of trauma and mayhem. Unless such beliefs are confronted and transformed by the Word of God they persist and remain strongholds in the lives of such believers no matter their education, status, experience, or faith convictions.

**Anthropological Dimensions**

One of the earliest studies on witchcraft and its significance in an African community was carried out by Evans-Pritchard among the Azande, of Sudan (Evans-Pritchard 1937). Since then a number of studies have relied on this significant, seminal work, adding insights to the nature, effects, and consequences of witchcraft beliefs on African communities. Witchcraft accusations have caused great societal turmoil resulting in alienation, separation, persecution, suspicion, and killings (von Boek 2007:294). Anthropologists regard this phenomenon as a way of regulating interpersonal relations—"a channel by which people can deal with hatred, frustration, jealousy, and guilt, and use socially acceptable opportunities for aggression, vengeance, and gaining prestige and attention" (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou 1999:152). Another function of witchcraft accusations is in making people conform to societal norms. People in such communities live in the fear of exciting the envy of others and therefore being accused of witchcraft because they stand out from the others (Hiebert and Meneses 1995:118). However, because witchcraft is regarded as the epitome of evil, accusations are never taken lightly. Accused persons are rarely tolerated, "but have to be cured, purged, evicted, or killed, whatever measure is culturally acceptable" (von Boek 2007:294).
What is most curious about witchcraft discourses in Africa is that those persons who most commonly stand accused are the weak, powerless, and defenseless in such societies—women and children. Often, these are elderly women who are either widows or childless, and children who are orphans. These socially disenfranchised persons with already peculiar circumstances in need of societal assistance bear the brunt of suspicions and accusations whenever anything goes wrong in homes or communities.

Resurgence of Witchcraft Beliefs in Africa

Without a doubt the missionary age was successful in planting the gospel seed in African soil. This is attested to by the Adventist Church statistics, which indicate that close to four out of every ten Adventists live on the continent of Africa. However, the missionaries were unable to eliminate witchcraft beliefs from the worldview of African believers. Such beliefs were regarded with disdain as primeval, and considered by them as superstitious; as a result all they succeeded in doing was to drive such beliefs underground. Secretly, locals continued to turn to shamans for aid in dealing with their fears, and the need of protection from witchcraft.

While the phenomenon of witchcraft beliefs were seemingly repressed for a while, about four decades ago the situation appeared to have escalated out of control. Eminent scholar of religious history, Philip Jenkins in his book, *The New Faces of Christianity*, traces the reemergence of witchcraft beliefs in Africa to the 1970s; the years of disillusionment, when many strange diseases surfaced in Eastern Africa, and when social factors fueled the fear of witchcraft (2006:110-111). Interestingly, it was about this same time that Pentecostal churches began to proliferate across the continent. Jenkins viewpoint harmonizes with the social deprivation theory advanced by Kenneth Archer considered to be responsible for the growth of Pentecostalism. The 3-Ds advanced by Archer are deprivation, disorganization, and the defective (2004:12). Essentially, what Archer espouses is a socio-economic milieu characterized by poverty, disempowerment, and seeming abandonment as the prime reasons that contributed to the flourishing of Pentecostal churches.

African Pentecostalism

Within the last four decades, around the entire continent Pentecostal churches, once disparagingly regarded as “mushroom churches,” have emerged as major stakeholders in the religious and political realms of most African countries. A major contributing factor to this growth is Pentecostalism’s keen perception and parallels with African traditional
beliefs and worldviews. African Pentecostalism reflects continuity with African Traditional Religion (ATR) evident in its emphasis on pragmatism (Nurnberger 2006:21)—what works—rather than on orthodoxy. Other analogous elements that demonstrate this keen resonance between African Pentecostalism and ATR are animism—the belief that the world is populated with a myriad of malevolent spirits from which people need protection; dynamism—emphasizing the inherent power certain objects possess, and power that is available for control over every phenomenon or condition; divination—the ability to discern the future, answer questions of causation, and provide guidance for decisions in life; deliverance—freedom from evil spirit possession, demonic harassment, and from witchcraft; and the promise of a better life (Onongha 2011:68-85). In addition is the emphasis on materialism—the quest for the better life, now (Ogbu 2008:194).

Many of these Pentecostal churches which emerged from African Independent Churches or African Indigenous Churches (AICs) profess a theology of the spirit world where witchcraft is ascribed a significant role as a causative agency for evil, misfortune, suffering, and death. Perhaps one of the greatest factors behind the growth of the Pentecostal churches is their acknowledgement and emphasis on the reality of witchcraft, and the spirit world—something the pre-existing mission churches still struggle to validate. Recently, witchcraft accusations have been observed to be growing in significance, and the main culprit is found in African Pentecostalism.

Paul Gifford in his study of Mountain of Fire and Miracles, one of the influential Nigerian Pentecostal churches that has become transnational, describes what he refers to as their “enchanted worldview,” with a sharply defined cosmology composed of witches, marine spirits, spiritual spouses, and curses (2014:123). He explains the significance of this brand of Pentecostalism stating,

Many scholarly treatments of Africa’s Christianity give this enchanted imagination and witchcraft only the most cursory mention. Yet, not to give this enchanted worldview its due weight is to misunderstand religion in Africa. I would suggest that African Pentecostalism is built on this religious imagination. This is the biggest single reason for the success of Pentecostalism in Africa. A form of Christianity in which this religious imagination can be given full play has now become acceptable. No longer is there a need for the phenomenon of “dual allegiance,” in which one goes to a mainline Christian service on Sundays and secretly resorts to a healer-diviner on a weeknight. One no longer needs a healer-diviner to identify and counter the spiritual forces causing one’s misfortunes, for this can be done on Sunday during the Pentecostal service. (Gifford 2014:123)
Deliverance services are common and regular features in African Pentecostal churches. It is not unknown in some of these deliverance services for the victims to be bound, or chained, depending on the nature of the case, and for the individual to be whipped into submission, until the evil spirits leave the host. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, a religion scholar who has written extensively on Pentecostalism in Africa explains that deliverance services are established practices among these churches because of a synthesis between traditional African beliefs and their understanding of Jesus’ role as healer and exorcist (2015:64).

Perhaps more disturbing about the connection between Pentecostalism and witchcraft beliefs and accusations is the knowledge that despite the close association between Islamic culture and magic, witchcraft accusations are rare in Islamic communities. This is not strange for even when witch-hunts were rampant in Europe, they were unknown in Islamic communities (Kors and Peters 2001:287). Kors and Peters aptly observe, “While Christian theologians could not settle for the observation that magic simply ‘worked,’ their Muslim counterparts could and did” (287).

Witchcraft Accusations and the Adventist Church

Personal observation, supported by interactions with ministers and membership from across the various regions of Africa—north, south, east, and West—suggest that witchcraft beliefs are strongly entrenched in the psyche and worldview of African Adventists more than what may be realized. Each time a discourse veers in such a direction anecdotes shared indicate that there exists unhealthy fear, even awe for the purported activities of those with such powers. In certain occasions and contexts some members and ministers have even been accused of possessing powers to bewitch and oppress others. While such accounts are often dismissively treated, rarely is the subject of witchcraft engaged in discourse theologically with the intent of responding to the fears and baggage associated with the belief. There have even been reports of some Adventist churches who have engaged locally reputable witch-hunters to help identify and exorcise alleged witches from their congregations. In one such instance, a special service of this nature was conducted on Sabbath.

As is often done whenever there is the hint of witchcraft beliefs and accusations the issue is usually swept under the rug and expected to remain there. Perhaps the greatest reason however, why this subject cannot remain unexamined and unengaged any longer is due to the growing influence of Pentecostalism in the religious affairs of the continent. Adventist church members with vestiges of traditional worldviews are prone to
attraction to Pentecostal congregations where the reality of witchcraft is acknowledged and seemingly resolved. Hence the growing documented evidences of dual allegiance in Adventist churches around the continent.

**Responding to the Challenge**

Now, more than ever before the Adventist Church in Africa needs to no longer pretend and hope that the matter of witchcraft beliefs and accusations will disappear if it just holds still and does nothing about it. The experience with Pentecostalism should serve as a lesson; for there was a time when some leaders believed Pentecostal churches were merely a fad that would never last. That is far from the case at the moment.

Because witchcraft beliefs are innate to the African worldview and the milieu in which Adventist members are immersed, the church needs to be intentional and earnest in responding to this pernicious phenomenon. Definitive measures are necessary on the part of Adventist leadership in Africa if worldview transformation is to be realized. In times such as these church leaders will need to be proactive rather than reactive—waiting to punish parishioners who they consider to have engaged in such practices.

As the Adventist Church stands at the crossroads—trying to decide whether to engage or not the controversial issue of witchcraft beliefs and accusations—and contemplates how to critically and biblically respond to this phenomenon, the counsels of renowned missiologists, Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou in their classic, *Understanding Folk Religion*, are worthy of close consideration. In their classic volume they present several important processes, which are briefly outlined (1999:173-174): (1) witchcraft beliefs and accusations should be taken seriously; (2) the church and its agencies should speak out against evil witchcraft causes; (3) the church and its leaders must stand up in defense of those wrongfully accused, and (4) the church must develop processes to defuse hostilities and demonstrate true unity and love among its members.

As the church in Africa contemplates a response to this subject the foremost question that needs to be addressed should be, Is witchcraft real? The importance of this question lies in the significance of worldviews and how they shape people’s responses to issues. A generation ago, issues such as witchcraft and ATR beliefs had no place in ministerial education and formation. For this reason, nothing was done to engage these subjects. The beginning place must be a return to the Scriptures as a guide to shaping our response to the phenomenon of witchcraft beliefs and accusations. If witchcraft is real, the church therefore needs to develop strategies to engage and respond to the fears and needs associated with this worldview.

In addition to this, in Bible conferences clear enunciation of the
significance of the Great Controversy doctrine and how it responds to the problem of suffering and evil needs to be undertaken. Biblical scholars and missiologists should together craft and share a theology of suffering that provides better explanations for suffering from a biblical perspective other than what African Traditional Religion offers—that ancestors, witches, enemies, and sorcery are the agents of suffering and evil. While it is true that suffering can emanate from an evil, satanic agency, such as is evident in the book of Job, the Bible clearly demonstrates that suffering may also result from poor human choices. Moreover, the Scriptures reveal the sovereignty of God over evil and suffering, transforming adversity and pain into purpose and praise. The Great Controversy doctrine, therefore, provides a metanarrative, a big picture that bestows perspective and coherence to the issue of suffering. In this manner, the doctrine responds to the rational philosophical explanation anthropologists indicate that witchcraft beliefs provide regarding the cause of suffering or evil.

Additionally, since fear dominates the psyche of many Africans, in recommended Bible conferences the subject of the believer’s status in Christ needs to be better emphasized. It has sometimes been stated that Africans fear Satan more than they do God. Therefore, the power of God to protect, to deliver, and keep his own needs to be thoroughly discussed and demonstrated to African believers. Until converts experience a better, superior way, witchcraft beliefs and accusations will never cease. As Allan Anderson astutely maintains, “Any religion that does not offer at least the same, and preferably more benefits as the old religion will be unattractive” (2014:166). Adventism in Africa desperately needs to provide better answers, demonstrate better security and identity to its members.

Until recently in ministerial formation the issue of spiritual warfare and deliverance ministries have not been taught or clearly demonstrated. Now, more than ever, these lessons need to be taught and underscored. Not the questionable, unbiblical practices associated with many Pentecostal churches under the guise of deliverance; rather, the kind that engages the Three Encounters for conversion advocated by Charles Kraft—truth encounter, power encounter, and allegiance encounter (2009:447-449). Such a balanced biblical approach, devoid of noise, display, or the magical, will respond to the spiritual needs and fears associated with witchcraft beliefs. Power encounters demonstrate the supremacy of Christ over the forces of evil; they are, however, a rarity in Adventist praxis. Many members are not sure they can turn to their pastors in matters regarding demonization and spirit possession. Allegiance encounters entail leading captives from the camp of the enemy to break their old connections, destroy tokens of their past affiliations, and determine to make Christ alone their Lord and Master. Truth encounters entail more than proof-texting—that for which
Adventists are well known—or the mere presentation of facts that reach the head but not the heart. Properly done, the truth encounter should enable members to understand and appropriate their new identity and relationship with Christ. Consequently, they should no longer live in fear and bondage because they know God is always present with them; for the shout of a King is in their midst (Num 23:21). Neil Anderson (2000) in his book, The Bondage Breaker, elucidates on these three encounters.

Adventist pastors and scholars need more than ever before to teach and demonstrate the power of God, which was evident in apostolic times. It was the display of such power that led to the establishment of Christianity in the former bastions of magical arts, such as Ephesus and Colossae, transforming them into centers for evangelistic missions. While on one hand African Pentecostal churches may be faulted for questionable methodologies, the Adventist Church on the other hand is not devoid of culpability either. The Adventist Church is also guilty of indifference against a cancer that has been slowly destroying the faith and spiritual vitality of its members on the continent. The time has come to act, for the Adventist Church in Africa to lead the way in applying and demonstrating a theology that is contextually developed, which responds to the twin challenges of intransigent witchcraft beliefs, and the warped, syncretistic methodologies of African Pentecostalism.

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How Curses Impact People and Biblical Responses

Introduction

A study of how curses impact people is one of the most important responsibilities Christian leaders must undertake. One writer warns, “Curses are on the rise in western culture as people dabble more and more in the occult and in organizations where people take secret oaths (such as the Masons)” (Edmiston 2010).

This article was originally prepared for the Fourth Adventist Mission in Africa Conference, which had the aim “to engage Adventist leaders in a serious discussion concerning causes, fear of, and biblical responses to witchcraft with the goal of reducing fear and dual allegiance among Adventist members in Africa.” From this broad aim, this paper focuses on: How Curses Impact People and Biblical Responses.

The paper is organized into three sections. The first section discusses curses and cursing in Africa, while the second section explores curses from a biblical perspective. Section three offers biblical responses, followed by a summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

Cursing and Its Impact in Africa

In this section I briefly analyze how African societies view curses and how they respond to this perpetual threat. The starting point is first to define what a curse is. According to the English Oxford Living Dictionary, the word curse refers to “a solemn utterance intended to invoke a supernatural power to inflict harm or punishment on someone or something” (2016). In Africa, such a use of supernatural or mystical power to inflict harm is generally called witchcraft. John Mbiti defines witchcraft as follows:
Witchcraft is a term used more popularly and broadly, to describe all sorts of evil employment of mystical power, generally in a secret fashion. African societies do not often draw the rather academic distinction between witchcraft, sorcery, evil magic, evil eye and other ways of employing mystical power to do harm to someone or his belonging. (Mbiti 2002:202)

This inclusion of a curse among the definitions of witchcraft confirms why a curse is one of the most feared manifestations of the use of mystical power. Kenyan scholar, Kisilu Kombo, elaborates further on the enigma of curses in Africa:

In African tradition, cursing involves the use of words or actions against an individual or group. Words indicating the misfortune one will suffer for engaging in a particular action or saying certain words may be uttered. Certain actions, for instance, a mother exposing her nakedness to her son for something the son did, constitutes a curse which negatively affect the person cursed. (2003:75–76)

Curses are often manifested in different ways. Some of the common manifestations include the following: continual financial problems, continual poverty, chronic illnesses, premature deaths or injuries, chronic strife, repetitive suicide cases in the same family, chronic mental torment, poor eating habits and poor sleeping habits, sickly infants, repetitive business failures, barrenness, repetitive miscarriages (Chaffart 2016). Regarding the motivation for cursing others, John Edmiston says that curses may be pronounced on the selected targets because of hatred, envy, greed, jealousy, use of magic, spiritual conflict or the desire for revenge (Edmiston 2010). John Mbiti explains more on the power of words:

There is mystical power in words, especially those of a senior person to a junior one, in terms of age, social status or office. The words of parents for example, carry ‘power’ when spoken to children: they ‘cause’ good fortune, curse, success, peace, sorrows or blessings, especially when spoken in moments of crisis. (2002:197)

This belief in the power of words is founded on the assumption that a curse “is not a mere wish for misfortune on a person or thing but a power that produces tangible results, for in cursing it is believed that a power is released that is effective in determining the destiny of the recipient of the curse” (Donkor 2011:92). Powerful as curses are believed to be, it is also believed that they function following a specific operating principle.
The operative principle is that only a person of higher status can effectively curse one of lower status, but not vice versa. The most feared curses are those pronounced by parents, uncles, aunts or other close relatives against their ‘juniors’ in the family. The worst is the curse uttered at the death-bed, for once the pronouncer of the curse has died, it is practically impossible to revoke it. (Mbiti 2002:211)

Kisilu Kombo adds emphasis on the exclusive operating domain of curses within the family or village setting in Africa:

Parents, grandparents, and other close relatives are known to curse persons within their families who may have done or said hurtful things against them, their families or the community in general. In most instances, the power of the curse is efficacious only in those persons who may be guilty of the offence. (2003:76)

Furthermore, Godfrey and Monica Wilson in their study of the Nyakyusa tribe of Tanzania confirmed that “supernatural sanctions were believed to be effective only against kinsmen, neighbours, and those with whom man [or woman] was in personal contact. No one feared witchcraft from outside the chiefdom. Historically, also, it was those who were near who were feared” (Wilson 2010:36). Nevertheless, the fear of curses is found in every society because “a powerful curse is believed to bring death to the person concerned” (Mbiti 2002:155). P. N. Wachege elaborates on the impartial way a curse may attack its target:

In many African communities, the fear of curses and cursing is real. A curse is a disturbing anguish in life and living. It does not matter whether one is a leader; educated or uneducated; restless youth or an elder; medicine man or a soothsayer; sorcerer or witch; polygamist or monogamist; celibate churchmen and women, or laity; man endowed with virility and fecundity; or woman blessed with femininity cum fruitfulness; pauper or billionaire; a peace maker or a peace breaker. The underlying factor is that of curse and cursing phobia. It is a fear which is so indispensable among many Africans’ life and living that even the Western or Eastern mainstream world religions have not managed to annihilate. It is such an incredible phenomenon whose anxiety and wonder remains. (2003)

In the desire to discover who sent the curse, and why, and how then to counteract the devastating harm of these mystical powers, African societies have always regarded the medicine men as the greatest gift and the most useful source of help to African societies (Mbiti 2002:166). Mbiti further explains how “the medicine men symbolize the hopes of society:
hopes of good health, protection and security from evil forces, prosperity and good fortune, and ritual cleansing when harm or impurities have been contracted. . . . It is the duty of medicine men to purge witches, detect sorcery, remove curses and control the spirits and living-dead. . . . So long as people see sickness and misfortunes as ‘religious’ experiences the traditional medicine-man will continue to exist and thrive” (2002:170). Elaborate rituals may be required in order to remove a curse, but that discussion is beyond the scope of this article.

In this section a general understanding of curses from an African perspective has been analyzed and presented. No critique, judgment, or endorsement was made to any of the views presented. Section three will offer a biblical response to the views presented above. In the next section the biblical perspective on curses and cursing is analyzed.

**Curses and Cursing in Biblical Perspective**

The purpose in this section is to discover the biblical view of curses. According to the *Tyndale’s Bible Dictionary*, a curse refers to an “invocation of evil or injury against one’s enemies. As practiced in the Bible times, cursing was the opposite of blessing and should not be confused with profanity in the modern sense” (Comfort and Elwell 2001:340). In Scripture, curses are always discussed in relation to blessings, and both are regarded to be key biblical concepts. Deut 27 and 28 present the covenant blessings and curses, expressed in materialistic terms. But at the heart of these chapters, the focus is “not the mechanistic application of rewards and punishments” (Evans 2000:399). Rather, it is a blessing to be in a relationship with God, while to be out of relationship with God is to be cursed.

A proper understanding of the causes of biblical curses is therefore as important as the basis for receiving blessings. P. W. Comfort and A. W. Elwell reveal the important role divine curses filled in the divine-human relationships in the Bible:

In the OT the curse was an integral part of a covenant relationship—between God and the community, between God and an individual, or among members of the community. To break the terms of a covenant was to merit the covenant curse or curses. A curse invoked under other conditions was powerless. (2001:340)

Among God’s covenant people, however, cursing was generally prohibited. While individuals might pronounce a curse upon themselves to prove their truthfulness (Num 5:19–22; Job 31:7–10, 16–22; Psa 137:5–6), the Mosaic Law forbade the cursing of parents (Exod 21:17; Prov 20:20;
Matt 15:4), the ruler (Exod 22:28), and the deaf (Lev 19:14). Cursing God was punishable by death (Lev 24:10–16; cf. Exod 22:28; Isa 8:21–22). Mary J. Evans explains the basis for these prohibitions: “When action is taken against children who curse their parents or citizens who curse leaders, it relates to the dishonor involved in the curses rather than any fear of their consequences. (Ex. 21:17; 22:28; 2 Sam. 16:9; Eccles. 10:20, etc.)” (Evans 2000:400).

Some of the divine curses recorded in the Bible are those that God pronounced on the serpent, on Adam and Eve (Gen 3:14–19), on Cain (4:11–12), and on those who might curse Abraham and his descents (12:3), as well as those who put their trust in human strength (Jer 17:5). More divine curses are recorded in the New Testament as well. J. A. Motyer clarifies the function of divine curses, saying, “When God pronounces a curse, it is: [1] a denunciation of sin (Nu. 5:21, 23; Dt. 29:19–20), [2] his judgment on sin (Nu. 5:22, 24, 27; Isa. 24:6), [3] the person who is suffering the consequences of sin by the judgment of God who is called a curse (Nu. 5:21, 27; Je. 29:18)” (1996:248).

Motyer further suggests, “The word of God’s grace and the word of God’s wrath are the same word: the word which promises life is but a savour of death and judgment to the rebel, and therefore a curse. When God’s curse falls on his disobedient people, it is not the abrogation but rather the implementation of his covenant (Lv. 25:14–45)” (Motyer 1996:248). Deut 27:14–26 stipulates human practices that would predispose individuals to become recipients of divine curses: idolatry, dishonoring parents, treachery against neighbors, injustice, incest, adultery, bestiality, bribery, perjury and disobeying God. But these curses (and blessings) did not operate unconditionally. God who is sovereign is always in control of their application (Evans 2000:400).

Just as in Africa, life in the ancient Near East was dominated by the need to cope with the terrifying threats of curses and omens. But as Evans advocates, “Attention should rather be directed to the single and significant blessing of being in relationship with God and the single curse of being outside God’s sphere, no longer in relationship with him” (2000:398). Renewing one’s covenant relationship with God is the only sure way of replacing a curse with a blessing.

**Biblical Response to Curses**

This section looks at biblical responses to curses. The entry of sin into the world that resulted from the disobedience of Adam and Eve brought all the suffering and death that we experience today. As a consequence of Adam and Eve’s disobedience, God pronounced curses upon the serpent,
the earth, and humanity (Gen 3:14–19). While sin introduced increasing conflict, suffering, and fear of death that are still observed in African societies, within the divine curses pronounced in Eden, God promised to send a Savior who would destroy the devil (Gen 3:15). Thus, God, even when he pronounced a curse, his word gives life (Deut 8:3; 32:46, 47). God rebukes those whom he loves—those who are in a covenant relationship with him (Rev 3:19). He wants all to repent (2 Pet 3:9), to confess their sins, and receive forgiveness (1 John 1:8–9).

Human words too, like divine words, have the power of life and death (Prov 18:21). For with our tongues we praise God, and also curse people (Jas 3:9, 10). Human words hurt because they come out of evil hearts (Mark 7:20–23). A human curse does not only hurt the intended victim, but it also does more harm to the one who pronounces the curse as Ellen White shows:

Evil speaking is a twofold curse, falling more heavily upon the speaker than upon the hearer. He who scatters the seeds of dissension and strife reaps in his own soul the deadly fruits. The very act of looking for the evil in others develops evil in those who look. By dwelling upon the faults of others, we are changed into the same image (2007:432).

This is why God warns that he will bring into judgment every word that is carelessly uttered (Matt 12:36, 37).

In his mercy God provided a way of removing the curse of suffering and death. The Bible says, “God made him [Christ] who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Cor 5:21). Christ took the place of the cursed humanity. The apostle Paul says, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us” when he hung on the cross (Gal 3:13). By his death on the cross, Christ not only saved us but also defeated the devil that kept us enslaved by the fear of death (Heb 2:14–15). Thus, when Christ announced the new covenant, there was no reference to curses (Matt 26:26–30). So, in the New Testament, the blessings are expressed not in material terms but with a marked emphasis on relationship (Evans 2000:400).

In the act of repentance, it is important to break away from any evil practice, like the Christian men of Ephesus did who had practiced sorcery. They repented by handing over their scrolls to be burnt (Acts 19:18–19). It is also important for us when people curse us, to love them, forgive them, pray for them, and bless them (Matt 5:44; Luke 23:34; Rom 12:14). The Bible shows that curses can be reversed by blessing (Exod 12:32; Judg 17:1–2; 2 Sam 21:1–3; Neh 13:2). God’s people do not need to go to any sorcerer
or medicine man to seek their protection or to break a curse (Isa 8:19). The Lord curses anyone who puts his trust in humans (Jer 17:5).

Christians can also effectively fortify themselves against evil forces by putting on the full armor of God and obtaining victory through constant, fervent prayers (Eph 6:10–20). Through earnest prayers of faith God’s people may also enlist the help of heavenly messengers to deliver their ensnared souls from the power of Satan (White 1950:558–559). In addition to and beyond his deliverance, the Lord provides protection for his children.

A guardian angel is appointed to every follower of Christ. These heavenly watchers shield the righteous from the power of the wicked one. . . . Those who follow Christ are ever safe under His watch care. Angels that excel in strength are sent from heaven to protect them. The wicked one cannot break through the guard which God has stationed about His people. (White 1950:512–513, 517; see also Psa 34:7)

As long as we remain under God’s protection, “an undeserved curse will not land on its intended victim” (Prov 26:2 NLT). When enemies curse us, God will bless us (P’s 109:28). No curse pronounced against those whom God has blessed will prevail because they are blessed (Num 22:12; 23:20–21). More important is that in the New Jerusalem there will be no more curses (Rev 22:3).

Summary and Conclusion

A paralyzing fear of curses is found in every society of the world. In traditional African societies, the fear of witchcraft dominates and characterizes the activities of the people’s everyday life. The anxiety to discover the cause of every human misfortune and to know what should be done about it perpetuates human conflicts, rather than reducing them. But when the issues of how to receive blessings and how to fight curses are viewed from a biblical perspective, the understanding of life’s issues rise to a new level. God, who seeks a covenant relationship with his people, becomes the giver of blessings and protector. A Christian’s covenant relationship with God gives blessings and curses a new vertical dimension, contrary to the traditional horizontal relationship characterized by enmity. The biblical understanding of curses allows the Sovereign God to be in control. There is no better way to conclude this paper than by viewing the whole topic through Mary J. Evans’s words when she wrote:

NT teaching echoes the OT view of blessing and cursing as relational. The ultimate and only important blessing is that of belonging to God, being part of his family. The only real curse is being out of relationship...
with God, outside of the community of blessing. In temporal contexts both blessings and curses can be described in material terms, but their material dimension is secondary. Although bad things can and do happen to those who belong to the kingdom, those who are part of God’s people cannot be under the curse; rather they are blessed. (2000:401)

**Recommendations**

1. In order to effectively address the fear of witchcraft, and in this case the fear of curses, there is a great need for our Bible scholars and theologians to give this topic a thorough study. The biblical understanding of the meaning of curses and blessings as revealed in this article needs to be expanded and deepened.

2. Church leaders (pastors and elders) need to be given biblical materials highlighting this new understanding of blessings and curses. In their preaching and teaching, pastors should emphasize the need for having a right relationship with God as the ultimate blessing.

**Works Cited**

All Bible texts, unless indicated otherwise, are taken from the Zondervan NIV Study Bible, 2002 edition. Zondervan Publishers.


Passmore Hachalinga was the Director of the Ellen White Research and Heritage Center, Helderberg College, Cape Town, South Africa when he wrote this article.
Overview and Response to Passmore Hachalinga’s Paper

1 Gen 3:17 mentions the first curse in the Bible when God cursed the ground because Adam and Eve had sinned. Sin resulted in hostility between human beings and the environment.

2 Gen 4:11 tells the story of God pronouncing a curse against Cain after he killed his brother Abel. A curse here means condemnation and judgment.

3 Gen 12:3 details the covenant (promise) God made with Abram, telling him that God would bless those who bless him and curse those that curse him. In other words, God promised to protect Abram.

4 Deut 11:26 lists the blessings and curses God set before Israel. Israel was to choose one or the other. If they obeyed God, blessings would follow. But if they disobeyed God, curses would follow—the land would not produce much. Their enemies would defeat them. In this case, a curse becomes a natural result of rejecting the blessings due to disobedience.

5 Job 2:9 narrates the sad story of Job’s wife advising Job to curse God and die. Here is a case of the lesser trying to pronounce a curse on the greater. The Bible teaches that we should respect those that are above us—parents, teachers, pastors, rulers, etc.

6 Luke 6:28 gives Jesus’ instructions to his followers to “bless those who curse you.” We should not seek revenge. We must teach people to forgive, even their enemies. We must leave revenge with God.

7 1 Cor 4:12 gives Paul’s advice: “When we are cursed, we bless.” This teaches the way Christians should live. We should be peacemakers, the salt of the earth, and the light of the world.

Important Topics to Teach Adventist Members

1. Teach that the existence of sin allows for misfortune to come on both
the good and the evil. This means that Christians will also suffer in this world. The fact that God allows us to experience these things does not mean he is vindictive.

2. Teach people to trust God even when things are going wrong for them. God allows misfortune in order to test the faith of his people. The absence of misfortune could encourage people to come to God for the wrong reasons such as for prosperity or health.

3. Teach people that even though evil spirits cast spells on them, Jesus Christ is superior and sufficient to meet their needs. As Christians we do not need to supplement our survival by double-dipping from God and from witchcraft (ancestral spirits). Our members double-dip because they are not sure where the best solution will come from.

4. Teach people that Christ is sufficient to supply all their needs. This is what the Book of Hebrews is saying—that Christ is better and greater.

5. Teach people that God will never leave them. He keeps his covenant. Romans 8:38–39 says that nothing will separate us from God’s love.

6. The Adventist Church must create churches that are friendly, welcoming, caring, and supportive. People who experience rejection by their families because they refused to participate in traditional practices that go against biblical principles, should be able to find acceptance, love and a safe place in the church.

7. Teach the Psalms. The Book of Psalms is a gold mine that Christians should read. It addresses human fears triggered by one’s enemies. In it the psalmists in their laments wrestle with their fears but conclude with a note of trust in God because of his loving kindness (Heb hesed). The Book of Psalms also deals with imprecatory prayers asking God to punish, shame, judge, repay, or cut off those who harm or abuse (e.g., Ps 137:7–9; Ps 139:19–22). Imprecatory psalms do not give Christians the license to curse or express vendettas against their enemies. Only God has a right to do so. Human beings cannot be trusted with anger because they express it in unjust ways, while God’s anger is always just. In the Psalms imprecations leave room for God to do what he deems best.
Introduction

Contemporary Africa is home to all the world major religions—Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam. In addition, there are philosophical and religious thoughts such as pluralism and postmodernism. To further complicate the situation is that fact that all these religious and philosophical ideologies are established on the back of African Traditional Religions (ATR), which seem rooted in the lives of most Africans and could be said to even characterize the post-conversion worldview of most Christian converts on the continent. Thus, it seems the multiplicity of religious convictions and even competition for adherents on the continent leave a kind of crisis in the area of spirituality. In the midst of these contending religions and philological ideologies is the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which strives to cultivate and promote Christian spirituality based on a biblical-shaped worldview. This article examines the threat of Pluralism, Postmodernism, and Dual Allegiance (PPMDA) to the development of biblical spirituality. Towards this agenda, the article is structured into five parts. Since the focus of this paper excludes an in-depth consideration of the origins and philosophical underpinning of these religious experiences, the first three sections survey Pluralism, Postmodernism, and Dual Allegiance; giving brief attention more to the defining elements of these persuasions. The fourth and final part provides some insights on
how these religious and philosophical ideologies affect the development of biblical spirituality in order to offer suggestions on what the Adventist Church might do to limit these influences.

**Pluralism**

Pluralism as a term has been used in three ways in societal discourse. It could have political, social, or religious connotations. In the field of politics, pluralism exists where multiple distinct groups share power to promote compromise and coalitions preventing any form of political absolutism (Pratt 2015:144, 145). Social pluralism could be said to exist in a situation where distinctions are made “between private values for life and public values for social order” (145). The third classification of pluralism, which is the focus of this paper, is religious. Religious pluralism could be defined as “religious diversity or heterogeneity” (Yaacob 2013:166). In this context, pluralism is the recognition of multiple religious groups believed to co-exist harmoniously, including the members of these different religions also have harmonious co-existence. Religious pluralism also has an ecumenical dimension. Ecumenical pluralism is the situation where people of different religious persuasions engage in an informative dialogue to learn from each other with no intention or attempt to convince, correct, or convict each other about preferred religious beliefs. A third path of religious pluralism is accepting the beliefs taught by religions other than one’s own as valid, but not necessarily true (166).

According to Paul Tillich, religious pluralism is the co-existence of a large number of religious groups in what may be considered a secular society (1963:12). Conflicting explanations have been given to the rise of religious pluralism. One school of thought places the foundation of this movement on postmodernism, a philosophical worldview that denies “absolutes, fixed certainties or foundations,” but delights in pluralism and divergence (McGrath 1992:363). This has been attributed to the collapse of the enlightenment idea of discovering universal knowledge through the power of reason (368).

Many have been driven to relativism by the collapse of the Enlightenment’s confidence in the power of reason to provide foundations for our truth-claims and to achieve finality in our search for truth in the various disciplines. Much of the distress concerning pluralism and relativism which is voiced today springs from a crisis in the secular mentality of modern western culture, not from a crisis in Christianity itself. (Allen 1989:9)

On the other hand, John Hick, a strong proponent of religious
pluralism, argues that religious pluralism could also be a reaction to two Christian ideas of salvation. The first is exclusivism; the belief that the singular and true faith leading to salvation is Christianity. The other idea is inclusivism. This view believes that “salvation for anyone depends solely on the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, but on the other hand that this salvation is available not only to Christians but in principle to all human beings. Thus non-Christians can be included within the sphere of Christian salvation” (2005).

This proposition was however, objected to by proponents of other religions who view the position as disparaging other religions, therefore they insist that every religion is valid. And as Rumi puts it: “The lamps are different but the Light is the same; it comes from beyond” (Rumi 1950:166, emphasis mine). In other words, religious pluralists would argue that every religion originates from God, leads to him, and could offer salvation; although the concept of salvation may differ from one religion to another.

The central tenet of religious pluralism is that all religions are valid pathways to a relationship with deity, whatever that deity may be. Thus, no religion has a monopoly on truth or the way leading to salvation. Truth is merely a perception and pluralism seeks to eliminate the attitude of triumphalism of one religion over another and even rejects the idea of denominational triumphalism among Christian denominations. Consequently, proponents of religious pluralism assert that its views engender stability rather than chaos in society. Writing on this in the context of America, Diana Eck posits:

Pluralism takes the reality of difference as its starting point. The challenge of pluralism is not to obliterate or erase difference, nor to smooth out differences under a universalizing canopy, but rather to discover ways of living, connecting, relating, arguing, and disagreeing in a society of differences. This is no small challenge, given the fact that some of the most contentious differences are within religious communities and even within particular sectarian or denominational movements. (2007:745)

Following this line of thought in the context of Africa, those supporting religious pluralism may argue that affirming the presence of African Religions—the religious experience indigenous to the continent—alongside the two religions introduced by missionaries—Christianity from the West and Islam from the East with their various theological propositions—contribute to stability because pluralism promotes religious tolerance. Further along this pathway of thought, the various forms of Christian identity in Africa, African Initiated Churches (AICs), the Orthodox, Pentecostal, rather than contending and competing for
adherents, have legitimate existences and mission since each has truth and even salvation in its religious traditions and paths. This could lead to a kind of ecumenism emphasizing cooperation, and service and fewer doctrinal or worldview distinctions.

In the context of Africa, however, the most noticeable drawback with religious pluralism is how anyone or each of the multiple expressions of faith can claim to profess the truth about a higher power with such diversity. Such a situation can lead to religious cynicism if not outright agnosticism. A religious cafeteria or market place of religious ideas with freedom of choice cannot but offer unbelief and weaken convictions. This kind of religious environment negates self-sacrifice, personal piety, and devotion. Religious pluralism is thus a recipe for liberal spirituality and no absolutes.

**Postmodernism**

It is generally agreed by scholars that postmodernism arose from the ashes of modernism, an era which gave prominence to reason and which hypothesizes that absolute knowledge could be gained through the human mind, and that this would consequently enhance intrinsic goodness (Goncalves 2005:22, 23). Paul Hiebert identifies five possible reasons for the rise of postmodernism: (1) the loss of faith in the Enlightenment after World War I, (2) the success of the modern era, (3) the critique of modernity’s hermeneutics of suspicion which questioned “all traditional ideologies” and sought “for certain, universal truths based on positivism,” (4) modernity’s weak emphasis on ethics and the purpose of knowledge that modernity promoted; and (5) the changes in modernity itself leading to uncertainly and insecurity (2008:212–217). The postmodern worldview could be described as “an intellectual mood, a set of contemporary cultural expressions that challenge the main beliefs, values, and principles of the modern worldview” and indicates “the end of a single, universal, all-encompassing worldview” (Gonclaves 2005:82, 84). Alister McGrath describes it this way:

Postmodernism . . . is generally taken to be something of a cultural sensibility without absolutes, fixed certainties or foundations, which takes delight in pluralism and divergence, and which aims to think through the radical situatedness of all human thought. Postmodernity is a vague and ill-defined notion, which perhaps could be described as the general intellectual outlook arising after the collapse of modernity. (1992:363)

However, Scott Moore considers “postmodernism as a ‘turn’ rather
than as an epoch or era . . . a modern problem and a modern phenomenon” (1996:133). He argues that “postmodernity is not what comes after modernity falls away, but it is that turn in which modernity’s assumptions have been problematized and the continuity of our confidence has been called into question” (137). In the view of Arnold Toynbee, the postmodern era is the fourth and final phase of Western history where “consciousness is adrift, unable to anchor itself to any universal ground of justice, truth, or reason on which the ideals of modernity had been founded in the past. Consciousness itself is thus decentered” (1956:211–215). Postmodernism “rejects modernity’s assumption of its own superiority and its rejection of other cultures as primitive. It affirms the worth of cultures, and emphasizes tolerance and cognitive and moral relativism” (Hiebert 2008:214). Certain features characterize postmodernism. Some of these are summarized in the following section.

Characteristics of Postmodernism

Relativity of Truth

The postmodern view of truth is that of relativity. It argues that “truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth” (Foucalt 2006:379). “Postmoderns believe that not only our specific beliefs but also our understanding of truth itself is rooted in the community in which we participate. . . . And since there are many human communities, there are necessarily many different truths” (Grenz 1996:14). Similarly, “all-encompassing stories are replaced by a respect for differences and a celebration of the local and particular at the expense of the universal” (Gonclaves 2005:116), therefore, it is “difficult to sort into the true and false, the meaningful and meaningless, the consequential and trivial” (Groothuis 2000:54, 57). Thus “all pre-existing ‘foundations’ of epistemology have been shown to be unreliable” (Giddens 1990:46). Consequently, the place, if any, of an objective universal worldview is minimized. Feelings, emotions, and intuition, rather than reason alone are also promoted as valid sources of truth (Grenz 1996:7). Discussion about truth therefore centers on contending interpretations rather than uncovering objective truth which do not exit (Gonclaves 2005:101). In other words, truth is community-determined and conditioned by the peculiar and unique experiences of each community. Consequently, for postmodernists no one can set the boundaries of behavior, and spiritual authority is inconsequential since truth is only community-determined. It then follows also that spirituality is relative and cannot be measured by any universal values.
Denial of Metanarratives

Extending from the postmodern perspective and its relativizing of truth is the disbelief in and undoing of metanarratives. As Michel Foucault puts it “each society has its regime of truth” (2006:379). There is no “place of objective truth, local narratives that work for a particular community are accepted as truth. Truth is now viewed only as a matter of interpretation and not what is real or true.” (Goncalves 2005:189). This situation implies that all religions propose narratives that are useful to human existence and no one religion can lay claim to universal or absolute explanation of reality (104, 105). Consequently, since truth is not revealed but society-oriented the definitions of truth among societies vary and such truths only serve the purpose of a particular society. Drawing from this pattern of thought in the context of Africa, and ATR, which are indigenous to the people, cannot be relegated behind Christianity, which may be considered foreign and distanced and may be perceived as incapable of addressing the people’s worldview.

Rejection of Authority and Ecclesia Alignment

Arising from the relativism of truth and dismissal of metanarratives is the “rejection of authority” and in this case God, since in his absence, no one universal truth exists (Deneault 2003:4). This is a major characteristic of relativism, since no one can declare the absolute truth in the absence of God. Accordingly, religious truth is seen as a “special kind of truth and not an eternal and perfect representation of cosmic reality” (Anderson 1990:44). Postmodernists think biblical Christianity is arrogant and is so presented by those who imagine it to be superior to all other religions. Accordingly for the postmodernists, “their own personal insights and views are more important than those of organized religion” (Gosnell 1995:377), since “all convictions about values have equal validity, which says in effect that no convictions about values have any validity” (Brown 1990:279). This allows postmoderns to attempt “to fulfill their spiritual needs through any kind of religion” (Gonclaves 2005:193), preferring non-institutionalized religion to organized, mainstream religions. (Gosnell 1995:377). In this situation, church attendance is not synonymous with good Christian values (377). There is autonomy of belief rather than spiritual dependence. This makes Christianity just one of the options and not the only option for spiritual development and loyalty.

Close to this concept of postmodernism is the argument that texts have multiple interpretations. This is called the New Criticism (Anderson 1990:80). Meanings are found in the interaction between the text and reader.
Any reader can understand a text through what is called “participative dialogue” (Gosnell 1995:376). The intent of the author is less significant to the interpretation of the reader. These features of postmodernism lead to worldview shifts, making values relative; these in turn affect spiritual loyalties and commitments. This could be summed up as follows:

The new model reflects a number of postmodern tenets: downplay of absolutes; distrust of transcendence; preference for “dynamic change” over “static truth”; desire for religious pluralism so that people of other cultures and religions are saved; the downplay of God’s authority over us; the tone of tolerance, warm sentiments, and pop psychology. For all of its nice thoughts, however, megashift theology strikes at the foundation of any faith that can call itself evangelical—the good news that Jesus died on the cross to atone for our sins and to offer the free gift of salvation. At stake is the gospel itself. (Veith 1994:214, 215)

Hence, it could be concluded that “postmodernity distrusts the universal totalizing nature of modern though and seeks fragmentation, indeterminacy, and pragmatism as liberating forces against the tyranny of modernity” (Hiebert 2008:215).

Dual Allegiance

The third religious orientation that is discussed in this article as it relates to the development of biblical spirituality is dual allegiance. This could be defined as the response by most Christians in Africa to the perceived inadequacy of Christianity to address their daily challenges of defeat, emptiness and helplessness in the face of sickness, poverty, uncertainty, and even hostility from demons and other malevolent forces, by resorting to pre-Christian practices of depending on rituals, persons and institutions such as sacrifices, priests, diviners, and shrines that promise wholeness from the unpleasant situations.

Dual allegiance is a state of mind that is subsequently played out in practical ways. It can be described as the phenomenon whereby a person demonstrates loyalty and dependence on the Christian God as well as on non-Christian African deities. It is difficult to differentiate dual allegiance from syncretism. It appears that dual allegiance leads to syncretistic activities and vice versa, . . . dual allegiance constitutes an internal or psychological system of inconsistencies, doubts, and fears that eventually become manifest in the lives of the religion’s adherents. (Dosunmu 2010:32)

Biblically, dual allegiance in the Old Testament seems to have resulted...
mainly from desperation for answers to uncertainties and self-preservation. All the key manifestations of dual allegiance in the Old Testament—the building and worship of the golden calf in the wilderness (Exod 32:1–9, Saul’s night visit to the witch of Endor to consult a familiar spirit (1 Sam 28:24), the contest of Elijah with the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kgs 18:16–39), Jeroboam’s erection and worship of golden calves in Dan and Bethel (1 Kgs 12:25–13:3), the shrine prostitution (1 Kgs 14:24), and human sacrifices and witchcraft (2 Kgs 17:16–17)—may be understood from these perspectives. The New Testament references to possible dual allegiances (e.g., 1 Cor 10:20; 2 Cor 11:13–15; Gal 1:6–9; Col 2:8–23) may have arisen from the tension of the New Testament Christian communities experience in reconciling their new faith with present realities.

Dosunmu (2010:36) and consistent with Paul G. Hiebert (2009:407–414) attributes dual allegiance to external causes such as “the flaw of the excluded middle, failure to contextualize, failures in the three essential Christian encounters—allegiance, truth, and power encounters.” These situations could be ascribed to the conflicting worldviews of early foreign missionaries and the recipients of the gospel, the attitude of the missionaries to the culture of the receivers, which led to cultural, intellectual, and spiritual voids and their general state of unpreparedness to address these voids (Bauer 2007:2–4). In terms of inadequate responses to cultural voids, the inability or unwillingness to contextualize may lead to dual allegiance.

When we fail to contextualize, we run a much greater risk of establishing weak churches whose members will turn to non-Christian syncretistic explanations, follow non-biblical lifestyles, and engage in magical rituals. This is because a non-contextualized Christianity seldom engages people at the level of their deepest needs and aspirations, and so we end up with what Jesuit Jaime Bulatao in the Philippines calls a “split level” Christianity. When this happens, Christianity appears to provide answers to some of life’s questions such as one’s ultimate destiny, eternal salvation, etc., but the concerns of everyday life such as why tragedy strikes, why one’s garden dries up, etc., do not receive a Christian answer, so people return to animistic explanations for dealing with everyday problems. (Whiteman 2005:60)

In terms of the three essential Christian encounters—allegiance, truth, and power—when the allegiance and commitment required of new converts is minimized, essential truths are not emphasized for the sake of numbers, and faith is not well-established to encounter the challenges of demonic powers, the tendency is a weak faith which may result in seeking alternative powers to respond to life challenges and fulfill aspirations. Thus, the description that “deeply committed Christians faithfully attend
church services and pray to God in times of need, but feel compelled during the week to go to a local shaman [native doctor] for healing, a diviner for guidance, and an exorcist for deliverance from spirit oppression” (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou 1999:15), could describe the experiences of many Christians in Africa.

Influencing Receptor Factors of Dual Allegiance in Africa

Receptor causes of dual allegiance refer to the culture and worldview of a recipient involved in a new religion. In this case, it is the African worldview and explanations given to the relationships between life experiences and the external forces that may continue to influence those who become a Christian. It may also include how people interpret social realities. In this vein, Onongha identifies some factors that influence dual allegiance in Africa. The first of these factors is “needs” (2011:5–7) which is defined as “good harvest, flourishing business, success in examinations, good luck, victory, rain for crops, protection against accident, protection from danger, protection against forces of evil, and healing” (Dopamu 2003:444). A second factor is the animistic belief of the traditional African worldview that blames spirits for every misfortune, accident or trouble, and for any unexplainable event. The spirits may be ancestors who are believed to be capable of controlling the fate of the living (Akpa, Nwaomah, and Umahi 2013:146) and who are believed capable to cause diseases, misfortune, epidemics, and sicknesses. An additional factor influencing dual allegiance is the uncertainty about the future, the unknown, evil, failure, shame, loss, and death. These uncertainties are a major contributing motivator for the search for power, protection, and prosperity.

A fourth factor is the magical worldview of the African. This manifests itself in the belief that people can manipulate or somehow influence nature to favor them in times of misfortunes or in their search of prosperity. Persons who are believed to have control over nature or are able to influence the future are sought after and venerated. Finally, the craze for higher social status is another factor. Since an advanced and prosperous status is considered an advantage, irrespective of how they are attained, dual allegiance offers a platform for this societal and economic ascendacy.

Manifestations of Dual Allegiance in Africa

Dual Allegiance manifests itself in several forms in Africa. One way is the use of objects such as mystic seals, talismans, charms, magic necklaces, bangles, wristwatches, anointed pens, power rings, colored candles, magic mirrors, incense; rings for success, good luck and true love oils,
life protection oils, exam success oils, attraction oils, holy waters, beauty powders, witch expellers, bath mixtures, olive oil, powder, perfume, and ritual bathing. The ritual of anointing in some Christian circles also tends towards dualism (Nwaomah 2009:62, 63; Nwaomah 2012a). The use of these objects and rituals is predicated on the African worldview of incessant confrontation between humanity and the spirit world and the efficacy and/or mediatory roles assigned to rituals to appease or conquer the spirits. These objects and rituals may assist in the realization of their desires. Another possible manifestation of dual allegiance is the new prophetism in African Christianity, which sometimes includes consulting spirit mediums (Deke 2015:11), which is well established and practiced in ATR where it operates through mediums, priests, and diviners. Whereas priests/priestesses and mediums may provide information orally under spirit possession, diviners are able to foretell events by means of their divining skills and objects” (Quayesi-Amakye 2013). This is one of the reasons why the church in Africa is unable “to differentiate between true prophets and false prophets, [since] it places much emphasis on the spoken word without evaluating the source” (Deke 2015:11). Consequently, “soothsaying, divination, sorcerers, fortune telling and spirit guides have been accepted and embraced in African theology under the banner of prophecy and faith healing” (12). Therefore, Africa is inundated with many claiming to hold a prophetic office. And the prophetic movement has gained much acceptance and influenced many Christians in Africa today because the prophetic intermediaries claim they do so in the name of God. However, it seems much of this movement is syncretistic in nature because it negates biblical authority and spirituality.

**Pluralism, Postmodernism, Dual Allegiance, and Biblical Spirituality**

The quest to capture the meaning of spirituality has been a tortuous one in the history of its study. This difficulty arises from the fact that this term is not exclusive in its usage. In beginning the discussion, it might be appropriate to concur with Downey (1999:14) that spirituality could mean the conviction that reality transcends the empirical realm and human alienation and fragmentation can be healed by connection with the transcendent realm. The “transcendent realm” is however subjective, depending on personal and religious perceptions. Thus “spirituality” has been defined as “the meaning and purpose [the] individual sees in life but does not define in religious terms . . . opening to the person’s inner self and to the transcendent, an inner force impacting the way a person thinks and lives, . . . the search for existential meaning in a life experience” (Samson
2003:334). It could also refer to the “affective, practical and transformative side of religion” (Spohn 2003:255). If spirituality is understood as “the lived practice of faith in the concrete, everyday experiences of our lives, then culture has an important impact on spirituality” (Muldoon 2005:88). While the definitions above may differ, one thread that runs through them is the search for meaning and the desire to have an experiential knowledge of the sacred.

T. R. Albin distinguishes Christian spirituality from all other types in the following ways:

Christian spirituality involves the relationship between the whole person and a holy God, who reveals himself through both testaments—and supremely in the person of his unique Son, Jesus Christ. . . . The test of Christian spirituality is conformity of heart and life to the confession and character of Jesus as Lord. . . . The guarantee of Christian spirituality is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer resulting in conformity to God’s will. (1988:757)

The Nature of Christian Spirituality

J. M. Houston has identified six fundamental elements of Christian spirituality worth mentioning (1984:1047). Some of these are discussed as they relate to this investigation.

First, Christian spirituality is not synonymous with asceticism, the practice of self-abandonment, and contempt for the material world. Christians must acknowledge that God has created everything and appointed some of his creation for the nourishment of human life. It is therefore imperative for them to appropriate to themselves all that God approves of but refrain from such that may cause harm and fracture their relationship with him. This seems to be the principle enunciated by Paul in his warning to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor 10:23, 31; Rom 12:1).

Next, Christian spirituality is also Christocentric. It was customary for Paul to describe the life of a believer as a life lived “in Christ.” This concept emphasizes the union the Christian is expected to have with Christ (see Gal 2:20). God’s original purpose in making humankind in his image (Gen 1:26–28) is reinterpreted by the redemption motif as the need to be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Rom 8:29).

Further, Christian spirituality involves the outworking of the grace of God in the life of a person, from the time of conversion to the termination of a person’s earthly existence. This process requires a constant growth and maturity in Christ-like life. This life entails community and fellowship (Eph 4:15–16), a life of prayer (Matt 6:5–15; 1 Thess 5:17), a sense of the eternal dimension in all aspects of one’s existence (Gen 50:19–20; Heb 7:26–27).
Rom 8:28), an intense awareness of life lived in the present before God (Matt 6:34), and a life that produces self-control (Gal 5:22–23).

Finally, Christian spirituality engenders fellowship. As social beings our spirituality is also tested by the social harmony it creates. No believer is an island. Christians are called to season the community they find themselves living in (Acts 2:42). For this seasoning to be effective it must be done with a sense of sobriety and love and excludes human characteristics and influences that negate godliness.

However, Schneiders argues that “not all Christian spiritualities . . . are equally biblical” (2002:135). This may refer to the peculiarities of various Christian traditions and how they impact the spirituality of their adherents. It is then possible to agree with Peter Adam that “biblical spirituality could mean using the Bible as a resource for spirituality, or could refer to that spirituality which the Bible commends and that results from using the Bible as a guide to spirituality” (2004:19). This type of spirituality recognizes God’s eternal power and greatness, appropriates personal encouragement, support, rebuke, and correction that Christian fellowship provides, and regards the Bible as central to every area of life (19). It is the spirituality that “designates a pattern of Christian life deeply imbued with the spirituality (ies) of the Bible. . . . An integrated contemporary spirituality that is markedly biblical in character” (19). Some elements of this type of spirituality include biblical devotional practices such as prayer, reading and meditating on God’s Word, personal and corporate worship, fasting, and stewardship. It also recognizes the role service plays in the development of a Christian’s spiritual life, the role of community, and awareness of the incompleteness of a person’s present relationship with God, thus heightening the sense of eschatology and the imminent return of Christ (Andrews University Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary 2012:15).

In the light of the discussion above, it could be concluded that biblical spirituality is that spirituality that recognises and upholds the centrality of the Bible. It is the spirituality that accepts biblical principles and examples to saturate one’s devotional practices, to guides personal and corporate worship, and is central to other aspects of Christian living such as fasting, stewardship, and service. This spirituality also admits the supreme authority of the Creator God and avows the universality of biblical truths and values.

However Pluralism and Postmodernism offer a cafeteria of truth and moral value. They advocate that no one religion is supreme, promote the rejection of universal value systems and truth leading to religious skepticisms. Postmodernism argues that the meaning people give their experiences in a given context is what determine their lives and should shape
their spiritual identities. Dual Allegiance on the other hand, searches for answers to the questions of life in multi-religions. These religious philosophies and practices confront Christianity’s claim that it is the only way to salvation and questions its adequacy for living and salvation. Consequently, this kind of religious environment minimizes biblical Christianity and “raise[s] deep questions about Christology, soteriology, worship, morality, ecclesiology, and a host of other issues. [And] the ways in which we answer these questions will certainly have an impact on our spirituality” (Muldoon 2005:89). This paper therefore makes three recommendations for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa that may assist its members in establishing faith and helping Adventist members become equipped to address the threat pluralism, postmodernism, and dual allegiance poses to the development of biblical spirituality.

**Recommendations**

**Curriculum Issues**

The first step towards mitigating the threat pluralism, postmodernism, and dual allegiance poses to the development of biblical spirituality is the need to include the study of these ideologies in theological and ministerial curriculums in Africa. This seems to be largely lacking in most ministerial and theological curriculums on the continent as was revealed in the consultative meeting on Ministerial and Theological Education held early in 2016 in Nairobi. Where such teaching does exist, there is a need to deepen its content and provide appropriate teaching and experiences in theological and ministerial education. This step will enhance pastoral and ministerial skills as they minister to members who daily face these challenges.

**Church Bible Conferences**

The present generation is daily being bombarded by ideologies that question the distinctiveness of biblical faith and spirituality, especially as understood and practiced by the Adventist Church. Therefore, it is important for ministerial and ecclesiastical leaders to work with theological educators to organize symposiums at the grassroots level, such as in local conferences and unions. These local Bible conferences should allow discussion of the issues raised by the various approaches to spirituality and should build the capacity of pastors and laity to better understand the differences between false spiritualities and biblical spirituality.
Re-evaluation of Evangelism and Membership Strategies

A third recommendation in ameliorating the threat pluralism, post-modernism, and dual allegiance pose to the development of biblical Spirituality is the need to re-evaluate evangelism and membership retention strategies in Africa. Studies indicate that the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa is very active in evangelism (Nwaomah and Nwaomah 2016:237–253). This is further buttressed by the recent huge baptism of about 100,000 people in Rwanda. But the challenge of nurture and discipleship remain. Most new members are not adequately transitioned from their pre-Christina worldview and stabilized in the Christian faith. Such inadequate post-baptismal care often exposes them to challenges and aspirations that could lead them to seek answers outside of biblical faith and practice. As I have argued elsewhere,

some of the foundational biblical truths believed, practiced and taught by Adventists to strengthen and establish the converts can hardly be properly taught and understood within the period of outreach, no matter how long the outreach may be . . . [and] a large number of these new converts may still be struggling with pagan influences, pressures from the society, and even threats to their lives from former affiliations, both family and religious. (Nwaomah 2012b:118)

It might be well to heed the counsel of Jim Cress who argues: “The product of evangelism must be disciples, not decisions. Failure to recognize this is a failure to fulfill the great commission through which Jesus sent His disciples into the entire world to make disciples of all people, teaching them to observe all things He had commanded” (2000:16, emphasis mine).

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Introduction

There have been a lot of debates about whether witchcraft is real or is just based on superstition among African communities (Bond and Diane 2001:6, 7). Different scholars in the area of anthropology and philosophy who have studied the phenomenon have established varied views based on ethnographic studies they conducted among different African people groups over the years. Based on such studies, Bond and Diane suggest four positions that have been established by such scholars on witchcraft: These include: “[1] Witchcraft [beliefs] are real, [2] There are no witches, only the belief in them, [3] Witches may or may not be real, and further research may shed light on the issue, [4]. For the study of witchcraft the above positions are irrelevant” (Bond and Diane 2001:6). This divide has created a never-ending discussion about the reality of witchcraft manifestations among African communities. For instance, early anthropologists like Wilson (1951), Middleton (1960), and Marwick (1965) viewed witchcraft as a phenomenon that was used to maintain social order in small-scale societies. Bongmba points out that there could be at least two reasons those anthropologists do not hold the view that witchcraft is real: (1) it does not fit their view of rationality (Bongmba 2001:xxii), and (2) it is just a “way of moralizing terminologies” (Geschiere 1997:12, cited in Bongmba 2001:xxii; see also Bond and Diane 2001:44). Therefore, Bond and Diane argue that, any conclusion arrived at as to whether witches exists or not, largely depends on the mindset of the ethnographic researcher (Bond and Diane 2001:7).

Nonetheless, such scholars who believe that witchcraft is not real in the African context may be viewing the phenomenon through “scientific” lenses. By scientific lenses I mean, they may be drawing their conclusions based on what they may claim as either evidential or non-evidential. I
cannot deny the fact that they may have good reasons for such claims because sometimes those who believe in witchcraft may go to the extent of claiming that even patients infected by the HIV/AIDS virus are bewitched. I still remember very well when one of my relatives contracted the HIV virus (allegedly transmitted from her husband) that led to her death. However, even after the death of her husband from the same disease, which could be viewed as proof of the virus, some still said that the cause of her death was because she was bewitched. To make matters worse, when she was ailing, I learned that she was taken to a witchdoctor for some traditional treatment by another close relative. I had to intervene and took her to the hospital for a diagnosis only for it to be confirmed that she was suffering from HIV/AIDS. This case study illustrates the fact that the belief in witchcraft often does not recognize scientific reality; hence, rendering some witchcraft accusations as a belief with no basis. On the other hand, the illustration shows how deeply the belief in witchcraft is rooted in the minds of most Africans, making it very easy for many to attribute every problem to the spirit world. Therefore, because sometimes the manifestation of witchcraft may not be able to be empirically verified, this allows some to argue that witchcraft is not real but just superstition. Based on this understanding Bond and Diane conclude that “witchcraft is about the manner in which people apprehend the world and the way in which they attempt to interpret and explain it” (2001:25). Even though each position raised by Bond and Diane may have some validity, nonetheless, it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss those positions; rather, I hold a presupposition that witchcraft among most African communities is a worldview issue.

Witchcraft as a Worldview Phenomenon

I have not conducted any empirical research on witchcraft per se. Nonetheless, as I review works of scholars who have examined African Traditional Religions and philosophy like Mbiti, Ayisi, Kirwen, Harries, and others, I constantly hear them state that witchcraft in the African traditional context is largely a worldview phenomenon (Ayisi 1979; Harries 2010:140; Kirwen 2005; Manala 2004:1503; Mbiti 1991). I join this line of thought based on their definition and examination of African religious and philosophical thought. For instance, Mbiti argues “the spiritual world of African peoples is very densely populated with spiritual beings, spirits, and the living-dead” (2011:75). Geoffrey Parrinder suggests that in the African cosmological view “everything in nature is living, or at least pre-living, and there is no such thing as absolutely dead matter” (1969:47). In other words, in the African worldview there are a host of different spirits
that exist in the universe (Mbiti 1969:75–81; 2011:75). Most scholars agree that this spiritual world is inseparable from the physical world of the living (Parrinder 1969:26). Hence, Mbiti further argues that the awareness of the spirit world “affects their [Africans] outlook and experiences in life for better and for worse” (1991:81). Therefore, in this regard the outward manifestation of African symbols and practices express the underlining assumptions of life. This is why scholars like Mwalwa make such a strong affirmation concerning this reality by stating, “I am convinced that witchcraft is NOT imaginary, nor unreal. It is still a strong force in Africa” (cited in Manala 2004:1503). In his concluding remarks, Mbiti affirms this fact by arguing that “belief in the function and dangers of bad magic, sorcery and witchcraft is deeply rooted in African life, and in spite of modern education and religions like Christianity and Islam it is very difficult to eradicate this belief” (1991:165).

Harries refers to this deeply held belief as the “DNA of life” among African people (2010:144), which gives some indication that the phenomenon is deeply embedded in the belief systems of African culture. Most Africans need no special orientation to believe that witchcraft exists, which means that witchcraft cannot be separated from the life of an African. This is evident by the fact that even though a significant percentage of the population of Africa has been exposed to Western scientific knowledge, witchcraft tendencies have remained a phenomenon among them even in urban settings (Drucker-Brown 1993:539; Behringer 2004:14; Donkor 2011:38; Kohnert 1996:1347; ter Haar 2007:10; Van Dyk 2001). Even today with the strong media and educational influence of secularism and modernity, the African commitment to belief in witchcraft has not been eroded. This is demonstrated over and over again in African society by how many Africans deal with sickness. When sickness does not respond to the scientific methods of treatment and when an illness persists, many resort to traditional methods. This led ter Haar to conclude that “it is notoriously difficult to change people’s beliefs, particularly when they are as deeply entrenched culturally as is the case with witchcraft beliefs in Africa” (2007:9, 67, 68). This deeply embedded worldview phenomenon is something that media, education, and even governmental legislation have not been able to eradicate in Africa.

One may ask, Why has the influence of modernity and the Christian faith not addressed this phenomenon adequately? Behringer suggests that one of the reasons may be that in the contacts by early missionaries and colonialists there was very little attempt to understand the African’s culture and practices (see Behringer 2004:26–46; ter Haar 2007:10, 16). Instead of addressing the underlying worldview assumptions and values that were in direct opposition with the Bible, they labeled everything as pagan
and forbade the practices without giving the people a biblical functional substitute. This resulted in many of the forbidden activities going underground and being practiced in secret. The missionaries used what Hiebert refers to “under contextualization” (Hiebert 1985:171) that allowed the continuity of witchcraft tendencies. Whenever there is a lack of a careful contextualization process in the presentation of the gospel, traditional beliefs and practices such as those connected with witchcraft often remain embedded in the people’s worldview.

Witchcraft beliefs are grounded in the concept of causation, which remains a guiding principle among Africans in explaining why misfortunes happen. This principle suggests that all misfortunes are caused by some unseen power. Most African groups have expressions alluding to such beliefs. For instance, the Swahili people of the Kenyan coast may exclaim when someone becomes sick, “kuna mkono wa mtu hapa” (there is someone’s hand behind this) (Mitchell 1977:68; see also Behringer 2004:14; Healey and Sybertz 1996:291, 291; Kirwen 2005:220; Manala 2004:1498; Mbiti 1991:117, 165, 166; Opoku 2002:78, 79). This saying indicates that someone with ill motive has decided to harm another person. Therefore, according to the African mindset, any misfortune or sickness is viewed as being caused either by ancestral spirits, bad magic, sorcery, or witchcraft (Magesa 1997:69, 183; Donkor 2011:69; Manala 2004:1499, 1500). This highly emotive issue is the source of a lot of enmity even among family members.

Those sicknesses caused by witches and sorcerers are regarded as severe and life threatening (Moila 2002:23), consequentially witchcraft is viewed as “the greatest wrong or destructiveness” (Magesa 1997:69; also see Maimela 1985:68) in the African traditional religious context. “It is a life-threatening evil” (Manala 2004:1501), therefore witches are the most dangerous and feared individuals in any African community (Mbiti 1991:168). Nonetheless, Mbiti further argues that such a fear could be viewed in a positive way because it is used to stabilize “relationship among relatives, neighbours, and members of the community” (168), hence enhancing harmonious living. Witchcraft is also regarded as a vice, which has no connection with African Traditional Religion (19). However, witches have suffered from brutal killings in order to eliminate them from society. Governments have responded by passing laws categorizing witchcraft activities as a crime in order to save witches from extra judicial killings (Geschiere 2006:221–223). Ghana has also established witch refugee camps to rescue those who have been accused of witchcraft.

Sources of Witchcraft Powers

This deep-seated belief in witchcraft in the African traditional context
resides in what Mbiti calls the “mystical order” (1991:41) as rendered in his categorization of African understanding of order and power in the universe. He further feels this mystical order governs the universe because it is connected to God’s power; therefore, it is viewed as a mystical power from God because “it is hidden and mysterious” at the same time (42; Magesa 1997:181). It is believed to be a power that resides in the spirit world “available for use by anyone who knows how to tap it” (Fuller 2001:80). Nonetheless, only a few people in society may have “skills on how to tap, control and use these forces. . . . These mystical forces of the universe are neither evil nor good in themselves, they are just like other natural things at man’s disposal” (Mbiti 1991:166) and can be used to help or harm other people. Those who use these powers to help others are known as witchdoctors; whereas those who use the powers to harm people are witches. The work of the witchdoctor is to counteract the harm caused by witchcraft (Miller 2012:2).

Unlike sorcerers who use materials and other paraphernalia to harm, a witch “is believed to have an inherent power to harm other people” (Mitchell 1977:67). It is believed that witches, by using magical power, have the capacity to operate in different forms such as animals, birds, or reptiles, and can hide themselves from people by taking on these other forms (Magesa 1997:185; Behringer 2004:13). The powers they employ enable them to operate in the spirit realm, and whereas sorcery is exercised when a sorcerer is in his or her conscious mind, witches expedite witchcraft unconsciously (Bellamy 2004:11).

These magical powers and witchcraft practices can be acquired in various ways: by voluntarily joining a witch society, by inheriting the powers from a family member, by buying the power from a witch, or as an innate ability (Mitchell 1977:67, 68; see also Fuller 2001:88; Kirwen 2005:228; Magesa 1997:184, 185; Manala 2004:1492). Some of the reasons witchcraft is directed at a person include jealousy, envy, and enmity (Harries 2010:142, 143). It is easy to see why witches are the most feared individuals in a community.

**Traditional Context of Mijikenda**

Because witchcraft is viewed as an ontological reality, different African traditions use different magic to protect themselves from the evil powers exercised through witchcraft (Parrinder 1969:64, 65). In view of this, Manala argues that “in traditional Africa an unprotected homestead is referred to as the playing ground for witches and its occupants are in danger of becoming easy targets of witches” (2004:1502). He tries to pass a notion that, according to the African mindset, witchcraft is so real that no one is
ready to take a chance of not taking necessary precautions for the protection of him/herself and the family.

For instance, the Mijikenda (the people group I belong to that is found along the Kenyan coast) use a protective charm called fingo. Fingo is made from medicinal herbs and dry powered roots of trees that are then placed in a sacred pot. The pot may be buried at the center or in one corner of a homestead. The main purpose is to protect the homestead and the family members from evil men. This custom grew out of the practice of early Mijikenda settlers who lived in dense forests. They put fingo at the center of the homestead to protect the people against invaders. They believed that the charm made the settlement invisible to the invading enemy or could also counteract any magical powers used against them or create confusion among anyone attacking them. They further believed that the powers of the fingo could cause the invaders to expose their intentions by causing some form of insanity (field notes taken during my ethnographic study among the Digo people in 2009).

During the ethnographic study among the Digo people, I discovered that in times of community need, such as sickness and drought, the village elders used to visit the fingo with the diviner to seek spiritual advice from their ancestors. The ancestors would reveal the cause of the problem and what should be done to remove it. For the community to be healed from the calamity, the village elders would then organize a community prayer ceremony called tambiko. The reason for all these rituals was because of their cosmological understanding that the ancestral spirits have a direct influence on the daily affairs of the living (Parrinder 1962:23). Hence, the community members would call upon the ancestors to protect them from evil men and evil powers. To illustrate this point I will share some experiences that happened to me and some of my family members.

Case Study #1

In 2007 I lost my father-in-law through an accident. He was carrying out his normal duty of repairing the roof of a house when he fell and broke his neck. While my two brothers-in-laws were going home for the funeral service, one of them got upset by his young brother who asked him, “Now that dad is dead, who will be next?” He then pointed to his elder brother, “you will be the next, so prepare.” Upon hearing that, the elder brother was very angry and he started fighting with his younger brother. He told me that he knew who killed his dad—his younger brother. It had been reported that one time his younger brother was witnessed to have been involved in a ritual of eating human flesh that was offered as a rain sacrifice. Therefore, he was viewed as one of the members of the
local witches club. A requirement of the club was that each member had to offer a relative as a sacrifice. It was believed that he offered his father to the club, but because he was very old they did not like his meat because it was very tough so they were now demanding another person. The young brother was very aware about this when he asked his brother, “Who will be next?” At the time my brother-in-law was telling me this story (2016), we had lost his younger brother a few years earlier in a mysterious way. He died in 2008, the year after the death of their father. He had not suffered any sickness. I remember that evening when we got the news that my brother-in-law was dead. We went to his house and found him dead in his chair. The medical report indicated that he had died of suffocation. His elder brother strongly believed that the club of witches offered him as a sacrifice. Because of the family’s belief concerning causation, before the body was taken to the graveyard, I witnessed them taking the body into his house first, which is not normal. Then after about 30 minutes, they came out and proceeded to the grave. Magesa alludes to the fact that the practice of feasting on the flesh of a relative is normal among witches (1997:185). He argues, “A general condition of ‘graduation’ into a witchcraft sorority or fraternity (coven) is to kill and eat the flesh of a close relation (185).” This is another reason why witches are ostracized and pushed out of family relationships. Then last year (2016) when I was interacting with my brother-in-law I came to learn that when they took the body into the house they had poisoned the entire body so that the witch club members would not be able to eat his flesh. My brother-in-law also mentioned that the chairman of the witch club had died just a week prior to our meeting. That death was received with a lot of jubilation in the community for he was well known as a witch.

Case Study #2

I vividly remember how in 1986 I was very sick for two weeks. I was bed ridden with a lot of pain throughout my entire body. When I tried to take any medication or pain killers I would immediately throw it back up. All the tests were negative. I wondered what this could be. After two weeks, the sickness disappeared and I regained my health and strength without taking medication. This seemed like a miracle to me. Time passed, then one day as my elder brother and I were chatting he made a statement which shocked me. He claimed that one of our distant grandmothers told him that I had a lot of blood. I asked myself, how could this grandmother know anything about my blood, since I never had any close relationship with her? One thing I knew about her was that she had been accused of being a witch. I then quickly connected my sickness with that statement
that she was interested in my blood and that she was an accused witch. This knowledge led me to conclude that she may have tried to bewitch me. In this case, there was a possibility that she sent a Jinn (an Arabic word for a spirit) to come and kill me. It is believed that when someone sends Jinn, they come at night and suck your blood until you die. I believe that that evil power sent to me could not take my life because of the indwelling power of Jesus Christ in me.

Case Study #3

Safari is a witchdoctor who meets between five to six clients each week. He mainly specialized in helping people overcome misfortunes (the Swahili term is visirani or mikosi) and clients who are disturbed by night runners (wanga). Concerning misfortunes, clients complain to him how they have lost many opportunities in life because of the perceived effects of witchcraft (kurogwa). Most people among the Mijikenda allude to failures in life as being caused by someone. They believe that someone may be jealous of their life, so they want to pull them down. Some of the indicators of visirani are a lack of employment, barrenness, miscarriage, or low performance in academic pursuits. Failure or poor grades in school may happen even to someone who may have a high qualification in their academics, but because of the perceived powers of witchcraft, they fail. Hence, those who visit witchdoctors like Safari do it with a belief that they will be treated and protected from any witchcraft power (Hearley and Sybertz 1996:292).

Witchcraft Worldview Values and Their Implications for Mission

Even though Christianity and Islam have experienced rapid growth in sub-Saharan Africa, many of those joining those religions continue to battle with tendencies towards dual allegiance. In other words, even though 70% of the population in the sub-Saharan region belongs to Christianity and Islam, witchcraft beliefs and practices are not disappearing. As alluded to earlier, this may be largely due to the African worldview concerning the spirit world. According to Hiebert worldview is “the basic assumptions about reality which lie behind the beliefs and behavior of a culture” (1985:45). Such assumptions are part of the DNA of a culture, which may be practiced “consciously or subconsciously” (James Sire 2004:17, cited in Terry and Payne 2013:159), hence, they are “largely implicit” (Hiebert 1985:85). Hiebert further brings to mind three types of assumptions: Cognitive assumptions relating to beliefs, affective assumptions relating to feelings, and conative assumptions relating to actions.
feelings, and evaluative assumptions relating to values (43; 2009:77). It is the cognitive assumptions which “shape the mental categories people use for thinking” (1985:46). These mental categories are the ones that help an individual filter and interpret any experience based on how he/she relates with the world. Hence, when new converts find themselves facing a unique problem, they may quickly interpret the situation through their cognitive categories on how they define reality.

How does worldview affect mission then? In most cases Adventist missionaries and local pastors have rushed to introduce their doctrinal teachings without understanding some of the people groups’ worldview, values, and assumptions. Some missionaries went to the extent of demonizing indigenous traditional practices and discarding them completely without providing biblical functional substitutes. Although this may have been viewed as needed on the part of the missionary to protect the teachings, nonetheless, this led the new believers to engage in syncretistic practices, that is, they mixed the new truth acquired from the missionary with traditional practices that were at odds with their newly acquired teachings (Parshall 2003:49). Bill Musk, while commenting about Islam, argues that such tendencies among new converts to a new religion are nurtured by the fact that official Islam “has few resources for dealing with the everyday concerns and nightly dreads of ordinary Muslims” (2003:215, 216). Witchcraft generates fear and uncertainty among African communities to the extent that when an unresolvable misfortune or sickness hits a person or family they may revert to traditional methods. Case Study #1 and #3 above demonstrate the existence of this phenomenon. As a result, the spiritual foundation of many Christians are shaken leading to compromise and syncretism.

Missiological Reflections and Recommendations

The main purpose of Christian mission is to share the gospel truth for the salvation of humanity. The gospel message is intended to address sinful tendencies and bring restoration to believers. Therefore, anyone who presents the gospel needs to understand that for mission to be effective the gospel message must also address the heart-felt needs of a people. This requires cultural sensitivity. Why should the Christian witness bother to present the gospel in the cultural context of the listener? Because a people’s culture is defined by their worldview and they can only relate to a new concept in the context of their perceived cultural realities. “To minister in another culture, one must enter the culture” (Grunlan and Marvin 1988:22). By entering the culture, Christian witnesses must not only seek to understand the culture but also become one with the community as far
as possible. This will help them contextualize the message to adequately address the cultural and worldview issues.

Culture operates at two levels: surface and hidden (Kraft 1996:20). The surface level consists of visible behaviors while the hidden level involves the values and assumptions of a people. Surface level manifestations may include things like rituals, music, drama, and dance—each performed with a specific purpose to express joy, sadness, or fear of the spirit (Hiebert 1985:172). Most of these ritualistic activities act as a bridge between the physical and the spiritual world (176–77). It is important to note that each cultural expression is driven by a particular objective meant to respond to a cognitive category. For instance, Africans perform different rituals in order to appease their ancestral spirits as they seek protection from evil people and evil spirits. The underlining objective of such rituals is to create harmony between people, the spirit world, and God.

Cultural expressions are outward manifestations of the schema, that is, the cognitive conceptualization of thoughts and patterns of a culture (Douglas 1966:1–3; Hiebert 2009:94). Hiebert views culture as having “three dimensions: cognitive, affective and evaluative” (1985:30–35; 2009:150–153). These three dimensions form the bedrock of any given culture. The cognitive dimension deals with a shared belief system. People in a given culture will act in a particular manner because they possess uniform cognitive perceptions of their universe. These perceptions exist in different categories that correlate with each other. Such categories may include but are not limited to: the invisible and the visible, the physical and the spiritual, the profane and sacred, the form and formlessness (Douglas 1966:95–99). Douglas elucidates this reality between the physical and spiritual category by arguing that

the spiritual powers which human action can unleash can roughly be divided into two classes—internal and external. The first reside within the psyche of the agent—such as evil eye, witchcraft, gifts of vision or prophecy. The second are external symbols on which the agent must consciously work: spells, blessings, curses, charms and formulas and invocations. These powers require actions by which spiritual power is discharged. (99)

Therefore, it is important that both missiological and theological tools and approaches be employed to address the challenges a people group faces when they are becoming followers of Jesus Christ. Hiebert suggests that in doing mission among a people group that “we need to understand the people and their thinking to translate the gospel into their thought patterns, we need also to understand the scriptures within their cultural context, so that we can translate them into the local culture without losing...
their divine message” (1985:97). This will facilitate in addressing the predicament of a people group.

The belief in witchcraft causes fear and uncertainty among many Africans. This is a predicament that has widespread implications for the Christian faith. I have witnessed the results of such fear among my own extended family members like the one shared in case study #1, most of whom are Christians. Some of my family members felt comfortable installing a fingo in their homestead in order to protect their home. Outsiders may wonder why an African should be concerned about witchcraft after coming to faith in Jesus Christ. Christians using traditional means for protection is a result of not clearly teaching what the Bible has to say about evil spiritual powers. The problem is not about a basic knowledge of Jesus, but rather the lack of biblical teaching on how a Christian is protected by God in the face of witchcraft attacks.

Theological Reflection and Recommendations

To address the challenge of witchcraft in Africa, deliberate efforts must be taken to address the African worldview assumptions in the area of mystical spiritual forces. Witchcraft powers are real, so to counteract this reality, followers of Jesus need to know and to see demonstrated that Jesus Christ is more powerful than any spirit or power. They need to know that Jesus Christ has powers to subdue any and all powers of darkness. Two possible approaches could be used in addressing witchcraft fears—better biblical teaching on witchcraft issues and better teaching on the part faith and prayer in the name of Jesus play.

Better Biblical Teaching

In order for Adventist theology to be relevant to an African believer, it must address the cultural challenges such as witchcraft. It is not enough to just share the 28 fundamental beliefs of Adventism. Cultural applications must be made that answer the fears and concerns of Africans. Believers need to know that witchcraft falls in the domain of evil powers, which are propagated by the devil. Nonetheless, there should be awareness that the powers of darkness have been defeated by the power of God in the name of Jesus. Only when the biblical message responds to the fears in such a powerful way that African believers know that “the spirit who lives in you is greater than the spirit who lives in the world” (1 John 4:4 NLT) will believers be able to reject the traditional ways of seeking protection. Africans need to understand the power that is available to them in the name of Jesus. They need to better understand what it means to have
God’s angels surrounding them and protecting them (Ps 34:7). Then need to understand that “a guardian angel is appointed to every follower of Christ. These heavenly watchers shield the righteous from the power of the wicket one” (White 1950:512, 513).

Better Teaching on Faith and Prayer

Adventists have traditionally avoided talking about evil spirits and deliverance and have done little to instruct its members how to deal biblically with evil spiritual powers. Grounding in the Word of God is the first step, but believers also need to understand the importance of faith that God can protect. Africans need to understand that “those who follow Christ are ever under His watch care. Angels that excel in strength are sent from heaven to protect them. The wicked one cannot break through the guard God has stationed about His people” (White 1950:517).

Faith and prayer are ingredients that allow God’s people to stand firm against the attacks of the devil. However, when God’s people compromise, when they revert back to the traditional means of protection from witchcraft powers, they lose God’s protection.

Satan is well aware that the weakest soul who abides in Christ is more than a match for the hosts of darkness, and that, should he reveal himself openly, he would be met and resisted. Therefore, he seeks to draw away the soldiers of the cross from their strong fortification, while he lies in ambush with his forces, ready to destroy all who venture upon his ground. Only in humble reliance upon God, and obedience to all His commandments, can we be secure. (White 1950:530)

Notes

1 According to Geschiere, “moralizing terminology [is] an unequivocal opposition between good and evil, even when the local terminology hardly lends itself to this” (1997:12, cited in Bongmba 2001, xxii).

2 Hiebert (1985:184–190) established four levels of contextualization: 1. Poor contextualization, which is the mixing of the old cultural beliefs and practices with the new. This results to a blend of practices that may lead to syncretic beliefs and practices. 2. Over contextualization, which is the acceptance of the all beliefs and practices regardless their compatibility to the new faith? This equally may result to syncretism. 3. Under contextualization, which is the denial of the old beliefs and practices to the expense of the new. In this regard, some of the old positive beliefs and practices that could have been used to build bridges of understanding are disregarded and equally demonized. 4. Critical contextualization. According to Hiebert, this involves a careful process of analyzing of each old belief and practice in relation to the gospel message. In the finale analysis, those old cultural tendencies that are in direct opposition with the Bible are rejected and possibly
replaced by biblical ones, whereas those beliefs, which are not in opposition with the Bible, may be used as a bridge in developing a meaningful biblical teaching that may illuminate the previous cultural belief.

3 Mbiti (1991) has established four categories on “order and power in the universe” which include: Order in the laws of nature, moral order among people, religious order in the universe, and mystical order in the universe. In his view, it is this order, which brings harmony in the universe.

4 The name Mijikenda is a compound Swahili word meaning “nine villages” (nine kaya or homesteads). The sub-groups that form the nine villages are: wa-Giriama, waDuruma, waDigo, waRabai, waKambe, waRibe, waChonyi, waJibana and waKauma. According to Spear these villages are related very closely but distinct, hence mijikenda is a communicative term to demonstrate their close relationship in their culture and the dialects they speak as people from one origin, Shungwaya. Several scholars have written about the Mijikenda people of the Kenyan coast. Their works have largely focused on the historical perspective of the people groups, their indigenous socio-cultural practices and how the emergence of Islam and Christianity in the region affected their traditional religions and cultural practices (see Allen et al. 1983; Briginshaw 1987; Brown 1980; Gomm 1972; 1975; Herley 1982; Holway 1971–72; Kraft 2007; Morton 1972; Ngw’eno 1997; J. Sesi 2009; S. Sesi 2003; Spear 1974). In this regard, their works have proved useful in understanding some of the cultural dynamics of the people as they (Mijikenda) interacted with the outside world.


6 In simple terms Howell and Jenell (2011) defined culture as “the total way of life of a group of people that is learned, adaptive, shared, and integrated” (36).

Works Cited


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BRUCE L. BAUER

Needed: A New Metric to Assess Adventist Mission

Why a New Metric Is Needed

From the very beginning the Seventh-day Adventist Church has had the goal to preach the Three Angels’ Messages to every nation, tribe, language, and people. This focus on growth and expansion was measured by listing when the various continents and then countries were entered. The church kept track of the total number of countries where the church was actively working. Even before the church was officially organized in 1863 Adventists started work in Canada. By 1875 Adventists were also found in Switzerland and Germany. In 1890 the church had work in 22 countries, by 1900 in 56, by 1930 at the end of the Daniels and Spicer era in 126, by 1950 in 193 (Bauer 1982:244-247), and in 2014 Adventists were working in 215 countries (Adventist Archives 2014). Measuring the progress of Adventist Mission by listing the number of countries where work is on-going might have been an adequate mission measuring stick in the early days of Adventism, but as more and more countries were entered it lost much of its effectiveness.

For example, Adventist leaders challenged those early Adventists to start work in South America, in Africa, in Asia, and then to enter countries where there was no Adventist work. However, even by 1950 Adventists were working in 83.9% of the world’s countries (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Office of Archives and Statistics 1950) and this only increased to 90.7% in 2014. (Adventist Archives 2014). However, while Adventists work in 90% of the world’s countries, they are not working in 90% of the world’s languages or people groups. Therefore, measuring Adventist Mission progress by using the number of countries in which the church is working has largely lost its motivating power and helpfulness in assessing the task remaining for the Adventist Church.
Three Different Metrics Proposed in the Global Strategy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (1989)

On October 10, 1989 the General Conference Committee meeting in its annual council voted a “Global Strategy of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.” The document mentioned three different metrics to measure the progress of Adventist Mission. First, early in the document a people group strategy was mentioned:

Evangelizing target populations will be most effective if they are divided into people groups, whose group characteristics facilitate a group approach in evangelism and secure decisions for the gospel. The term “people group” describes groups of people who are bound together in some pattern of familial, regional, linguistic, ethnic, political, economic, and/or religious affiliation. It can apply to a village culture, a professional group, or any other group bound by a common bond. (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1989:473)

The document went on to suggest that there were three types of people groups: Primary Groups because of shared ethno-linguistic affinity, Secondary Groups that are defined by social status, age, class, or caste, and Tertiary Groups based on occupation, residence, common circumstances, or shared interest. It is interesting to note the last two sentences in that section: “No definite figures are available regarding the number of these various categories which are not only overlapping, but also constantly changing. The best estimates speak of about 12,000 primary groups that are largely untouched by the Gospel of Jesus Christ” (473).

The people group concept had existed since 1974—15 years before the Global Strategy was developed—when Ralph Winter introduced the concept at the Congress for World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland. The significance of the people group strategy was that it shifted the focus of missions from countries with political boundaries to distinct people groups (Winter 2013). By 1989 significant progress had been made in identifying the number, size, and percentage of Christians in each people group, yet this metric, while mentioned was not the primary metric adopted.

Adventist Mission instead chose a metric that was unique to Adventists—million population segments. Charles Taylor spent months dividing the world’s population of five billion into million population segments, then determining whether or not there was an Adventist presence in the segment. It was discovered that 3,200 of the segments had an Adventist presence, while 1,800 were unentered. The General Conference set the goal to “establish by the year 2000 a Seventh-day Adventist presence in
every population segment of one million as identified at the beginning of the decade 1990-2000” (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1989:481). This was a very ambitious goal that would require entering a new segment “of one million every other day for ten years (3 per week, 15 per month, 180 per year)” (482).

So, how did the church do with the new metric? Unfortunately there is very little hard data as to what took place. The million population metric lasted only seven short years—until 1996—and then passed from the scene (for a more detailed history of million population segments, see Morgan 2014:137, 138).

The third metric mentioned in the Global Strategy was languages. The Global strategy document identified 271 languages with more than one million speakers where there was no Adventist presence (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1989:481).

**What Metric Should Adventist Mission Use?**

I believe that few would argue against the idea that the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs a mission metric that can measure the task remaining and that can be used to motivate and promote greater engagement in mission. Most people would agree that using a country by country metric has outlived its usefulness and motivating potential; however, there are three possible metrics that could be useful: (1) languages Adventists use in publications and oral work, (2) church members per million population, and (3) unreached people groups. This section will look briefly at the strengths and weaknesses of each of these potential metrics.

**Language**

From the very beginning of Adventist missions the church has kept track of the number of languages in which they have publications. The 1910 *Annual Statistical Report* mentioned that the Adventist Church had publications in 67 languages (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1910:2), whereas by 2013 Adventists had publications in 366 languages and had oral work in an additional 581 languages for a total of 947 languages (Seventh-day Adventist Church 2016:85-87). Work in 947 languages seems impressive until one contrasts that with the 7,097 living languages in the world today (Lewis, Simons, and Fennig 2016).

It would be fairly easy for each union to ascertain the number of languages in their territory and then compare that list with the languages the church is already working in. The *Ethnologue* also provides an accessible source for the names and numbers of languages in each country and...
the number of speakers for each language—important information when developing strategies to start new work among unentered groups. Much of the information can be accessed on-line such as table 1 which lists the distribution of the world languages by area of origin.

Table 1. Distribution of world languages by area of origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Living Languages</th>
<th>Number of Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>2,139</td>
<td>30.1</td>
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<td>Americas</td>
<td>1,062</td>
<td>15.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>287</td>
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<td>1,313</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<td>100.0</td>
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</tbody>
</table>


The advantages of using languages for a metric include the fact that the church already gathers this type of information so no additional data would be needed to begin tracking the languages where Adventist work is in progress. Another advantage is that the Ethnologue provides language lists for each country and lists the number of speakers in each language—again providing essential information needed for strategic planning to begin work among unentered language groups. Revelation 14:6 mentions that the eternal Good News will be proclaimed to every language, so there is a biblical rational for using languages as a measure of the task remaining.

Perhaps the biggest disadvantage of using languages as a metric (table 2) is that in the large language blocks such as Chinese, Spanish, English, Hindi, Arabic, Portuguese, Bengali, Russian,
Table 2. Most widely spoken languages in the world (first-language speakers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Approximate Number of Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Chinese</td>
<td>1,197,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Spanish</td>
<td>414,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. English</td>
<td>335,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Hindi</td>
<td>260,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Arabic</td>
<td>237,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Portuguese</td>
<td>203,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Bengali</td>
<td>193,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Russian</td>
<td>167,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Japanese</td>
<td>122,000,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Javanese</td>
<td>84,300,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Infoplease 2016.

Japanese, and Javanese—the ten largest language groups in the world—the groups are too large for strategic planning purposes and too diverse to be helpful in developing specific church planting strategies to reach the various groups within those languages. Therefore, while using languages would be an improvement over what the church uses at present to measure progress in missions, I believe there is a better metric that could contribute more information and be more helpful in planning strategies for church planting purposes.

Church Members per Million Population

In the 2015 Annual Statistical Report the Global Mission (table 2) lists each country of the world and has a column that reports the number of members per million population. The next column lists the population per member ratio. Both of these statistics are helpful in tracking growth within specific countries (Seventh-day Adventist Church 2016:81), but there are also serious weaknesses in using these as the only metrics to gauge the success of Adventist mission. Perhaps the best way to illustrate the weakness is to pick a country that has a high percentage of Adventists but has many neglected and unentered groups.

Take Kenya as an example. Kenya had 795,161 members at the end of 2013. There were 17,997 members for every million people in Kenya and a population per member ratio of 56, which is extremely healthy. However, the greatest weakness of only using these two types of information to inform the status of Adventist Mission in Kenya is that whole tribes and...
language groups can be completely ignored and remain untouched by the Three Angel’s Messages.

The Joshua Project lists the total population of Kenya as 46,881,000. However, of that population 5,391,000 or 11.5% is unreached. There are 111 people groups in Kenya with 32 or 28.8% of them unreached (Joshua Project 2016a). Samuel Lumwe did a study based on 2009 figures where he listed 95 people groups based on languages in Kenya with 39 of those languages not having even one Seventh-day Adventist (Lumwe 2009). Therefore, the greatest drawback of using church members per million population and population per member ratios is that language groups and people groups can be completely overlooked.

People Groups

A third possible metric to measure the progress of Adventist Mission is to chart whether or not the church is working among the world’s 16,475 people groups. The Joshua Project lists 6,664 of those people groups as currently unreached, which is 40.4% of all people groups representing 3,076,658,000 or 42.2% of the world’s population (Joshua Project 2016b). I am sure that the Seventh-day Adventist Church would discover an even larger number of people groups where there are no Adventists, so our task is even more challenging.

There are several advantages of using a people group approach to measure mission progress:

1. A people group approach is biblical. Matthew 28:19 says, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations (panta ta ethne). A better translation would be to go make disciples of all ethnic groups or all people groups.

2. A people group approach is reasonable. It provides a workable strategy that helps church leaders see the various segments in our communities. It helps the church develop specific strategies for the various groups in our communities.

3. A people group approach is manageable. Consider the difference in evangelizing 3 billion unreached people versus evangelizing 6,664 unreached people groups. Consider the difference in evangelizing a city of 250,000 people versus evangelizing 15 or 20 people groups in that city.

4. A people group approach is helpful not only for church administrators who are developing strategic plans at the macro level, but the approach is also helpful for pastors and those working at the micro level in helping them better develop strategies for cities and districts.

5. A people group approach comes with extensive research data already provided by several organizations that is constantly being updated and enhanced. In addition to the Joshua Project, Global Research also provides an excellent data base on the people groups of the world.
6. In an era of globalization, vast numbers of displaced people, immigrants, and refugees have arrived in our countries and cities. A people group metric keeps track of these shifts in population.

The biggest disadvantage of using the people group approach for Seventh-day Adventists is that the church would have to begin using a completely new metric which would involve changes to the way information is gathered and documented in the annual statistical reports.

Another challenge is to decide which definition to use for an unreached people group since there have been a variety of attempts to identify exactly what is meant by an unreached people group. For example, in the early days of people group research an unreached people was defined as a people group with less than 20% of its members who were followers of Jesus Christ (Wagner and Dayton 1981:26, 27).

Global Research uses the term “Unengaged Unreached People Group (UUPG) with the following definition: “A people group is unreached when the number of Evangelical Christians is less than 2% of its population. It is further called unengaged when there is no church planting strategy consistent with Evangelical faith and practice under way. A people group is not engaged when it has been merely adopted, is the object of focused prayer, or is part of an advocacy strategy” (Global Research).

The group that has done the most research on people groups is the Joshua Project. Notice their definition: “An unreached or least-reached people is a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Christians with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group without outside assistance. Joshua Project uses the terms unreached and least-reached to mean the same thing” (People Groups Resources).

This definition is widely used and could easily be adapted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The church could consider any group unreached that does not have adequate numbers of Adventists and the needed resources to evangelize the rest of the people group without outside assistance.

This fits with another concept that was in the original Global Strategy document when it spoke of the need for “Direct Action” areas of the world. “Direct action, where needed, occurs when a higher organization takes the initiative, in consultation with any existing subsidiary organizations, to achieve Global Strategy objectives. It may also occur where no subsidiary exists” (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1989:474). This would allow unions, divisions, and the General Conference, in consultation with subsidiary organizations, to initiate work among unreached people groups in their territories.
Recommendations

Charting the number of countries and languages the Adventist Church is working among should be continued. However, in view of the need for a comprehensive mission metric to better measure the progress and growth of Adventist Mission I propose the following be approved by the Global Mission Issues Committee and recommended to the Adventist Mission Board:

1. Recommended that Adventist Mission adopt as its primary metric a people group approach for measuring the task remaining.

2. Recommended that the Adventist Mission Board adopt the following definitions:

   a. *People Group*: A people group is a significantly large sociological grouping of people who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of shared language, ethnicity, religion, race, caste, occupation, education, or patterns of social interaction.
   
   b. *Unreached People Group*: An unreached people is a people group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Adventists with adequate numbers and resources to evangelize this people group without outside assistance.
   
   c. *Reached People Group*: In order for a people group to be considered reached, the following criteria must be considered: (1) There are adequate numbers and resources to evangelize the groups without outside assistance, (2) people worship in their first language or heart language, not in a trade language or in translated worship services,¹ (3) people have access to the Bible and other evangelistic materials in their first language, (4) the people group has indigenous church leaders who can evangelize the rest of the people group without working through a translator.

3. Recommended that the Joshua Project data on people groups be used as the primary source for developing an Adventist list of unreached people groups in each division, union, and conference.

4. Recommended that Adventist Mission work with Adventist Membership Services to develop reporting criteria for the people group approach.
Notes

1 Worshipping in a trade language is not adequate for the following reasons: (1) a person’s first language is the heart language, the one a person was born into, and is the language that communicates at the very deepest level with individuals, and (2) often only the adults, especially those who work in the market place speak the trade language, while the women and children speak their first language in the home. If worship is conducted in the trade language it is difficult for whole families to worship together in meaningful ways.

Works Cited


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Global Mission Issues Committee of April 5, 2016 Recommendations
Voted by the Mission Board on October 2, 2016

In view of:

1. The Great Commission commanding us to reach all peoples (Matt.28:18–20);
2. The call to be faithful in sharing the three angels’ messages with unreached nations, languages, people groups, and cities (Rev 14:6);
3. The immense mission challenge of billions of people in unreached people groups;
4. The Global Mission mandate to focus on planting new congregations in the world’s most challenging areas and people groups;

And whereas:

The Mission Board has adopted the following definitions:

1. People Group: A significantly large sociological grouping of people who perceive themselves to have a common affinity for one another because of shared language, ethnicity, religion, race, caste, occupation, education, and/or patterns of social interaction.

2. Reached People Group: In order for a people group to be considered “reached” by the three angels’ messages, the following criteria must be considered:
   a. There are adequate numbers and resources to effectively witness to the group without outside assistance.
   b. They have the option to worship in their first language or “heart language,” not only in a trade language or in translated worship services.
c. They have access to the Bible and other key materials in their first language.

d. They have indigenous church leaders who can witness to the rest of the people group without working through a translator.

3. *Unreached People Group*: A group among which there is no indigenous community of believing Adventists with adequate numbers and resources to effectively witness to that group without assistance from “outside” (e.g. foreign cultures or other people groups).

Therefore, it is recommended that:

1. The Office of Adventist Mission find funding to enable the divisions to partner with Global Mission Centers on specific key projects to plant groups of believers in high priority areas, among unreached people groups.

2. The General Conference, coordinated by Adventist Mission, create a taskforce to study how the Global Mission Centers can better assist the world church departments, services, and territories in planting new groups among unreached peoples.

3. The Office of Adventist Mission continue to:

   a. Use a people-group approach for measuring remaining mission challenges.
   
   b. Seek ways to ensure that Urban Centers of Influence focus on starting new groups of believers among the unreached.
   
   c. Explore a new funding structure that will prioritize church planting projects in the least reached people groups beginning with the largest and measured by language, population, Adventist to population ratio, and other criteria.
   
   d. Provide funding for starting new groups of believers among unreached majority populations (including post-Christian and secular populations in Europe).

4. The Office of Adventist Mission work with the Offices of Adventist Membership Services (AMS) and Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) to track mission progress in:

   a. Unreached people groups of at least 100,000 people or more;
   
   b. Cities with a population of at least one million.
5. The Office of Adventist Mission work with AMS and Adventist World Radio (AWR) to:

   a. Create the Global Mission Strategy System by mapping current Seventh-day Adventist work around the world;
   b. Begin providing current unreached people group information to church leaders.

6. The General Conference use the Joshua Project and other core resources as sources for developing an Adventist database of unreached people groups in each division, union, and conference.

7. The General Conference, coordinated by Adventist Mission, create a technological and media think-tank to:

   a. Consider ways to use technology and media in unreached areas and among non-Christian people groups.
   b. Find ways to measure the impact of these activities in unreached areas.

8. All ministerial training programs at tertiary level to include at least one course on cross-cultural mission, and ministry to non-Christians.

9. Each division, in consultation with unions and fields, make specific strategic plans to reach the unreached peoples and cities in their respective territories. This plan would include:

   a. Human and financial resources;
   b. Plans for establishing new church groups and Urban Centers of Influence;
   c. Publishing (print and electronic) and integrated media (AWR, the Hope Channel, social media), education, comprehensive health ministry, Total Member Involvement (TMI), and all departments of the church.
   d. Working cooperatively with other divisions and entities when an unreached people group crosses territorial boundaries.

10. The Office of Adventist Mission support the Reach the World strategic plan by providing data for various General Conference initiatives and strategies including Mission to the Cities, Revival and Reformation, and TMI in their efforts to:
a. Focus the mission action of the world church on the remaining mission challenge and unreached people groups and cities;
b. Coordinate prayer resources for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in hearts of unreached people groups;
c. Inspire church members to pray systematically for unreached people groups.

“If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (2 Chr 7:14 NKJV).

Notes

1Worshipping in a trade language is not adequate for the following reasons: (1) a person’s first language is the heart language, the one a person was born into, and is the language that communicates at the very deepest level with individuals, and (2) often only the adults, especially those who work in the market place speak the trade language, while the women and children speak their first language in the home. If worship is conducted in the trade language it is difficult for whole families to worship together in meaningful ways.
BENJAMIN M. BONILLA LÓPEZ

Mission within Societies: Revisiting the People Group Methodology

Introduction

The world population is constantly changing and along with it societies have also grown and evolved. A new and globalized era allows humans more than ever to connect with each other and this causes cultures and traditions to be altered. Where then do the Church and Christianity fit among this ever-growing and ever-changing globalized world?

The foremost intent of this study is to understand what the primary occupation of the present-day Church should be and what the role of each individual member is. In order to accomplish this goal I will look at the purpose and nature of the earthly ministry of Jesus by observing his auto-proclamation of intent as presented in Luke 4. Second, after establishing Jesus’ ministry as a foundation for mission, Mark 16 and Matthew 28 will serve as the primary objects for understanding what Jesus envisioned for the Church (and each member within it) to be involved in even after his ascension. After establishing what type of mission Jesus expects his Church and each member to be accomplishing, the People Group methodology, especially its four approaches to mission as explained by Ralph D. Winter and Bruce A. Koch, will be offered as an ideal way for undertaking the given task.

Finally, a small section will be dedicated to exploring the value of the People Group methodology for present-day missionary endeavors and the completion of the task the church was assigned to achieve. This paper is written from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective though the term “Church” is used freely and in reference to the universal Church that is comprised of faithful members of the Body of Christ (1 Cor 12) that seek to keep God’s commandments and remain faithful to Jesus (Rev 14). It is the general understanding behind this paper that every individual member
of the Body, notwithstanding their professed denomination, is called for mission and to accomplish the task given to all by the Lord.

**Mission: A Twofold Task for Jesus**
—A Twofold Task for the Church

**Jesus**

He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him. He began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” (Luke 4:16–21 NIV)

The text above describes the first time in the Gospel of Luke where Jesus announces the mission he had to accomplish. It is interesting to note that the reference Jesus is attributed to have used on this occasion encompasses two texts found in Isa 58:6 and 61:1–2. When these texts in Isaiah are examined in light of the Septuagint, the Greek word translated as “release” or “freedom” is not used exclusively for these two incidences. Moreover, by examining the other places where this term is used greater understanding is shed upon the purpose of Jesus’ ministry.

The Greek word *aphesis*, which is used in Isaiah, appears five additional times in the Old Testament. More specifically, it appears in Lev 25. In this chapter the Greek word is used to indicate the “release” brought forth to the Israelites in the year of Jubilee. Thus, when exploring what the prophet Isaiah wrote in the light of these verses in Leviticus, the thoughts of release and freedom receive a deeper meaning. Consequently, the text read by Jesus in Nazareth conveys a greater meaning to what would become his earthly ministry.

Skinner explains, “Combining the two passages from Isaiah emphasizes this theme of ‘release’ that characterizes Jesus’ ministry. The same word appears elsewhere in Luke to describe people’s release—usually translated ‘forgiveness’—from sins” (2016: para. 3). Based on this argument, it can be concluded that Jesus’ ministry on this earth was twofold in nature and encompassed two principal spheres: a social sphere, which provided relief to all those who were distressed by earthly troubles such as poverty,
hunger, and rejection, and a spiritual sphere where providing freedom to all humanity from the imprisonment of a sinful nature was emphasized.

This twofold nature of Jesus’ ministry is shown over and over in the four Gospels through narrations where Jesus is seen healing those who were afflicted, both spiritually and physically. One clear example is shown when the Gospels narrate how Jesus healed a woman who was deeply sick (Luke 13:12), thus confirming his commitment to those who had sorrows that required social involvement. Another example showing the spiritual sphere of Jesus’ ministry, can be observed when Jesus forgave the sins of a woman who was caught in an immoral situation (John 8:11). Through these two simple examples, it can be shown how Christ’s ministry was both holistic and twofold in nature and moreover, completely focused on bringing relief to the needs of humanity.

According to Ellen White, “To all people, rich and poor, free and bond, Christ, the Messenger of the covenant, brought the tidings of salvation. His fame as the Great Healer spread throughout Palestine. The sick came to the places through which He would pass, that they might call on Him for help” (1999:9). White furthers the understanding of the twofold nature of Jesus’ work and boosts the sense of it being a ministry that was focused on bringing salvation and wellbeing. All those who were sick and/or in need of salvation came to Christ because they saw in him a person who was truly involved in sharing God’s blessings with all.

If analyzed through what the Gospels present, there is no doubt that Christ’s earthly ministry was a complete success. The Gospels evidence thousands becoming his followers and his ability to bring relief to all who came in contact with him. Therefore, his earthly mission, that of proclaiming freedom for the prisoners and setting the oppressed free, was doubtlessly fulfilled. While on the cross and just before letting go of his life, Jesus was able to look back on his earthly work and exclaimed: “It is finished” (John 19:30). Although this is a dark scene because the Savior is seen in his most vulnerable form, it is one full of victory and hope because through this ultimate sacrifice Jesus concluded his twofold earthly ministry and brought aphesis to humanity.

**The Church**

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.” (Mark 16:15–18)
The work to be done on earth did not end at the cross. After Jesus’ death people were still suffering from infirmities and injustices. Moreover, many had not yet come to know that salvation from sin was possible through Christ. It was to fill this void of able workers for the dissemination of the good news of salvation through faith in Christ alone that the Church was called to initiate movements of reform under the leadership and direction of the Holy Spirit. However, to better understand the role and mission of the present-day Church, it is imperative to explore the incidences where Jesus clarifies the task he called his followers to perform. One fascinating passage can be found in the text shown at the beginning of this section: Mark 16.

This Bible quote from Mark belongs to the interpretation the Gospel writer offers of the highly discussed “Great Commission,” which is more often quoted from Matt 28. Nonetheless, the present version is clearer in conveying the ultimate purpose of the church as set by Christ. Note how Jesus in this text is clearly establishing that his disciples were to preach the gospel for people to believe and receive salvation. Moreover, his disciples were commanded not only to preach but also to continue his social ministry. Because of this, people who were tormented by demons would be able to receive freedom from them and those who were sick would be able to be restored to complete health. Thus, Christ is clearly continuing, though his disciples, the twofold ministry he started while on earth.

Additionally, it can be inferred from Mark’s Great Commission account that the gospel is holistic in nature. The disciples were to preach and share with humanity the same twofold ministry that Jesus had performed, which as presented before, encompassed an element of spiritual salvation and an element of social welfare. Notwithstanding its duality, this work would continue to be considered as being one fundamental entity—the gospel. Thus, preaching the gospel would imply the healing of spiritual and physical wounds just as Jesus had done before.

Concerning Mark’s version of the Great Commission Matthew Henry comments that the text is a declaration of true faith, which receives Christ for all the purposes of salvation, and which produces its right effect not only on the heart but also on the life of the believer. Additionally, he leads the readers to observe the power that was endued in the apostles for the purpose of confirming the gospel. The apostles were to preach about the salvation made possible by faith in Jesus and they were to perform miracles, which were to confirm the veracity of what was being preached. Moreover, these miracles would serve as means of spreading the gospel among the nations that had not heard it before (Henry 1997:937).

When one looks at the ministry of the church during the first centuries after Christ’s ascension, it can be said that it was as successful as Christ’s
ministry on earth had been before. The early church was able to effectively disseminate, wherever it was established, the full extent of the gospel of Jesus Christ. A fourth-century Roman emperor named Julian, “The Apostate,” because of his hostility towards Christianity and continuous efforts to revive paganism in the Roman Empire, is recorded to have expressed the extent to which the early church accomplished their designated ministry. Julian wrote a letter complaining that when the pagan priests neglected the poor, Christians were always present and willing to take over the need for caring for the less fortunate (Ayerst and Fisher 1971:179–181). The effectiveness of the work done by the early church was so evident that even this emperor, who was characterized for his opposition to Christianity, had to acknowledge its good deeds.

One might also interpret the wide presence of Christianity today as a measure of the successful ministry of the early church. The assumption being that because there was an early church, which disseminated the gospel in a successful manner, today Christianity is found in almost every country of the world. Nonetheless, because there is still a wide range of people who have not yet heard the gospel, much work still needs to be done. Thus, the present-day church needs to continue the work it was initially called to do by Jesus and take its responsibility to disseminate the gospel.

David J. Bosch opens his masterful piece of work *Transforming Mission* by arguing that the present-day church centered its attention on the term mission and consequently all the activities implies within that descriptor only as recently as the 1950s (2011:1). Although it can be argued whether or not the church has really been focused on mission only since the 50s or if it has been its focus since its foundation by Christ, there is little doubt concerning the escalation of missionary activities in Christendom during the last century. Along with missionary activities, it can also be argued that discussions relating to the interpretation of the Great Commission in Matt 28 have been escalating as well. This has been the case mostly because, as stated before, Matt 28 has been extensively used for justifying missionary endeavors.

However, a high risk exists in adopting Matthew’s Great Commission as a simple catchphrase to be applied freely to all missionary endeavors. Bosch comments, “It is inadmissible to lift these words out of Matthew’s gospel, as it were, allow them a life of their own, and understand them without any reference to the context in which they first appeared” (2011:57). Thus, an in-depth understanding of the Great Commission, as understood by the Gospel writer, must be sought in order to correctly comprehend what God expects of his church today.

If examined in its original form, one can come to realize that there are
three central Greek words used by Matthew in this text: mathéteuó—usually translated as “make disciples,” baptizó—typically translated as “baptize,” and didaskó—regularly translated as “teaching.” Thus, the Great Commission can be summarized as having three central tasks for the Church to perform: make disciples, baptize, teach.

Bosch clarifies the grammatical structure in the Great Commission by stating, “The two participles ‘baptizing’ and ‘teaching’ are clearly subordinate to ‘make disciples’ and describe the form the disciple-making is to take” (2011:73). Therefore, it is correct to assume that for Matthew and consequently for Jesus, since he is the one giving the command, discipleship is what should be central in any missionary task performed by the church.

However, what does making disciples entail? Bosch once again provides the answer by remarking, “Mission involves, from the beginning and as matter of course, making new believers sensitive to the needs of others, opening their eyes and hearts to recognize injustice, suffering, oppression, and the plight of those who have fallen by the wayside” (81). Hence, it is correct to assume that the present-day church, just as with the ministry of Jesus and the early church, has a twofold mission to accomplish: seeking to bring people to Jesus’ forgiveness and taking care of the less fortunate.

White has an important quote, which aids in better understanding the connection between this twofold mission of the early church and the church today. She comments, “It is the divine plan that we shall work as the disciples worked. Physical healing is bound up with the gospel commission. In the work of the gospel, teaching and healing are never to be separated” (1999:83). For her, the twofold mission of the church is as clear today as it was for the early church. It is the responsibility of the church to bring the gospel to the world by showing the promise of salvation in Christ—the teaching—along with social works that offers aid to those who suffer from wants—the healing.

Peters mentions, “Through the ages the Church has been involved in the life of mankind, in making of nationhood, building of culture, structuring of society with its functions and institutions and in shaping the form and quality of political systems” (1979:7). Although it can be argued whether or not the Church has been extensively involved in the political aspects of the world, it is true that it inherited from Jesus a role that sought the betterment of society. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the present-day church to seek the betterment of society.

Notice Ellen White’s comments, “The world needs today what it needed nineteen hundred years ago—a revelation of Christ. A great work of reform is demanded, and it is only through the grace of Christ that the
work of restoration, physical, mental, and spiritual, can be accomplished” (1999:84, 85). It is only by the grace of Christ and through being connected to him that the church can battle against the pressures of modern society and be able to undertake and fulfill its twofold mission.

Yet, while it has been confirmed how deeply ingrained in the Bible is the twofold missionary responsibility of the present-day church, it seems as if the church is still struggling to find the most effective way to disseminate the gospel. Notwithstanding the benefits it possesses over the early church, the most recognizable of all being mass media communications, it cannot be denied that the church today has not yet found the right formula to arouse the interest of the masses towards Jesus and his offered gift of salvation. Schreck and Barrett seem to have found embedded in the Great Commission of Matthew a solution to the question of how to communicate the gospel to the world. They argue, “Human beings live in the context of society, and in interaction with one another. In order to see disciples appear, we must evangelize persons in their social and cultural matrices. In current terminology this includes evangelizing people groups” (Schreck and Barrett 1987:5). It appears that when disseminating the gospel, the Church must take into account one key aspect: people groups.

**People Groups: Reaching the World through Its Societies**

**Definition of People Groups**

People groups and people group thinking has become a prominent concept in missiology since it was first introduced by Ralph D. Winter in the First International Congress on World Evangelization held in Lausanne, Switzerland in 1974. More specifically, it was urged to all the congregations represented in the congress that Christian churches had to work harder in order to reach the unreached people groups of the world. These were referred to as “unevangelized” in the Lausanne Covenant document. The foundation for this conference and for the later developed document was clear: it was important for all Christians to come together in the task of preaching the gospel to all mankind and making disciples of every nation (Stott 2009:12).

However, if the goal of the church and by addition every church member is to proclaim the gospel by being engaged with unreached people groups, it is essential to first of all define what a people group actually is. For Winter a people group is a group of individuals that share a common affinity with each other based on language, religion, ethnicity, residence, occupation, class or caste, situation, etc., or a combination of these. Nonetheless, if seen from a missionary perspective, the element of
disseminating the gospel must be added. Thus, a people group comes to be defined as a social group where the gospel can be proclaimed without hindrances of understanding or acceptance (Koch and Winter 2009:536).

"The definition emphasizes the things a group of people hold in common and that act as boundaries which set this group apart from other groups . . . causing all individuals to feel at home in one group as opposed to another" (Robb 1994:8, 9). People group thinking seeks to rid missionary endeavors and ministry from having geopolitical boundaries and rather focus on those aspects that unite a society. Consequently, when disseminating the gospel, one will start to evaluate those aspects that make a social group unique, rather than merely looking at people’s nationality, in order to find applicable ways the gospel can become personal for each individual and result in true discipleship.

People group approaches in mission make it possible for a Filipino immigrant coming from Visayas (a specific region of the Philippines) who works as an English teacher in Bangkok, to know Jesus in such a personal way that otherwise would not have been possible. "Those who learn to think in people group terms realize the importance of coming to understand their target group before planning any ministry to reach them" (Robb 1994:15). When using the people group goggles one comes to understand that a person is much more than a Filipino living in Bangkok. People who are engaged in mission can see those aspects that distinguish an individual from all others thanks to having a people group centered mind. If considered in light of the past example, some of these elements might include belonging to a specific region of the Philippines, being an immigrant, having a higher academic preparation, and residing in an urban area. With people group thinking the proclamation of the gospel centers on the individuals and the possibility of them having a personal relationship with Jesus.

Four Approaches to People Groups

As mentioned before, individuals possess characteristics that make them unique. However, these same characteristics that evidence distinctiveness, offer the possibility of gathering individuals into social groups that share most, if not all, of the same characteristics. People group thinking assesses these characteristics in order to find effective ways of disseminating the gospel among social groups while still maintaining a personal connection with each person.

Koch and Winter explored four different approaches to people groups that the Church can look at when engaging in missionary efforts with various groups of people. They suggest, "There are four useful ways of
looking at the idea of people groups: blocs of peoples, ethnolinguistic peoples, sociopeoples, and unimax peoples” (2009:534). These approaches could be seen as a way of deductively viewing the world and its societies; each of these approaches will be expanded below.

Blocs of peoples refer to the general categories into which people groups can be divided for analysis. When working with this concept, it can be subsequently divided into two groups: cultural blocs and affinity blocs. Cultural blocs refer to what are considered as general cultural traditions such as: Muslim, Buddhists, non-religious, and others. Affinity blocs refer to the merging of ethno-linguistic peoples into what is known as “people clusters” and afterwards, joining these “clusters” into one category: affinity blocs. Some examples of affinity blocs could be: Latin America, Southeast Asia, and the Arab world (534–536).

Although blocs of people might not seem to be entirely useful because it is so broad, if seen in the light of what has been previously defined as the gospel, namely a twofold missionary endeavor that consists of preaching salvation in Christ and establishing social ministries for those in need, then looking for blocs of people can be highly beneficial. While it is true that this approach is too broad for making the usual evangelistic strategies that seek to attract individuals, it can be very useful for developing social ministries that target a general population. In Latin America, a region that has been characterized by a strong presence of sexism, there is a need to work with battered women and to seek gender equality. Hence, church related organizations could benefit from looking at the world through people groups spectacles and its blocs of people could give guidance for creating relevant ministries for the women of Latin America who have been victims of machismo (male supremacy).

Allocating church resources can also be done so that all blocs of people in need can be correctly targeted and addressed through this distribution. The book of Acts tells how the early church divided its resources in order to work effectively among Jews and Gentiles, these being two distinct blocs of people. The apostle Paul was assigned to work among the Gentiles and Peter was to work with the Jews (Gal 2:7–8). Consequently, all blocs of people were rightfully represented and if people with needs were found, the church would be able to respond. If applied to the present-day church, resources could be divided in order to address the needs of any blocs of people that are in need; for example, refugees in the Arab world afflicted by the major conflicts in the Middle East.

The second approach, ethnolinguistic peoples, refers to an ethnic group that is distinguished because of its self-identification on the basis of traditions, history, customs, and language (Koch and Winter 2009:534). Although the ethnolinguistic peoples approach contains several qualities,
the most commonly used and easily identifiable one is language. The Church can benefit from this people group approach by emphasizing the importance of having ministries in people’s native languages. A biblical basis for this approach can be found in the book of Acts where the people who gathered for the day of Pentecost received the Holy Spirit and started speaking in different languages (Acts 2:1–4). It would seem that for the Holy Spirit it is of utmost importance that individuals can worship in their heart languages, thus allowing for a profound and particular relationship with God.

The ethnolinguistic approach to people groups is by far the most common in the church today with its emphasis on language, traditions, and customs. However, Koch and Winter present what is considered to be a challenge when applying this approach. They say, “Sometimes what appears initially to be a unified ethnolinguistic group turns out to be several smaller groups” (534). Therefore, if ministering in a country like Guatemala, the church cannot opt to disseminate the gospel by doing so exclusively in Spanish. The Minority Rights Group International reports that there are 21 distinct Maya groups in Guatemala, which make up 51% of the national population and hold approximately 26 Mayan languages that are still spoken today (Minority Rights Group International 2008).

Consequently, if the ethnolinguistic approach were to be applied, the church would have to create ministries that supply the needs of 21 distinct groups in 26 different languages in Guatemala alone. Although it might seem to be an impossible task because of the vast number of languages, traditions, and customs present around the world, this is of utmost importance and must be taken seriously with the necessary resources made available. If the gospel that needs to be shared is about a personal God who seeks to connect with all people groups, then every individual should be able to know about Jesus in a personal way and hear that message in her/his own language and culture.

The third approach to people group ministries is that of socio-peoples. This approach can be simply defined as “an association of peers who have an affinity for one another based upon shared interests, activity or occupation” (Koch and Winter 2009:535). It is in this approach to people groups, more than in any other, where personal evangelism and the involvement of every individual church member in mission is crucial to the dissemination of the gospel. The socio-peoples approach can be interpreted as being the sum of the two preceding approaches along with an additional element that causes it to be more precise—the association of peers. Thus, borrowing the illustration of the Maya people in Guatemala once again, an example of effective socio-peoples approach in mission would be when a ministry is formed to reach the Maya K’iche’ women who work as farmers in the Guatemalan highlands.
For sharing the gospel in its purest and most correct form, the socio-peoples approach for mission outreach is perhaps the best alternative. Only in this approach do individuals receive the care they truly deserve and need. Moreover, this approach not only seeks to reach others but also allows individual church members to embody true discipleship. While engaged in the socio-peoples approach, church members will have to maintain a close relationship with Jesus for him to place in their minds ways for effectively connecting with other individuals.

“Approaching a socio-people can be strategic in giving a focus for ministry among a specific subset of the larger society as a first step to a full blown church planting” effort (Koch and Winter 2009:535). Because of the emphasis on relationships, a socio-people approach can be highly effective and as seen in the quote, an excellent precursor for church planting efforts. Nonetheless, its most valuable characteristic—closeness to people—also has some possible drawbacks. If a church does not possess the necessary human resources to take this approach to the people groups in its area, it will not be possible to connect effectively with all the socio-peoples group present. Hence, the last approach to people groups, unimax peoples, could prove to be a solution to this disadvantage.

The Unimax peoples approach is defined as “the maximum seized group sufficiently unified to be the target of a single people movement to Christ, where ‘unified’ refers to the fact that there are no significant barriers of either understanding or acceptance to stop the spread of the Gospel” (535).

For this definition Koch and Winter take into account the meaning that was previously assigned to the concept of people groups when seen from an evangelistic perspective. Because barriers of understanding and acceptance are taken into account, the unimax peoples approach is allowed to generalize and bring together various groups within the socio-peoples approach that can be categorized as not having barriers to their interactions. This allows for diversity in the Body of Christ as long as it does not hinder the understanding and acceptance of the gospel by any individual.

The unimax approach is not so centered in seeking the contentment of each individual but rather emphasizes the feasibility of reaching the various groups in a territory. This helps solve the problem of a lack of sufficient human resources to deal with the vast number of existing socio-peoples groups.

“The value of the unimax approach lies in the way it identifies the boundaries hindering the flow of the gospel, while at the same time firing the ambitions of dedicated Christians to pursue the evangelization of every peoples cut off by prejudicial boundaries, leaving no smaller group sealed off within a larger group.” (536).
The Importance of Having a People Group Centered Mission

Missionary endeavors that adopt a people group centered methodology and the four approaches listed above are likely to become more comprehensive and effective in reaching people. Because people group thinking is rooted in individuals and their uniqueness, when the gospel is proclaimed in this way it is not hindered from its natural personal approach. Jesus is presented just as he truly is, as a caring God who wishes to relate with everyone in a personal way.

The present-day church needs to take these approaches to mission very seriously and adapt its current missionary efforts so that they can reach the various individuals within their own groupings in society. These four approaches to people groups should be applied to church life in such a way that they transform both the missionary and church administrators. Careful assessment of every church endeavor should be conducted to ascertaining if the witnessing approaches used fulfill the primary function of the church or merely continue reaching out to the dominant groups already found within the membership of the church.

Church ministries can be transformed by adopting a people group centered mission so that all members of the Body are taken care of just as if Jesus himself was in charge. In addition, if the people group approach was adopted by local churches, those individuals preparing to join the church and those in the surrounding neighborhoods would experience the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit. The two-fold missionary task given to the church by Jesus would once again become the main reason for the Church to exist.

Conclusion

There is a dire need within the setting of Christendom, especially in the area of mission, to establish relevant and appealing ways of presenting the gospel to the world. People and the ways information is shared are constantly changing, but the Church seems to be trapped in traditional methods of disseminating the gospel that were developed in the past but have very little relation to the Bible. Yet, the Bible is clear concerning what Jesus’ understanding of the primary occupation of his Church should be and the role every member has to play in this process.

It has been found that what is commonly understood as “the gospel” is actually a misinterpretation of a concept that represents a unity of two distinct and equally important tasks: proclaiming salvation from sins through faith in Jesus and the continuation of a social ministry that was established by Christ and intended to care for the needs of all.
The misinterpretation lies in the fact that these two elements should be equally present whenever a disciple is seeking to announce the Kingdom of Heaven, but somehow most of the time one of them is overemphasized thus, over shadowing the other. Additionally, it has been discovered that because the world is diverse, ever-changing, and full of different expressions of what it means to be human, the correct way of announcing the Kingdom is through people group-centered ministries, which seek to apply the four approaches to mission.

In addition when a people group approach is used in connection with all missionary efforts, every individual contacted in this way should be able to connect personally to Jesus and his twofold gospel. The task was successfully founded by Jesus with his earthly ministry and closely followed by the early church. Now it is the responsibility of the present-day church to make sure the work is fulfilled and that the world is prepared for Christ’s second coming.

Works Cited


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“Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods” (White 1948:30). There is a possibility that one out of five of your neighbors in the U.S. will be Hispanic, as according to the U.S. Census Bureau, the Hispanic population in 2012 was over 53 million, representing about 17 percent of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau 2013). This article focuses on newly arrived Hispanics to the United States of America and on culturally relevant ways to evangelize them. The nature of this article does not allow an in-depth analysis of this segment of the population; however, statistical data will provide a glimpse of the challenges of this mission field right in our own backyard.

Between 1970 and 2013, the Hispanic population grew by 44 million, a six-fold increase (Brown 2014). Hispanics have already surpassed Caucasians in California (Dwyer 2014). Mexicans represent 64.6 percent of all Hispanic immigrants to the United States (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrea, and Cuddington 2013). Hispanics have grown an average of 505% between 1980 and 2000 in areas considered “new destinations” in the southeast, such as Atlanta (995%), Greensboro (962%), Charlotte (932%), Orlando (859%), Nashville (630%), Fort Lauderdale (578%), Sarasota (538%), and Greenville (397%). Due to the fact that men arrive in the U.S. first, in these areas they outnumber Hispanic women by 17 percent (Singer and Suro 2014). These Hispanics require a specialized form of ministry since many established congregations in these and other areas do not have previous experience ministering to Hispanics.

Most Hispanics are Catholics, which is reflected among newly arrived immigrants. The 2010 census reported that Mexico had some 101,456,786 Catholics among the population aged five and above, which equates to around 91% of the total population (Roman Catholicism in Mexico 2015).
Although nearly three-quarters of Latin Americans consider themselves Catholic, only 40 percent said that they practice their faith (Frazer 2005). About 76 percent of Mexican immigrants to the United States come as Roman Catholics (Brodie et al. 2002:55). Many of those who recently came are nominal Christians, with a high chance that, if they came from a small town or from the countryside, they may have never touched a Bible.

It seems that in the United States the preferred term for the religion of the majority of newly arrived Hispanics is simply “Catholic,” but in their countries of origin they usually refer to themselves as being “Roman Catholics.” They do not understand much about “denominations,” and in their minds all who are not Catholics are “Protestants” or belong to a sect. Today much may be said about the “separated brethren,” but in the mind of many in Latin America, Protestants are still considered heretics. This underlines the importance of approaching newly arrived immigrants with a friendly attitude, showing an interest in their felt needs, with the goal of earning their confidence. Also by helping them in different forms of ministry will remove many obstacles for the presentation of the gospel.

Ministering to Newly Arrived Hispanics

Hispanics show receptivity to the message of the gospel more than ever before in the history of this country (Sanchez 2006:35). Sociological studies and experience indicate that newly arrived immigrants are much more receptive to the gospel than established ones. Experts have realized that “the need for acceptance and recognition is uppermost in the mind of the Hispanic” (Shannon 1989:B1). The newly arrived immigrants suffer from strong feelings of alienation, isolation, and loneliness, which leads them in a quest for community (i.e., group acceptance, identification, and solidarity (Holland 1974:455). This openness indicates that both Anglo and Hispanic believers need training in sharing the gospel with people with a Roman Catholic background, however, this should be done before approaching them.

Almost one-third of the immigrants from Latin America come to the United States as evangelical Christians (Brodie et al. 2002:55). These new arrivals can very easily plant new congregations. In many cases, all they need is a little encouragement from an existing English congregation that will offer them an opportunity to use existing facilities and hold worship services in Spanish. They will be the most effective in attracting friends, neighbors, and relatives.

The Hispanic population is dominated by youth: Half are younger than 27 years old. In comparison, half of the Anglos are older than 40 years (Cohn 2005:A5). Hispanics of Mexican origin are the youngest out of the
14 largest origin groups, with a median age of 25, compared with Cubans’ median age of 40 (Brown 2014). As expected, this trend is reflected in Spanish-speaking churches in the United States. Hispanic churches usually have an active group of young people in positions of leadership, which attract non-believers. On the negative side, Hispanics tend to drop out of school at an alarming rate (Fry 2003) so need a ministry of encouragement and, in many cases, ministries offering English as a second language.

Immigrants are among the segment of the population most receptive to the gospel (Ramseyer 1973:68). One of the best ways to reach out to people in any community is to discover felt needs and minister to those needs. One of the most urgent needs is learning English. Among other problems, first-generation Hispanics are not able to communicate in English and, as a result, will most likely earn low salaries, face economic difficulties, and not be able to open a bank account. A free English class in a church facility (cafeteria, chapel, gym, church school), if properly advertised on Spanish-speaking radio and newspapers, will attract many newly arrived immigrants. Since they may not have transportation, a church van offering transportation to the venue of the class will be a plus for the project. Properly trained mission-minded teachers will be able to plant the seeds of the gospel in the hearts of many of these newly arrived immigrants. Invitations to social events related to the English class, including typical and regional foods, games, and picnics will also help to establish cultural and spiritual bridges.

Other forms of ministry should aim to satisfy the felt needs in the areas of social and health services. A church-run community center could offer compassion ministries, counseling services, dental care, medical services, health screening, sport activities for the youth, health education, and a food bank. All these efforts will require time, energy, personnel, and money. These activities should be done with the clear goal of leading the recipients beyond their felt needs to their real needs—salvation through Jesus. As people from the community come to the center, they should have a viable opportunity to read Christian tracts, watch Christian videos, and fill out prayer request cards, receive personal visits, and join Bible studies. In this way, a group of non-Spanish speaking believers can make a great contribution in spreading the gospel among the surrounding Hispanic community.

Personal Evangelism among Newly Arrived Hispanics

Before talking with newly arrived Hispanics about religion, it is very important that the Adventist witness becomes aware of their beliefs, traditions, and practices. One may never refer to what one knows about them,
but this background knowledge may prevent a person from using the wrong approaches, from offending, and from not covering crucial topics that will help these new immigrants become mature and balanced Christians.

It is also important to be patient. Many Hispanics have a profound ignorance of the Bible and their initial inability to understand the principles of the gospel require patience on our part. Since they often are not even thinking of changing their religion, it is important to not rush them into Bible studies. Meet them where they are. The “milk of the Word” must be given before administering the “strong meat.” Many have not yet touched a Bible and do not know the difference between the Old and the New Testaments, or between a chapter and a verse, thus it is important to awaken their interest in Scripture.

State your confidence in the Bible. The goal of the first step in personal Bible studies is to direct their mind to the Bible. Many Hispanics have a Catholic background and have been taught the primacy of tradition. At the Council of Trent in 1545, the Church rejected the teachings of Martin Luther about Sola Scriptura and said that tradition was “to be accepted ‘with as much reverence’ (pari pietatis affectu ac reverentia) as Sacred Scripture” (Jedin 2003). Our challenge is, with the power of the Holy Spirit, to help people understand the primacy of the Bible as “the only rule of faith and practice.” Meanwhile, even when many from a Catholic background hear the readings from the “Word of God” on Sundays they do not always connect it with the Bible. Many believe that the Bible is a Protestant book. It is also helpful to use the Douay version of the Bible to help them understand salvation by grace through faith. During your evangelistic sermons or in personal Bible studies, repeat many times that the Bible is the Word of God. A line that helps Hispanic people accept new teachings is, “True religion is not to do what the pastor, the teacher, or the priest says, but to do what God says.”

You may want to determine their level of understanding and start from there. Some will appreciate learning what the Bible says about how to secure a happy home, how to raise children, how to be a good husband, etc. Others may even need to start with simple Bible stories such as the Creation, the Flood, Abraham, etc. They may also appreciate studying the ancient prophecies of the Old Testament fulfilled in the person of Christ. The point is to meet them where they are, then develop their confidence in the Bible as the Word of God.

Before you study controversial issues, begin with topics they can agree with. Topics at this stage could include the Trinity, prayer, and the Bible as the Word of God. Once they accept that the Bible is inspired by God, it will be easier for them to accept that there is only one Mediator, salvation by grace through faith, confession made directly to God, baptism by
immersion, etc. Before studying these “new teachings,” it is important for people to accept that the Bible transcends Tradition. The use of the Douay Bible in your Bible studies can also be helpful since this is a version of scripture that is widely used among Hispanics. Always handle the Bible with great reverence. After they have confessed Christ as Savior and Lord, they may want to study advanced topics such as “Peter and the Keys,” “The Sacrifice of Mass,” “Purgatory,” “The Rosary,” etc. (Walsh 1967; Sanchez 2003).

When working for Hispanics remember that most come from a Roman Catholic background so use their terminology in your Bible studies. For instance, when referring to the Bible say “the Holy Scriptures,” “the Holy Book,” or “Holy Bible” — “in the Holy Gospels we read that. . . .” When referring to Jesus, use the term “our blessed Lord,” “our Lord Jesus Christ,” etc. When referring to the apostles, talk of the “holy apostles.” In your studies, make as much reference as possible to what Saint Peter the Apostle said about salvation, about Jesus, etc. Most Hispanics do not use the term “Lord’s Supper” but, rather, “Holy Communion.”

The issue of Mary deserves a separate paragraph. Catholics have learned that Protestants do not respect the “the Most Blessed Virgin.” It is important not to offend them with a careless treatment of Mary. Surprise them! You can legitimately speak of “the blessed virgin,” or even the “holy virgin,” without diminishing any biblical teaching. They will immediately think, “This Protestant is different!” and will feel more inclined to continue to study the Bible with you. Many Hispanics are offended when a Protestant insists that Mary had other children (“brothers of Jesus,” see Mark 3:31–35; 6:3; John 2:12. They believe that these brothers may have been Jesus’s cousins or even Joseph’s children from a first marriage). Do not attempt to resolve this issue. Do not talk against Mary. Stay on the affirmative—speak of “one sufficient Mediator.”

When involved in personal Bible studies, pray with and for them. Hispanic people will greatly appreciate your fervent prayers offered on their behalf. They may have never heard an evangelical talking to God as a friend without using formulas or always repeating the same things. They will soon be ready to pray with you.

Personal Bible studies may be the best way to introduce the gospel to a newly arrived Hispanic because they can ask questions. They will also be relaxed in their own homes, without being afraid of being criticized. Once you have established rapport and developed a genuine friendship with them, they may be ready to attend church services, and you will be able to assist them in making a public commitment to Jesus.
Public Evangelism among Newly Arrived Hispanics

When you consider public evangelism among newly arrived Hispanics, remember that for many of them Protestant churches are perceived to be threatening places. Many Hispanics feel very uncomfortable attending a Protestant church. Remember that newly arrived immigrants usually have serious mental barriers against Protestants, as they may consider them heretics. In some places they may even use the term “Lutheran” to refer to all non-Catholics. In the minds of many Catholics, Martin Luther was the worst heretic who ever existed (Monselice 2011). The best venue for evangelistic meetings that aim to attract newly arrived Hispanics is a neutral place, such as a school gymnasium, or the cafeteria of a church (Hiebert 1994:180). Of course, a hotel meeting room is a good (but expensive) option. An announcement of a “rented auditorium” may attract more Hispanics than an announcement of a meeting in a Protestant place of worship.

The best time of the year to invite Hispanics to an evangelical service is the last week of Lent, the week immediately preceding Resurrection Sunday (Lent is a period of 40 days that starts with Ash Wednesday and leads to Easter Sunday). While for Evangelicals the events of Easter are commonly reduced to a weekend, for many Hispanics the entire week is of crucial importance. They call it “Semana Santa,” or “Holy Week.” Another common expression is “Passion Week.” This period of intense devotion runs from Palm Sunday to Holy Saturday, a day of vigil in anticipation of the resurrection.

During this special time of the year it is best to focus on the passion and sufferings of Christ. You may announce “meditaciones cuaresmales” (“Lenten meditations”). An announcement in Spanish may read something like this: “Attend Lenten meditations during Semana Santa! See and hear about the passion, crucifixion, death, and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In the handbills, feel free to show a bloody hand nailed to the cross. Use terms that are familiar and start the Saturday night before the “Palm Sunday” (one week before Easter). During the nightly services of Holy Week, show films about the life of Jesus (or show a portion of the film before each Lenten meditation).

Among Adventists in South America, Easter is the most important and effective evangelistic season of the year. Due to traditions that can be traced back several centuries, many Hispanics feel the built-in necessity of doing something religious and, in many cases, sacrificial during “Semana Santa.” For many throughout Latin America, this will be the only time they will go to church during the entire year. During this week it is common to see people walking on their knees for long distances to a special
shrine, avoiding consumption of meat, and participating in processions. It may sound strange, but some from a Hispanic background may even be willing to attend a “Protestant” event, if it is done in a proper manner. This is especially true if a commemoration of the Passion of Christ is offered in a home for the surrounding neighborhood.

Church services aiming to attract newly arrived Hispanics may start a “Semana Santa” series with introductory topics such as the origin of the Bible and the relevance of the Bible for our days, Old Testament prophecies about Jesus, and the importance of prayer. The most important days of the season are “Holy Thursday” (“Maundy Thursday” in England), “Good Friday,” “Holy Saturday,” and “Resurrection Sunday.” Take advantage of the season and present the plan of salvation on “Holy Thursday,” explaining why our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross. Show how “Saint Peter the Apostle” said that only Christ can save (Acts 4:12). A good topic for “Good Friday” is “A Love Story Written with Blood” (illustrate it well with PowerPoint and video clips) and then make a call to accept Jesus as Saviour. Keep in mind that in most Hispanic countries radio stations only play funeral music during “Holy Saturday”—so do not play “happy music” on that day! A good topic for Saturday night is “The Religion of the Empty Tomb.” Talk of Jesus’ resurrection, but also include initial references to death and “the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting,” the last sentences of the Apostles’ Creed. Insist that Christianity is the true religion (this is an important idea, because it undermines the concept that only the Roman Catholic Church is the true religion). Show that Saint Paul the Apostle said that “there is one mediator between God and men” (1 Tim 2:5).

As for altar calls, follow the principles of progressive decisions—a gradual progression in form and intensity. You may invite them to come to the front for a special prayer request. When you make the first invitations to accept Jesus as Saviour, you may ask them to fill out decision cards. Invite them to raise their hands during a PowerPoint presentation. When you make the first altar calls, make sure that the auditorium is poorly illuminated with a PowerPoint graphic. Many Hispanics are reluctant to confess their trust in Jesus in a Protestant meeting, and they do not want to be seen as they make their first decisions. If you rush them to confess Jesus at the first opportunity they visit a Protestant meeting, they may never return. Of course, you want them to eventually make a public confession of their faith in Jesus—just remember that they did not grow up in the Bible Belt and that you need to prayerfully design a strategy that will fit their cultural backgrounds. Meet them where they are, and then little by little, as they are able to bear it, unfold to them the great truths of the kingdom.

Plan for a careful follow-up after “Semana Santa” through regular Bible
study sessions to cultivate the interest generated during Easter. You may start during Holy Week to announce that on Wednesday, after “Resurrection Sunday,” you will give away Catholic Bibles, beautifully illustrated. A simple option is to continue with Christ-centered Bible studies in which the newly arrived Hispanics will grow in their understanding of biblical teachings. Make these meetings interesting by marking a Bible together, encouraging them to ask questions through open dialogue, and praying for their personal needs.

**Small Group Evangelism**

Ministering to families is of crucial importance. The major theme dominating the Hispanic culture is the deep importance of the family to all its members (Clark 2014). They have a larger than average number of children per family, although their income is well below the national average. When a Hispanic thinks of his family, he thinks of an extended circle, often living under the same roof. The great importance of the family in Latin American culture can be stated by saying that the value of family well-being overrides the importance of the individual (Moore and Pachon 1985:96).

The individual in Latin America has a deep consciousness of his membership in a family. He thinks of his importance in terms of his family membership. . . . The world to a Latin consists of a pattern of intimate personal relationships of his family. His confidence, his sense of security, and identity are perceived in relationship to others who are his family. (Fitzpatrick 1971:78)

Since family is so important for the Hispanic community and plays an important role in God’s plans for human happiness, the concept of home and family is an appropriate and relevant bridge to reach out to the Hispanic community. There is the need of developing strategies for evangelizing whole families (McGavran 1999:325).

The use of cell groups has been demonstrated to be an effective strategy to reach whole families in urban Latin American churches, mostly because they stress the need of belonging (Greenway 1977:176). Experts from the Church Growth Movement state that “the phenomenal growth of the Pentecostal movement in Latin America reflects the effectiveness of using families to evangelize families” (Montoya 1987:41).

New forms of evangelism should be encouraged. Approaches based on family life will attract the interest of Hispanics, especially recently arrived immigrants with a high need of belonging. Strategies covering the family
will not only help to improve the quality of their lives, but will also serve as an entering edge to reach the whole family. Some evangelists have developed approaches in this direction, but no doubt other forms could be developed. I believe that the homogeneous unit strategy will serve to reach recently arrived Hispanic immigrants more effectively than a strategy based on a multicultural approach.

The following proposal is a strategy for small groups that I have used effectively in evangelistic ministries among recently arrived immigrants to the United States (Martin 2015:173–201). Christian families are trained on how to attract their relatives and friends to a Bible study about family issues. Rather than a lecture, the study is a guided discussion on selected issues based on the Bible. Non-believers are encouraged to express their opinions. The small group uses study guides. The presence of strangers may affect the quality of the dialogue, so this should be offered to the inner circle of people from their own social group. In about ten sessions, the discussion switches from family issues only to family issues related to salvation. Once the studies, including salvation, are covered, the group will be ready to cover other biblical doctrines. When family leaders are converted or a substantial number have made a commitment to Christ, the group is ready to join regular church services or an evangelistic series covering deeper doctrinal subjects. The new converts are then trained to repeat the process in different places and with different people. Again, this approach may easily work as a follow-up of evangelistic activities during Easter.

Many Hispanics come to the United States in search of a better life, but they need to find the way to true life, and “that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10). Their religious background may be a stepping stone to the evangelical message. They may respond favorably to the gospel if it is presented in a positive, sensitive way. Most church members need to be trained on how to share the good news with immigrants who come to our own backyard. They are “white unto harvest” (John 4:35).

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I was hoping for a peaceful afternoon, but two rambunctious toddlers were clambering across the sofa and fighting to sit next to me. One child broke his brother’s toy, and I had to coax the guilty party to apologize. They made peace and soon were zipping around the room at speeds that nearly gave me a headache. When they started their second shouting match, that’s when I made the decision: I’m leaving. They saw me pick up my bag and begged for me to stay. I felt a twinge of guilt, but quickly brushed it off.

After all, they are not even my kids.

In my work as an overseas missionary, I often play surrogate mother to children in my target community. I love children, and yet I love that I can leave them with their parents at the end of the day. The fact that children seem to gravitate towards me has led many people to ask why I do not have little ones of my own. It’s a fair question. I’m in my late 20s, happily married, and yet have shown no signs of fluffing the baby nest. I know I’m not the only one who is childless by choice. Likewise, I know I’m not the only childless woman who is constantly peppered with comments, questions, and suggestions about motherhood that in the end, only make us feel substandard, defeminized, and misunderstood. I am writing this article on behalf of the many Adventist women who, like me, struggle against discrimination and judgmental attitudes within and without the church for choosing not to create progeny.

As childless women, we have to contend with a constant stream of misunderstanding. Some well-meaning church members may ask if we’ve seen a doctor, wondering if there may be some medical dysfunction in either my husband or me. Truth be told, the doctor would most likely roll his eyes and tell us to stop using contraception, but I can’t tell that to the lovely, white-haired ladies that suggest such checkups.
Another misconception about childless women is that we have some dark skeleton in the closet. Perhaps we were abused as children, and have deep emotional scars that we don’t want to pass on to our little ones. While this may be the case with some women, it is not my reality, and only makes me feel uncomfortable when people insinuate it. How much more uncomfortable would I feel if this really were my reality? Let us be careful how we address childless women.

Another misunderstanding views childless women as spiritually immature or selfish. At a recent Christmas party where Adventist missionaries from our district gathered together to celebrate the season, a well-meaning colleague struck up “the conversation.” It usually begins as light banter, with jokes about “when are you going to have your own,” “it’s not too late yet,” and “you still have plenty of time,” but eventually it gets more difficult to ward off the pressure, especially when Ellen White enters the picture.

“Ellen White has so much to say about how children perfect your character,” my colleague, mother of two children, told me with deep concern. “I’ve seen in my own life how they truly complete me. It’s a wonderful experience that helps us to grow spiritually. Mrs. White is so clear about a woman’s role being primarily as a wife and mother—without children, you can never really reach your full potential as a woman.”

Having a deep love and respect for the words of Ellen White, I was not unfamiliar with the concepts my colleague was sharing. But the barb among the roses was a suggestion that I am somehow only quasi-female without children, and can only attain to a partial level of character growth without them.

“Yes, I read that,” I responded. “But her concepts on motherhood are multifaceted, because in the book Adventist Home, Ellen White writes that a childless couple becomes a selfish couple (1973:159). But in the exact same book, she also writes that missionaries should have small families or no children at all (165, 169). So, I guess you could understand it both ways. Maybe our ministry functions in the same way as children, to perfect our characters. If we are constantly giving to those we serve, the ministry can keep us from becoming selfish.” My friend, undeterred, suggested that I think more about motherhood—after all, I still have time.

Today’s medical conventions are helping women to successfully bear children even into their 40s. It may be that in the future, my husband and I will decide to create our own little flock. But for now, we are fully immersed in mission work for people who have never heard the gospel. To have a child would be irresponsible on our part, either the work would receive decreased attention, or the child would.

I think of the heroic missionary William Carey, lauded as the “Father of
Modern Missions.” What the exciting missionary volumes usually don’t bring out about his life is that during his 41 years in India, Carey’s four children were horribly neglected and wild. Carey’s wife, suffering from mental dementia, was unable to give them the appropriate attention that they needed, and Carey himself was so absorbed in his labors to translate the Bible and expand the borders of Christianity that very little effort went into shaping his children’s characters. It is only because other missionary wives stepped in to fill the gap that his oldest son, Felix, ever became a preacher—indeed, it was a miracle that he became anything more than a wild “tiger,” as he was described in his childhood years. Many missionary families have successfully reared well-adjusted children in overseas contexts, but many others have been disappointed at how their busy missionary lifestyle has shaped (or misshaped) their sons and daughters. Whether or not to have children while ministering overseas is a question that deserves the utmost caution—and it cannot be answered for you by anyone else. No one from the church, family, or mission compound can look in from the outside and successfully judge your temperament to know how well you would be able to simultaneously juggle these two all-absorbing life callings.

Bearing children in mission contexts is not merely a question about “do you want children?” Of course I want children. Don’t you think that when I see billboards with chubby-cheeked babies, I yearn to hold one in my own arms? Don’t you think that when I hold your baby, I imagine what it would feel like to grow a little life in my womb, to feed it from my own body, to watch it look up to me in utter trust and dependence? No, I don’t have any medical problems, skeletons in the closet, or spiritual malfunctions. At the end of the day, I am a woman, and I do have deep, sometimes irrepressible urges to motherhood.

But I’ve also experienced a calling. And that calling to evangelize the lost comes before any other consideration in my life.

Have you ever had to give up something that you deeply desired for the sake of doing God’s will for your life? A certain relationship, or career path, or cherished activity? Then you know how difficult it can be to surrender what God is asking for. Please don’t make it harder for me and other women like me to keep our Isaac on the altar. Other childless women in your church or mission context may have different reasons, but don’t forget that we are all women, and this topic is one of the most sensitive that can be discussed. Please don’t joke with us or make sly comments. Please don’t try to counsel us if we didn’t ask for it.

I have had fellow missionaries tell me that I will be an ineffective witness if I do not have children, since, presumably, women in this part of the world will never listen to my advice if I cannot demonstrate my
competency as a mother. These kinds of messages are not to be found in either Scripture or in the Spirit of Prophecy, nor have they been proven in any kind of longitudinal study that compares the long-term ministry effectiveness of childless women versus mothers. Until academic studies or the scriptural witness can even begin to suggest that missionary mothers are significantly more effective in ministry than childless missionary women, I can only interpret these messages as a form of discrimination.

I have truly appreciated how the Adventist Church has made ground-breaking advances in providing for special needs individuals, such as the blind, deaf, and physically handicapped. They are different, but we lovingly accept them just as they are. Adventist churches open their doors to black, white, Hispanic, Asian, and Arab members. We are a global family with a level of inclusiveness that makes everyone feel at home. Please, let’s make sure not to judge or push our opinions on childless women, either in the mission field or in our local churches at home. They each have a story, but tread softly because for all the plastic smiles we paste on, it really is sensitive ground.

Now, with that matter discussed, let’s get back to the fun part. If you have children of your own, we would be more than happy to take them for a twirl on the merry-go-round while you finish your potluck lunch. And when they are sweaty, exhausted, and hungry, we’ll give them back and thank you for letting us have a good time with them. Secretly, the childless woman in your church or mission context may be wishing for her own sweaty little munchkin to take home, but then again, maybe not. In the end, it’s not really your business to know.

Works Cited

Book Review

Paulo Cândido de Oliveira

Charles E. Van Engen, Ed.
*The State of Missiology Today: Global Innovations in Christian Witness*
Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016
pp. 304  US$ 31,50 (IVP website)

In 2015, Fuller Theological Seminary organized a conference to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the School of Intercultural Studies (SIS), former School of World Mission (SWM). *The State of Missiology Today* is the result of the proceedings of that conference. The aim of the book is to celebrate the missiological vision and innovations of Donald A. McGavran (specially his work *The Bridges of God*) and associates in the influential SWM. At the same time, it proposes future directions of missiological engagement projecting from present converging themes weaved throughout the book. The identified “trends” are not intended to be comprehensive; still, it serves well as a springboard.

The list of authors reflects the ecumenical and global perspective that Fuller believes is the current missiological milieu. The
result is a multicultural, polycentric and polyphonic collection of articles that readers shall find helpful. The title is somehow misleading since the book has no intention to cover and evaluate the current state of the field in a global dimension *per se*. Readers must bear that in mind.

The book is divided in two parts. The first section celebrates the vision and innovations of McGavran and associates in the SWM showing diffusion innovations that sprang from their work. A general introduction to the work is written by Charles Van Engen and frames the conversation as looking back to evaluate and reflect on the theories, paradigms and models produced through the school. Noteworthy, in this first part, is the article by European scholar Pascal Bazzell and the question of encounters with other faiths and whether *evangelization* includes being *evangelized*. What would it mean for an Adventist mission? The second part looks at current arguments for the field casting the directions of what lays ahead for missiology.

The book overall result is a variety of missiological perspectives that is not comprehensive but helpful for a taste of contemporary wider missiological thinking in Christianity. Furthermore, it reflects diverse possibilities for missiological studies. Some might think that it is too loose and does not come to a conclusion of “the” state of missiology. However, it precisely reflects the nature of mission studies in transition as it moves away from a modern to a postmodern missiological paradigm, as David Bosch has argued. Yet, it is in the conclusion that I judge the work drives the most stimulating material for the student of mission.

If in the introduction Van Engen looks backwards, in the conclusion current Dean of the SIS and mission historian Scott W. Sunquist draws from the collection of articles to compile eight trends to guide the future of missiology. They are (1) technology, (2) insider movements, (3) preemptive peacemakers, (4) scripture, (5) migration and displacement, (6) Holy Spirit, (7) poverty and promise, and (8) mission from the South to the East. Are these the only trends and themes in missiology today? Certainly not, as the book does not claim comprehensiveness or completeness, but it serves well as a springboard. At least two elements are clear from the readings. Mission is moving away from numerical gains and the “how-to” towards kingdom living witness among peoples. This transition reflects the frustration with ready-made methods in favor of more spiritual one in which the central driving force is the often unsettling guidance of the Holy Spirit in context. The other connected converging theme is the refocus of mission as an action of God. This reflects further maturity of the understanding and implications of the *missio Dei*, which has been largely accepted across the board in global Christianity. Adventist missiologists would do well to ask questions concerning the implications of such trends
for Adventist missiology. Furthermore, what are possible contributions from an Adventist mission perspective to the wider Christian conversation?

This book collection of articles will benefit the student of mission in different stages of academic journey. It is well-organized and relevant with voices from different Christian traditions and from various parts of the world. It is not a textbook, but a panoramic view of contemporary concerns and approaches in mission studies.

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A culture can no longer be an island to itself and without crossing cultural boundaries, one can no longer be relevant. We now live in a global world. Cultural diversity does bring benefit to the world of business and to churches. However, diversity in culture also brings confusion, misunderstanding, and unnecessary conflict. Businesses can suffer if there is not good communication or understanding of the similarities and differences between coworkers or clients. The church is an institution that is supposed to embrace diversity, but that diversity can also create conflict if there is a lack of understanding of cultural similarities and differences.

To minimize the breakdown in communication and working relationships in the business world, Erin Meyer has done extensive research in many countries to identify continuums of a cultural map where people can visually
identify differences and similarities between countries and cultures in eight areas: communication, feedback, persuasion, leading, deciding, trust, disagreements, and the management of time. This map can be used to identify where different cultures fall relative to other cultures to help people navigate and adapt to the cultural differences.

The benefits of understanding these continuums of differences in eight cultural areas can not only help people in business but also in church settings better navigate an increasingly global world and can encourage bridge building between cultures to better facilitate business and church activities.

Leaders have always needed to understand human nature and personality differences to be successful in business—that’s nothing new. What’s new is the requirement for twenty-first century leaders to be prepared to understand a wider, richer array of work styles than ever before and to be able to determine what aspects of an interaction are simply a result of personality and which are a result of differences in cultural perspective. (Meyer 2014:143)

With such an understanding of human and cultural differences, one can be a much more effective leader in today’s world. I highly recommend this book to all leaders who work with people from diverse cultures.