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**JAMS**  
Journal of Adventist Mission Studies Vol. 6, No 1, Spring 2010

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JAMS is a peer reviewed journal, published in May and November by the international Fellowship of Adventist Mission Studies, Berrien Springs, MI 49104-1500

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Editorial

This issue of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* contains several articles that discuss challenging or restrictive situations the church faces in society. Fatal Flirting: The Nazi State and the Seventh-day Adventist Church looks at the danger of placing too high a priority on maintaining the structure of the church in the face of a repressive regime. Shaking Hands with the (D)evil: Adventism and Communism chronicles some of the ways a communist government seeks to divide, weaken, and ultimately destroy Christian faith. The interview with Pastor Isaiah also offers insight into the difficulties of fulfilling the gospel commission in communist Vietnam. Rebekah Liu’s Viewpoint offers additional insight into the dangers of using questionable methods to draw people into membership as she examines several aspects of the history of Adventism in China.

Not all the challenges the church faces are government related, for unfortunately within the church there are still women and men who reflect the race, ethnic, and tribal issues of society. Recent events in Rwanda and Kenya illustrate the ugly human side of life that resulted in Adventists killing Adventists on the basis of tribal loyalties and pressures. Even when race, ethnicity, or tribal loyalties do not result in violence, they often discriminate against equal access to education and advancement in the Church.

Is it possible that Adventists are so concerned with teaching the distinctive doctrines of the church that they have neglected to teach adequately on the implications of being a new creation in Jesus Christ? Why is it that a growing number of Adventist young people are entering the military with little if any thought of the consequences that they will be called on to kill and destroy human life? Why has noncombatancy waned within the United States? Why are issues of poverty, injustice, and suffering not given higher prominence in Adventism? Kabena Donkor looks at these topics as he reflects on how Adventists have related to these societal issues.

David Shenk offers case studies that illustrate the positive results that can occur when the Body of Christ stresses reconciliation and what can happen when good biblical teaching stresses the importance of peaceful coexistence. Adventists could learn much from our Mennonite friends in this vital area.

This issue marks the beginning of the sixth year for the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*. Along with a new look the editorial staff welcomes Danica Kulemeka as the graphic designer and Abraham Guerrero as the managing editor.

Bruce L. Bauer, Editor
It is estimated that a staggering 55 million people perished during WW II, including the six million Jews—men, women, and children—who died in the ethnic extermination camps and ghettos across Europe (US Holocaust Museum:2008). This essay is divided into four sections, beginning with a quick overview of the historical aspects of the Nazi Regime, followed by events in the Christian churches in Germany, then looking at the interactions of the Nazi State and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and concluding with some of the lessons learned from this sad chapter of Adventist history so that hopefully our church will not stumble again over the same issues in the future.

In the history of human achievement it is easy to find much to create wonder and amazement at the potential for good in people. However, the dark pages of humanity’s history can also quickly deflate any illusions of perfection and remind us of humanity’s ability to inflict pain and suffering. Perhaps by reviewing our sordid past, we can learn not to commit the same mistakes and perhaps in the future write more pages for good than for evil.

The Nazi State

When reflecting on the causes for the Holocaust one must not divorce the incident itself from the many diverse elements that surrounded this phenomenon. This infamous occurrence in history was not the result of an isolated and vacuous in-vitro conception. Saul Friedlander makes a poignant evaluation of this reality when he states that “the ‘History of the Holocaust’ cannot be limited only to a recounting of German policies, decisions, and measurements that led to this most systematic and sustained of genocides; it must include the reactions (and at times the initiatives) of the surrounding world” (2007:xv). Therefore it is valid to state that the Holocaust was just the apex of a series of events, currents of thought, phi-
losophies, laws, and diverse elements that tragically converged to create this horrid story.

One of the elements fueling the fires of the Holocaust was a pervasive anti-Semitic worldview that expressed itself concretely in various policies enacted by the Nazi Government from 1933 to 1939. A careful scrutiny of these policies allows one to divide them into two basic viewpoints: intentionalist and functionalist (Friedlander 1989:11–18). These viewpoints differentiate themselves in the interpretation they give to the intention behind Nazi rule and its dealing with the Jews, and the ultimate outcome of the policies in the infamous Final Solution.

Functionalists view the Final Solution as an evolving process within the Nazi regime. For them the Nazi government started its ethnic cleansing with non-murderous intentions, however, once the regime ran out of ideas on how to deal with the Jews that they had rounded up, they inevitably arrived at the decision to exterminate them (Friedlander 1989:11-18). Contrary to this approach is a second view that assumes that the final solution was planned and executed masterfully by the Nazi party from the very beginning of its rise to power (1989:11-18). However, considering Hitler’s anti-Semitic vitriol openly expressed in his master work Mein Kampf years before his ascension to power (Schleunes 1989:58), the second view seems more plausible. Nevertheless, regardless of which viewpoint one might feel inclined to believe, the end result was the same—the extermination of one third of the Jewish population in Europe.

When the Nazi administration came to power in 1933 its legislation reflected its racial worldview. The promulgation of laws such as the Aryan Paragraph that segregated the population based on race and limited the number of Jews in civil and professional services was followed by the Nuremberg Laws that provided the legal framework that allowed the final banishment of Jews from all professional realms. These laws were just the visible results of a long sustained racist ideology that pervaded the country at the time.

What catches one’s attention about this particular era is that these policies and restrictions against the Jews were not imposed by the government at gun point, nor were they forced upon the general population; on the contrary, they were approved by the people of Germany in diverse plebiscites, and the overwhelming majority of the people of Germany simply did not see a problem with these laws or with the racial worldview of the state. As long as the Jewish problem was taken care of in an orderly manner within the confines of the law, the majority of the population was satisfied with the recommended solutions. There was almost no reaction from the population regarding the immoral and unjust nature of the treatment that Jews received. “Popular opinion, largely indifferent and infused with a
latent anti-Jewish feeling further bolstered by propaganda, provided the climate within which spiraling Nazi aggression towards Jews could take place unchallenged” (Kershaw 1983:288). As war broke out in 1939, the rest of the story is all too well known.

**The Christian Churches**

There is a sad paradox that must be considered before delving into the second section of this short essay. The enacted racial legislation was supported by the majority of the population and that majority had one particular characteristic in common: “The Germany that Hitler led remained 95 percent Christian and 55 percent Protestant” (Ericksen 1999:22). It is staggering to consider these numbers in the general scheme of things. It was Christians who voted Hitler into power and it was the same Christians who praised his arrival in 1933 to the chancellery as a new beginning and renewal of hope for Christianity in spite of his racial tirades. It was Christians who stood idly by as the rights of the Jewish minority that had contributed so much to German culture were stripped away with very little or no protest by the Christian majority.

In his book *Theologians under Hitler*, Robert Ericksen analyzes the thoughts of three of the most prominent German theologians of that era as examples of the widespread warped Christian ideological support the churches gave to the government initiatives (Ericksen 1985).

**Paul Althaus** welcomed the rise of Hitler as a miraculous turning point from the hands of God (Althaus 1999:24, 25). Althaus was a pioneer in the concept of Volk, referring to a closed community of people united by blood and soul. He tied this notion to the church and its importance in the preservation of the nation, a community preserved by pure bloodlines and biological unity (Althaus 1999:25). This concept was developed mainly as a response to the opposition that some of the Marburg Theological Faculty had with the Aryan Paragraph (Ericksen 1999:25). After 1938, however, Althaus did refrain from making any additional open endorsements of the regime. However, he was never known to be vocal about denouncing the governmental abuses against the Jews (1999:25).

**Emanuel Hirsch**’s stance in favor of the regime was much more aggressive than that of Althaus. He was a supportive member of the Nazi Party, and never once toned down his comments in favor of the Nazi regime even after 1938 or by 1945 (Ericksen 1999:26). His theological views were strongly mixed with a strong nationalism that seemed to be the dangerous cocktail that led Hirsch to adopt the racial theology of the German National Church and allowed him to embrace the Aryan Paragraph. He argued that Christians of Jewish descent had no place in the reconstruction of Germany (1999:28). His beliefs went so far to ascribe and defend
the ludicrous idea that Jesus was not a Jew, but was really Aryan (1999:28). Robert Ericksen summarizes Hirsch’s position when he states:

He cannot have been unaware of the brutal anti-Semitic rhetoric of the National Socialism when he gave his enthusiastic support to Hitler. When the Deutsche Christen advocated the Aryan Paragraph and consequently shrugged [off] widespread opposition, he took their side. When Jewish colleagues were removed at Gottingen University, he raised no protest, at no time before or after 1945 did he indicate convincingly that the anti-Semitism of the Hitler era violated his wishes. (1999:31, emphasis mine)

Gerhard Kittel is known for being the main editor for the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament in ten volumes. Though he was not as vocal or philosophical as the two aforementioned scholars, he also joined the National Socialist German Workers Party and aided the Nazi cause. Contrary to Althaus or Hirsch, Kittel did not adhere to the view that placed the Old Testament against the New Testament; however, of the three theologians, his rhetoric regarding spiritual anti-Semitism was the most open. In spite of an apparently respectful and even admiring attitude towards the Jews and the Old Testament before 1933, Kittel spent the following decades after 1933 arguing for a difference between the Jews of the Old Testament and the modern day Jews as a way to salvage his personal admiration for the Old Testament while sustaining his stance in favor of the ideology of the State (Ericksen 1999:34).

This cursory observation of the views espoused by the aforementioned theologians, allows us to draw a somewhat accurate picture of the generalized sentiment within Christianity during the pre-war years. Granted, it would be somewhat unfair and almost too simplistic to attribute solely to them the molding and influencing of every single mind in the Christian Church in Germany. However, it is safe to infer that along with other factors contributing to the racial worldview of Germany, these influential men within the sphere of the church contributed in strengthening the prejudices of the nation and the church with the weight of their opinions, and that as seminary professors and as renowned scholarly figures of the German theological world, their thoughts and ideas influenced the clergy and the members of the church, thus giving them responsibility for the connection of Christianity and the Holocaust. By supporting their ideas with a purported scriptural basis they endorsed the state in its actions.

However in all fairness, in spite of an apparent hegemony of opinion in favor of the Reich among Christian churches there were some who
opposed the Nazi government. One of the most renowned is the case of the Confessing Church that stood up to the intrusion of the Nazi State in church matters, particularly in the case of the Aryan Paragraph’s racial intent of eliminating Jews from holding clerical office and/or being members of the church. After the German elections of 1933, some pastors formed the ‘Pastor’s Emergency League’ that would come to be the basis of the ‘Confessing Church’ (Baranowski 1999:96). The Confessing Church’s main concern was the government’s interference in ecclesiastical matters, and yet it also had a blind side to its protest. Shelly Baranowski accurately describes this situation:

Thus, the efforts of oppositional pastors and theologians to stop the German Christians from ‘Aryanizing’ the Evangelical Church—that is, expelling pastors, church officers, and parishioners with Jewish blood—could not conceal the instinctive anti-Semitism that continually prevented the Confessing Church from challenging anti-Jewish persecution, both within the church and without. Like most conservative groups the Confessing Church supported the National Socialist Regime as long as it respected the position of the institutions that had traditionally buttressed German politics and culture. (1999:91)

The Confessing Church stood firmly and rightly in the belief that the state could not usurp ecclesiastical prerogatives and dictate what happened inside the confines of the church, nor could it stipulate who could or could not be a pastor or a member of the church. However the problem with the Confessing Church was that it did not take its remonstration a step further decrying the anti-Semitism undergirding the policies of the Nazi regime. The abuse of power was protested; the overstepping of boundaries was decried; yet the greater issue was left unsolved and unaddressed. It seems that the error of the Confessing Church was similar to that of the Abolitionists in the years of the American anti-slavery movement: their victory got rid of slavery but it did not address the root of slavery, racism. The state’s motivations—power, greed, and racial hate—for infringing on the church’s prerogatives were blind spots for the Confessing Church. Jews could be baptized into the church; but they were still viewed differently because they were Jews. A popular cartoon of the time summarizes the sentiment in a crass attempt of humor as it portrays a Jewish couple leaving a church with the caption “Baptism can make a Christian but cannot straighten a nose.”

Not only did the Confessing Church raise its voice in protest when the State overstepped its boundaries, but the Catholic Church almost single
handedly opposed the ‘Mercy Killing’ laws of the Nazi Party. In 1939, the laws were put into effect “to get rid of unworthy life.” These directives were approved in secret by the government, but somehow became public. It was at this point that Archbishop Van Galen is known to have opposed the policies, denouncing them in a sermon that was distributed across Germany. He was not alone in this crusade, as the Archbishop Worm of Guttenberg also openly denounced euthanasia. The Nazi regime, wanting to keep the peace at all cost, backed off from the policy. The protesters in this case were not executed, they were placed under house arrest; however, when their parish members protested, they were set free and the archbishops were reinstated to their parishes (Ericksen 2007).

Thus we can observe that the population was not forced, obligated, coerced, nor threatened to collaborate with the regime’s laws, at least during the pre-war years. The Christian population simply accepted the philosophy of the state, blindly and without questioning it. The church protested when it saw some abuse of power in regards to organizational interference, yet was silent when the anti-Jewish policies were enacted. It is mind boggling to attempt to understand how the hermeneutical contortions of the leading theologians could excuse and even legitimize such actions against any human being; and yet history sadly attests that it happened. The question we need to ask is: In all this, where did the Seventh-day Adventist Church stand?

**The Seventh-day Adventist Church and the State**

Following in the footsteps of the Christian majority, the Seventh-day Adventist Church cannot be commended for its actions during the Nazi Regime. Echoing the praises for the rise of Hitler to power, Adolf Minck, President of the Adventist German Church, penned his satisfaction with the election of Adolf Hitler in the August Edition of *Advenbote* (the official periodical of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Germany at that time): “A fresh enlivening, and renewing reformation spirit is blowing through our German lands . . . this is a time of decision, a time of such opportunities for a believing youth as has not been for a long time . . . The word of God and Christianity shall be restored to a place of honor” (Minck 1994:259). Another example expressing enthusiasm for the Nazi state was Wilhem Mueller who went so far as to label Hitler as “chosen by God” for the office of chancellor and praising his similarity with Adventism’s health reform: “As an anti-alcoholic, non-smoker, [and] a vegetarian he is closer to our own view of health reform than anybody else” (Mueller 1994:260).

Not only did the Seventh-day Adventist leadership sing praises to the Nazi government, it even went so far as “strongly recommending” how its members were to vote in every plebiscite of the Nazi Regime. Notice the
case of Georg Durolf, president of the Rhenish Conference. In connection
with the November 12, 1933 plebiscite that proposed the removal of Ger-
many from the League of Nations, Durolf wrote in a circular sent out to all
churches of the Rhenish Conference saying it was necessary to view things
not as a party issue but as the right attitude toward government, thus it
was the duty of the minister to “give appropriate guidance in the matter”
(Durolf 1994:261). Sadly, in spite of all the praise and official stance that
the church took in favor of the government, the Nazi state decided to ban
the Adventist Church on November 26, 1933. This ban lasted until Decem-
ber 6, 1933 (Blaich 1994:262).

The Adventist Church’s pro-government PR campaign became much
more aggressive after the ban. It went on to support the notion of the
Volkisch state, ascribing validity to that idea and saying it was in accor-
dance with biblical principles. In the December 1933 edition of Gegen-
vartsfragen, one of the Adventist periodicals, it proudly proclaimed that
“we are part of this revolution as well—as individual Christians and also
as a corporate denominational body” (Blaich 1994:264). This type of en-
thusiastic approval of the state was not an isolated incident. The accep-
tance of the Volk concept with its racial undertones, its ideology of ethnic
purity, and its implicit proscription of the Jews due to their racial heritage
was accepted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church as part of the gos-
pel proclamation. A church writer stated: “The Volk when organized . . .
forms a Volksgemeinschaft or ethnic community, and Adventists should
be among the very best members of such a community (Sinz 1977:17).

The adoption of this viewpoint as part of Seventh-day Adventist
thought was mixed with the church’s characteristic health message as a
means to court the state and to gain favor with it. “While continuing the
traditional emphasis on healthful living, Adventist publications soon ad-
opted elements of the Nazi racial agenda. . . . A curious path led from
caritas, the caring for the less fortunate and weak, to elimination of the
weak, as the work of God” (Blaich 2002:180). The “positive” result of these
changes was the “mainstreaming” of Adventism as the State promoted
healthy living and family values through church publications. Neverthe-
less slowly but surely the Adventist health message adopted the volk un-
dertones, giving it a twist and changing the original intent of health reform,
morphing it into what the state dictated and not what Scripture taught.
The church leadership was aware of this twisting of terms and meanings.
G. W. Schubert, vice-president of the German Adventist Church, shared
his “faint hope” with a fellow vice-President of the General Conference of
Seventh-day Adventists that “perhaps this might be the way of the Lord
to get the same freedom later on for the distribution of our religious litera-
ture” (Blaich 2002:182). That freedom never came and time proved that the
compromise was not to be “the way of the Lord.”

The church’s guidance in voting increased in the years following the ban. For the plebiscite of April 10, 1938, which validated the annexation of Austria and the later invasions of the Rhineland, the church leadership decided that it would be good to illuminate the decisions of the Adventist voters. In a circular passed around on April 4, 1938, the German Union recommended that Adventists hand the Fuhrer “a thankful ‘yes’” (Blaich 1994:265).

Furthering its compromise the Adventist Church also agreed with the forced sterilization policy, also known as the Eugenics Laws (Blaich 2002:176). At first the opposition to such policies was open and general among the church members and leadership as it was viewed to be a violation of Christian principles. However in response to this resistance the government responded with an educational campaign that used Adventist journals to defend the new eugenics laws. Again, hermeneutical acrobatics were used to defend the government’s position that was based on principles that were completely antagonistic to Adventist beliefs. The farfetched explanation suggested the notion that Christians should “not [be] interfering with nature’s process of cleansing the nation’s racial pool” (Blaich 2002:177).

As the eugenics policies became law the opposition to such concepts and legislation was silenced from Adventist publications. Sterilization was only a first step in this racial attack; the next step involved the elimination of those who were deemed to be hazardous elements to the German gene pool. Those who opposed euthanasia were Catholics and Lutherans, while Adventists remained silent (Blaich 2002:180).

The church’s public endorsement of the Nazi regime continued as late as 1941 when Adolf Minck wrote, in a June 24 letter to the Gauleiter (District Leader of Nazi Germany who served as a provincial governor) of Danzig-Westpreussen: “At this occasion I may once again assure you that the members of our denomination stand loyally by the Fuhrer and the Reich. They are continually encouraged and supported in their basic attitude. The leadership of the denomination considers this as one of its most noble duties” (Minck 1994:264). These demonstrations of loyalty however did not satisfy the state, and its pressure grew even greater on the church especially in the issue of Sabbath keeping. The church appealed to its long championed principle of religious freedom to no avail. In the Rhineland members were pressured to work on Sabbath, especially in industries pertaining to the war. Adolf Minck was called to the central Gestapo offices, and was persuaded to address the issue. As a result the leadership of the Adventist Church recommended that their members should submit to the authorities and not bring any problems among themselves or the church
(Blaich 1994:270). As the state regulations against religion increased year after year, the church obeyed them closely in order to avoid a second banishment at the hands of the regime (Pratt 1977:4).

An assessment of the situation during those years is difficult. The support and obedience given to the regime allowed the church to function in some areas and to maintain some sort of structural simile at a time when many organizations were not permitted to operate unless they conformed to the regime. The Seventh-day Adventist sanitariums were still operational during the pre-war years and even during the war. There was a constant tension with fulfilling the mission of the church, complying with the state, and maintaining the structural organization of the church. Ronald Blaich describes the tension accurately stating: “While the church had little choice but to conform to Nazi standards if it wanted to publish . . . it is also clear that German Adventist leaders eagerly courted Nazi goodwill by accommodating to the new order” (2002:181).

After the war, the Adventist German leadership reacted by closing ranks and resisted all outside pressures from the General Conference to denounce or proscribe their perceived errors. It appears that the actions taken were wholly justified by the German leadership. In a letter to the General Conference President, J. L. McElhany, Adolf Minck expressed this sentiment of self-defense by rationalizing that they had followed church policy, they had maintained the structure of the church, and also that they had had to adapt to living the commandments according to the times they lived in, times of war, and not peace, nonetheless maintaining in their minds the holiness of the Decalogue (Minck 1994:277).

**Lessons Learned**

It seems clear that during this sinister and sordid period of history, the Christian church as a whole cannot claim to be completely blameless for the “blood of the innocent.” To illustrate the situation an analogy will be used of a young woman, virtuous, beautiful, and prized. This young lady one day decided to flirt with a man other than her fiancé; a man who seemed strong and powerful, and who promised to make her distressful situation better. The flirting increased, and soon the young lady found herself asking for favors from this man and in gratified payment she slowly but surely gave away her chastity and virtue. One day she found herself lying naked and withered, used and abandoned by the man who promised her the world but who only used her for his own selfish gain. The imagery might be a little harsh; however, it is the same imagery that the Scriptures use to portray deviation from principle and the compromising of God’s people throughout history with surrounding political currents.

Christians in general viewed Hitler as a leader and the Nazi Party as
a solution to the ongoing liberalism that had characterized the Weimar Republic. Nevertheless there were a few voices that disagreed with this hopeful view of the Nazi regime. According to Doris Bergen, “Most Christians in Germany did not share Bonhoeffer’s conviction about the fundamental opposition between those two worldviews, but hard-core Nazi leaders did. Martin Bormann and Heinrich Himmler; as well as Adolf Hitler himself, considered Nazism and Christianity irreconcilable antagonists” (Bergen 1996:1). And this is the deep irony in this particular story, a sad lampoon in which the churches compromised their virtue with the most antagonistic and anti-Christian power they could have compromised with. God’s bride danced with the Devil.

There are a few other lessons for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to learn from these dark pages of our history. It seemed that the church found itself being pulled from three different directions: the desire to carry out its mission, the need to please the state and avoid its demise, and the wish to keep its organizational structure intact. At some point, between the notion of announcing the Kingdom of God and rendering to Caesar that which was Hitler’s, it saw a third important element so decided that the best way to serve God was to maintain its organizational structure. In order to maintain the structure it compromised its principles, and this series of concessions grew out of a malady that can be labeled “organizationalism” that has as its main purpose and focus a compulsion to save the organized structure at all costs. It was this urge that drove church leadership to sell out and ignore the reality of the atrocities that the state was perpetrating under the cloak of national reform. “The leadership of the Adventist church in Germany though possibly unaware of the full dimension of the mass murder of millions of Jews, kept not only silent in view of the persecution of Jews but even agreed to propagate anti-Semitic thoughts and ideas in their official publications. This strategy was in line with the church leaders’ deliberate pursuit of adopting a plan to ensure the survival of the church organization” (Heinz 2002:193). Some would rationalize that this strategy did pay off. After the war was over the Adventist Church had indeed kept its administrative organization intact and was able to recover quite quickly (Blaich 1994:280). The question is what good is it to save the structure if the organization saves it to the detriment of its soul?

Not only did the church suffer from an organizationalism malady, it also became infatuated with Hitler. Hitler stood for conservative family values, was against pornography and prostitution, did not drink or smoke, and was even a vegetarian. He was an Adventist dream come true; what a catch from our young virtuous lady. The church made the mistake of looking at the appearance, while being blinded to the signs of foul play.
that were visible early on in the fascist regime and by Hitler himself. It disregarded reality and was so dazzled by the prospect of becoming part of the mainstream that it ignored and forgot that even though both entities might apparently be standing for one common purpose (i.e., health reform), at the end of the day both institutions had diametrically different and antagonistic motives that propelled the so called common shared purpose. Both worldviews were completely incompatible, and in spite of this the church thought that in complying with the state, it would be preserved. The Nazi government never cared for the church or its well-being and neither did it care for the preservation of the church’s organization. Sicher paints a somber picture when he says that “the presses that had praised the government were stopped, and the paper that had printed them was confiscated; all raw material was needed for the war” (Sicher 1977:19).

The deadly cocktail of national reform combined with a message of patriotism along with a government that espoused family values was too much to say no to; the racist tirades became an acceptable part of the package. It seemed wise to comply with this type of state, in order to obtain strength; a compromise sown in the hopes of preservation. The problem is that the church forgot that its strength comes from God and not from the state; it comes from her bridegroom, Christ. The church forgot that it does not exist in its organizational structure but in its people. It forgot that the mission is to announce the Kingdom of God, or the hour of God’s judgment in accordance with Revelation 14. It should have had no part in echoing the ideologies of a fascist state.

It seemed easier to seek power from the state to carry out the proclamation entrusted to the church, especially when it seems that the church was incapable of achieving its purposes solely on its own power. The problem was that when that transaction occurred, it was the state that grew in power and not the church. The age old principle suggests that when the church and state unite, it is to the detriment of the church rather than the betterment of the state. This has been a somber and sad reality throughout the pages of human history.

I do not wish to vilify the leadership of the church from the comfort and safety of seventy years of hindsight. It is true, those were trying times and the leadership perhaps was taking the best course they could come up with to save the organization. However time, even immediate time, proved the path taken to be a road to perdition rather than a road to salvation, a road that gave the church a raw deal in the end. The Adventist Church would do well never to forget that it should not depend on its structures for its survival, but on its Founder and Bridegroom, Jesus Christ. The church would do well today to be aware and stay vigilant to
the permanent snare of flirting with the state, to understand the lure of seeking protection from governments, to avoid the temptation of enforcing religious principles with the state’s aid and power, rather than proclaiming its standards with the power of God.

The mission and existence of the church does not require the power or the protection of the state; God’s mission only needs the power of God. It is pivotal to remember that it is only to God that the church owes allegiance. At what cost should the church preserve the organization? At what cost should the church join in any way with the state? At the cost of losing its integrity? What is more valuable to the church, its structures or its soul?

The institution should not be about looking good but about being good and keeping its integrity. The reality is that when the church decides to flirt with the state and seeks protection in the arms of government rather than under the wings of the Almighty, it trades the position of the exalted bride of Christ for the role of subservient mistress of the state. The church has no need of the state, it never did, and it never will in order to preach and fulfill the mission given by Christ himself. The church would do well in remembering its history, because only in its past can it find the answers to avoid the same blunders in the future.

Works Cited


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At the 2002 Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS) meetings in Toronto, I was interviewed as a young Adventist scholar. After talking about the situation of the Adventist Church in Romania during Communist times, one participant asked a straightforward question: How could Adventists, especially pastors and administrators, cooperate with the Communist authorities and still have a clear conscience; was it possible to cooperate with the Communists and still be a true Adventist? I offered him the shortest answer possible: it depends. Unfortunately, time did not allow me to unpack that answer. I realized that he, like many others, used a Free World mentality without realizing that people living under a Communist regime have a different worldview. I also understood that I needed more than words and stories to present a realistic and credible picture of the Adventist Church living under a totalitarian regime. I needed documents. However, the Adventist Church in Romania had only a small archive and most of the items were committee minutes. A few years later when the archives of the former secret police in Romania, Securitate, were open for public and academic research, I received accreditation as an external researcher. Browsing through some of the millions of folders and files, I discovered that Securitate had many more files and documents about the Adventist Church during Communist times than the Church did. I decided to spend as much time as I could to research the methods Communists used to influence the life and mission of the Church, and the advantages and disadvantages of the Church’s cooperation with a Communist totalitarian government. This survey may help create a profile of the mentality and strategies used by a Communist regime, a profile that could be helpful for Adventist leaders when having to make decisions regarding situations in totalitarian Communist countries today. This paper presents some of the preliminary results of my research in the Securitate archives in Romania.
Background

The Adventist Church in Romania was persecuted long before Communism by both the government and the Eastern Orthodox Church. The records indicate that different governments treated the Church differently. As long as the National Peasants party was in power they outlawed the Church, while the Liberal party tolerated and even recognized the Church. For example, in 1937 Vlad Mocanu, the Union president, and Mateescu Tanase, the secretary-treasurer, were arrested because the Church collected funds for the needy and the orphans following the war and the famine in Spain. This initiative was considered “illegal” with the result that the leaders were put on trial. The case was finally closed on August 29, 1939 (D6878:67-83; the cited documents follow to the Securitate filing system-file/volume:pages).

Over the years not only have leaders been persecuted but lay people also suffered. In a village, the local elder and several Adventist families were arrested because they did not attend the blessing and dedication of an open-air shrine. They were accused of antinationalism and of spying for foreign governments (D6878:276). The local Orthodox priest, in his report, insisted that the shrine should be considered a national symbol since Romania is a Christian country.

When the first Adventist primary school was opened at Fagaras, the national press commented negatively (D6876:326). Every initiative of the Church was seen as antinational, and an Adventist school was considered a dangerous place for young people to study. The Romanian Orthodox Church was behind many government initiatives against the Catholic or neo-Protestant churches. They pressured the government to restrict their activities and deny them the right to evangelize or speak publicly about their beliefs (D6878:322). Before the 1941 census, Orthodox priests accused the Adventists of telling their friends to declare themselves members of the Church so the total membership would justify official recognition as a religious minority (D6878:326-327).

An interesting document, dated 1941, is a post-card sent by an Adventist member to his church elder where the term “brother” was considered suspect and the secret police began an investigation (D6878:394). In 1941 the government had rejected the support of a violent ultra-nationalist group called “The Brotherhood” (also known as “The Legion” or “The Green Shirts”). The group went from being backed by the government as ultra-nationalists to being hunted with their leaders sentenced to death. It is not difficult to understand why the term brother, used on a postcard, was considered suspicious. The result was an unavoidable overlap between politics and religion.
A Profile of Communism in Romania

A Communist regime considers religion as “the opium of the people.” Their strategy is to reduce a church’s activities to cause it to weaken and die with the final goal to create an atheistic society. However, at the same time they want to be seen by the rest of the world as the promoters of democracy and religious liberty. This contradiction of seeking to destroy religion while at the same time pretending that there was no religious persecution, existed in Romania. The Communist government of Romania used two institutions to attain this goal: the State Department for Religious Affairs and the secret police called the Securitate. The first was supposed to promote religious freedom, while the second was the coercive arm of the state. After taking power, one of the main strategies of the Communists was to create a commission to study each religion and confession in order to understand how it functioned, its strength and weaknesses, so a plan could be devised to destroy each group from the inside. State representatives were sent to live with different Christian families and watch them for three months, after which they presented the conclusions to the State Department for Religious Affairs. The Securitate was supposed to break any resistance against the Communist government by offering only two options: prison, or cooperation. More than 4,000 priests and pastors, regardless of their religious confession, faced this choice during the first years of Communist power, and an estimated 10 percent died in prison. Many agreed to cooperate at the end of their prison time. After 1965, when President Ceausescu declared his independence from Moscow and the former USSR, the prison option became rare but recruiting clergy and lay people as informers for Securitate flourished.

Recruiting Securitate Informers

One of the common recruiting tactics was to send military draft notices or to summon a person to the local police station to check the address on the ID card or some other paper. Others, who submitted requests for a passport or visa to travel outside the country or who requested approval to use a typewriter, were summoned to the Securitate or Internal Affairs Ministry headquarters(D141/12:180). Notice how the process worked: “X is our agent from 1979, and demonstrated sincerity and interest in doing his assignments offering useful information. . . . Because he occupies an important position in the administrative structure of the Adventist Church, we recommend that he get a visa to visit Austria, Switzerland, and the German Federal Republic. . . . He should be checked for any intentions to not return or treason. . . . Instruct him to inform on another agent going on the same trip . . . and on people he will visit in Heidelberg (D141/12:188, 195-196, 251).
Some of those summoned did not even reach the local police station but were approached on the way and invited for talks at the Internal Affairs Ministry headquarters or at a secret location. Some pastors were reprimanded for writing letters to people or institutions outside Romania without first checking with the State Department for Religious Affairs and were threatened with losing their jobs if they did not cooperate. A recruiting session could last up to eight hours and during this time diverse psychological methods were used to apply pressure. However, there were informers eager to cooperate on their own initiative. “X considers his patriotic duty as a true Christian to cooperate in a sincere and loyal way. ...The informer signed the agreement without hesitation, indicating his conscience is at peace, without conflicting his religious beliefs” (R206674 at 04.23.1957).

Excerpts from a Recruiting Report

The scope of the recruitment: An ‘invigoration’ of the Adventist activities has been noticed lately with a greater number of converts, strengthened networking between Adventist churches all around the country, and a number of illegal publications. This situation requires recruiting a good informer who would help us control the activities of the Adventists. We do not have enough informers among Adventists in this county. In the churches it has been noticed that there is an increase in the number of interests drawn by methods such as twisting the Scriptures, scaring people with the teaching about the Second Coming and the end of the world, and by making people distrustful of this life. Some propagate the teachings of the Adventist Reform Movement which is declared illegal in Romania.

Description of the candidate: He is objective and knows the facts. The candidate is a good communicator, with a sharp instinct, very analytical, and one who can act calmly and prudently in difficult situations. He is well prepared professionally and socially.

Place of recruitment: The office of the representative of the State Department for Religious Affairs. The candidate must be convinced that cooperating with us is a very important and noble assignment, which can be given only to serious and devoted people.

A Typical File of an Informer

Other people (especially pastors) cooperated because they sensed an opportunity to climb the hierarchical ladder of the Adventist Church. The following case study is of a pastor who was already part of the conference administration. Initially (1964), he declined the invitation to cooperate, but in 1976 he accepted and is described as sincere, honest, sociable, communicable, changed since 1964 and now encour-
aging parents to send their children to school on Saturday. His knowledge and character places him above his peer pastors, with the perspective to rise to a superior rank at the Union, especially due to the support of the Adventist believers in Teleorman County that represent one of the core groups of Adventist membership.

It was planned that the informer candidate was to be invited to the State Department for Religious Affairs for talks, and on his way back he would be “accosted by chance” and brought to the Securitate office in order to impress and gain advantage over him. “If he would refuse or have doubts, talk to him without strings attached letting him know that we could solve his personal or church problems.” Finally the pastor agreed to sign the contract, adding that he will “keep this a secret and inform regularly.”

In a later report, the contact officer mentions that the pastor reads literature and fiction novels expanding his mind, and is in complete agreement with the Government’s Communist policies. He is nice looking, trustful, and nicely dressed. He says he is tired, overstressed, but otherwise healthy. He is ‘concerned’ by some of his colleagues’ comments that it was better for him to stay as treasurer at the Conference than to move to the Union. Earlier he objected to our request to ‘challenge’ some people to talk about sensitive issues. We decided he was wrong and explained to him that, by the nature of his position, he is required by law to inform us about events that take place, in spite of his will.

The pastor informed freely, even enthusiastically, about colleagues, friends, and people in the Diaspora, often inserting additional information that was not requested by Securitate. Any time there was a chance, he denigrated his colleagues, especially the ones he saw as competitors for administrative positions or those who were better than he. In his reports, some names come up frequently. He makes them seem to say what he wishes or thinks. For example, he is frustrated that one of his colleagues visited the Romanian group at Marienhöhe College in Darmstadt, Germany more often than he did, and is also trusted while he is not. The pastor is incensed that some people consider him an informer and a traitor, and vehemently denies any connection with the secret police when someone asks him publicly and directly about other potential informers. On his way back to Romania he gathered information about the immigrants in the Romanian church in Vienna, Austria. In a report, he informed about the proceedings and talks at the conference constituency meeting (1989).

His last note is dated October 1989, shortly before Communism fell in Romania. This was during the time when mass movements and social and political tensions were occurring in neighboring Communist countries. He indicates that some Adventist believers make “inappropriate” comments regarding the social movements in Hungary, and that he is “deeply
concerned, even indignant,” about such people who manifest an unfit character. He suggests that the government should take action against them [the union constituency meeting was coming soon, and an obedient and supportive attitude toward the government was explainable]. At the end of the report, the contact officer “suggests” that he should nominate those making “inappropriate” comments (R80505:1-19).

Attempts to Control the Diaspora

Some pastors informed about their trips to Western countries and also about Adventists in the Diaspora. Some informers received assignments to infiltrate Romanian Adventist churches in Vienna, Austria, and Darmstadt, Germany. The immigrants were encouraged to meet separately from the host church in order to “better preserve their national identity, to educate and keep them from taking any illegal steps, or publish any type of samizdat or unauthorized publications in order to smuggle it inside Romania.” Plans were made that an informer pastor would try to convince the Diaspora members to invite him and somebody else (probably another person trusted by Securitate) to hold Bible studies and evangelistic meetings inside the United Nations Center for Immigration in Treiskirchen, Austria, so he could have access to and inform about illegal immigration to control it (D141/12:198). The Communist government tried to find out the various ways illegal immigrants used to exit the country (D141/12:200). The Securitate intended to keep Romanian Adventists in the Diaspora dependent on the pastors coming from Romania, and thus maintain control over these groups. The immigrants were supposed to fully trust the Romanian pastors, and were to be convinced that they could not solve their own problems without the help from Romania.

Frequently, such informer pastors would get into trouble because the Diaspora members would recognize their connection with the secret police. Such a case was reported in New York where an informer pastor raised suspicions when he refused to remain in the US when invited by several members of the Romanian community. Even the Securitate officer wrote on the margin: “Should we believe that everybody encouraged him to stay, or is he trying to convince us how devoted he is and how many temptations he overcame in order to return to Romania?” (D141/12:224-225). Recognized and identified as an informer, he had to move to another host family because the initial one did not want to have anything to do with him anymore (D141/12:153).

When people from the Diaspora wanted to send charity gifts to Romania, the informer pastors refused to accept the goods in order to demonstrate that people in Romania had everything they needed at home (D141/12:151).
Any pastor (or lay person) who decided to immigrate would be carefully monitored, and his public image tainted. Such an example is Nicusor Ghitescu, a seminary professor who left the country for a health problem but decided not to return. The Union president himself told the pastors in a meeting that Ghitescu was a liar, and no one should trust him because he had cheated the members, the Conference, the Union, and the Division (D141/2:238). In a letter to the General Conference (GC), the Union president asked them not to employ Ghitescu because he was a traitor. Unfortunately, for a couple of years, the GC followed the Union president’s advice, but in the meantime Ghitescu organized a Romanian group and the local conference finally employed him as a pastor. Another seminary professor, Aristide Doroftei, found himself in a similar situation when the North American Division refused to employ him after receiving letters from the Romanian Union President. Even Jeremiah Florea, the first Romanian pastor called by the GC to organize the Romanian Adventist Diaspora, is described in a very negative way to Robert Pierson, the GC president because he criticized the personality cult of the Union president. Other immigrant pastors were described as “leftovers,” “useless,” “false heroes,” and “cannot be trusted.” However, the same Union president sent positive recommendations for Victor Diaconescu, his friend, who had no problem being employed as a pastor. He even suggested that “trusted” pastors from Romania could be sent, if really needed.

Another case involved George Mateescu, a conference finance controller, who requested permission to immigrate legally. The Securitate ordered the conference to fire him, and also to disfellowship him, in order to discourage others from following his “negative” example. When the conference fired him and he could not find another job because of his official request to immigrate, Mateescu went on a public strike without food, and wrote letters that were aired by radio Free Europe. Finally, he was allowed to leave the country. Even after he immigrated, Securitate made sure he was perceived negatively: “No one talked about him any longer, no one regrets him,” was written in a later report (D141/2:289). Anyone who sent letters to either radio Free Europe, Voice of America, or Deutsche Welle, was included on a list of “undesirable” people in the Ether plan to discredit them in front of their peers.

Not everybody agreed to cooperate with Securitate. Some people refused to become informers. Two Adventist pastors are on record for refusing to provide lists with the names of people attending church services or the names of those who would not send their children to school on Saturday. They also refused to provide their daily pastoral schedule. The pastors replied they would do it only at the union’s request. The State Department for Religious Affairs representative threatened to withdraw...
their ministerial licenses. He asked them to request the union to send their salaries by postal money order (so the government could control their wages, and use that control as a leverage). One of the pastors, the treasurer of the conference, refused saying the union did not instruct them accordingly. Later, another pastor, who agreed to cooperate with Securitate, informed the state that when he tried to get the requested lists directly from the churches, he encountered strong resistance from the local members. The members told him he had no right to do this, that this was not his job. The informer started to preach from the Bible about the duty to obey the government. After the sermon, a member of the church told him he would not provide the information even if he would have to die.

Sometimes informers who initially agreed to provide information decided to step back or openly disobey orders. The records prove that several people were abandoned or excluded from the network of informers. Some continued to send and receive mail from people outside the country. Others deliberately did not communicate information about funds used in the church or in the underground networks. Some people gave only vague information, with no details, so their reports were considered useless. Others avoided the Securitate officers completely, running from them in the street or hiding in stores so they would not be spotted. Most of these people were harassed and threatened, but did not give in.

Securitate’s Strategic Plan for 1982-1983

One of the key documents for understanding how the Securitate worked and their strategy was the annual planning document. The Securitate yearly evaluated their activities and made specific suggestions for the future. For 1982-1983 they suggested that the following items be accomplished:

- Operation Horizon (designed by Ceausescu to use foreigners for presenting a positive picture of Romania) was to be strengthened, since it resulted in a better image of the country in the West. A visit by Bert B. Beach and an article in the Adventist Review, where Romanian Adventists were declared “old-time Adventists,” was quoted as an excellent result of influencing Western entities to present a positive picture of Communist Romania. Plans were made to positively influence future visits in 1983 of C. L. Wilson, B. B. Beach, Maurice Battle, R. Nixon, and R. Neals—from the U.S.A., Burbank Howard—from England, and Edwin Ludescher, Gianfranco Rossi, Pierre Lanares, and Jean Zürcher—from Switzerland. The church had to inform the State Department for Religious Affairs regarding any visit by a foreign representative from the West. The invitation to visit the country had to be issued by the State Department.
In the spring of 1983 there was another specific plan to influence people from Western Europe to indirectly work for them. Jean Zürcher’s visit is detailed, and the plans to tell him what to say after getting back home are clearly spelled out. The delegation to the annual division meeting was also to be instructed along the same lines. Besides the economic, immigration, and religious topics to be addressed, the delegation was supposed to contact Costica Balota, an outspoken Adventist supporting religious freedom in Romania, who was considered hostile by the Communist government because of his letters aired by short-wave radio station Free Europe or sent to the U.S. Congress. The delegates were supposed to encourage him to stop denigrating Romania because of the government may impose restrictions on the free exercise of religion for the Adventist Church.

The strategy included techniques for influencing people, by compromising, misinforming, or discouraging them. Several people considered reactionary and hostile (most of them immigrated later), were to be neutralized and their activity stopped: Octavian Cureteu, Nicușor Ghițescu, Gabriel Isaia, Titu Cazan, E. Burghelea, Costică Balotă, Ene Gheorghe, Geo Caraivan, etc.

Informers with good prospects were to be trained and upgraded for more efficient work. Several pastors from Cluj, Mures, Sibiu, Dolj, and Bacau were listed.

Foreign Adventist students who studied at Romanian Universities were to be contacted and recruited as informers. They were usually well received by Adventist churches and were not suspected of any involvement with Securitate (no one knows for sure if this strategy succeeded).

People who were involved in underground or illegal activities were to be closely monitored. Coconcea Octavian, Grigorescu Corneliu, Sima Constantin, and Neacșu Ion were suspected for producing, multiplying, storing, and distributing “mystical and hostile” (religious) literature.

The recruiting activity was to be accelerated in order to cover all churches and hot spots, and the situation of the 28 Adventists and 29 Reform Movement Adventists spied on was also to be decided. During 1983 22 new Adventists and 12 new Reform Movement Adventists were to be recruited in order to cover the entire network. When the recruiters were not able to find willing people, the officers made up reports and files in order to meet their quotas. People who never collaborated with Securitate are surprised today to find in the archives documents supposedly written by them.

Of great interest were people who had access to the underground
networks. A quarterly evaluation was to be done, with special emphasis on those who had information about “illegal” or “clandestine” activities. For this reason, the pastors (or future pastors) were targeted, and people with authority and influence among church members as well. Special attention was to be given to seminary students, or the potential candidates for administrative positions at the union and conference levels. Every semester the list of seminary students and teachers was requested by Securitate, including the distance education students. Special instructions were given for recruiting every seminary student as an informer (D141/2:112, 118, 119, 126, 127, 130, 131, 138).

• An atmosphere of mistrust, suspicion, dissension, was to be created and maintained among church leaders so they would not work together. Divide et Impera was Securitate’s dictum.

• Very active people (or some they considered “fanatical” but who were evangelistically active), who would decline to cooperate with Securitate, would be contacted openly so church members would become suspicious and distrust them and so they would be isolated and their influence destroyed.

• Articles would be published in the national media describing the “true” intentions of the “fanatical” and “active” Adventists, so they would be discredited, compromised, and rejected by society. The factors that determined church growth were to be studied and strategies and methods devised to “unmask” and annihilate the effects of religious activities. People in factories, social organizations, schools, and institutions had to be informed periodically about these “antisocial” elements.

• For those who would not cooperate, special strategies—like being caught in illegal meetings or activities—would be employed. Special search warrants were issued in order to discover groups meeting on Sabbath in their own homes. Such people would be fined, and even arrested and convicted for petty crimes or felonies.

• Dissident movements were not encouraged to develop because they were difficult to control. The Baptist, Pentecostal, and Brethren churches had a congregational structure, so was much more difficult to control than the pyramidal structure of the Adventist church. A pyramidal structure does not help the church survive under totalitarian regimes or in times of trouble. The documents indicate many suspicious youth activities in other Congregationalist neo-Protestant churches, but none in the Adventist church. The Securitate’s control was efficient, helped by the Adventist church’s structure (D150/5:88). When the “Dew of the Morning,” “TKW,” dissident, or underground Adventist movements appeared, Secu-
ritate made sure all levels of the church were informed and warned, so no new members would be attracted by such groups. The pastors involved were to be kept in public view and were blacklisted so they would not have any influence in the church.

**Control of Church Administrators**

The Communist government tried to control the constituency meetings at all levels of the church. Periodically, lists containing the names of the church boards and the number of members in each church were requested by the State Department and verified by the Securitate. The names, addresses, and phone numbers of pastors (including retirees) were also requested, including who else lived there or who may answer the phone (D141/2:122, 125).

The documents also contain lists with names of candidates for administrative positions. Where two names for a certain position were suggested by the church, one was crossed out by the State Department for Religious Affairs or the Securitate and was never presented to the constituency (D141/1:175-178). Every time the constituency meeting took place, a representative from the State Department was present to make sure the “directions” were followed. At the Bucharest Conference in 1988, the delegates to the constituency meeting did not agree with the proposed name offered by the State Department and protested vehemently. The proceedings continued until late at night, and when the name of the new conference president was announced and voted, the State Department representative, George Carstoiu, hurriedly and nervously left and slammed the door (D141/2:120). It was the first time in a long time that a constituency meeting opposed a suggested candidate, although the records indicate that both candidates cooperated with the Securitate (R80496:9).

**Control of Church Finances**

The most effective means of control targeted the Church finances. By law, all the money received by any church had to be deposited in bank accounts. However, the money could not be used without special permission from the State Department for Religious Affairs. The approved budgets did not even cover the expenses to pay a decent salary for the pastors, and barely covered administrative costs. Many requests for funds to repair church buildings or to build new ones were turned down, in many cases leading to the deterioration of the buildings to the point that they could no longer be used. The pastors’ salaries were very low, forcing some to look for additional sources of food and money. Some church workers raised honey bees and sold the honey, others functioned as photographers at weddings, baptisms, and funerals, while others worked part-time as farm-
ers. This situation did not allow them to work full-time for the church, which was exactly what the Communists wanted. The Adventist Church could not employ or train new pastors without the State Department for Religious Affairs’ approval.

Although a religious minority, the Adventist Church had 20-30 times more money in tithe and offerings than the Orthodox Church. The Communists tried to annul the tithing system, but finally realized it was one of the basic Adventist doctrines. Instead, they tried to suffocate the Church financially. Faced with such restrictions, the leadership of the Church decided to create a parallel financial system. Only part of the tithe and offerings would be recorded, while the rest entered a secret circuit (called the secret pocket) designed to help the Church survive and fulfill its mission. At a ministerial meeting, a conference president publicly suggested that each church should retain funds for their local needs because the National Bank would not give cash for repairs, heating, or other local expenses. One informer added his interpretation to the communiqué (which the government was happy to hear): “The proposal suggests churches should avoid the state audit and control at any cost, so they could use the funds as they wish. The conference president wanted to be seen as a hero, having the courage to challenge the government” (D141/12:164).

This system functioned between 1950 and 1958 when the Securitate arrested all the leaders of the union and conferences and tried them publicly for stealing the money of the believers. This was a clear attempt to give the Adventist Church negative publicity. However, the trial concluded that the funds were not stolen, so the Communist government accused them of mishandling the money and using it for other purposes (since an important part of the money went to the local representatives of the State Department for Religious Affairs as “gifts,” the Securitate did not crack down on the parallel system for almost eight years). The new Adventist leadership was forced to accuse their brothers in court and make efforts to “recover” the money. Stefan Nailescu and Arthur Vacareanu, the former president and treasurer were sentenced to 10 and 8 years in prison, while the other 23 leaders were released. It was a clear attempt of the Communist government to decapitate the Church and give it bad press. Later, the secret system was applied on a local basis, so that financial committees could cover local church expenses.

**The Intellectuals Seen as a Threat**

Securitate paid a special attention to educated church people. Intellectuals were particularly targeted and spied on. Church elders in this category are mentioned from all neo-Protestant churches and the following Adventists are named: Paul Gheorghe, Sandu Stroescu, Paul Bu-
Some of them are listed because of their evangelistic abilities (Paulina Arcuş from Roman, and Aron Mureşan from Tulcea), others for their musical talents (Vasile and Doina Cazan at Cluj and Chinari), while others taught children in the various churches (Cornelia Orban at Craiova) (D150/5:85-87). A 1985 statistic made by the State Department of Religious Affairs shows that from a total of 4,445 neo-Protestant intellectuals, 2,583 were Baptists, 864 were Adventists (325 in Bucharest), 536 were Pentecostals, and 462 belonged to the Brethren (D150/5:92-93).

**Sermons as Coded Language**

During the 1950s and 1960s the State Department for Religious Liberty had inspectors present at worship services to take notes and control what was said. Many times they would summon the pastor and ask for explanations regarding certain terms used in the sermon. For example, if the sermon focused on the parable of the talents, the inspector would accuse the pastor of using coded language by which he meant U.S. dollars, and the members understood the message about capitalism being God’s favorite economic system. Poets were also a target for Communist authorities because they could easily use metaphors and symbols with a double meaning.

**Controlled Education**

Adventist professors and children in state schools (no private schools were allowed during Communism) were harassed and humiliated. The case of school no. 25 in Galati is relevant. Ilie Ranghiliţ was the executive director and was also an Adventist. Together with Stefan Ouatu and Maria Ciuplea, two other Adventist teachers, the three were accused of propagating Christian doctrines among the students and also of registering too many Adventist students in the school, such as Preda Marius, Felea Gheorghe, Olteanu Leonard, Zotoiu Aida, Olteanu Lorina, Graur Sigilda. The officials were concerned because on Sabbath the students would be in church and sang in the choir. They accused director Ranghiliţ of taking bribes from these students and their parents because he had been spotted traveling in their cars or borrowing their cars, was frequently called at home by them, or receiving “gifts” from them (the students and the director participated in literature distribution or church activities). The parents of the other children were suspicious and envious. The Securitate decided to scatter the Adventist students among several other schools (D141/12:41). Adventists children were frequently harassed because they did not attend school on Saturday. Their citizenship grades were lowered, as well as the other grades in order to force them to repeat the school year.
and not finish their education.

In order to control children’s education, the Communist government declared children’s Sabbath School and youth programs illegal. For more than thirty years the Adventist Church was faced with the impossibility of educating their children in religious matters. Therefore, the religious education in the family became of paramount importance. In the 1980s, when Magdalena Dumitrescu, the wife of the Union treasurer, began unofficially reorganizing the children’s Sabbath School, she was threatened, and her house was often searched for translated, typed, or photocopied material. This happened because her husband would bring Sabbath School material from the Euro-Africa Division, which was translated and circulated among the churches. While the children would learn in their Sabbath school classes, some parents watched at the doors for intruders or informers. Every time such an uninvited guest arrived, teaching materials disappeared and the topic was changed or the kids started singing.

The Youth Hour was changed into a music meeting, but similar programs took place under a different umbrella. The Securitate archives contain hundreds of musical programs from churches in Bucharest, with the names of the people involved and every song and word that was uttered. Similarly, there are notes on many sermons preached in various churches in the large cities (some were even recorded on tape).

**Social and Private Life Spied On**

Many Romanian Adventists used to gather once a year in the country for a week-end, something similar to a camp meeting. They would go to a traditional place, such as a clearing in the woods where fields of white narcissus grew. The Securitate archives reveal that informers were present even there. Pastor Cornel Constantinescu, the organizer, is mentioned, as are pastors from other districts (i.e., Dan Popovici Basarab), as well as the members and visitors from other parts of the country. The plate numbers of the buses and cars of those who came were listed (for example, in 1982 buses and cars from Dambovita, Arges, Prahova, and Ialomita counties were present, as well as from Bucharest). During the summer, church youth from different parts of the country used to meet and organize summer camps. Such meetings were considered suspect and illegal, and many times the young people had to move to another area or to go home early due to reports filed with the local police and authorities who enforced the orders.

**From Bibles to Toilet Paper**

Religious literature was drastically controlled, especially Bibles. Bibles could not be printed in Romania during the Communist era. However,
they were printed in the West and smuggled into the country using different venues. Bibles had to be stored in inconspicuous places, sometimes even under building materials out in the courtyard. Although they would sometimes get wet or moldy, people were extremely happy to own a Bible. Most Bibles came hidden in the cargo barges on the Danube River, wrapped in plastic tarps, and abandoned at night at predetermined unpopulated areas where people were waiting in the bushes to collect them. Traian Aldea wrote his memories about those dangerous but rewarding trips to the Danube shores (Aldea 2002). However, later Securitate had informers who provided information on the whole operation. The last known shipment of Bibles on the Danube was seized, people arrested, and the Bibles sent to a paper factory and reprocessed into toilet paper. However, Bibles continued to come in cars and trucks with double walls or compartments.

People like Alexandru Sima, Gheorghe Alexandru, Cornel Grigorescu, Neacsu Ion, Octavian Coconcea, Radu Grigorescu, and many others risked their lives in order to provide, print, and distribute religious literature. Others were contact persons, or simply covering for those who were risking their lives. Many times the Communist printing presses were the very places where religious literature was printed or copied. The State Department for Religious Affairs would approve 3,000 Sabbath School Quarterlies to be printed for all 65,000 Adventist members. With great risks (and usually great sums of additional money), the editor Octavian Coconcea would persuade the printers to run 30,000 more (D141/2:345). Even the Church administrators were scared because of the risks posed by such high numbers of printed copies. The disproportion soon became evident for Securitate, who followed the leads of the network. The same story happened again and again. The inside informers filed reports, but local representatives of the State Department were bribed, in order not to report what was happening to higher levels. There were instances when Securitate became suspicious and cracked down on the whole network. Some people were arrested, the printers lost their jobs, and the church representative had to be moved or demoted.

When the church needed more than Sabbath School Quarterlies, or daily devotionals, an underground network stepped in. People who knew English or French would get hold of a book and start translating it into Romanian. Others would type the manuscript on old manual typewriters, with up to 15 copies at a time on special thin paper. Then others would bind the books and distribute them. During the 1980s, when photocopiers became available in Romania at certain state institutions, the underground network would pay the person who was supposed to guard the photocopiers in order to allow them to make more copies from one of
the typed manuscripts. Usually such persons were the Securitate agents themselves, for they were human, too. It is also true that religious literature was unknowingly produced by the Securitate itself. Some books and brochures were printed at the Casa Scanteii (the Spark House) where Communist propaganda materials were printed (D141/3:218). Many times informers would write reports about people who were seen visiting the house where a printer at Casa Scanteii lived. A good number of visitors were Adventists from the underground network. However, the informers indicated exactly where the copying machines were located and suggested that these should be tightly controlled.

Demolition of Church Buildings

The government ordered that church buildings be demolished in spite of the member’s fierce opposition or the presence of representatives from the U.S. Embassy. The story of the Grant Church in Bucharest is typical. Letters to Nicolae Ceausescu, the then President of Romania, and to the government had no effect. Suggestions from high ranking architects to move the buildings on rails were rejected. Members barricaded themselves inside the building, although electricity, water, and sewage had been cut off. Women and children formed a human chain around the building so bulldozers could not push forward. Church members threatened to meet and worship in the ruins if the building was demolished. The tension reached its peak when authorities brought a crane in order to tear the roof off the building, but the members together with children and women stood on the roof. President Ceausescu himself had to come and assess the situation from a distance. He ordered the building demolished at any cost, even if the people would be harmed. The strategy was to place a trusted person among the members who would report on a time when vigilance would be low and who would open the gates of the compound so the soldiers and prison inmates surrounding the building could enter. Unfortunately, the pastor himself was the one to convince the members to allow an engineer to stay with them under the promise to help them better resist. Less than 48 hours later, the “engineer” opened the gates and the crowds flowed inside, crushing the resistance, hurting people, breaking doors and windows, and making the building unusable. The pastor was “rewarded” by being allowed to travel outside the country and meet his brother who lived in the West. His name is not even mentioned in the reports regarding the events. The church moved and functioned in a tent for the following ten years, because no building permit was given to rebuild.

A year later (1987), another Adventist church in Bucharest was scheduled to be demolished, together with the union headquarters, the seminary, and the publishing house, but because of other social protest move-
ments in the country, Ceausescu’s attention was diverted. However, reports indicate that members threatened to meet in their own houses and apartments if the church was demolished, which the government feared. U.S. Embassy counsels frequently visited the union headquarters, and this, too, delayed the demolition. The names of Mrs. Susan Sutton, secretary of the U.S. Embassy, and Martin Wernic, from the U.S. State Department, and other diplomats from the political section of the Embassy are mentioned.

Other churches did not benefit from the visits of Western diplomats. The Communist government refused to authorize building permits for churches or delayed them as long as they could. Until 1990, only 525 Adventist churches existed officially, but the number doubled overnight after Communism fell. That shows how many churches and people met “illegally” until they had the chance to have their own building. Usually the members met in private houses and sometimes even in high rise apartments. This worked well for house churches, but members fought hard to have a building they could call “church” because of the mentality of Eastern Orthodox people who would never feel comfortable worshiping in an apartment or private house.

The records show only a few situations in which the members built their churches without permits, only to be fined and to face the prospect of having the church demolished, but there were many such instances. The situation at Sepreus, Arad, became very tense when the Communist authorities ordered the church to vacate the building which was almost finished, and brought bulldozers to raze it. The mothers with their children stood in the way of the bulldozers and, in the end, the bulldozer drivers refused to hurt anyone and left. The authorities had no alternative but to give a building permit and allow the members to finish construction. The same situation happened at Oinacu, Giurgiu (D141/12:80, 141, 239).

Conclusions

This short survey of documents in the Securitate archives illustrates some of the methods the Communist government used in an attempt to destroy the structure of the Adventist Church in Romania and the religious faith of Adventist Christians. Although pretending to guarantee religious freedom, the government used the Securitate forces to restrict religious activities, demolish church buildings, reduce the number of worship services, confiscate and destroy religious literature, control church finances, infiltrate the Diaspora, manipulate church leadership selection, and recruit informers in order to control and finally destroy the Church from the inside. By God’s grace, the Romanian Adventist Church not only survived but grew in spite of such tactics and Communist persecution.
The survey also indicates advantages and disadvantages of cooperating with an oppressive regime. Every political and social system has its weaknesses that can be used in order to pursue the mission of the Church. The question regarding the morality of such cooperation must be judged against the prospect of the Church’s survival under Satan’s relentless attacks. The understanding of the Great Controversy offers the correct perspective. In my opinion the issue should not be “if” but “how far” the Church should go to shake hands with an oppressive regime. The biblical stories of Daniel, Esther, Nehemiah, and Joseph offer valuable help.

Finally, the research demonstrates that the pyramidal structure of the Adventist Church is very vulnerable when a dictatorial or oppressive regime infiltrates it and compromises its leadership. Communists have sought to divide the church in order to destroy it. Romanian history, as well as of other Communist countries, shows that cutting contact with world leadership and isolating a national or local church is one way governments use to gain control over a church structure. The separation and mistrust between the official church and the underground movement is part of the same strategy. The Adventist Church should create a strategy that will help its members survive by allowing flexibility in its present structure and focusing on the autonomy and self-sustaining power of the local church rather than building an administrative hierarchy. In the future, additional research may contribute to help design such a master plan or a list of guidelines to be used when dealing with Communist regimes in countries that presently control 25 percent of the world’s population. I believe that God is in control and that he will never let his church down. But it is our human responsibility to learn from the lessons of the past in order to be prepared and ready for unexpected events in the future.

Works cited

Cristian Dumitrescu, a native of Romania, is an associate editor of JAMS. He grew up during the Ceausescu’s dictatorial regime and experienced Communism first-hand. Cristian is accredited with CNSAS, the Romanian institution that hosts the former Securitate documents, for research on how the communist regime tried to influence and control the life and mission of the church.
During the recent General Conference session in Atlanta I interviewed Pastor Isaiah (PI), the Adventist World Radio speaker for Vietnam. Bruce Bauer (BB), Editor

**BB:** Pastor Isaiah, when did you and your family leave Vietnam?

**PI:** We left Vietnam in 1975 after the war ended. I was 17 years old. My father was a Seventh-day Adventist pastor in Vietnam, and then also in America.

**BB:** Prior to 1975 where was the Adventist work in Vietnam located?

**PI:** Most Adventist work was concentrated in Saigon where there was a hospital, the academy, and the printing house. Because of these institutions there were two large churches each with several hundred members in Saigon, plus another church for the Chinese in Cho Lon. Outside of Saigon, there were two smaller churches in the south—Can Tho and Vom Nhon. In the central part of Vietnam there was a church in Da Nang with an elementary school and several other small companies in Tam Ky, Quang Ngai, Quang Hue, Phu My and other Branch Sabbath Schools. But among the ethnic people in the central highlands there were several thousand members. This was also where the work was growing the fastest.

**BB:** What happened to the Adventist work after the country was unified under the communist government?

**PI:** In 1975, just before the war ended, almost all the church leaders, hospital workers, and teachers from the academy were taken out of Vietnam. In all about 500 Adventists leaders, employees, members, and their
relatives were taken out of Vietnam to the United States. The communists closed all the churches in the central part of Vietnam and the church properties were confiscated. The communists took over the hospital and the academy in Saigon, but allowed the central church (Phu Nhuan) to remain open as well as the Chinese church which continued to function with a small membership. In the southern part of Vietnam, Can Tho and Vom Nhom continued to be open. All the other churches were closed. For several years the work of the church seemed to be paralyzed.

**BB: How did you get involved in the radio ministry for Vietnam?**

**PI:** In 1992, the Orange County Vietnamese Adventist Congregation started a weekly TV program to reach out to the Vietnamese communities in North America. In 1995, Elder Robins Riches, who was the president of the Southeast Asia Union, heard about the TV program and requested to use the sound track of the TV programs for a daily radio program broadcast by Adventist World Radio (AWR) to Vietnam. The broadcasts to Vietnam began in July 1995.

**BB: What kind of expectations did you have for the AWR broadcasts to Vietnam?**

**PI:** At first, we thought that it would take at least five years before we could see any result from the broadcast because we had no way to advertise them within Vietnam and the Vietnam government controlled all communication channels with the outside world at that time. The Lord blessed the efforts, and within five weeks we had received five letters that had been brought out of Vietnam by tourists and sent to the Hong Kong address (a neutral point for communicating with Vietnam). Among those five letters was a letter from a Catholic priest, who indicated that he was working with a 22,000 member parish, and that he was using the materials of the broadcast to teach his members. He later indicated that he would like to be baptized and join our church. Since that first batch of letters, many more letters were sent to Hong Kong to request literature and the offered Bible lessons.

**BB: What did you do to follow up the radio interests?**

**PI:** I started by contacting the Seventh-day Adventist Mission in Vietnam to see if they could quietly do the follow up. I wrote and called the president several times to urge him to do this. The radio program invited people to attend the Phu Nhuan headquarter church. But then I started re-
ceiving letters from listeners who had visited the Phu Nhuan Church, saying they were turned away or given a cold welcome. Many of them also indicated that when they entered the church, some officers bluntly told them that the Phu Nhuan church had nothing to do with the radio program (this is understandable because of the persecution from the police).

Then one day I visited Nguon Song, the Center for Evangelism and Materials of the Vietnamese Sunday Churches Worldwide to buy some Bibles. After asking my name, I was greeted warmly and respectfully by the director and all the workers of the Center. This kind of greeting was very surprising especially since all the Sunday churches in Vietnam consider the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be a cult and usually avoid all communication with Adventists. Then the director told me, “Pastor Duong, God is using you all over Vietnam. Many people had come to Christ and joined the Sunday churches because of the radio broadcast.” I humbly gave praise to the Lord for the good news, but wondered if I had done enough?

Then one Sabbath after the worship service, two visitors indicated that they wanted to talk to me. They introduced themselves as viewers of our TV program in California. They said they had just returned from spending two months in Vietnam, and while there had visited several Sunday churches throughout Vietnam and heard that there were many listeners tuning in to the Peace & Happiness radio broadcast on AWR who were joining the Sunday churches as a result.

During that same period of time we also received many more letters from listeners indicating that they could not find any Seventh-day Adventist church in their area, so they asked whether they could join a Catholic church or a Sunday church which were under the control of the government?

Because of all these factors, I contacted the Southeast Asia Union Mission (SAUM) president, Elder Robin Riches, and requested help in doing something for all the interests. Christians cannot just sow and not reap. With much prayer and planning, I asked Robin Riches for permission to start an Adventist underground church system in Vietnam. He flew to the U.S., met with my church board members, and gave us the green light to start an underground church in Vietnam.

Even with permission from the SAUM president, I was still reluctant to start the underground work. I did not have any experience with house churches. I had left Vietnam almost twenty-two years earlier. I wondered whether I should trust all the letters I received from Vietnam even though I knew that they had to risk their lives to write to us. I then decided that I had to see everything with my own eyes before I would proceed. I asked the SAUM president for permission to enter Vietnam using my U.S. pass-
port and American name. In September 1998, I visited Vietnam as a tourist. I selected those radio listeners I thought could be trusted to meet with me. We tested their sincerity first and also set up a plan to avoid police raids. I spent one month in Vietnam, traveled from the south to the north to train several people in how to lead small groups of five to twenty-five at the most. Even though I tried my best to avoid the police, in many cases the police raided the places I was using for training, and I narrowly escaped. Some nights I changed hotels three times to avoid the police. I used different names with different groups. By the end of that month I had trained seventy people to be the leaders of the underground movement.

I went to Vietnam with an inquiring heart, questioning the sincerity of the people. I left Vietnam with full confidence in the faith of these people. I had no doubt about their commitment to Jesus Christ and their hunger and thirst for the Word of God, and their commitment to spread the message of the gospel to other people. I vowed that I would help them by any means which the Lord would give me.

We set up an underground printing and distribution system for various publications. It is extremely difficult to print literature in a communist country where the government controls all the printing presses and all the other means of mass communication. Distribution is equally challenging. If it is possible to print and distribute material in a communist country for one year without being arrested, that is a miracle. But if God allows that to be done for fifteen years without the system being discovered by the police, that is a supernatural phenomenon.

The movement gained momentum and spread from the south to other parts of Vietnam. As new groups were established in various places opposition also started to build. First, it came from the mission (probably at the urging of government officials), then it spread to the police. I also felt the heat and pressure from some Vietnamese Adventist leaders and Vietnamese members in America, but also from some of the leadership of the SAUM.

The Vietnamese Mission president voiced his objections to SAUM. He requested that the radio broadcasts not use the name Seventh-day Adventist on any printed materials because this would bring trouble to him and the mission people from the government. He was also against the setting up of an underground system for the radio Adventists in Vietnam. One Vietnamese Adventist leader from the U.S. stirred up opposition against the AWR *Peace & Happiness* broadcasts and also against me personally. Then, even the SAUM officers changed their attitude and I received pressure to shut down the underground work. The battle went on throughout 1999. False accusations, name calling, gossip, malice, stirred-up division within my congregations in the U.S., telephone threats, anonymous letters
sent to my home to threaten or accuse me, using some of the people on my team against me, pressure from respected church leaders—all this was building during 1999. By December, I decided to stop working for Vietnam on the ground that the Bible teaches that I should obey my superiors. I conceded to the requests of SAUM at the end of December 1999.

But a miracle happened. God intervened and wanted his work to continue. I received four visions consecutively in a four week period that came every Tuesday night in which God sent his angel to tell me that I should continue with the work in Vietnam. I did not know how since I had already decided to shut everything down in Vietnam. I had given the underground workers in Vietnam stipends for three months and had told them to stop all activities. I did not know how to carry out the command of the visions. Then on the fifth Tuesday night an officer from the SAUM flew to America, called me, and asked if he could come to visit me in my home. During the conversation, he asked me to start the underground work in Vietnam again, and gave me permission to work anywhere in Vietnam with no limitations. I told him, “I am a man of my own word. When I said I stopped, I stopped. Don’t try to test my sincerity.” He reiterated his request, so I told him I would pray about it.

During this time, I received news from Vietnam that there were many Sabbath-keeping groups developing all over Vietnam. They were independent from each other and called themselves by various names, such as, The Church of Jesus Christ Seventh-day, Catholic Returning to Their Origin; Seventh-day Church of God; Seventh-day Baptists; Seventh-day Pentecostals; Seventh-day Bible Church; Seventh-day Evangelical Christ Church, etc.

After that I contacted the SAUM president and asked what was happening? He told me that the SAUM had discovered that the communist government was using the Vietnam Adventist Mission to try to take over the underground work and to kill the movement. The pressure from the mission was a trap. So now the SAUM wanted me to start the work up again.

I told the president, “People are not toys. We cannot turn them on, then turn them off. If we work this way nobody will trust our word anymore. How can we preach to them?”

I told Robin Riches, “If you really want me to start the work again, I have two requests: (1) please do not tell me to shut the work down again until Vietnam has complete freedom that allows the people to make decisions for themselves, and (2) since the Vietnam Adventist Mission does not want me to use the name Seventh-day Adventist in connection with the underground church, and since the Mission also does not want me to print any literature with the Seventh-day Adventist name on it, and since
there are so many Sabbath-keeping churches in Vietnam now, the union must give me a name for the underground work.

At the July 2000 General Conference Session in Toronto, a committee composed of a General Conference Associate Secretary (Larry Coburn), the Southern Asia-Pacific Division president, the AWR president, the Adventist Southeast Asia Project board chair and director, and the SAUM president voted for the radio ministry and underground work to use the name, “Everlasting Gospel Underground Church.”

**BB:** How difficult was it to set up the underground house church network in Vietnam?

**PI:** To set up and operate an underground network in a communist country is not easy. Every three houses has a government officer and every ten houses has a chief who oversees everything. Besides that everyone is a potential informant for the police. Any stranger entering the area can be spotted immediately and reported to the local police. The government controls everything. Any legally functioning organization has government agents. These agents are either planted there or bought by the government to supply information about the activities of the organization to the police. Furthermore, the government spreads distrust within the organization’s members to cause division and force cooperation with government agencies. If the government cannot control an organization’s leader, the government will create rumors or accusations or false evidences about crimes committed in order to remove that person. In other words, if a leader does not cooperate with and work for the government, he or she will not be a leader very long.

Furthermore, the communist propaganda machine is very effective and powerful. It will create chaos within the ranks of an organization to destroy morale and weaken the will to carry on with the organization’s mission.

In the most severe situations, church workers were put into prison and tortured to break their will to serve Jesus. At other times people were heavily fined so that the financial penalty would discourage church work.

In the past and even today in most parts of the country when people leave their local area they must ask for permission from the local police. Each year, though, since 1999 I have conducted secret training sessions for the underground church leaders. Even thought this has caused many difficulties and even impossibilities, the Lord has opened the way for those attending to escape many unimaginable situations.

To run an underground system in this kind of environment is very difficult. I have to say that it is by God’s grace and power that the house
churches have survived until today. The house churches are a tribute to God.

**BB:** Isn’t it true that recently there has been an easing of restriction on Christian activities in Vietnam so there is more freedom today?

**PI:** When Vietnam wanted to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) and receive economic aid from the West, the government had to comply with the WTO’s requirements. It also changed its practices toward Christianity at that time. Now the government tactic is to pressure church groups to register and allows churches to function within the scope of direct government control and permission. Permission must be sought and received before any religious activity can be carried out. The church organization becomes an arm of the state, or state’s instrument to carry out the state’s agenda. The church is used to promote the government’s agenda and to improve Vietnam’s image abroad.

When the communist government recognizes any church group, the pastor of each local congregation must become a member of the Mat Tran To Quoc (Fatherland Front) which is the right arm of the communist party. All the members of this organization must attend annual training in which they must learn (1) communism and its history (2) Ho Chi Minh’s doctrine, (3) the theory of evolution, and (4) the communist party’s policy.

I certainly hope that the recent changes will bring the best result for the people and the church in Vietnam, but I am afraid that this change is only strategic and formal, not ideological and will only be temporary. The government changes the way it treats the church for its (government) own sake, but communist ideology is still there. The party must be first and must have absolute power. Everything else exists for the sake of the party.

Church history gives us an example to illustrate my point in the Roman Empire’s attitude toward Christianity. At first the empire persecuted Christians ruthlessly. Then because the survival of the empire was at stake, the emperor recognized the church and used the church to strengthen the state. The emperor controlled the church’s leaders as his magistrates. When the Roman Empire persecuted the church, the church grew stronger and purer. When the Roman Empire recognized the church and stopped all persecution, the church was riddled with compromise and plunged into the Dark Ages. The church lost its commitment to biblical orthodoxy. The church no longer served the Savior as its Lord; the empire was the church’s new provider and lord. The church lost its mission and its doctrinal purity.

The same thing seems to be happening in Vietnam now. Many people welcome the change from the government and believe that a new dawn
is coming to the church in Vietnam. But news has recently surfaced that government agents have told church leaders in many parts of Vietnam that the church does not need to obey the Bible. Churches are to do what the government officials command first, and second, what the Bible commands. Morality and doctrine are no longer needed in the church.

**BB:** What do you think it will take to bring the government recognized Seventh-day Adventist Church in Vietnam and the underground work into unity?

**PI:** When freedom completely returns to Vietnam, especially religious freedom, then the world church can facilitate a process whereby (1) the leaders of both groups can meet together, (2) a reorganization plan of the church in Vietnam can be approved, and (3) Vietnam can be divided into three or four missions or more if the underground church continues to grow at its current rate.

**BB:** What is your dream for the future of Vietnam?

**PI:** If I have a choice, I would like to devote the rest of my life to the evangelization of Vietnam. By God’s grace I would like to (1) train 100 committed youth evangelists to evangelize the whole of Vietnam, (2) continue to evangelize Vietnam through the use of radio, television, and the printed page, and especially through the use of DVDs, and (3) write more material about theological studies (a Bible Commentary, etc.) for future leaders and to use as outreach materials. By the grace of God, I would like to see at least one million Vietnamese become Adventists during my lifetime.
The roots of conflicts in Africa are multiple and varied. Ethnicity is a powerful reality that has been exploited to devastate Africa. Dr. William Zartman, Professor of International Organization and Conflict Resolution and Director of African Studies at the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University, after summarizing six theories of ethnic conflict, argues that purely ethnic conflicts are rare. While ethnic consciousness and dis-ease is common among groups, this consciousness is inert. He suggests that conflict is created by agents who have a certain agenda and who manipulate ethnic consciousness as a mobilization strategy (Zartman 1998).

Conflicts in Africa

At any given time, many conflicts are going on in Africa. Some are boundary wars between nations, such as between Ethiopia and Eritrea or between Eritrea and Djibouti. These are not many. Then there are revolutionary wars that attempt to remove governments that are perceived to have been in power for too long or have become oppressive. These may be characterized as wars of liberation. Sometimes the conflicts are drawn along ethnic lines, when the governing party is generally representative of one ethnic group, while the opposition is generally composed of a different ethnic group. These may take the form of either trying to force the government out of power, or becoming secessionist movements, trying to break away and form a separate state or country. Then there are conflicts between ethnic groups, without the government being involved on either side of the conflict. In addition to all these there are general situations of tension between ethnic groups without open armed conflict. This whole range of situations requires interventions of some kind in order to bring about harmonious co-existence.

In a fifteen year period (1989–2004), seventy-six peace agreements
were signed involving twenty conflicts in Africa. During that same time thirty-one peace agreements were signed in six conflicts in Inter and South America (mainly Guatemala and El Salvador). There were sixteen peace agreements in ten conflicts in Asia, and nine peace agreements in Europe (former Yugoslav republics, Moldova, and Georgia, etc.), and seven peace agreements in the Middle East in the conflict over Palestine (Högbladh 2006:12).

During that period it is evident that there were more conflicts going on in Africa than on any other continent. More recently the picture still has not changed much. So it appears that Africa is a continent in conflict. The conflicts have led to reversals in development. Warring parties destroy infrastructure they cannot afford to rebuild. Capable people move away to serve in other countries where they feel safe and secure. Productive sectors are decimated and young people see no hope for their future. Even the Church loses some of its educated and skilled people as they relocate to safer regions. Table 1 illustrates this variety of conflicts.

**Vocabulary of Africa**

African people are categorized into tribes. The word tribe is itself neutral in terms of its lexical meaning. But it is immediately infused with new meaning when used by a particular group in a given context. For example, when a non-academic African uses the word tribe, he or she simply means a group of people who share the same identity in language, ancestry, and geographical location. Keith Somerville, a lecturer in journalism at the School of Arts at Brunel University in Uxbridge, London, has spent over thirty years as a journalist at the BBC. He has written widely on Africa. In an article titled “Africa Is Tribal, Europe Is Ethnic: The Power of Words in the Media,” he observes about the media’s projections of Africa, “I’ve been researching and reporting Africa for over thirty years. It has always struck me that it is reported differently from the rest of the world. The words used differ, particularly adjectives, and the assumptions behind the use of those words differ hugely.”

Somerville reminds us that the word tribe comes from the Latin *tribus*. It originated in Rome where it was originally used to describe people groups whose culture was inferior and were suitable for conquest and subjugation.
Table 1. States with Recent Cases of Civil/Ethnic Resource-Based Conflicts in Africa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>Nature of Conflicts</th>
<th>Major Causes</th>
<th>Status of the Conflicts</th>
<th>Characters/Parties</th>
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</thead>
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<td>Resources and power struggle</td>
<td>Hot peace and post-conflict</td>
<td>Internal and external involvement</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reconciliation</td>
<td>(Western countries)</td>
</tr>
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<td>2 Democratic Republic of Congo</td>
<td>Civil/ethnic</td>
<td>Resources, poor sharing, dictatorship</td>
<td>Ongoing peace process partly resolved</td>
<td>Internal and external involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(DRC)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Rwanda, Zimbabwe)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Burundi</td>
<td>Civil/ethnic</td>
<td>Power sharing and ethnic inequality and injustices</td>
<td>Partly resolved</td>
<td>Internal and external involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(Rwanda)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Sierra Leone</td>
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<td>Resources and political contestation</td>
<td>Partly resolved</td>
<td>Intrastate and external (Liberia)</td>
</tr>
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<td>5 Rwanda</td>
<td>Ethnic/civil</td>
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<td>Intrastate multi ethnic conflict</td>
<td>Resources/political marginalization</td>
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<td>7 Cote D’Ivoire</td>
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<td>Interstate</td>
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<td>Civil/ethnic</td>
<td>Resources and political contest</td>
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Among these were Germanic and Gallic groups. Julius Caesar frequently used the term in this sense. The term tribe came to be used as a reference to people considered to be at a lower level of civil and political development—a stage before becoming a kingdom or a state.

Somerville shares how he was powerfully impacted by the language difference in the coverage of the conflicts in Georgia and South Ossetia when compared to the coverage of the post-election violence in Kenya. He observed that “the violence in the Caucasus was nationalism, or perhaps a mix of nationalism and ethnic conflict. Kenya was tribalism. Much of the British media—from the BBC to the Guardian and then to the tabloid press—used the term ‘tribalism’ widely, giving an impression of primitivism and a violence endemic to Africa.” The words that are generally used in reporting on Africa are tribe, tribal, tribalism, and tribalist.

Somerville argues that the term *tribe* was in fact not part of the vocabulary of the different ethnic groups in Africa. Each group labeled itself by its ethnic name (Zulu, Luo, Ashanti, Bemba, Shona, Ndebele, or whatever the specific group). The next group was identified by its name, and not as a tribe. Colonial powers began to use the word tribe to designate the colonized peoples. From its Latin origins the word was given broad currency by colonial usage. The word was even used outside of its original meaning when applied to peoples who belonged to highly structured societies belonging to established kingdoms.

When black peoples of Africa rose up in arms against white colonial governments, those struggles were never described as ethnic conflicts. Yet the clearest divide in the conflicts was ethnic. Such conflicts were more accurately described as liberation struggles or wars of independence. The label used for describing a conflict should arise from the underlying cause of the conflict. The cause is that which when changed will remove the
basis for the conflict. So called *ethnic conflicts* therefore do not arise from ethnicity. Tribal wars do not arise from the identity of tribe. Rather, conflict arises from one party’s manipulation of factors or resources to disadvantage another group.

**What Is Tribalism or Ethnocentrism?**

Tribalism may be defined as a consciousness and loyalty to one tribe, leading to exaltation of that tribe above other peoples. Tribalism leads a person to view only the members of his or her own tribe as people, and disparage all others as inferior. Language or labels used of the other group may be derogatory and dehumanizing. Ethnic conflict is produced by the insecurity that emerges when an actor is unsure of the intentions of another actor and the two are already mutually hostile (Horowitz 1998:57).

Ethnocentrism is the attitude of placing one’s own ethnic group at the center of other ethnicities and using one’s own culture as the yardstick by which all others will be measured and evaluated. It involves making generalizations concerning the goodness of one’s group and the badness of other groups. We are ethnocentric when we think certain positive characteristics are common to our group, while certain other negative characteristics are generally true of other groups. We are ethnocentric when we see other people through the lens of our group and judge them based on our group’s yardstick.

Ethnocentric thinking results in our making incorrect assumptions about our group and other groups. We generalize the weaknesses of a few to characterize the whole group, and we exaggerate their evil. We compare the weakest points of that group to our strongest points.

**Theories of Ethnic Violence**

Political scientists have debated the underlying causes of ethnic conflict. Three basic schools of thought seem to dominate the schools of discussion. These have been labeled as primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist.

**Primordialist School**

The Primordialist School believes that ethnic groups exist because “there are traditions of belief and action towards primordial objects such as biological features and especially territorial location” (Grosby 1994:168). Donald Horowitz postulates that ethnic groups exist based on a kinship system that “makes it possible for ethnic groups to think in terms of family resemblances” (Horowitz 1985:57). These biological and territorial bonds are used as the basis of identifying friend and enemy.

There seems to be some validity to this theory as an explanation of eth-
nicity. However, when used as a basis for explaining the causes of ethnic conflict, it falls short. A primordialist causation for ethnic conflict makes conflict unavoidable. As long as biology and geography exist as differentiating factors, conflict is inevitable. This fails to account for why certain ethnic groups live side by side harmoniously while others are in conflict. Opponents to this view argue that ethnic conflicts are really the result of political, economic, and institutional issues. Ethnicity only becomes a rallying and mobilization point.

Instrumentalist School

A second theory posits that ethnic conflict is the product of community leaders “who used their cultural groups as sites of mass mobilization and as constituencies in their competition for power and resources, because they found them more effective than social classes” (Smith 2001:54-55). In this approach ethnicity and ethnic identification “are viewed as instrumental identities, organized as a means to particular ends” (Cornell and Hartmann 1998:59). In the recent violence in Kenya, many participants were asked by the news media why they were fighting. Some gave answers that reflected the words of leading politicians. A number of them said they did not know. One man said he was fighting because everyone was fighting. Another said that he was fighting because he wanted to protect his family from the enemies. This theory seems to be the most plausible. It seems to be supported by the demonstrable reality that most ethnic conflicts involve certain leaders, and peace and reconciliation negotiations will only succeed if these leaders are involved.

Constructivist School

The constructivist theory proposes that ethnic conflict is the result of a social construct based on experiences, knowledge, and perceptions of one group as they interpret another. This knowledge may be a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of certain events, and there is a selectiveness in the retained knowledge. So what results may not be a true reflection of reality, but a construction pieced together from the perceptions and knowledge of many in the group.

The experience of Rwanda reveals the results of ethnic constructivism. Hutus and Tutsis had coexisted peacefully for a long time. When the Belgians came they found it convenient to pit one group against the other so as to forestall a united resistance and possible rebellion. All citizens were required to have national identification cards that indicated their ethnic group. Thus the ethnic designation became part of the identity. Over the years Tutsis were given opportunities and promotions that were not readily given to the Hutus. Thus began a process of profiling each other based
on observable experiences, knowledge, and shared perceptions. Ethnic distinctions were minimal. Decades of intermarriage blurred the biological boundaries, and they shared the same language and culture. They shared the same geographical location. On the surface, this is a population that should not have had any conflicts. But years of constructivism had created images of an enemy in the mind. And what happened is history. Those national ID cards had an important role in the targeting of victims in the genocide (Mamdani 2001).

Precipitation of Violence

In more recent times, social scientists have begun to develop theoretical models of ethnic conflict and civil wars that draw on multiple theories as a way to understand causation. An example of this approach is Monica Duffy Toft in *The Geography of Ethnic Violence*. She demonstrates that a variety of issues like ethnic group settlement patterns, socially constructed identities, charismatic leaders, etc., may precipitate violent escalation of a dispute even when the violent parties know full well that the violence will leave them worse off (Toft 2003). The surprising factor is that other groups under similar circumstances do not become violent.

Mediators are persons who undertake to talk to the conflicting parties with a view to creating a suitable atmosphere for dialogue between the parties themselves. Ideally, the mediators should not come from one of the aggrieved entities, nor should they be seen to be sympathetic to, or be in some way aligned with one of the parties. Negotiators are persons who have the trust and confidence of their group and are authorized and empowered to speak on behalf of the group.

Conflicting parties typically focus on the past. They recall the hurts of the past and count their scars. These are then projected into the future as the perceived reality. The goal of the mediator is to help conflicting parties begin to focus away from the past in order to look to the future.

Biblical Models for Addressing Ethnicity

There are several biblical models that suggest principles to follow when addressing ethnic issues facing the church today.

Neglected Widows

In the history of the New Testament Church, Acts 6 records a situation that was beginning to generate tension and animosity along more or less ethnic lines. Jews from a Hellenistic background felt that widows from their group were being neglected in the daily distribution of food. They felt that Palestinian Jews were treating their group unfairly. “The Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because...
their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, “It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them”” (Acts 6:1-3).

The apostles did not sweep this issue under the carpet or treat it as petty. The aggrieved party was involved in the creation of a solution. The Church came out of the situation stronger. Leadership had the courage to admit that there was a problem and the wisdom to engage others in solving it.

The Church at Antioch

The church at Antioch was as close to being a model as one gets in its ability to understand and constructively deal with multi-ethnic situations. The city of Antioch, built by Seleucus I Nicator, and named in honor of his father, Antiochus, was the third largest metropolis (after Rome and Alexandria) in the Roman Empire. It had a population of between 500,000 and 800,000 inhabitants. Encircled by an external wall, Antioch was also subdivided into ethnic quarters. Ray Bakke observes that “the city, like the old city of Jerusalem today, was divided into Greek, Syrian, Jewish, Latin and African sectors” (Bakke 1997:145, 146).

So evident were these internal divisions along ethnic lines that the city was nicknamed “tetrapolis.” Apparently, walls were built in an attempt to ensure minimal ethnic conflict. We may label this as peace by physical separation. If you did not like those who were different from you, all you had to do was retreat into your own quarters. Strabo informs us that the city of Antioch had a large library, but it was divided. The city was Hellenized and had north-south and east-west highways passing through it connecting to major parts of the Roman Empire, but it was divided. In 47 BC Julius Caesar conferred on Antioch the status of a “free city,” but it was divided. Later, Augustus made Antioch the imperial capital of Syria, but it was divided. It was a leading center of trade and commerce, but it was divided (Bakke 1997:145).

When Greek speaking believers who were mainly Jewish were driven by persecution out of Jerusalem and Judea, some of them went and settled in Antioch. There they shared the good news of salvation in Christ, resulting in reconciliation between people and God, and between different peoples. As differences were put into the background, people from different ethnicities found a common attraction to Jesus Christ and were drawn together to worship and serve him. Different ethnicities scaled the walls that had divided them and came into one fellowship. The common citi-
zens were taken aback by this flagrant disregard of long-standing socio-cultural norms. In cultural shock and consternation, they hurled scorn at the believers, mockingly referring to them as Christians, people without boundaries. So daring was the disregard for convention and so scornfully fitting was the derisive label that it stuck.

If one visited the Antioch church on a Sabbath morning, one would be confronted with a mosaic, not a monoculture. Luke’s profile of the church leadership team is revealing. “Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul” (Act 13:1, emphasis mine). The leaders included Barnabas (a Jewish Levite from Cyprus), Simeon who was called Niger (a black African), Lucius of Cyrene (from North Africa), Manaen (a former slave of Herod the tetrarch) and Paul (a former Pharisee from Tarsus). The diversity of this leadership team was reflective of the spectrum of the society they represented. The Church was intentional about integration of different ethnic groups into the one body of Christ. There was no mere tokenism.

It is no surprise that this church became the new center for missions. Rising above the divisions of the society around them, they modeled the reality of a new creation. The Antioch church became the sponsors of the greatest missionary enterprise of that time. They were an outward looking church. From the agenda of the Judaizers that emanated from Jerusalem, it is clear that the Jerusalem church was an inward-looking church, concerned about preserving its cultural heritage, and afraid that people from out there might change the status quo. They saw Peter’s mission to Cornelius as a threat that had to be investigated and cautioned against. Antioch received missionary reports with joy and encouraged the apostles.

Paul, writing to the Ephesians, talked about a church without walls. He described the mission of Christ as having resulted in the breaking down of the walls that separated Jew and Gentile—indeed all people—and bringing peace between them. After slaying the enmity, Christ proceeded to create one new person from the former conflicting parties. And using these reconciled persons, he proceeds to build with them a holy temple which is the dwelling place of God. These are powerful symbols of the Church—a new building made of different ethnicities who are now one in Christ Jesus.

In the words of Jurgen Moltmann, “It is the task of Christians in the existing world conflicts in which they live, to proclaim the Gospel of justification, to live the liberating faith, to exercise the ministry of reconciliation and to give in their congregations a demonstration of a reconciled humanity in the fellowship of men and women, Jews and gentiles, slaves
and freemen (Gal 3.28)” (Moltmann). The Church is a demonstration—showing forth an alien community—one that is founded upon different principles.

Moltmann emphasizes the centrality of Christian engagement in its struggles as part of Christian mission. “It is especially when Christians fulfill these specifically Christian tasks, that they serve the realization of humanity of all people. By proclaiming God’s justifying justice they proclaim the dignity of human beings. By practising the right of grace they practise basic human rights. The Christian faith therefore does not excuse us from the struggle for the recognition and realization of human rights, but leads us into this very struggle” (Moltmann).

**Pride and Prejudice**

As the saying goes, “Give the dog a bad name, and hang him.” When people develop a certain perception about another group, there is so much that happens to prove or demonstrate the perception. As human beings we have a penchant for organizing things into categories, placing them in boxes, placing a lid on the boxes, and then labeling them for future reference. When we categorize, box, and label, we save ourselves from having to reexamine things every time in order to establish where they belong. Obviously, this is fine and commendable when we are dealing with things. It is, however, tragic when we are dealing with people and people groups. We classify. We judge. We limit. We destroy. We alienate.

**Triggers of Ethnic Violence**

When ethnic conflicts arise, it appears that the issues are not primarily differences of ethnic identity. But, is it really so? Five weeks ago I listened to a BBC Radio News report as I drove home from the city of Nairobi. The report touched on a community in northern Kenya that is experiencing severe drought. Cattle are dying and people do not have enough to eat. The report indicated that thirty-one people had been killed in ethnic conflicts in that area. When there are normal rains, and the communities have adequate pastures, there is no problem. The two ethnic groups live together side-by-side peacefully. However, when water is scarce and pastures are limited, ethnic violence flares up. Is this ethnic violence or is it pasture conflicts?

Ethnic conflicts flare up at certain times and die down at other times. What are the trigger points for ethnic violence? What is it that sparks conflict between two groups that have been living together peacefully? May I propose that the common triggers are scarcity or dwindling resources, imbalances or shifts in power structures, and manipulation of or inadequate representation in institutions, structures or managerial processes of the
community. As Bonnie Ayodele has pointed out,

In a state with an unjust system of distribution, politics of exclusion, social injustice, deprivation, human rights violation, oppression, intimidation and domination, the issue of resource remittance would always constitute a volatile contestation. The likelihood for the constituting groups to demand for equitable accommodation, distribution of power and resources; and the struggle to bring about changes in the oppressive system by redressing power imbalances would always be at the fore of their politics. (Ayodele 2008)

**Variety of Responses to Ethnic Tension**

In all conflicts there are God’s children who are merely victims, caught in the realities of a cruel fallen world. The Church needs to go in and stand by their side, to comfort them and to give them relief and hope. Then there are those of God’s family who are caught up with the attitudes of this world. They are partners with the perpetrators of violence. Their hands are drenched in the blood of their victims. Having perhaps inadvertently taken their eyes away from Jesus, or having never really known him, they have descended into the works of darkness. What should the Church do with these? It is much easier for me to pontificate some answers in this sanitized setting of a mission conference, away from the heart-wrenching realities of the pain of those who have been stabbed in the back by a known brother or sister. Such should not simply be kicked out or ignored as if they do not exist.

Paul the missionary wrote to the Corinthians—a church in the mission field, “All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God” (2 Cor 5:18-20). Notice the progression of his teaching. First, he reminds the believers that we have been reconciled to God. This was accomplished through Christ by God’s initiative. He then gave to those he had reconciled a ministry—a work to do for others who have not yet experienced the same.

Paul uses a rare New Testament word to describe our mission. He describes the believers as ambassadors (*presbeuo*). The word denotes someone who is elder or senior and is commissioned on the basis of this seniority to function in a particular representative capacity. The word came to be used of making a petition as a senior representative. It is clear from Paul’s teaching that we have received from Jesus the ministry of reconciliation and are to urge offenders in Christ’s stead to be reconciled to God. The
primary function of the Church is to bring about reconciliation. We are not well equipped to judge, but we are eminently equipped to minister reconciliation. We are commissioned with instruments of grace to act on God’s behalf.

Then there are those of God’s children who hold up the standard of truth. They take great personal risks in service to victims. And when they or their families are victims, they respond with active forgiveness. They know who has hurt them and they are ready to forgive. This is not the passive forgiveness of someone who is powerless and has no control. This is active forgiveness of one who chooses to walk the higher road of grace and reconciliation. Such have looked into the face of Jesus and have become captivated by his grace. The Church should affirm them and encourage others to emulate their example. By giving them opportunities to share their testimonies, they can become an inspiration to others to make similar choices.

An Example of the Church’s Response

During the period of the post-election violence in Kenya I saw the response of the Adventist Church and it made me feel proud and humble to belong to this family. The East-Central Africa Division (ECD) administration went into action almost immediately. At first there were intervention trips that took supplies and other assistance to the camps where displaced people were being gathered. Church members were invited to go along and meet the victims and just encourage them. These activities were significant enough to have been featured on the national television, radio, and print media.

The ECD then organized a meeting for pastors and church leaders to listen to their stories, to help them step back and see the larger picture beyond their particular location, and to give them training on how to go back to their church and communities and become agents of reconciliation. I sat in most of the sessions with the pastors. Sometimes it was hard to restrain tears as pastors shared their own experiences or those of their church members. At other times we laughed as we listened to some reactions that only become humorous when observed from the safe position hindsight affords. The sessions themselves produced healing as people came to realize that they were not alone in their fears and struggles.

What Lessons Have We Learned?

From South Africa the setting up of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission is very suggestive. While other nations have had their Truth Commissions, the South African commission has some unique features. The
chairman, the deputy chairman, and four or five of the commissioners were leading and influential churchmen. This gave this national commission a very strong religious or spiritual foundation. The commission insisted on the whole truth being told as a condition for amnesty. The chairman emphasized the central importance of forgiveness and reconciliation throughout the process. I think this is a model that may be helpful in dealing with situations of clear discrimination and deep hurt. Perhaps the Adventist Church often does not want to investigate the conflicts and hurts of God’s people. It is easier to let one hurt or disgruntled brother or sister go away with the hope that he or she may find another church family than to begin dealing with dirty linen. It seems to me that South Africa may have a valuable lesson for us. Deep, full reconciliation requires the truth. It requires time. It requires patience. It requires hearing and understanding.

From Kenya it is clear that the involvement of third parties who are not seen to have any alignments is of crucial significance. This resulted in a cessation of hostilities. However, fundamental issues of past imbalances have not yet been addressed. It is clear that cessation of hostilities is an easier part, but peace building requires deep commitment and real changes. This calls for continuing engagement. The parties have to be held accountable for meeting the terms of the agreement. This is the case in Zimbabwe, in Sudan, and in a number of other countries. Communities of faith have a role—a public role to be the light of the world and the salt of the earth. I question whether there can be such a thing as a private, secret demonstration. By its very nature a demonstration is public. It is intended to be seen, and its message is to be heard publicly.

I was in Rwanda at the beginning of July 2009 and had the privilege of being guided in a tour of the Genocide Memorial Museum. I was struck by the reality of a situation I had always read about. Something went wrong—very badly wrong in Rwanda. I was baffled by how deep the hostility must have been, for something of this magnitude to happen. But what was more troubling to me was, Where was the world when Rwanda happened? How could we—the rest of the world—wake up each morning and go about our pointless duties and preoccupations while Rwanda was happening. For 100 days we watched our TV screens and went to our places of work. Where was the Church? I am not just talking about the Church in Rwanda. There were sad stories of complicity, and heart-warming stories of courage and grace. But where was the rest of the Church? I came away from that museum visit feeling dirty and guilty. I was not my brother’s keeper. I stood at a safe distance and watched, and then looked the other way.

From Rwanda we have learned the dangers of looking the other way and losing time when events are unfolding before our eyes. Non-involve-
ment turned out to be very costly in human lives and in other ways. We also learned that we cannot trust ourselves to all live up to the standard of truth. We surprised ourselves by the things we could do if we were not closely watched. We also learned that the grace of God can enable us to offer forgiveness even in the face of the deepest hurt. We can look into the face of an enemy and say, “I forgive you.”

Some Fundamental Issues

The Political Division IV of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in 2008 held a conference on “Mediation in Africa.” In preparation for the conference a study was commissioned that investigated the extent of conflicts in Africa. The study underscores the importance of a comprehensive approach in trying to bring about peace and reconciliation. Four areas were identified as needing to be carefully addressed (Mason 2008:11). These are dealt with from the point of view of nations and states. I will address these briefly from the point of view of the Church.

Security

Sometimes physical security is threatened even within the Church, and it needs to be safeguarded. The Church should respond when an individual faces threats of physical harm as a result of ethnic tension. More often, however, in the Church it is other kinds of security like employment and fair advancement within the system. Administration and supervising bodies should ensure that each worker has job security and that any threats are dealt with openly and firmly.

Wealth-Sharing

Wealth-sharing addresses access to the available resources without discrimination. How equitably are human resource development opportunities distributed? Are different ethnic groups being fairly represented in the granting of bursaries and other educational opportunities?

Power-Sharing and Identity

A key contributor to ethnic tension is perceived imbalances in the power structures and decision-making processes of the Church. Some historical imbalances go back to missionary times when the Church was first planted. In some cases institutions were established in one region, and persons from one region were groomed for leadership. The Church should be seen to be addressing these imbalances.

Human Rights and Justice

Questions of unfairness and injustice need to be investigated and rec-
tified. The church should have an open system that gives a sense of fair arbitration and grievance processing procedures. When ethnic issues are alleged in a complaint, the arbitration body should include meaningful representation from the aggrieved ethnic group or at least from another neutral party. Justice and fairness must be seen to be done.

**Suggested Strategies**

Alvin M. Kibble, Vice President of the North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists sums up his counsel on how to deal with ethnic issues in the Church:

We must break “the silence.” A family is dysfunctional when there are some subjects they cannot or will not discuss.

We must find meaningful ways to talk through our differences if we ever hope to have Spirit-filled unity emerge from our diversity.

We must endeavor to listen carefully to one another, especially when we disagree.

We must neither overestimate the ability of the traditionally-privileged, nor underestimate the untapped abilities of our minorities.

We must not change the rules and standards of qualification when faced with the leadership challenges of competing ethnic or gender candidates.

We must fully engage our people, especially our young people, in the on-going mission story of Adventism.

We must refresh and revive the Adventist brand.

We must strive as Seventh-day Adventists to connect with the people of our communities, enlarging our network.

We must not and cannot effectively do evangelism at arm’s length.

We must be willing to cross the divides in a collaborative effort that bridges race, culture, gender, and generation, forging new partnerships that multiply our resources.

**Conclusion**

The Adventist Church in Africa is diverse and growing. It faces many challenges, not least of which is ethnic tension. In some countries these tensions are minimal, while in other places they are significant. Where these ethnic tensions exist, the energy for mission is diverted into non-productive activities both by membership and leadership. We cannot wish away negative ethnic feelings. We need to be intentional about addressing issues and felt needs. The Adventist Church needs to be proactive in addressing these areas of tension. Specific interventions are needed to build peace and harmony. Instructions and training need to be provided to pastors and other church leaders on creating a harmonious atmosphere among different groups in the body of Christ.
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Biography

Dr. Joel Musvosvi was born in Zimbabwe. His educational qualifications include a BTh from Solusi University in Zimbabwe and the MDiv and PhD in New Testament from Andrews University. Dr. Musvosvi’s work experience includes being a primary school teacher, a pastor, a college Bible teacher, a division departmental director, and an academic administrator. He is currently Dean at the Adventist University of Africa in Nairobi, Kenya. Dr. Musvosvi and his wife Angeline have a son and two daughters.
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My parents pioneered the proclamation of the gospel within a region of the Zanaki people of Tanzania where Christ had not been known before. Our South Mara home was at Bumangi eighteen miles inland from Lake Victoria’s eastern shores. Slowly the Holy Spirit called forth a church, a fellowship of reconciliation, amidst much travail.

Power and Clan

Confrontation with the powers was real, and especially with the powers of hierarchical authority and inter-clan division, which swirled around Wakuru, a young girl of about twelve who was one of the first believers in Christ. Her father had arranged for her to marry an old polygynous man from within her clan.

When Wakuru believed the gospel, she was confident that Jesus Christ wanted to free her from that kind of marriage, and so she refused to marry the man. This was unprecedented, for fathers had the authority to decide who their daughters should marry. Alas, her father had already received the dowry cattle. That meant the marriage arrangement was irrevocable. The confrontation between young Wakuru and the entire system of family and tribal custom shook the whole Zanaki edifice to its foundations. Never before had a twelve year old felt empowered to resist her father’s will in such matters. The confrontation went on for months, with beatings and even chaining Wakuru within her mother’s hut for many weeks. Finally the father acquiesced. Short of killing his daughter, there was nothing he could do to break her firm decision.

Then came another astounding upheaval which made the first confrontation only a side show. One of the first young men to believe in Christ, Nyakitumu Meso, approached Wakuru’s parents asking to marry her. She was delighted with the proposal. Alas, her parents and clan elders were infuriated, for Wakuru was of the Basketmaker clan, and Nya-
kitumu of the Blacksmith clan. A taboo ran deep within the Zanaki matrix which was divided into these two clans; Basketmakers and Blacksmiths could never marry. In vain Nyakitumu explained the biblical revelation that all humanity come from one parent. Although over the centuries people have divided into clans and tribes, in Christ there is a new humanity that transcends race and tribe.

For months the discussions went on between Nyakitumu and Waku-ru’s parents, permeated with much prayer by the little emerging church at Bumangi. At last Wakutu’s parents acquiesced, but with dire warnings that the marriage would be cursed and they would never have children. So Nyakitumu and Wakuru were married in the thatched roofed church house at Bumangi, the first Christian wedding within that region of the Zanaki people. While the church was filled with joy and song at the wedding celebration, the Zanaki elders united in cursing the couple so that they would never have children.

The Lord blessed Nyakitumu and Wakuru with thirteen children and in time their family replaced our family as the pastor couple at Bumangi; the home I first lived in was filled with the joyous laughter of the children of the Meso family. The clan leaders would shake their heads in astonishment commenting that the children of Christians are as numerous as goats. The marriage of this couple was an eternal memorial that in Christ there is, indeed, one new humanity. Many years later this couple had another first for the Zanaki people, their 50th wedding anniversary. In polygynous societies there are never wedding anniversary celebrations. So this anniversary was a celebration involving the whole community, with cattle killed for the feast, a packed church, several choirs, a couple dozen pastors coming, some from great distances, all to rejoice with the Meso family in this miracle of the grace of God. And Wakuru said with her face caressed in joy, “My husband never beat me even once; he just loved me all these years!”

**Blessing Other Clans**

Any consideration of the gospel of reconciliation within the East African context begins with such small and powerfully revolutionary breakthroughs of the reconciling grace of Christ as demonstrated in the life of this couple. They were indeed called of Christ as ambassadors of the gospel of reconciliation among the Zanaki. Especially revolutionary was the discovery that in Christ inter-clan barriers are transformed, that Christ calls people to love and bless people of alien clans. Of course, hospitality for the guest has always been a core value in African societies; but in Christ the guest becomes family! That is what astounded the Zanaki people, Basketmaker and Blacksmith living together as husband and wife.
This is the theme that Father Vincent Donovan develops in his description of the gospel becoming indigenized among the Maasai of Tanzania (Donovan 1978). The Maasai are the traditional warrior society of East Africa, for they have institutionalized a theology of cattle raiding growing out of an ancient myth that all cattle on earth were originally God’s gift to the Maasai. So much of their political energy goes into trying to retrieve their cattle that other clans possess; consequently, the boundaries between the Maasai lands and other societies have been notable as violent conflict zones for generations.

It is in that context that Donovan began an exploration of the biblical message with several Maasai hamlets. They began with Abraham, who was also a nomadic herdsman, and whose call to follow God meant that he was to become a blessing to all nations (surrounding tribes)! In time these discussions came to the astounding account of Christ who forgives his enemies as they put him on the cross. After some months of this amazing journey of discovery of the nature and call of God, Donovan and the hamlets discerned that the time was at hand to decide whether to commit to Christ. For several weeks Donovan did not visit the hamlets to give time for each to make an authentic decision.

Finally the day for decision was at hand. As Donovan met the hamlets one at a time he learned that for each hamlet the core issue in making the decision for or against Christ was whether they would abandon their traditional warrior culture and cultivate peacemaking with surrounding societies, such as the Kikuyu or Luo who had been rivals and enemies for many generations.

That was the core of the decision: Would the Masaii love and bless their traditional enemies or continue their war-like ways? Would they lay aside their weapons and become a community of peace? Remarkably each hamlet had decided to become believers in Christ, except for one hamlet. They decided that the cost of following Christ was too high. They were explicit that they had decided to continue their warrior culture. Donovan describes going to the edge of the hamlet and, as Jesus commanded, made it clear that they had made their decision and he would not be returning to meet with them again. He left that hamlet that day with a heavy heart, knowing he would not return again. They had made their decision.

**Peace within the Hamlet**

A core test of the commitment to Christ related to their traditional enemies as well as to their relationships within the hamlet, and especially men and women relations. Among the Maasai there was a taboo in regard to men and women eating together; that could never happen. Yet they knew that in Christ men and women have become a new humanity, a fel-
lowship of reconciliation. So the initiation of the communion fellowship in each hamlet represented in the most profound way the breaking of a taboo as men and women participated together in the communion fellowship of the covenant of Christ. As the beer jug was passed from person to person as each partook of this sign of Christ’s blood of the covenant, some hands trembled at the awe of it all. In drinking from the same beer mug together, they were indeed participating in a new fellowship of reconciliation in which there is neither male nor female, but one new humanity.

Occasionally, when Donovan came to a hamlet to share the mass, elders would say to him that they were dealing with a broken relationship, and so for this week there would be no mass. He should depart and hopefully next week they would be ready for the mass. As he would approach a hamlet for the mass, typically an elder would pick up a tuft of grass and hand it to Donovan exclaiming, “The peace of Christ between you and me.” Donovan would then pass the tuft on to another person, and the tuft would be handed from person to person until all had received the tuft. The passing of the grass as a sign of peace was preparatory to the peace, forgiveness, and reconciliation that the mass represented.

A Reconciliation Movement

Reconciliation was also a central theme within the East Africa Revival Fellowship. Within the small emerging church at Bumangi there was a yearning for an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as was true of churches across East Africa. A small group would meet regularly in our little church for early morning prayer, beginning with the second rooster crow (4:00 a.m.). In concert with this prayer movement, the Lord moved indeed. Church services could go for many hours as people repented deeply and received the transforming infilling of the Holy Spirit. Even those who were not believers would refer to the convicting work of the Holy Spirit saying that the “fire of God is coming down.”

The theme song of the revival filled the churches, “Glory, glory Jesus saves me, blessed be his holy name, for the cleansing blood has reached me, glory, glory to the Lamb!”

If the revival were to be described within a Scripture text it would be 1 John 1:7-9: “But if we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

The message of the Revival invited the personal confession of sin, receiving the transforming grace of forgiveness, and walking in daily fellowship with others who were living in the Way. Regular fellowship meetings...
of those in the Way have characterized the movement. Reconciliation with God and one another through the blood of Christ was the central theme of the revival. For example, Festo Kivengere of Uganda shares how in the early days of the revival the Holy Spirit convicted him of his attitudes toward the white headmaster of a high school where he had once taught. So Festo rode his bicycle fifty miles to the home of the headmaster, to ask forgiveness. In racially charged colonial East Africa, that was absolutely remarkable (Kivengere 2008:171). It is not surprising that the Ugandan revivalists were nicknamed *Abalokole* (People on Fire).

**Love for the Enemy**

In the 1950s the Mau Mau War for Kenyan independence erupted. Then later there were violent tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda. Also in Uganda Christians suffered immensely under Idi Amin’s rule. In these settings the revivalists were nicknamed, the People of the Lamb. Just as Christ, the Lamb of God forgives, so also the People of the Lamb were committed to being ambassadors of reconciliation as the people of the Lamb of God.

**Kenya**

Heshbon Mwangi of central Kenya shared his story with me. He was the headmaster of a school. One morning as he rode his bicycle to school he noticed that the villagers seemed subdued and at school the teachers were in a huddle by themselves. He did not know, although all were aware, that shortly the Mau Mau would attack him. Suddenly the Mau Mau warriors burst through the forest with knives and pistols as the teachers fled. As they beat and slashed Heshbon they shouted,

“Who is Jesus?”

“He answered, “Jesus is the Son of God and my Savior.”

“Can’t you join us in the fight against the colonialists?”

“No, I belong to Jesus.”

“Don’t you know that Jesus is a white man?”

“No,” said Heshbon. “He is the Son of God and my Savior. He will be yours too if you receive him.”

“Kill him! Shoot him!” they shouted.

Heshbon responded, “Wait a bit. I have nothing against you. Only that I love Jesus!”

The attackers left him for dead. Students and teachers scattered. All thought Heshbon had been killed. For the rest of his life his face carried the deep scars from the knifings that day (Shenk 2008:130).

I asked Heshbon, “Why did you not keep a gun in your home for pro-
He responded, “In our traditional religion when the covenant lamb has been slain and we have eaten its flesh in a covenant of peace, then all who have partaken of that lamb can never again do violence against one another. How much more so when we have partaken of the communion cup of the blood of Jesus the Lamb of God, can we never again do violence toward one for whom Christ has died.”

Across the conflict areas of Kenya hundreds of the People of Lamb were martyred. When another of their number had laid down his life for Christ, the Abalokole across the region would fill buses and trucks and travel by the hundreds and even thousands filling the countryside with songs of joyous victory as they traveled to another celebration of one of their number counted worthy to lay down his or her life for their Savior.

This theme of reconciliation and forgiveness of the enemy was central to the Abalokole movement. This was an extremely difficult commitment in societies struggling with the colonial legacy and inter-tribal tensions. For example, in Kenya, only six years after independence in 1969, the country was at a political impasse, and on the verge of inter-tribal civil war. A number of the People of the Lamb were martyred for their refusal to participate in the political polarization or refusal to take oaths that bound them to ethnic and ancestral loyalties. Thousands of Abalokole from societies across Kenya met in the central highlands as a witness to the whole nation: we as believers in Jesus the Lamb of God will never do violence toward one another no matter what our tribal backgrounds might be. In Christ we are reconciled and we are committed to living in peace and committed to the peace of Kenya. That commitment salted the whole society with a more reconciling spirit (Smoker 1993:1-78, 284).

With this legacy, it is sobering that in the election impasse and violence that ensued in Kenya in 2007, there were insufficient voices calling for reconciliation. There were such voices and actions, but the churches on the whole seemed incapable of authentically transcending the tribal divides in Kenya, and especially the Kikuyu–Luo divide. I could, however, share accounts of heroic efforts at reconciliation, as for example a Luo bishop who hid a Kikuyu under his bed for some weeks. Had the bishop’s actions been known within his Luo village, the bishop would most likely have been killed.

Rwanda

In the late 1950s tensions between Hutu and Tutsi in Rwanda produced violent clashes. In the midst of these developments many People of the Lamb laid down their lives in their demonstration of authentic reconciling love. The Kenyan Heshbon Mwangi wrote to his brothers and sisters
in Rwanda admonishing, “Keep a positive testimony, both in word and deed. Use only one weapon—that of Calvary’s love for all, particularly those who are persecuting you. Only one weapon, love!” (Adeney 1963:13).

During those dark days Hutu and Tutsi would commemorate their reconciliation with one another by sharing often in the communion cup and bread of our Lord’s body. This was not trivial. When one school headmaster was being beaten to death, he cried out, “I have done nothing wrong. I am not in any party because I am a saved man. I do not hate anybody. I am not afraid to die for I shall go to my Heavenly Home” (Adeney 1963:47).

But darker days were to come. Twenty years later (April 6, 1994), the President of Rwanda, Juvenal Habyarimana, was killed in a suspicious plane crash. That was the trigger to unleash a genocidal conflict between Hutu and Tutsi. The churches as a whole were tragically compromised sometimes actually abetting the conflict. However, a dramatic exception was the People of the Lamb, who were Hutu and Tutsi united in love and fellowship for one another. Because of the inter-tribal nature of the People of the Lamb, they were often referred to as the Party of Jesus, for they did not belong to any of the belligerent camps.

Immediately on the day that the Hutu-Tutsi genocide commenced, the perpetrators went to the home of the key leader of the People of the Lamb, Israel Havigumana, and they killed him and his wife. Thereafter across the country the Party of Jesus were especially targeted, and we estimate 50,000 were slain within several days of the onslaught. Remarkably when the genocide abated and tens of thousands had gathered in refugee camps, it was the People of the Lamb who had survived the genocide who conducted mass meetings for repentance within the camps. Their message of forgiveness and reconciliation in Christ could be heard for as a fellowship of reconciliation thousands of their numbers had laid down their lives for Jesus and the gospel of reconciliation that he offers.

There was also space for outside help. Church agencies such as Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) sent teams of trauma counselors to move through the camps hearing the trauma, listening, and counseling. At that time neighboring Burundi was also edging to the brink of a Hutu-Tutsi conflict as well. So MCC placed unobtrusive teams into potential conflict areas as a presence for peace. These teams of outsiders were ears and eyes and presence for peace. A sister agency to MCC, Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) does just that, placing teams of reconcilers into conflict areas such as Rwanda and Burundi. It is dangerous work, yet they seek to be the presence of Christ to stand between the adversaries, absorbing the violence and thereby bringing peace.
Uganda

In 1971, General Idi Amin seized power in Uganda. He hijacked Islam, promising wealthy Arab nations that he would Islamize Uganda, which by the 1960s was mostly Christian. Half a million Ugandans died through his atrocities. The People of the Lamb prayed. Finally the leadership of the church respectfully confronted the President. As a consequence the Church of the Province of Uganda Archbishop, Janani Luwum, was martyred on February 16, 1977.

Over four thousand people ignored the police cordon and climbed the hill to the cathedral overlooking the city of Kampala. They could not bury their bishop for the authorities had taken the body to remote regions of northern Uganda. Nevertheless, the cathedral hillside overlooking the city filled with the triumphant songs of the People of the Lamb. The amazed city below heard their joyous song, “Glory, glory, Jesus saves me! Blessed be his holy name. The cleansing blood has reached me! Hallelujah to the Lamb!” (Kivengere 1977:80-83).

At the same time a team of keen young Christians were preparing dramas and song to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the coming of the gospel to Uganda. The churches were planning wondrous celebration events, and these young people were central to all those plans. They were killed around the same time that the archbishop was killed. Friends warned Bishop Festo Kivengere that his name was next on the list. So he and his wife and daughter set out across the hills by foot at night toward Rwanda. Some weeks later the Kivengeres were safely in London, and Festo went alone to a nearby cathedral. Alone with the Lord he struggled. The Lord said simply, “Festo, do you love Idi Amin.”

“No, I hate that man,” Festo responded.

“But I have died for Idi Amin.”

The battle within Festo’s soul raged. And finally in surrender he cried out, “Jesus, because of you, I do indeed love Idi Amin.” Later Festo wrote a book about all of that, I Love Idi Amin (Kivengere 1977).

Peace Themes in Traditional Religion

These commitments to reconciliation flow deep within the African soul. The gospel and the formation of the church fulfill a deep yearning and commitment to harmonious community building. Hand-shaking is just one expression of reconciliation themes deep within the traditional society. When meeting and leaving a friend, there is multiple hand-shaking. Even the child is remembered. An Asante proverb exclaims, “I am because we are; we are because I am!” The individual can only fully become a person within the context of community. On the other hand community cannot function without the lively engagement of the person.
For this reason in traditional cultures decisions were never made by voting. Rather the community leadership invested many hours in discussion and consensus building. When I was serving on church councils or university forums, we would discuss matters at length. If a consensus was not achieved, we would defer until further discussion could take place. The reason voting cannot work is that those who lose the vote will feel “defeated.” Defeat is not in harmony with community building.

In consensus no one is defeated. This is why a multi-party system is difficult for African political structures. The candidates in the one party system are selected through a process of consensus building by the recognized and respected decision makers. This means that the social structure must be hierarchical; that is true of all Bantu and Nilotic social systems in East Africa. (Somali systems are more egalitarian.) The chief is at the apex of the society. He is counseled by the elders. The chief and elders are roles that people acquire through discernment that is formed by wisdom and age and community building leadership qualities.

Each society (tribe or clan) has its own hierarchy with the chief presiding at the apex of the community. Decisions flow from the apex with his council of elders downward. The function of those at lower levels is to carry through with the decisions that come down from above. Each level of the hierarchy has its own decision making responsibilities but always in harmony with the counsel coming down from the wise ones above. The lower levels offer gifts to those above in gratitude for the wise counsel that they receive. Gifts move upward, wise counsel flows downward. There can therefore be no challenge to the higher levels of authority for that would disrupt the harmony. The flow of counsel downward and respect flowing upward must be protected in every way possible, for disruption distorts community, and distorted community disrupts the harmony of life (Mbiti 1971:61-66).

For example, the society will not tolerate a break in relationship between a father and a son. If there is a broken relationship the elders will intervene. They will meet with both father and son, determine what the issues are, what steps need to be taken to bring restoration of the relationship, and seek to effectuate a restoration of father-son harmony. If the father dies in a state of broken relationship with his son, that is the ultimate tragedy, for his wounded spirit may become malevolent and there is nothing more fearful than a malevolent ancestral spirit on the prowl.

Fractured Peace

The system has its challenges, and especially so in modern society where mobility and the modern nation state pushes societies to develop structures that are inter-clan. The traditional hierarchies only function
well in a mono-clan situation. The hierarchies are dependent on the favor of the ancestors. Therefore, change is anathematized for deviations from the way of the ancestors will invite their revenge. A further complication is the enormous restraints on personal freedom and initiative that the system demands, as Wakuru’s experience demonstrates.

In traditional societies one hierarchy may develop relations with another hierarchy, but each must maintain its internal integrity. The modern nation state with elected leaders from different clans does not look kindly on that kind of system. Furthermore, a grass roots electorate destabilizes the system, for authority in a grass roots electorate can challenge the authority of those in the hierarchy above. Add to that the fact that each society has its own myths of origin. For example, the Wakiroba of East Africa believe they have originated from the leopard and the Kikuyu myth has the primal Kikuyu couple originating from the fig tree. So humanities are divided each with its own origin—what a brew of inter-clan rivalry that mythical concoction creates! Recall the account of the impasse over the inter-clan wedding of Wakuru and Nyakitumu described above.

Even in these modern times these traditional systems and myths tug powerfully at societies all across Africa. This is at the root of the Kenyan election impasse in 2007. Here was a modern nation state doing quite well, an apparent bastion of stability. It was exceedingly corrupt with gifts flowing upward through the system to the wise decision makers above and wisdom emanating from the wise leaders holding power within the apex of the hierarchy. Then it appeared that the presidential candidate from a non-Bantu Nilotic society had won the presidential election. The Bantu societies of Kenya did not have the societal mechanisms to cope with such an upending of hierarchical control. It was unfathomable that a Nilotic could become president. Kenya moved to the precipice of disintegration.

Only an authority from outside with ample hierarchical credibility (former general secretary of the United Nations), only he with his team of advisers could muster the credibility to intervene. Through the force of moral authority Kofi Annan brought about a semblance of restoration, which in the end consisted of the creation of two parallel hierarchical authorities. The same development has unfolded in Zimbabwe, with two parallel hierarchies functioning side by side. Election results proved meaningless in the light of hierarchical realities. And of course the Rwandan genocide of 1994 was a look behind the curtain at the hell that these ethnic-centered systems can sometimes create.

**Jesus Inaugurates an Authentic Revolution**

Imagine the revolution the gospel brings when Jesus Christ walks across the path of these traditional worldviews and invites, “Come, follow...”
me!" When a people say, “yes” to that call, the hierarchy is upended. The chief becomes servant (Phil 2:5-9). When the gospel first came to Uganda, the chiefs were astounded by Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples. The unthinkable happened. A number of chiefs went into the fields and began to labor side by side with their slaves; some freed their slaves (Anderson 1977:27, 28). That is the spirit with which Julius Nyerere ruled, the first president of Tanzania and a devout Catholic. When government dignitaries would visit him when he was at his home in rural Butiama, he would invite them to join him in the field digging side by side with the villagers, or at harvest time helping with the harvest. Government business would wait until the afternoon after the morning’s work in the fields was completed.

The church is the only authentic inter-clan community. Islam is a competitor with the church for the formation of inter-clan community. However, the Islamic liability is that Islamization requires Arabization, for the Qur’an and the required ritual prayers are in Arabic. The consequent pull toward Arabization serves to nurture people away from their indigenous culture in order to become truly faithful participants in the universal Muslim nation. Quite to the contrary, across the African continent the first book published in the languages of most societies has been the gospel and other Scripture portions (Sanneh 1989:211-214). Genesis and Matthew were the first to be available. Imagine the joy of discovering that God in Christ is incarnate within the language and ethos of the local society. It is not surprising that joyful dance characterizes many African congregations as they join in worship using local idiom and language. And that is the genius of the church; it is both indigenous and local while also universal. For example, the Lord’s Table is celebrated in local idiom with bread from local grains, yet the table is also a statement of participation in the fellowship of the universal church.

When the Mennonite Church in Tanzania was on the verge of a major split dividing the church along tribal lines, the political authorities in Tanzania were appalled. They well knew that the church is the most authentic inter-clan community. If the church breaks along tribal lines, the nation could not survive. So the Muslim President Mwinyi met with the Mennonite bishops and told them that as president he was commanding them to preserve the unity of the church. “Follow your Bible and be the church,” he commanded.

The Cross within the African Context

The Lord’s Table (Eucharist) is a powerful ritual of reconciliation. The communion table is a remarkable fulfillment of the deepest yearnings for reconciliation within the traditional African societies. I was impressed by
this when teaching at Kenyatta University College in the 1970s. For their research assignment students were required to interview their grandparents asking the question, “How did your society work at restoring peace in times of conflict?” So I acquired seventy research papers on conflict resolution from societies across Kenya. These papers were case studies of a variety of conflict scenarios, such as father-son, husband-wife, neighbors in a land dispute, warriors fighting over a girl, or full-scale inter-clan war. I wrote a book based upon these research findings, *Justice, Peace, and Reconciliation in Africa*.

A central theme in all these studies was a commitment to restorative justice rather than retributive justice (the exception was the witch, who was destroyed, perhaps by placing the witch in a hive of bees). The elders would meet, hear the complaints, and then pass judgment on steps to be taken to restore the broken relationship. Then in every case study, the reconciliation and peace was always consummated through the sacrifice of an innocent animal. In one case study the sacrifice was a virgin girl. In every case the sacrifice had to represent the best that the protagonists could offer—the victim had to be perfect.

The Samburu tribe of Kenya is an example. If there was violent conflict between warriors, the elders would meet, hear the complaints, and pronounce judgment on steps to be taken for restoration. Then a perfect one-year-old white bull was selected and slain. The blood was caught in a container and sprinkled on the warriors and their weapons which were placed side by side forming an elongated gate. The warriors would pass from the arena of conflict to that of peace by bending over and walking through the elongated gate of peace that their weapons had formed. Then they would cook the flesh of the bull and feast together, sharing meat with one another. They would make white bracelets from the skin of the bull and place these bracelets on the arms of the warriors. All who received this bracelet of peace could never again fight another warrior who had that bracelet (Shenk 2008:64-68).

As I worked through these reconciliation themes, I discovered the French anthropologist/theologian Rene Girard. His research has led to his insistence that in traditional religions everywhere the sacrifice of the innocent victim is always required for the effectuation of covenants of peace in situations of conflict. So the East African sacrifices for reconciliation are really participants in a universal phenomenon. Girard has concluded that the innocent victim absorbs the hostility of the protagonists, and dies thereby breaking the cycle of retributive justice and violence. He believes this reality points to a universal truth paradigm, namely Jesus, the Lamb of God, who is the best heaven and humanity could offer. Jesus, as the innocent victim, absorbs the violence on the cross, forgives, and dies thereby
breaking the cycle of violence (Girard 1977:1-67; 250-273).

Ah! That is exactly what Heshbon Mwangi shared with me when I asked why he did not violently protect himself and his family during the Mau Mau wars. He pointed out that in the traditional Kikuyu religion the covenant of reconciliation was effectuated through the sacrifice of a lamb—how much more so do we need to love the one for whom Christ, the Lamb of God, has died. He somberly reflected, “When we have taken the communion of the blood of the covenant of the Lamb of God, we can never do violence against another for whom Christ has died.”

The communion of the Lord is the table of peace; “My peace I give to you!” Jesus exclaimed. But he also made it clear that his peace is not the same as the peace that the world offers. In fact, that covenant of peace that the Mau Mau practiced was the covenant that bound fellow Kikuyu into the bonds of peace, but that peace was also an oath to violent conflict against the British colonialist and all who were their allies. In 2007 when Kenya stood at the abyss of inter-tribal war after a disputed election, it is reported that covenant oathings were reinstituted in different locations across the country. These were ethnic covenants, binding the participants to a fellowship of violence if need be against all who would challenge the hierarchical claims to power by the governing authorities who were Bantu (Kikuyu) dominated. These fearsome oaths were rooted in the authority and power of the ancestors.

It is noteworthy that after the Kofi Annan peace accords were implemented, several Christian congregations with their leaders went to every location across the country where it was known that such oathings had taken place. In the name of Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, they prayerfully broke the power of these oaths thereby freeing those who had participated in these oaths so that they could join the peace-making process without fear of retribution from the ancestral powers. The covenant blood of Christ frees from the powers of death and speaks life and forgiveness and reconciliation.

Sometimes the presence of a team from outside can be a gift in the reconciliation process, as Kofi Annan’s presence demonstrated. In Kenya, while the atrocities were still raging, Mennonite church leaders encouraged the trusted Eastern Mennonite Mission’s (EMM) representative for Africa to come and facilitate reconciliation conversations. It is amazing that at risk to life because travel was so dangerous, leaders from across the Mennonite Church convened under the chairpersonship of the EMM Africa representative. It was an emotive gathering for all had deep grievances and their congregations and families were terrified. Yet as they talked, they kept coming back to this question: Will our ethnic identity or our commitment to Christ and the church as a community of reconciliation
be pre-eminent? It was a terribly hard question. When they first met, for some the ethnic pull prevailed. But they kept returning to this question: Will we embrace Jesus and his way of peace? In the end all decided to stand firm in Christ regardless of what the cost might be, including possible death.

Then after the violence began to subside, the Kenya Mennonite Church convened trauma healing and reconciliation seminars in various locations within the church constituencies. One of the resources was the book, *Justice, Reconciliation and Peace in Africa*, based on the Kenyatta University College students’ research. These seminars were well received, and helped to further strengthen the commitment of the church to the calling of Christ to be communities of healing and hope.

Peacemaking is hard work. A Kenyan team of reconcilers discovered that when they began to engage the protagonists in apartheid South Africa as the country was beginning the tumultuous journey toward post-apartheid nationhood. That narrative merits a separate tome. But let me just say that a multi-racial and multi-ethnic Kenyan reconciliation team linked up with brothers and sisters committed to reconciliation in South Africa. In unobtrusive yet dramatically creative ways they intervened as peacemakers when South Africa was at the brink of cataclysm. A key player was a university professor, Washington Oumu. Prayer and action permeated the effort. A crucial component was safaris to the game parks that the reconciliation team arranged. They would take a dozen protagonists and decision makers at a time to enjoy the elephants together! And then around the campfire in the evening each would share his story; they learned to know each other not as the enemy, but as fellow human beings. The whole effort was permeated with a climatic prayer gathering of thousands in Cape Town; that was the night that key decision-makers finally made the enormously difficult choice to have free and open elections (Cassidy 1995:141-214).

### The Peace of Islam and the Peace of the Gospel

The Muslim community is also much concerned about peace. In fact Islam means peace. It is noteworthy that the Muslim community’s commitment to peace is significantly formed by a meta-narrative that takes the Islamic commitment to peace in very different directions than is true of the New Testament church. For twelve years in Mecca in seventh-century Arabia, Muhammad called on the warring and fractious polytheistic clans of Arabia to unite as a people of peace under the authority of God. His preaching had minimal effect. However, when he heeded the invitation to come to Medina, all of that changed. His migration to Medina is the *Hijrah*, and this event enabled Muhammad to gain the mechanisms...
of political and military power. With those instruments of power he was able to defeat his foes and establish and extend the peace of Islam (Dar al Islam) throughout Arabia. Within eight years of the Hijrah, Muhammad entered Mecca leading 10,000 soldiers in triumphal victory over the forces opposed to the peace of Islam.

At the height of his popularity, after Jesus had miraculously fed 5,000 men plus women and children by breaking several loaves of bread and a couple fish, the Galileans demanded that he become their king. Like Muhammad, they would have had an army to lead. These were the Zealot freedom fighters against the polytheistic Roman occupiers. Jesus rejected that invitation, instead setting his face to go to Jerusalem where he knew he would meet the cross. In this decision, Jesus chooses a direction for the establishment and extension of the peace of God that goes in the opposite direction than that represented by the Hijrah. His colt ride into Jerusalem just before his crucifixion says it well in the words of the Prophet Zechariah:

See, your king comes to you,
   Righteous and having salvation,
Gentle and riding on a donkey
   On a colt the foal of a donkey
I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
   And the war horses from Jerusalem,
And the battle bow will be broken.
   He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
   And from the River to the ends of the earth!
   (Zech 9:9-10)

This peace that Zechariah proclaims is effectuated in Jesus on the cross. As all the violence and hate and rebellion of the world crash into Jesus on the cross, he cries out in forgiveness. In his forgiveness the cycle of violence and retribution is broken, and we are healed and forgiven. In Jesus God has taken our place. Our sins are forgiven indeed.

In the wake of the Hijrah and Muhammad’s triumph in battle against superior Meccan forces, the Qur’an’s assessment is that Jesus the Messiah could not be crucified. There is no space for the cross in a Hijrah formed theology wherein peace needs the assistance of military and political power. Hence Islam denies the crucifixion. Muslims believe that Jesus was whisked to heaven bodily; he never died, he was never crucified.

The peace of the cross in Christian experience is a rich tapestry. I will comment on only two dimensions: forgiveness and reconciliation. Foun-
dational to authentic personal peace is the reality of forgiveness of sin. Jesus has taken our place; we are forgiven indeed. By denying the cross, Islam has forfeited the assurance of forgiveness. In the cross we are also reconciled to God and to one another. Jesus absorbs the violence, and forgives. The cycle of retribution is broken. We are reconciled. Again by denying the cross, it is difficult for Islam to grasp the possibilities of reconciliation. In the absence of the cross, Islam is inclined to rely on retributive justice more so than restorative justice.

Ahmed Haile is a Somali follower of Jesus Christ who has worked extensively in peace-making efforts within the Somali milieu. He teaches peace studies at Daystar University in Nairobi. His perception is that the pre-Islamic traditional themes have peacemaking themes that are especially helpful in the current cycles of retributive violence which seems unstoppable in the Somali context. He bypasses the Islamic retributive systems enshrined in Islamic Shari'ah and builds instead upon the pre-Islamic traditional themes of covenant (her) as he works as mediator and counselor for leaders seeking to find ways through the impasse. The traditional approaches to peace-making are based upon restorative justice; he feels that Islamic systems are more inclined to retributive justice. The champions of Islamic law have been quite peripheral to the peacemaking process; in fact, the Islamists seem to complicate the peace process.

Ahmed feels that there are remarkable commonalities between Old Testament restorative peacemaking and the traditional systems. He views the communion table within Christian experience as being foreshadowed by the her system which effectuates both intra-clan and inter-clan covenants of peace. Ahmed considers it as not coincidental that the peacemaking efforts in Islamic Somalia have quite consistently looked to Christians such as Ahmed or the UNO appointed peace envoy, Bethel Kiplegat, and others to help show the way forward. He feels that there are significant convergences between traditional covenant making and biblical commitments to restorative justice (Haile 2005:256-261).

**Concluding Comments**

Recently eight Anabaptists were invited to a dialogue with Iranian Muslim theologians in Qom, Iran. After my presentation on the peace of Jesus, I was presented with this question: “Why do you put the cross so central in your presentation on the peace of Jesus. You know that we Muslims do not believe in the crucifixion, so put the cross as an insignificant side issue that we disagree about, but let’s dialogue about core issues.”

I responded, “If we remove the cross, we have robbed the gospel of peace of its soul.” As I see it the genius of peace-making in Africa is a recovery and an embrace of the cross as the soul of the gospel. And it
is obvious that the traditional religious heritage of Africans has been a preparation for their believing and embracing of the gospel of peace and reconciliation.

Recently I preached in a refugee congregation in Omdurman, Sudan. About 150 were present, mostly widows and orphans from the wars in the Nuba Mountains and Darfur—most from Muslim background. I shared, “In Jesus God has entered your experience fully. Jesus was a refugee, most of his childhood boy friends were killed, he was unjustly accused, tortured and killed, as has happened to your husbands. God raised him from the dead. He therefore has not only participated fully in all that you have experienced, but in his resurrection power through his Holy Spirit Jesus is empowering you to forgive your enemies as he forgave, and to triumph over the injustice and suffering that you have experienced. Jesus invites you and empowers you to forgive and to serve joyously in his kingdom of righteousness and peace and love that he is bringing to pass right here in this church.”

After that sermon, these widowed and in most cases molested women, went into the courtyard in the midst of that refugee camp and with songs of joy and yodeling they danced with joy as they sang praises to Jesus their healer and redeemer. I did not know the language, but there was one word I did know, Yesuous. Every song was permeated with joyous praise to Jesus who has not and will never abandon them and who is their healer!

Works Cited


David has lived in East Africa much of his life, where his parents were pioneer missionaries with Eastern Mennonite Missions. He and his wife, Grace, invested sixteen years in Somalia and Kenya with a special focus on educational work within Muslim contexts. He has also served in international global church networking and missions, most recently as academic dean at the Lithuania Christian College. At present he is Global Consultant with Eastern Mennonite Missions.

His interest in relevant Christian presence, peacemaking, and witness in a world of religious pluralism, and especially among Muslims, has taken him into more than 100 countries, usually as a presenter in seminars or in dialogical engagements with Muslims. A recent engagement was a formal dialogue with theologians in Qom, Iran. He has authored or edited seventeen books or booklets and written numerous articles on themes related to the gospel and peacemaking in a pluralist world. He has taught in a variety of universities and seminaries in the USA and internationally. Recently he was invited to present lectures in a Shanghai university on inter-civilizational peacemaking. He is a pastor, preacher, church planter, and teacher; he holds a doctorate in religious studies education with course work in anthropology from New York University.
In an assessment of Seventh-day Adventists’ involvement with social issues, the following remarks were made in an unpublished paper: “Today the church is split between isolationists who have little interest in the Church’s participation with society other than what is necessary to protect institutional interests, and activists, who want the Church’s voice to be heard on the great issues of public morality that face society” (Standish 2006:4). The current state of affairs follows a period of institutionalism, which in turn, was preceded by an earlier stage of activism. It is widely reported that worldwide, as of 2002, only about 29 percent of Seventh-day Adventists were involved in community activities. Activists, however, are divided. There are traditionalists who are more concerned about issues that are considered to herald Sunday laws (national ID cards, the rise of the religious right, government support of religion, etc.), while conservatives would rather have the church work on issues on the broader conservative social agenda such as abortion and same-sex marriage.

Others, concerned about issues on the broader liberal social agenda, would like to see the church involved in matters such as universal healthcare, racial/gender discrimination, world peace, the elimination of poverty, the death penalty, and the protection of the environment (Standish 2006:4, 5).

Of course the church has neither been totally negligent nor silent on these issues. It has issued statements on wide ranging matters, from abortion and AIDS to climate change, cloning, homosexuality, homelessness, poverty, to gene therapy (Dabrowski 2005). The church’s significant health and educational ministry around the world should also be understood as an immense contribution towards uplifting the lot of the less fortunate. Adventists believe that the well being of the human person depends on an inseparable interrelation of such matters as physical and spiritual health, education, and human rights. On these initiatives, the
The church is known worldwide to be a significant player. The church is also known worldwide for its championing of religious liberty. Furthermore, in different parts of the world, constituencies of the church have been visibly involved in social activism. A week before the 2005 G8 meetings in Scotland, members of the Crieff and Edinburgh churches were among some 222,000 anti-poverty campaigners as part of the “make poverty history” demonstration. In 2008, Mozambique’s president commended the government’s partnership with the church to combat poverty and improve communities. Several of these stories could be multiplied around the world.

Nevertheless, other situations such as apartheid in South Africa, the genocide in Rwanda, and the conflict in Kenya following its recent controversial elections in 2008 cause people to ask: Should not the church be doing more about these things? But how does the church know if it should get involved, and when and how should it get involved? These questions raise ethical issues that are inherently complex. Besides, the evidence seems to present a mixed picture of both noble and bad behavior on the part of some Adventists. What can we say about these things? Without denying the church’s positive influence both corporately and as communities of believers around the world, certain situations call for reflection. It is impossible to get into the details of all the matters related to the church’s involvement in the public square. Neither is this paper intended to provide a social doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Much more cooperative effort will be needed to undertake that task. The paper simply focuses on those matters that are of interest to this conference, and takes a diagnostic tone with the view to providing some general points of reflection that could be helpful to the church as it thinks about what more could be done on these issues of concern. First, we will throw a little bit more light on the nature of some of the social issues that are of interest to the conference, second, we will try to give a succinct statement of the church’s theological stand on those issues, and finally, we will explore the concept of ethical discourses as a way of raising the level of sensitivity and activity towards social issues in the church.

Matters That Call for Critical Reflection

There seems to be important reasons why the church needs to be more alert towards certain social issues in different parts of the world. What is provided below is by no means exhaustive, and is not intended to describe the situation of the church everywhere. But it is given as a caution to what could become a disturbing pattern in some sections of the church around the world.
War and Political Conflicts

From the Rwandan massacres in 1994 which actually led to the sentencing of a former Adventist administrator by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (BBC News, February 20, 2003), to the conflicts in the Balkans, the tensions in the South Pacific (coups d'états in Fiji and the Solomon Islands) (see Kukolja 2000:61-65), to the recent post-election crisis in Kenya, a consistent picture emerges: Adventists in regular standing have either actively participated in political conflicts or condoned them. Meanwhile, the perception persists that in such circumstances official denomination responses are often either not forthcoming or belated (as in Rwanda) or vague (as in the crisis in Kosovo). Tihomir Kukolja observes that when Adventists become actively involved in political conflicts with racial undertones it is not enough for the church to repeat “the well-worn statement . . . that the Church is not involved in politics” (Kukolja 2000:63).

Rather, “such circumstances should move the worldwide church to do something other than simply publish moralizing and doctrinal pamphlets about its commitment to pacifism and peace. The church has an obligation to voice its moral concern—even outrage when necessary—in a clear, unbiased, and fair way during times of political crisis, times when its own people might be confused about issues of nationalism and racism” (Kukolja 2000:63).

Nationalism, however, raises its own complex issues and sometimes apparent conflicting perspectives. It is reported that the Global War on Terrorism has prompted increasing numbers of Adventists to join the armed forces (Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries 2007). On the one hand, this development appears to be cast in positive terms when it is remarked that “war hardly seems the likely venue for encouraging spiritual ventures, yet conflict can spawn great good” (Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries 2007). The report appears to adopt a two kingdoms approach in which it is argued that citizens prioritize conflicting loyalties by balancing the objective with the subjective: the dilemma is “resolved by exercising a practical faith that fulfills spiritual responsibilities to God by serving one’s fellow man” (Adventist Chaplaincy Ministries 2007). On the other hand, one can hardly avoid the seeming tension between this approach and the Adventist statement on peace.

Apartheid and Racism

In a paper on “The Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern Africa—Race Relations and Apartheid,” presented at the Association of Seventh-day Adventist Historians Meetings, April 19-22, at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama, Jeff Crocombe alleges a pattern of discriminatory
practices that have characterized the church since its inception in South Africa in the 1890s. Crocombe agrees with the conclusion of I. F. du Preez and Roy H. du Pre in their *A Century of Good Hope* that in South Africa “the Adventist Church was always far ahead of the government of the day in applying racial segregation in the church, and far behind when it comes to scrapping racially discriminatory measures. By the time apartheid was introduced into law after 1948, Adventists had been practicing it for twenty or more years” (du Preez and du Pre 1994, quoted in Crocombe 2007:4).

It is interesting to note, however, that elsewhere in Nyasaland (Malawi) when, despite the abuse and exploitation of black farm workers by white farmers, the British colonial government introduced a poll tax and hut tax for all Africans living on white owned farms, it was the Seventh-day Adventist Church under the leadership of Priest John Chilembwe, that started to organize a protest against the colonial taxes.

Today, Adventists have a statement on racism which reads in part, “The Seventh-day Adventist Church deplores all forms of racism, including the political policy of apartheid with its enforced segregation and legalized discrimination” (Dabrowski 2005:83). Critics, however, point out that this official statement was issued only in 1985. And it was only three years after the formal end of apartheid in 1994 that the South African Union Conference Executive Committee submitted a statement of apology to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee, and it included an alibi that “the Seventh-day Adventist church community was a victim of the governmental system” (quoted in Crocombe 2007:6).

But, elsewhere, in America, the church recognizes the racial issue and has taken steps towards dealing with it. At a North American Division summit on race relations in 1999, the following ten critical issues indicative of the racial problem in the church were identified:

1. Adopt a new paradigm of inclusion.
2. Educate the members of North America regarding the negative effects of “White Flight.”
3. Eliminate all policies and practices which disadvantage people of color.
4. Become color blind and gender neutral in Church appointments.
5. Develop diversity education programs in every entity of the Division.
6. Become intentional about strategizing to become one Church.
7. Create effective ways to celebrate race relations progress.
8. Develop strategies for racial reconciliation in the paid Church structure.
9. Eliminate duplication in the Church structure.
10. Conduct sensitivity training throughout the Division (see the Office of
Poverty, Injustice, and Suffering

In a recent address on the future of Seventh-day Adventist health ministries, Jan Paulsen, President of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, underscored the integrated nature of Adventists’ response to issues of poverty and suffering. “Health ministry,” he remarked, “is therefore indivisible from our commitment to education, to human rights, to humanitarian work, to environmental care, to our desire to be a force for good in our communities” (Paulsen 2009:10). Paulsen proposed a theology of connection as one of four values to ground the Adventist approach, observing that “living in connection with others means seeing the large problems of society as collective human problems. I begin to see that poverty, for instance, is not just the result of random circumstances or arbitrary luck” (Paulsen 2009:9). Here, Paulsen appears to recognize the structural nature of the problem of poverty and suffering, for which reason he may have recommended that “we must, at times, have the courage to ‘wade into the fray,’ to recognize and condemn structures or practices that diminish the dignity of our fellow human beings” (Paulsen 2009:10). However, he does not confuse the recognition of the structural nature of the problem with its solution, for elsewhere, he carefully distinguishes between seeking political power and seeking a voice in the public discourse. “There is a vast difference,” he notes, “between seeking a voice in the public discourse, and seeking to wield political power. As a church—and individuals—we have not only the right, but the obligation, to be a moral voice in society; to speak clearly and eloquently on that which touches our core values. Human rights, religious freedom, public health, poverty, injustice—these are some of the areas in which we have a God-given responsibility to advocate for those who cannot speak for themselves” (Paulsen 2007:9, emphasis mine). Paulsen strikes the note of advocacy not as a novelty, noting Ellen White’s observation that slavery, unjust racial prejudices, oppression of the poor and such are “a serious menace to the well being of the human race, and as evils which the church of Christ is appointed by her Lord to overthrow” (White 2002:473). Indeed, the Church Manual admonishes church members in every community to be outstanding citizens “working for the common good of all” (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2005:173).

Yet it is this sense of advocacy that has sometimes appeared to have been found wanting among Adventist communities. It is reported that only about seven percent of Adventist churches in the United States are involved in community organizing projects or advocacy on social issues in their communities (see Center for Creative Ministry, FACT Research Find-
ings, at www.creativeministry.org). This apparent disconnect between profession and practice calls for further reflection.

### In Search of Understanding

How does one begin to explain the phenomenon that has been explored under the three broad social concerns outlined above? How does one understand the fact that a church that officially espouses refraining from seeking political power has some of its members spearheading the violent overthrow of governments or perpetrating violence in support of ethnically charged political conflicts? How is it that the church’s social pronouncements often seem slow in coming? Why do statements of social responsibility and involvement not appear to translate into action in some places? Is the church’s theology on these matters clear and accessible?

### Restating Theological Positions

The questions raised above are mainly ethical questions, meaning that they are concerned about issues of right and wrong decisions and actions. Moral decisions or actions, however, are generally undertaken from particular frames of reference. The discipline of philosophy has provided several of these reference points for making ethical decisions, but Christian decisions on moral issues, however, cannot be based on philosophical systems or cultural attitudes. Christian ethics, if it is to remain Christian, has to be guided by principles derived from a biblically shaped worldview. The recovery of Christian ethics goes hand in hand with the recovery of Christian doctrine. By implication Seventh-day Adventists’ approach to social issues will be determined to a large extent by their understanding of their biblically-shaped worldview as defined by the relevant aspects of their theology. Could the apparent inconsistencies noted above be the result of confusion over theology?

### Involvement in War and Political Conflicts

The Adventist position on war appears to have evolved from a stance of combatancy (where members are drafted) to a noncombatant position and finally to a noncombatant recommendation. How do these positions compare with other existing Christian views on war? Centuries of Christian discussion on the biblical view of war has yielded no consensus (see Hess and Martens 2008). The lack of consensus derives basically from the apparent paradox between the waging of war in Old Testament times including pre-theocracy (Gen 14), theocracy (Judg 19 and Josh 8; 10), and monarchy periods (2 Sam 5; 8) and the pacifism of the New Testament (e.g., Matt 5:39-44; Luke 6:27-35) and the latter’s injunction to subordinate
oneself to civic authority (Rom 13). In attempting to resolve the apparent paradox, Christian views on war have ranged from non-violent pacifism to the idea of a qualified participation (e.g., the just war approach) and the concept of the crusade (for a brief discussion on the history of these approaches during the history of the church see Clouse 2007:714-716). On their part, Adventists prefer to see themselves as noncombatants. The beginnings of the present Adventist statements on noncombatancy can be traced to an action of the General Conference Committee on September 16, 1941 (see Haynes 1950:21-29). In Adventists’ formulation of noncombatancy this is not antimilitarism, it is not pacifism, it is not conscientious objection to war as that is ordinarily understood. It is rather a discriminating recognition of the divinely stated principle enunciated by Jesus Christ that the Christian lives and moves in a two-fold area of obligation and loyalty. He has a duty to his government as well as to his God. He is to render those things to Caesar which belong to Caesar just as faithfully as he renders to God those things which belong to God (Haynes 1950:22).

Several Annual Council resolutions (1954, 1969, and 1972) restated the basic noncombatancy stance of 1941 with some variations. Some historical accounts, however, have pointed out that early Adventists had pacifist roots (see Harwood 2008:4-10; Osborne 2003:14-16; Morgan 2003). Osborne writes, “The church’s founders were New England pacifists who had roots in the Radical or Anabaptist Reformation, and they shared a tradition of social and political dissent that had given rise to Quakers, Mennonites and other religious communities committed to the ethics of non-violence” (Osborne 2003:14). This became quite evident in 1862, after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation by President Lincoln, when according to Ginger Harwood, “Adventists had to decide whether they would embrace ‘just war’ theory or maintain their non-resistance position despite the high stakes involved” (Harwood 2008:7). Ellen White’s view at the time, in spite of Adventists’ empathy for those enslaved, was that “God’s people, who are His peculiar treasure, cannot engage in this perplexing war, for it is opposed to every principle of their faith. In the army they cannot obey the truth and at the same time obey the requirements of their officers” (White 1948:361). Subsequently the General Conference session of 1865 voted, “While we thus cheerfully render to Caesar the things which the Scriptures show to be his, we are compelled to decline all participation in acts of war and bloodshed as being inconsistent with the duties enjoined upon us by our divine Master toward our enemies and toward all mankind” (Review and Herald 1865:196).

Ronald Osborne is of the view that following the death of Ellen White in 1915, the Anabaptist ethos of the early church eroded (Osborne 2003:15). According to Osborne, “The consensus of the new generation was that it
was no longer the church’s role to question the rightness of military adventures or foreign policy so long as Adventist soldiers were allowed to continue in their peculiar commitment to Sabbath observance. It was in this spirit of patriotic cooperation with the government that the Adventist Medical Cadet Corp was created, with beginnings in the early 1940s. The Corps sought to prove that good Adventists were also ‘good Americans,’ eager and willing to serve in the military, albeit in noncombatant roles” (Osborne 2003:16). With his captivating article title, “The Great Disappearance: Adventism and Noncombatancy,” historian George R. Knight remarks that “in the early 21st century, the church is in danger of losing an important teaching related to the Christ who claimed that Christians must love their enemies, rather than be trained to kill them” (Knight 2008:14). Knight’s assessment of noncombatancy appears to differ from Osborne’s pacifist inclination. For Knight, the Medical Cadet Corps, a creation of the church in the 1930s, was a positive way by which the Adventist public was kept aware of issues related to noncombatancy and military service (Knight 2008:13) whereas, for Osborne, the Corps was part of the beginning of the spirit of patriotic cooperation.

Obviously, some misunderstanding exists on the church’s understanding of noncombatancy which needs to be cleared up. Does the Adventist position on noncombatancy, even when stripped of its present recommendatory stance, come close to the “just war” approach? Is this the reason why some Adventists get involved in national and tribal conflicts?

Involvement in Issues of Poverty, Injustice, Suffering

Statements issued by the Seventh-day Adventist Church on social issues, we have noted, are many, including positions on domestic violence, tribal and national warfare, human rights, use of tobacco, abortion, euthanasia, human cloning, caring for the environment, and homelessness and poverty (see Dabrowski 2005). Each of these statements embodies a basic theological perspective that has been expressed in the Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology, namely, that being “an integral part of the civic community, a Christian cannot evade responsibility towards society” (Kis 2000:700). By way of providing some basic guidelines for carrying out the Christian civic responsibility, Miroslav Kis provides three basic principles: the principle of obedience to God first (Acts 4:19); the principle of obedience for the sake of law and order (Rom 13:1-7); and the principle of social justice. Under the last principle, Kis’ remarks are generally representative of the official church’s position.

The principle of social justice demands that human rights be respected and that Christians lead society in that direction (James
5:1-6). Beginning within the church and expanding to relations in the civic domain, discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or status must never occur without Christian opposition. While the church as an institution cannot resort to immoral or political means it can use all appropriate avenues allowed by the political structure of a country. There should be room for those feeling a call to occupy public office. (Kis 2000:701, emphasis mine)

Similar remarks are made regarding Christian social responsibility, noting that “there is no such thing as poverty; there are humans who are poor. There is no suffering, no hopelessness, no war, no disease in the abstract; there are only suffering humans, homeless people, fighting neighbors, and sick persons” (Kis 2000:702). Christians find themselves under a principle of identification which causes them to emulate Christ’s identification of himself with the unfortunate (Matt 25:31-46). To the extent that these remarks reflect the theology of the church, they do not only sharpen the need for the church’s sensitivity to the situation of the unfortunate, they embody a certain degree of advocacy on its part.

The question that needs to be addressed now is the following: If the church has a noncombatancy position, albeit recommendatory, on issues of war and political conflicts, why are Adventists increasingly getting involuntarily involved in wars and political conflicts? (see Lechleitner 2007). If the church has a theology on social issues that makes no room for civic and social irresponsibility why is the church often showing up in research findings to be socially significantly uninvolved? Any attempt to provide adequate answers to these questions requires careful attention to the variety of moral discourses relevant to the subject.

**Exploring the Varieties of Moral Discourse**

The renowned theologian James M. Gustafson has written about what he calls “varieties of moral discourse” and employed them as a means of analyzing church and society material. I contend that Gustafson’s categories will be helpful in clarifying the situation that the church finds itself in with respect to the apparent disconnect between profession and practice on social issues. The premise to the discussion below is that greater discourse on ethical issues is critical to ethical sensitivity and activity. Gustafson makes four key distinctions between prophetic, narrative, ethical, and policy discourse (Gustafson 1988:267-278).
Prophetic Moral Discourse

Prophetic moral discourse according to Gustafson, may take the form of either indictment or utopia. The former “addresses the roots of moral or social waywardness,” the latter, an ideal future state designed to motivate a community towards its realization (Gustafson 1988:269). There is no concern here about particular failed or inadequate policies; only orientations of a broad and fundamental nature that may explain certain shortfalls. Prophetic moral discourse has its benefits, but it has limitations too. On the positive side, indictment and utopian discourse, especially where vivid language and symbols are used, have the ability to arouse human moral sentiments. But as Gustafson points out, although prophetic discourse motivates action, it does not direct it since the move from indictment or moral vision requires the interposition of other moral discourses (Gustafson 1988:272).

By way of providing some examples among Adventists, on the one hand, Calvin B. Rock’s “The Church and Society” (see Rock, http://biblicalresearch.gc.adventist.org) by and large falls in the category of prophetic discourse of the indictment kind. Rock finds a certain reluctance among a section of Adventists to engage with socio-political systems and issues. His analysis traces this reluctance to “some theological aspects of Adventist conservatism” including apocalyptic eschatology, sectarian ecclesiology, radical determinism, and a freewill image of man (Rock:5-12). On the other hand, although some of the church’s official statements on social issues incorporate other discourses, the statements are essentially expressive of ideal states that the church wishes to see in place. This is especially the case with the statements on poverty/homelessness, environment, and racism.

The relevance of this discussion on prophetic discourse is the following. Without arguing the validity or otherwise of any particular expression of prophetic moral discourse, prophetic discourse is good as far as it goes; but it is not sufficient. Of course the church needs prophetic discourse to arouse it from a state of complacency. Especially in some parts of the developing world, it would seem that a great deal of prophetic discourse on church members’ involvement in political conflicts at the national and ethnic levels is long overdue. Nevertheless, the church would still not have done its social ethics after it has unearthed the roots of its apparent social disengagement and put out statements of desiderata. Other variants of ethical discourse, besides prophetic discourse, need to occur throughout the church worldwide.
Narrative Ethical Discourse

Narrative discourse refers to the maintenance of a system of narratives, stories, parables, etc., that sustains the memory of a community and is relied upon at points of particular moral choices. Its significance is related to the recognition that narrative is central to identity formation. Narrative ethical discourse can be helpful in bringing about most of the “church and society” ethical goals that the church has expressed in its statements. In the Adventist Church, the significance of narrative seems to have found the most expression on the issue of war. Consider the following observation. “Mueller also notes that much of the German reticence toward active military service probably stems from the country’s traumatic experience during World War II. According to Bruinsma, that painful memory ‘may still linger in the collective Adventist European consciousness’” (Mueller 2007:9). Here, it may be argued that World War II functions as what I may call a “massive default narrative.” George Knight refers indirectly to the power of narrative and bemoans its absence when he recounts how in the past the church maintained its noncombatancy stance. He writes,

The Adventist public was also kept aware of issues related to noncombatancy and military service by the lives of individuals who had made a difference in one way or another. On one end of the spectrum were those Adventist service personnel court-martialed and imprisoned for their religious convictions, including some 35 serving prison sentences of from five to 25 years at the end of World War I. At the other end of the spectrum were such individuals as the ubiquitous Desmond T. Doss, who received the Congressional Medal of Honor for having saved the lives of at least 75 wounded men in a World War II battle in Okinawa. Doss, the hero of noncombatants, and the only one to ever receive the award, was a frequent speaker at Adventist colleges, schools, churches, and general gatherings. (Knight 2008:13)

I wish to suggest that in places of the world church where members have been implicated in national and ethnic political conflicts, a “Truth and Reconciliation” type of committee could function in the church as a medium for needed narrative discourse. But not only on the issue of war do we need such discourse. It is needed on other issues of social concern where the church is legitimately and properly mandated to play a role. This will include expressing itself on issues such as abortion, homelessness/poverty, racism, etc. Yet, as important as narrative discourse is, it is also insufficient, for as Gustafson observes, “the particularity of the story
might impede discourse with those who do not share its authority” (Gustafson 1988:269). For example, on the question of military service, it has been remarked that “today, many Adventists enlisted are of the Vielmann, rather than the Doss persuasion: They see carrying—and potentially using—a weapon as an undesirable but inevitable element of military service” (Lechleitner 2007:8). Thus, stories can enlighten ethical decisions but they need to be tested by a more rigorous moral discourse.

**Ethical Discourse**

By ethical discourse Gustafson has in mind rigorous, self-conscious argumentation and clarification of ethical concepts backed by Christian convictions. What is required is a careful philosophical examination or argumentation of ethical issues such as rights and justice, duties, etc., not in the context of extant philosophical systems but, in this case, within a distinctive Adventist theological context.

At this level of discourse we discover several deficiencies among Adventists. Although it is my view that there is a paucity of philosophical ethical reflection on social issues among us, I will focus on the lack of rigor in the theological base for such ethical argumentation. The purpose of this focus is to make the argument that part of the inconsistency and disconnect in practice on social issues discussed above may stem from an insufficiently rigorous public theology or social doctrine.

**Framing the Theological Discussion (Niebuhr’s Typologies)**

Whether we speak about the church’s response to war, racism, or poverty and homelessness, we are involved in public theology. The church needs a social doctrine, and the doctrine needs to be properly framed. So far, this does not appear to have been done. The lack represents a significant vacuum in the church for the reason that the issue of Church and State, so critical to Adventist thought and action, is often the contact point for Christian ideals in society. Therefore, as a matter of foundational theological importance, the church needs a clear perspective from which to see the relation between the believer and the public square. This is the issue which H. Richard Niebuhr called “Christ and Culture,” and for which he developed five typologies to describe the relationship: (1) Christ against culture, (2) Christ of culture, (3) Christ above culture, (4) Christ and culture in paradox, and (5) Christ the transformer of culture (Niebuhr 1951). Dennis P. Hollinger has drawn out the importance of the Christ-culture question: it affects what we think about the possible impact of Christian ethics on society; it affects one’s general stance towards society (flee it,
fight it, reform it, ignore it, etc.); it determines the methods we deem appropriate to use in influencing society and its institutions; and it affects what we think may be appropriately borrowed from society in aid of worship and gospel proclamation (Hollinger 2002:190).

**Adventists and Niebuhr**

How does Adventist thinking relate to Niebuhr’s typology or does it? In the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* it is referred to but not seriously engaged, except to say that “Christ envisioned the church plunged into the ferment of society, yet free from the evils of the surrounding culture” (Kis 2000:700). There is no question, however, that in the recent past Adventists have approached social activism with some skepticism. In a way that may not fit neatly under Niebuhr’s typology. Adventists seem to have been guided in their involvement in social matters by their stand on church and state. It could be said that “church/state skepticism” would be the Adventist response to Niebuhr’s enduring problem of Christ and culture. Without reflecting on “two kingdom” theology with much theological specificity and detail, Adventists appeared to have instinctively refused to take on the role of policing society’s conscience. This is undoubtedly the result of their understanding of prophecy and the role the state will play towards the end of time on matters of conscience and religious freedom. This is the reason why Adventists, as a matter of principle, are usually wary of entanglements with state and state activities; it is also the reason why the church plays a leading role in matters of religious liberty around the world. But, in a recent, more direct Adventist engagement with Niebuhr’s typologies, John Wesley Taylor basically rejects 1, 2, 4, 5 by themselves while 3 is embraced with some modification. The principal modification of “Christ above culture” is that politics is “not seen as basically neutral, but deficient,” leading to the conclusion that “in the Christian worldview, evil is opposed, yet human culture is affirmed and elevated, by the grace of God” (Taylor 2008:206ff). Taylor suggests an overarching perspective of the Lordship of Christ in the context of the Great Controversy motif. Apparently, setting his position over against “two kingdom” approaches Taylor writes, “The believer then sees himself not as possessing dual citizenship, but as a citizen of the *encompassing kingdom* of God” (Taylor 2008:207). The deployment of the Great Controversy motif as part of an overarching one kingdom perspective could be a fruitful line of enquiry. But Taylor’s suggestion may require further teasing out to distinguish it clearly from the “Christ above culture” approach which has been the Roman Catholic stance since Thomas Aquinas. The fundamental difficulty for Adventist thought with the “Christ above culture” approach is its inbuilt two-tiered theologizing approach.
perspective is reflective of the classical Roman Catholic “natural-revealed” theological methodology.

The lack of a clearly defined theological perspective on the “Christ and culture” question in the church has meant that some ethical conclusions on social issues appear to be based on one or more of Niebuhr’s typologies. But, from a very tentative and rudimentary perspective, how may the outlook on social issues look like if the Great Controversy motif were to color the Adventist framing of them.

On the Question of War and Involvement in Political Conflicts

Much is made today about the issue of loyalty to God and loyalty to country when it comes to involvement in political conflicts. Felipe Vielmann perhaps speaks for those Adventists who do not see combatancy to be in conflict with Adventist values. He argues, “For me, it was more of an issue of duty to God and country” (Vielmann 2007:9). This reasoning is obviously based on Rom 13:1-2 which speaks of civic powers as “ordained” of God. This thinking has led to a brand of two kingdom/two loyalty approach in Christian history. The just war tradition is based on such thinking. The danger, however, is the tendency to absolutize the worldly kingdom. Martin Luther, while rejecting the idea of crusade, was a firm supporter of the just war approach due to his respect for the state as ordained by God to preserve order and to punish evil in the worldly realm. The Reformed tradition, on the other hand, accepted the crusade concept because they saw the state both as the preserver of order and as a means of furthering the cause of true religion.

In Rom 13:1-2, however, Paul did not intend to convey any idea of absolute power to civic authority. The word translated “ordained” (Greek. τασσό, to order, arrange), neither carries the implication that God always approves the conduct of civil governments nor that the Christian has a duty always to submit to them. A Great Controversy perspective, however, without denouncing the principle of the basic legitimacy of the church’s participation in the public square, should caution the Seventh-day Adventist against the facile presumption of both the inherent goodness or badness of cultural institutions. Rather, it should arm the Adventist with a “hermeneutic of suspicion” towards culture and its institutions knowing that in this conflict “He [Satan] is intruding his presence in every department of the household, in every street of our cities, in the churches, in the national councils, in the courts of justice, perplexing, deceiving, seducing, everywhere ruining the souls and bodies of men, women, and children, breaking up families, sowing hatred, emulation, strife, sedition, murder. And the Christian world seems to regard these things as though God had
appointed them and they must exist” (White 1911:508).

The foregoing argument may require us to understand the Adventist noncombatancy stance to mean that “voluntary noncombatancy” is contrary to historic Adventist values. As Angel Rodriguez has correctly noted, “There is no such thing as a just war. . . . The church must insist at all times on the evilness of human wars” (Rodriguez 2003:11). Consequently, voluntary involvement in political conflict based on national, ethnic, or any sectarian loyalty contradicts the historic Adventist understanding of biblical values.

On the Question of Racism, Poverty, Injustice, and Suffering

We noted earlier on that there is basic agreement, theologically, on relieving the plight of the unfortunate. Ellen White wrote, “The poverty of the people to whom we are sent is not to prevent us from working for them. Christ came to this earth to walk and work among the poor and suffering. They received the greatest share of His attention. And today, in the person of His children, He visits the poor and needy, relieving woe and alleviating suffering” (White 1933:23). How may the Great Controversy motif inform this basic theological perspective? Taylor is right in the view that it calls for a reorientation of thinking—from seeing Christian engagement primarily in terms of political action, to viewing political involvement as the faithful response of witness” (Taylor 2008:207). In principle, it may call for non-violent activism that includes advocacy, mediation, conciliation, and “casting one’s vote in favor of specific issues or platforms, rather than merely as a reflection of partisan alignment” (Taylor 2008:207). In addition, the Great Controversy’s “hermeneutic of suspicion” should alert us to the “dangers of compromise of principle and of a corruption of values, as well as allowing an involvement with politics to become all-consuming” (Taylor 2008:207). This perspective is important in view of the admonition that “those who hold the reins of government are not able to solve the problem of moral corruption, poverty, pauperism, and increasing crime. They are struggling in vain to place business operations on a more secure basis. If men would give more heed to the teaching of God’s Word, they would find a solution of the problems that perplex them” (White 1952:173). Taylor correctly points out that the position of Lordship entails perils. Precisely because it extends Christ’s sovereignty to all facets of life, it risks coming close to Niebuhr’s “Christ as Transformer of Culture” typology of which the social gospel, liberation theology, and the activities of what is commonly called the “religious right” are prime examples. The benefit of the Great Controversy dimension is to place matters in a proper perspective so as to avoid the tendency toward excesses not only of the
left, but also of the right including the more recent theonomic movement of the likes of Greg Bahnsen. Hollinger is right on the tendency on the part of transformers of culture to equate particular social and political agendas with the kingdom of God.

He correctly observes, “In their attempts to effect change for righteousness and justice . . . effectiveness has preceded faithfulness, and in the process, the unique contribution of Christian ethics has been lost” (Hollinger 2002:213).

**Policy Discourse**

Although ethical discourse informs, policy-making choices need to be made under particular circumstances. There are responsible agents to be considered, the potential for actions to effect change to be thought through, and a general deliberation on what is desirable within given constraints. But as Gustafson notes, policy discourse “accepts conditions which from prophetic and ethical perspectives might be judged to be morally wrong, or at least inadequate” (Gustafson 1988:270). Meeting the challenges of church and society in the 21st century demands thoughtful policy discourse on all matters, but here our focus will be on issues of poverty and suffering. Among the aspects that require reflection are those related to agency, that is, matters relating to who and how to address social issues.

Adventists’ sensitivity to the plight of the poor and needy came quite early in the movement’s history. Dorcas Societies began in America in 1874 and spread quickly throughout Adventist churches overseas. These societies are local church based and funded groups making garments and supplying food for needy families, caring for the fatherless and widows, and ministering to the sick. By the time of the World Wars, it is reported that “the Dorcas Society remained as the principal SDA welfare agency. After World War II, which left millions homeless and destitute, appeals directed to the churches and Dorcas Societies for material aid met a substantial response in the form of food, clothing, and other supplies” (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia 1976:344). In 1956 the church established an international relief agency called the SDA World Service (SAWS). SAWS had the main objective of alleviating pain, hunger, and suffering among people, without regard of their race, religion, or gender, and to assist in rehabilitation through self-help projects and educational services. Records show that the program was supported mainly by the Disaster and Famine Relief Offering that was promoted and received once a year in all churches around the world (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia 2002:1335).

In 1984 SAWS was reorganized and renamed the Adventist Disaster and Relief Agency (ADRA) with increasing emphasis on community development. Today, for many in the church ADRA is the public face of Adventist relief and welfare work, but the bulk of ADRA’s funds comes
from the United States. Although Dorcas Societies and Community Ser-
vice Centers continue to operate in some places, much of the corporate
church’s mindset seems to be a de facto “out-sourcing” of community
work to ADRA. In several places around the world, instead of members
contributing to the church’s humanitarian work (as was the case with
SAWS), some have come to believe that they have a right to receive help
from ADRA. Confusion also exists in some parts of the world that Wom-
en’s Ministries has come to replace the Dorcas Society, further weakening
the work of the latter.

The upshot of all these organizational changes is that over the years,
grass roots member support and involvement in community services has
waned. Besides the need for prophetic, narrative, and ethical discourses
in the church today, there seems to be a need for policy discourse that
refocuses on member participation and support in working for the needy
in society. A corollary issue to this discourse to refocus on member par-
ticipation may be the need to reassess what appears to be an institution-
alization of the church’s welfare work. Given their understanding of the
interconnectedness of human pain and suffering, Adventists have tradi-
tionally relied on their educational and medical institutions to respond
to suffering. Could it be that this approach, depending as it does on the
church’s institutions, tends to emphasize the role of institutions at the ex-
 pense of individual church member involvement? Indeed, as part of this
discourse the question needs to be addressed whether the church should
approach its role in society from an institution (mater fidelium) or from the
perspective of the community of believers (coetus fidelium) (for a helpful
discussion on this issue see Van Reken 1999:198-202 and Vander Meulen
1999:202-206). Indeed, there are those who may take the position that as
communities in different parts of the world, the church is significantly
involved in their local areas.

Further questions that need to be considered in relation to the church’s
agents of social intervention include the following. The church has co-
operated with outside entities (the Red Cross, etc.) in the past on some
matters of social action. At what levels and to what degree should such
cooperation be encouraged? Also, since the church’s involvement in social
issues has a spiritual dimension, what spirituality, from an Adventist per-
spective, would be constitutive of a proper mode of engagement? (For a
general discussion on spirituality in public theology, see Mouw 2005:471-
484). With what voice and posture should the church’s agents engage in
the public square? These are the policy issues that if properly addressed
in conjunction with the prophetic, narrative, and ethical discourses dis-
cussed above might encourage greater involvement by the church in so-
cial issues.
Conclusion

In spite of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s involvement in several humanitarian activities and numerous statements on several issues of social concern, it is often criticized for not being sufficiently engaged in the public square. The reflections offered in this paper point to some disturbing patterns that require the attention of the church. These are particularly in the areas of racism, political activism, and issues regarding poverty and suffering. Quite clearly, the church’s theology is in no way anti-society. It seems, however, that a greater appreciation of, and attention to the different levels of ethical discourses relevant to public theology could go a long way to improve not only the church’s image but also its involvement in the public square. In particular, there is a great need for the church to develop a rigorous and comprehensive social doctrine to nurture the prophetic and policy discourse of the church both corporately and as a community of believers.

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I knew it would be challenging for me as an Adventist minister from mainland China who was converted from atheism and communism to faith in Jesus and membership in the Adventist Church, and yet who has never renounced her love for the Chinese Communist Party because of her new faith, to write a review on *Awaken: Memoirs of a Chinese Historian*, an autobiography by professor Chang-Sheng Gu who openly renounced both Adventism and the Chinese Communist Party. In many aspects, professor Gu is a “strange other” to me, whom I can dialogue with, learn lessons from, and receive different perspectives on many things without agreeing with him on all the issues raised.

Gu’s memoir is roughly divided into four periods of his life, i.e., his pre-Adventist life, life in the Adventist Church, life under the Chinese Communist Party, and life in the United States, a life story spanning more than eight decades.

Gu’s pre-Adventist life was “a life in a slum” (1). His family belonged to the poorest class of Chinese people whose major concern in life was to survive no matter what. Although Gu only devoted six pages (1-6) to this period of his life, this provides an important social background which sheds a lot of light on Gu’s perspective of life and helps the readers understand the behavior of Gu’s parents as well as himself.

Gu summarizes his family’s “conversion” to Adventism by using a typical Chinese expression, “eating the foreign religion” (6). As typical of this kind of conversion that happened and is still happening in many poor countries, the Adventist Church felt “the best way to attract people to join the church was to offer them jobs or charity” (6). So they took “loving” advantage of the poor people’s desire to survive by offering Gu’s
father a job in the Shanghai Adventist Sanitarium under the condition that he “would have to be baptized before he could take a job” (5). After his father began work, Gu’s life story within the Adventist Church revolved around their family’s effort to keep his father’s job in the church (10) so the family could survive. Gu especially notes that his father did not understand the meaning of his baptism, and what worried him was “the dirty water” that he swallowed from the baptismal pool (18). Gu’s father’s unhappy experience during his baptism appears to be a sign of Gu’s own unhappy experience with the Adventist Church. Although his life in the Adventist Church was not all bad since he had some encouraging experiences with Dr. Harry Miller that brightened his outlook on the Adventist Church, his overall evaluation of life in the Church was that he “let” his life “be dictated by the Seventh-Day [sic] Adventist Church” (49). As a boy he was required to attend the Adventist school in order for his father to keep his job, and he claims he even had to marry a girl he did not love and had to work in the Signs of the Times Publishing House in order to please the Adventist pastor.

It is no wonder that at last, in 1951, after the Chinese Communist Party took over the government, Gu was active in exposing the missionary activities in his church and he cooperated with the work team during the ‘Anti-American Imperialism Accusation Campaigns (83). He was “selected [by the Communist Party] as a member of the [accusation] committee” (61) and later was “chosen to be one of the accusers at the third and last accusation meeting against the Adventist Church” (64). During the accusation sessions Gu confessed that, “my work for the American Christian mission in China was solely to make a living to support my family” (83).

In 1956, Gu finally ceased his work-relationship with the Adventist Church and became a worker in the Shanghai Foreign Language College, and later he transferred to the Shanghai Institute of Historical Studies. During this time he remained as a theist. Throughout his early years under the Chinese Communist Party, Comrade Luo, the director of the Shanghai Bureau of Religious Affairs, had been friendly to him, but Gu’s overall experience with the Chinese Communist Party was not a happy one either. During the Great Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), like many people during that time, Gu was falsely accused and was sent to a labor camp for three years mainly due to his involvement with the National Party during the Anti-Japanese War and also his work in the American operated Adventist publishing house. After Deng Xiaoping assumed power, he was assigned a job to teach in the History Department of the East China Normal University, at which time he started work on his book on the history of Christian mission in China.

In 1984, Gu traveled to the United States at the invitation of President
Regan for the National Prayer Breakfast together with Billy Graham and shortly after he became a visiting scholar at Yale University, thus marking the starting point of his scholarly life in America. While traveling in the United States in 1989, Gu responded to the government’s crushing of the June 4th Student Movement by writing an article that was critical of the Chinese Communist Party, which forced him to break off his working relationship with the Party. Since then he has remained in the United States and is currently enjoying his life as an American citizen in Massachusetts.

Gu’s life is a miniature of the lives of the common masses in China. His struggle to survive and to finally achieve success as a scholar in spite of many years of turmoil in China is encouraging.

Gu did not explicitly explain the title of his book, leaving the reader to ponder the question: Awaken, but from what, and by what? Is he referring to being awakened from the “brainwashing” of the Adventist Church (70), but also awakened from Communist ideology? Or, awakened by the democratic spirit of freedom in America?

As an Adventist minister serving the Adventist Church for more than 20 years, I have to confess that I felt a lot of pain as I read Gu’s book. My Church and many other denominations owe an apology to people like Gu and his parents, and to many other poor families who have been taken advantage of in China and throughout the world. The Church is totally responsible for creating “rice Christians.” Unless the Church recognizes how it uses poor people, reconciliation between people like professor Gu and the Adventist Church will never be possible. It is so easy to point a finger at professor Gu and his family for eating the foreign religion, but that may be too critical. As I noted earlier, Gu’s family belonged to the poorest class in China. Gu’s parents and even himself while in the Adventist Church were deprived of traditional Confucius ethical teachings. The ideal person in Confucianism is what Mencius described when he said that, “a virtuous man is a man whom no money and rank can corrupt him, no poverty and hardship can shake him, and no power and force can suffocate him.” This high ethical standard belongs to the educated elite in China so no one should judge Gu and his family by this ethical standard. To the poor masses what counts is whatever it takes to help them survive. It is in this area of people’s struggle to survive that the Adventist Church needs to be self-critical because somehow, in the name of Jesus, the church took advantage of simple struggling humanity’s need to survive and thus betrayed many and placed a stumbling block before the little ones whom Jesus loves. I am thankful that God’s grace continued to work in Gu’s life for even after his bad experience with the Church, for Gu remained a believer in God. Gu’s experience leaves one pondering the relationship between a visible church organization and the kingdom of God. Does God
still embrace someone like professor Gu who left the “Remnant Church” for various reasons?

In addition to sharing some of his life story in the Adventist Church, Gu the historian also provides some statistics concerning the former Adventist China Division and offers his insight into the Adventist system. He specially mentioned that “from 1902 to 1940, the China Division received a total of $635,802.95 from the United States to be spent primarily on the construction of church, school, and hospital buildings. Instead, over 40% of the money was spent on the missionaries’ residences alone while the church buildings only occupied 2.3% of the total funds (63). Gu is not the first person to refer to this statistic. As early as 1951, both the China Division treasurer, S. J. Lee, and the former China Division Executive Secretary, David Lin, lamented that “today [1951] all the fine, large buildings in which the church invested 40 percent of its funds, and the missionaries’ houses which consumed another 43.5 percent, are in the hands of God’s enemies. They stand as a monument to the former wealth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in China” (see S. J. Lee, “Adventism in China: The Communist Takeover,” Spectrum 7 (1976), 16-22; David Lin, “Years of Heartbreak: Lessons for Mission by a China Insider,” Spectrum 7 (1976), 22-33.). Lin also adds that “with very few exceptions, the China Training Institute [the “Andrews University” in the former China Division] faculty and student body of 1950-1951 are no longer practicing Seventh-day Adventists. The same is true of our other schools. . . . Men hurrying to be baptized in order to qualify for a job.”

From a missiological perspective and as an eye-witness account of the current growth of the Chinese Adventist Church, I believe that the dissolving of the former China Division has proved to be a blessing in disguise, and part of that blessing includes the rise of the Chinese Communist Party and the enforcement of the Three-Self Principles (Self-governing, Self-financing, and Self-propagating) in the Adventist Church. All these events have produced several positive results. First, it cleansed the Adventist Church of rice Christians, second, political forces helped the Adventist Church in China, the fat lady, in George Knight’s words, to reduce her weight in order to enter the narrow gate by forcing her to forsake her top-heavy institutional structure (Does the Adventist Church worldwide also need some political force to help her today?), third, events in China enabled the Adventist churches to rely more on the leading of the Holy Spirit. When the former China Division was still in existence with all its institutions, church membership in 1946 was just a little over 20,000. Today, without any institutions, no seminary, no hospitals or schools, the Adventist Church has a membership of 400,000.

Zheng Zhao-Rong, the 93 year-old pastor, former president of the
Chongqing Sanitarium and Hospital, and also a former principal of the Chongqing Adventist Academy, reflected on the Adventist mission in China in these words:

During the time when the Chinese Adventist Church was under the leadership of a Mission, the leadership structure in Shanghai was huge with lots of personnel spending lots of money, but the baptisms were not many. Later when foreign missionaries were gone, and outside financial support was cut off, our loving heavenly Father moved the brothers and sisters in Shanghai to work for the Lord with zeal. Although at that time, in the Shanghai church, there was only one person who got full-time pay and only a few received allowances, the lay members of the church worked with zeal, and every year, there are more than 200 people baptized. For so many years, the Mission failed to translate the five great works, the Great Conflict Series of the Spirit of Prophecy, and yet, within a short period of two or three years, these were all translated and printed under extremely difficult situations. When the Mission was still in China for so many decades, was there ever an incidence that more than 1,000 or 2,000 people were being baptized at one time? Never! And yet, when there was no foreign leadership, these kind of baptisms of 1,000 and 2,000 actually happened. What do these facts indicate? It indicates that the progress of God’s ministry does not depend upon talents, knowledge, and money, but the willingness to suffer hardship and to endure toil, and God’s faithful sons and daughters obey God’s guidance, looking up to the results which are given by the Lord through the Holy Spirit. The past experiences, and the understanding of the past, give us important lessons. We should always bear in mind these lessons which the Lord has given us in practical lives (Zheng Zhao-Rong, letter written November 23, 2008 to a leading brother in Beijing, and that was sent by the brother to the General Conference President together with the brother’s own letter regarding Chinese Adventist Church issues. Both of the letters never received a reply).

In addition to the above letter, Gu’s life story under the Chinese Communist Party also caused me a lot of pain. His story recalls the painful and difficult road China has collectively gone through as it moved towards modernization. Despite so much pain caused by human systems, as a minister working in China, I would like to offer my opinion to professor Gu as well as people in the West regarding the Chinese Communist Party. In his epilogue, Gu expressed his firm belief that “China will have democracy in the near future.” He was “hopeful for China because my country has over four thousand years of civilization to back her up” (204). I agree with Gu that China will have democracy in the future, but I firmly believe every country has its own culture and ways to achieve prosperity. It seems that Gu felt democracy was the way to solve all China’s problem, but apparently he wrote this before the economic crisis started in the United States before spreading to the rest of the world like an epidemic.
China does have over four thousand years of civilization, but has also experienced over two thousand years of autocratic political systems. The last emperor of China was only overthrown in 1911, and within 100 years, it is amazing that China could make such progress under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). Comparing today’s China with the China of sixty years ago, I would have to say that the CCP fulfilled its promise to the Chinese people when it first propagated its ideology. It is true that the CCP is an autocratic political party, and yet it was born within the context of the larger Chinese culture, is part of the Chinese people and their way of doing things, and works comfortably within the Chinese worldview. The CCP fits the mentality of the common Chinese people, for it was crafted by the Chinese people. If outsiders want to help China, simply writing articles harshly criticizing it will never help, but will only harden the hearts of the leadership in China.

I believe that when Chinese people harshly criticize the CCP in front of an overseas audience they may be suspected of building their own political status in the West. It has been my observation that one of the fastest ways to gain popularity in the West is to speak openly against the CCP. Why is it so hard to give more time to China, and leave China alone to her own people and problems? If people really want China to change for the better, it would be better for them not to take the easy route by staying overseas and writing, but to return home and contribute their part in improving the country. This is what Detrich Bonhoeffer did when he decided to take the last ship from the States back to Germany to join his suffering people to face the challenges together as part of the collective body.

Furthermore, democratic ideas have been part of Western civilization from the very beginning, starting from the Greek city states more than two thousand years ago. Western civilization has also gone through a number of democratic movements throughout the ages, including the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation, the Industrial Revolution, etc. The United States started with a democratic system partly because of what the Puritans had gone through, yet more than two hundred years later in 1963 Martin Luther King gave his “I have a dream” speech. Even today on the Martin Luther King holiday similar speeches and sermons are given to push for more democratic treatment towards African Americans even inside the Adventist Church. So a lack of democracy is not only a CCP problem, it is also part of the prevailing culture of the Orientals where collectivism is preferred over individualism.

Inside China, the lack of democracy was also a problem within the Adventist Church, even in Adventist homes. But I do agree with Gu that China will “gradually and peacefully [be] changed” (204) for the better.
Gu’s life experiences tell it well that whenever a country is in turmoil, the common people suffer most.

There are some other minor things I would like to interact with in Gu’s book. Gu asked, “where did all of the grain go? When in Anhui province alone there were 700,000 people [who] starved to death in the years between 1959-1961” (132, 133). All the figures Gu used were from a local government leader. The first reason he gave was “the grain went into the stomachs of most of the members of the CCP, from Mao and the highest officials to the grassroots party members.” I checked with my mother, currently an ordained pastor of the Adventist Church in China, who was a government officer at that time and a non-Communist regarding Gu’s statement. She said this must be Gu’s misunderstanding. In fact, from the grass root CCP members’ home up to Chairman Mao Tse Tong’s home, everyone’s rice was regulated during those years.

At that time, in spite of the starvation, most of the Chinese people still passionately loved Chairman Mao and that was why there was no revolt during that time. Furthermore, the Chinese people had not yet been awakened from their Mao worship. The reason which caused the starvation was first of all, the inflation of the grain harvest figures by local governments who wanted to create a picture that communism was successful so they exaggerated the figures of the grain harvest when reporting them to the central government. The result was that most of grain was stored to exhibit the prosperity under the leadership of the Party while people were actually starving. A second reason was that even when there was grain in the fields, all the human power was being invested in the steel making program so not enough people were left to harvest the grain. One additional minor thing that is apparent is that professor Gu is not very well acquainted with Adventist teachings and doctrines, otherwise he would not have stated that “their [Adventists] prophet was Ellen White and their interpretation of the Bible is based on her writings” (11). This is a very common misunderstanding about the Adventist Church by non-Adventists.

A third minor thing I would like to point out is that professor Gu comments that “the ideology that ‘history should serve the politics, especially the present politics’ is still strong today in the People’s Republic of China under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party” (140). My question is, In which country is it that history does not serve politics? The CCP simply and clearly stated this political principle while the rest of the Western world would not dare say it. History is never neutral, so when Gu states that “as a historian, I told American audiences the true stories of what happened in the People’s Republic of China,” I believe he made that statement in all honesty, yet I would have to add that the same history written...
by different people always comes out with a different slant, and each of those versions could be called a true version of history, but not the only true or complete one.

Overall, I found this book thought provoking. I’m grateful for Gu’s honest opinion and description of the human side of the Adventist Church. It is a valuable first-hand historical book, but it is also important to recognize that any human organization has the same kind of faults as mentioned in this book. The book also reminded me that we should never lose sight of the God who is in, outside of, and above the Church. I recommend that a copy of this book should be placed wherever mission training is taking place and in the administrative headquarters of the General Conference and divisions to help church leaders remember the lessons from the former China Division. The Adventist Church should never forget what was done to the poor in China. Never again should employment be used as an inducement for church membership. Never again should poor families be hurt like the Gu family was.

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This research aims to rediscover mission as taught by the Old Testament and to show how that mission is consistent with God’s loving and just character as reflected in the whole Bible. Toward this end, the research surveys assumptions that influence Old Testament mission theology and evaluates ways in which current theologies of mission and theological currents relate to the unity and continuity of the Bible. With this background, the study then proposes a comprehensive theological framework that preserves the unity of God’s character and his mission.

Chapter 1 shows how the traditional understanding of centrifugal and centripetal mission is often based on uneven assumptions and indicates the need for a balanced approach to God’s character and to his mission.

Chapter 2 reviews the main mission theology works of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that deal primarily with the Old Testament. The chapter shows that the development of mission theology was influenced by an array of events and extra-biblical assumptions that affected God’s mission by assigning a different type of mission to each Testament, thereby missing the unity of Scripture.

Chapter 3 analyzes the basic assumptions of theological currents such as dispensationalism and covenant theology and shows how belief in the superiority of the New Testament over the Old affects the understanding of mission in the Bible. The chapter also shows how the outward focus of
ecumenical mission leads to a distortion of the biblical text.

Chapter 4 looks first at basic biblical assumptions that should inform the reading of the text and uses these assumptions in an attempt to discover a comprehensive framework for building a mission theology. The second part of the chapter proposes the cosmic conflict as an all-encompassing framework that preserves the unity and continuity of Scripture. It addresses main thematic concerns of previous mission theologies and restores mission’s rightful motivation and purpose.

Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarizing correctives to the popular understanding of God and mission (missio Dei) in the Bible that come from recognition of the universal dimension of the cosmic conflict framework. This chapter also suggests some further missiological implications of that framework.

A Strategic Model of Short-Term Missions for the Andrews Korean Seventh-Day Adventist Church

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Date completed: February 2010

Problem

The Andrews Korean Seventh-day Adventist Church has played its missional role in Berrien Springs, Michigan, since 1977. In the current situation, more than 70 percent of the church members are students and their families and most Koreans in the Berrien Springs area are Adventists. There are hardly any non-Adventist Koreans in the local community. It makes it tough to do adequate and effective evangelistic training for each member. As a result, very few members have had the experience of sharing the gospel or their personal spiritual testimony with those outside the church.

Method

A biblical and theological analysis, literature review, contextual analysis of the Andrews Korean Seventh-day Adventist Church, and its in-field experiences related to short-term mission programs of the church were pursued to design a strategic model of short-term missions for the Andrews Korean Seventh-day Adventist Church.
Results

A model of short-term mission for the Andrews Korean Seventh-day Adventist Church will be set up for training participants strategically. All participants of short-term missions will be exposed to a missional environment and they will experience the joy of sharing the gospel. A home mission will be developed in order to provide experienced church members with the opportunity to do short-term mission for continuous missional experience. All church members will be trained to be active Christians.

Conclusion

Short-term mission is a good method to provide church members with missional experience. Through this experience, participants can become contagious Christians. Accordingly, the church should utilize this program, design a strategic development curriculum for the training of participants, and apply it to them successfully. In this project, I suggest a strategic model of short-term mission for the Andrews Korean Seventh-day Adventist Church. If the local church adopts it, considering its present situation and resources, it will be a helpful element for the growth and revival of the church.

Inspired by the movie with the same title, Catherine Larson decided to write a book about the reconciliation and healing process after the tragedy of genocide in Rwanda. The book follows the stories of the movie characters and analyzes them in depth.

Conflict is inevitable. But conflict leaves behind scars. To Larson, a scar can reveal the human capacity for evil but also the potential to heal. To her, a scar reflects the process of reconciliation. In this case the process is a painful one, since the criminals have been released and now have to face the surviving victims. “How can they live together,” she asks? The scar can be a separating border between past and future, between justice and mercy, or it can become a road map for reconciliation. Larson shows how Rwandans promote the later.

The main concept in the book is restorative justice as opposed to retributive justice. Restorative justice brings the criminals and the victims face to face in the process of reconciliation. This kind of justice is based on the biblical concept of forgiveness, especially the Old Testament seeking of *shalom*. The title of the book comes from the Lord’s Prayer. Forgiveness is not simply forgetting. In one of the victim’s words, “forgiveness is a gift one gives to change the heart of the offender” (87). It is a lifelong commitment, a decision taken in spite of feelings and rationalizations. The offender has to accept this forgiveness in order to be effective. The acceptance includes an admission of guilt and shame. This lifetime commitment
is expressed in the REACH acrostic presented by Dr. Everett Worthington: Recall the Hurt, Empathize, Altruistic gift of forgiveness, Commit publicly to forgive, and Hold on to forgiveness.

In a practical way, the restorative justice has a particular face in Rwanda. The umuvumu fig tree shadows the popular tribunals, called gacaca, which require the telling of truth and confession on the perpetrators’ side and the desire for peace and reconciliation instead of revenge from the survivors. It is not simply justice looking for guilt and blame, but redemptive justice, a process of restoration and restitution. It is more than punishment for a broken law; it seeks to restore relationships and people. The community is part of the process by supporting both sides to help people get over the tragedy. The elders facilitate the dialogue and recognize the responsibilities, and also identify the solutions. It is a justice that involves all parties and requires that they go forward together. Out of tragedy comes beauty.

The approach of the book is very positive, although painful. The reader’s emotions are stirred, both against the perpetrators as well as the victims. The end of each story brings relief to such emotions and hope for the future. The book is also surprisingly practical, including an application of each story to the present life of the reader, by means of prelude, postlude, and interludes between the chapters. The book also includes a list of resources and organizations that practice restorative justice, as well as an appendix with steps necessary to be taken by both the offender and the victim. I highly recommend the book to every person who is interested in the peace and healing process, but particularly to those who have been hurt. The book is a must for pastors, missionaries, and spiritual leaders who are in charge of the reconciliation process in different parts of the world. The gacaca type tribunal teaches all of us a contextualized lesson about God’s justice and reconciliation.
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