et al.: Refugees
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Editorial ......................................................................................................... v

Towards an Adventist Theology of Refugees ............................................. 1
Nicholas P. Miller and Janna Quetz

Biblical Perspectives on the Role of Immigrants in God’s Mission ............... 11
Charles Van Engen

God’s Call to Embrace the Stranger ............................................................... 30
Samia Sanchez

The Impact of Trauma: How Do We Present Jesus to Those So Fractured? ................................................................. 37
Ingrid Weiss Slikkers with Orelia Daye

The Children of the East ............................................................................. 48
Richard M. Davidson

Insider Movements Among Muslims: Reflections on Their History, Identity, and Theology ......................................................... 78
Richard Doss

A Biblical Approach for an Inner Healing Discipleship Cycle for Migrants and Refugees ............................................................................................. 96
Dióí Cruz

Overcoming Barriers to Effective Missions .................................................. 120
Kelvin Onongha

Who Gave You Authority to Baptize? ......................................................... 127
Milton Adams
Immigrants and refugees are in the news almost every day with people lining up on both sides of the issue with ideas on how to deal with them. More important than one’s feelings though are the biblical principles that should guide every Christian in deciding how to relate and treat the strangers coming to our countries. Four excellent articles offer help in discerning the issues from a biblical perspective.

Nicholas Miller and Janna Quetz offer several helpful concepts that should guide in developing a theology of refugees and Charles Van Engen’s article suggests additional biblical principles to that should help discern God’s hand in bring immigrants to Western countries where God’s people can introduce them to a God they have never met or known.

Samia Sanchez relates case studies on caring for refugees in Germany while Ingrid Slikkers and Orelia Daye share information on the importance of Christian churches and individuals providing love, care, and daily assistance to those fractured by the trauma of being a refugee.

For those interested in better understanding who the “children of the East” are, Richard Davidson presents an excellent in-depth article from a biblical perspective as he identifies them as present-day Muslims living in Arabia and near-by areas in the Middle East.

Another article that is timely and well-written is Richard Doss’ article on insider movements. Some have been too quick to discredit insider approaches, but the arguments that Doss presents need to be taken seriously by any mission-minded follower of Jesus Christ.

Bruce L. Bauer, editor

The next issue of the Journal of Adventist Mission Studies will focus on case studies dealing with contextualization. If you or someone you know has been involved in presenting a topic, ceremony, or some aspect of Christian mission in a contextualized way, please write it up and submit it for publication. We need to help others see the variety of ways the gospel can be presented in biblically faithful ways while being culturally sensitive and relevant.
Recent political developments have thrust the problem of immigrants and refugees to the front of the public policy agenda in America. Political groups stir up their bases to either build a wall and throw out 11 million undocumented immigrants or set up sanctuary cities and seek for open borders. While this scuffle happens, US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are becoming more aggressive in rounding up undocumented immigrants, some here since infancy, and arresting them for deportation. How should Adventist Christians, many of whom are immigrants themselves, respond in a biblical manner to the public policy and humanitarian issues raised by immigration? What biblical and inspired counsel might we find to inform our theological views on the topic and give a firmer biblical foundation to whatever actions we choose?

The Refugee and Immigration Issue in Context

To assess the biblical or theological approach to an issue or problem, one must be aware of the scope and nature of the issue. Before turning to biblical principles about justice and immigrants, we will first look at the issue of immigration in the United States. Immigrants may not all be fleeing from persecution or fear for their physical safety, but they have made a huge decision to leave what they had to look for something better. They seek refuge in a new place and try to live out their hopes and dreams for life there, even though they may not speak the language and have few family or friends in their new country. In the case of America, they come as immigrants looking for the “American Dream.” In a sense, this is all of our stories, because unless you are a Native American or African American, you or your ancestors are part of this group.
According to the PEW Research Center, in 2017 there were about 49,780,000 people living in the US that were born in other countries (2018). Some politicians would have us believe these people are dangerous, among the worst from their country. A Gallop poll found that 45% of Americans thought immigrants made the crime situation in the USA worse (2018).

The reality is, however, that studies show immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than native born citizens. Illegal Immigrants are 44% less likely to be incarcerated than native-born Americans, and legal immigrants are 69% less likely to be incarcerated (Landgrave and Nowrasteh 2017). Mexican immigrants are a large concern to some people, yet when comparing men 18 to 39 years old, native-born Americans were almost four times as likely to be incarcerated than immigrants from Mexico (Ewing, Martínez, and Rumbaut 2015).

These immigrants come with a goal of finding a better life and to be productive members of society, making them less likely to be criminals. Studies show immigrants are almost as likely as US citizens to have a bachelors or advanced degree (Anderson and López 2018). And while some people raise concerns about immigrants taking their jobs, the truth is that 51% of Americans feel immigrants do not have much effect on job opportunities for them or their families. Additionally, 72% believe that immigrants are taking low paying, menial jobs that most Americans do not and will not seek (Gallop 2018). Most Americans view immigrants as helpful to society: 57% think immigrants improve our food, music, and arts; 45% think they improve our economy; and 69% think they improve or have no effect on our social and moral values (Gallop 2018).

At times the press creates a sense that a majority of Americans view immigration as something needing curtailing, but that is not the case either. In the early 1990s, about 65% of Americans were in favor of decreasing immigration levels, but since then things have changed. Currently, more people still want to decrease immigration (35%) than increase it (24%), but the majority are willing to keep the immigration levels as they were in 2017 (38%). If current trends continue, by around 2022 more people will think we need to increase immigration levels (just over 30%) than decrease it (just under 30%) while the majority will continue to want to keep the levels as they are (40%) (Gallop 2018).

With the ranks of those in favor of decreasing immigration levels falling and those in favor of increasing levels or keeping them the same rising, the current government actions to prevent immigration may be in opposition to the majority’s opinion. In 2017, ICE arrests rose 30%. Yet non-criminal arrests rose 146% compared to a rise in criminal arrests by 12% (Bialik 2018). When asked in 2015, only 19% of Americans were in
favor of deporting illegal immigrants. The majority, 65%, wanted them to be able to stay and become citizens, an additional 14% felt that while they should not be citizens, they should be allowed to remain in the US to work (Gallop 2018).

It does not seem that immigrants are as big a problem to America as the public currently perceives. Rather, it seems that the immigration problem is one that is primarily promoted by certain political leaders who find illegal immigrants a convenient scape-goat around which aggrieved constituents can coalesce their frustration and anger. Maintaining secure borders and seeking an orderly immigration process is certainly a legitimate goal. But making up for years of haphazard effort and neglect by punishing poor, often disenfranchised, yet hard working immigrant seems unfair. How can Christians think about this topic in a constructive manner?

**Christians and Justice**

What insights into the issue of dealing with immigrants can Christians gather from the Bible? Micah 6:8 says, “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.” But what is justice in the context of immigration?

The Bible frequently speaks of justice as being of great importance and value, and something that the believer should pursue on behalf of others and society. In the Hebrew, the most frequent word for this is *mishpat*, meaning literally a verdict or legal decree. A Greek word often translated justice is *krisis*, meaning judgment or decision. The 6th century Roman Law, *Institutes of Justinian*, defined justice as “the constant and perpetual will to render to each his due” (*Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* 2017). But there are many theories and concepts of what justice looks like in practice. This article will cover three: Commutative/Personal Justice, Procedural/Legal Justice, and Distributive/Social Justice.

**Commutative/Personal Justice** is honesty in personal agreements and contracts with friends and strangers. The philosopher Thomas Aquinas explained commutative justice as fair buying and selling: “one person should pay back to the other just so much as he has become richer out of that which belonged to the other” (*Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*). That is, people should be paid for the value of what they sold.

**Procedural/Legal Justice** is fairness in the rule of law. Things like non-discrimination and fairness in courts and legal procedures, not favoring race, class, or social status. The philosopher John Rawls broke procedural justice down further: with perfect procedural justice—if it is followed a just outcome is guaranteed; imperfect procedural justice—if it is followed it is
likely, but not certain to produce a just result; and pure procedural justice—there is no independent way to assess the justness of the outcome, for example, a coin toss (Floyd).

*Distributive/Social Justice* is how the goods, services, and resources are divided up or distributed to begin with, both in society and the world, and the laws that decide these divisions. Thomas Aquinas defined distributive justice as laws that goods “are [fairly] apportioned among people who stand in a social community.” Not that everyone will receive the same portions, but that they will receive what they are due (Floyd).

To give a simple illustration of these different forms of justice, consider a basketball game. A justice-ruled basketball game would include not cheating or committing flagrant or technical fouls, instead showing good sportsmanship (Commutative/Personal); the referees should not favor one team or player but should call fouls and rules fairly (Procedural/Legal); teams should be balanced and fair—a men’s college team playing a girl’s high school team would be a grossly unequal distribution of talent and basketball resources (Distributive).

Unsurprisingly, the Bible affirms all three versions of justice, but seems to pay particular attention to distributive justice. Personal and procedural justice can be found in Lev 19:35, “You shall do no wrong in judgment, in measures of length or weight or quantity. You shall have just balances, just weights,” and Deut 1:16-17, “And I charged your judges at that time, ‘Hear the cases between your brothers, and judge righteously between a man and his brother or the alien who is with him. You shall not be partial in judgment. You shall hear the small and the great alike.’”

But there are limits to procedural justice. The French poet, Anatole France, wrote, “The law, in its majestic equality and might, forbids the rich as well as the poor to sleep under bridges at night” (France 1894). But does a law like this actually equally impact the rich and the poor alike? How many of the rich want to or need to sleep under a bridge? So a law that appears neutral on its face can in fact create a far greater burden on a certain class of people than on others. Thus, “equal treatment” can be used as an argument to continue to enforce very unequal circumstances. Rules against begging in the subway may be enforced equally against rich and poor, but who do they primarily impact? Equal protection of the laws tends to preserve the status quo in a fair way. But what if the status quo is unfair?

**The Bible, Distributive Justice, and the Immigrant**

Distributive/Social Justice seeks to create a more level playing field for all citizens. Many Adventists believe that distributive justice should be a matter for private charity, for example, this is what we do when we donate
to the United Way or the Salvation Army or our local charity. Reactions by many Christians to political attempts to seek a fairer distribution of resources range from cries of socialism to communism, which is what many Evangelicals said about the Obamacare health plan and similar programs.

But the Bible has much to say about distributive justice. It talks about mishpat (justice) versus tsedaqah (righteousness). While these are overlapping ideas, there can be bad laws (mishpat), but not bad righteousness (tsedaqah). A just system of laws and procedures aims at the end to have a righteous society. We are not just concerned with fair procedure, but fair outcomes, a righteous society, and indeed a righteous world.

There are frequent references in the Old Testament to the state acting on behalf of the poor, the alien, or immigrant. The laws of harvesting and gleaning stated that the edges of fields should remain unharvested for “the poor and the sojourner” (Lev 19:10). Part of yearly tithes were to benefit the Levite, “the sojourner,” widows, and orphans (Deut 14:29). There was a third-year tithe that was laid up for the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow (Deut 14:28-29). Every seventh year, the fields were to lie fallow, and the poor, which would include strangers, were allowed to harvest and reap (Exod 23:10-11). The weekly Sabbath rest was to be extended to the “sojourner” and the “stranger” within one’s gates (Exod 20:8-11, 23:12).

Yet justice for the immigrant was not limited to just the state’s part. The individual was also to show justice to the sojourner: “The stranger that sojourneth with you shall be unto you as the home-born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were sojourners in the land of Egypt: I am Jehovah your God” (Lev 19:34). “[God] executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt” (Deut 10:18-19). “Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow” (Deut 27:19). “Then I will draw near to you for judgment; and I will be a swift witness against . . . those who swear falsely, and against those who oppress the wage earner in his wages, the widow and the orphan, and those who turn aside the alien and do not fear Me,’ says the LORD of hosts” (Mal 3:5).

Immigrants were not only to be cared for but were given the same rights as citizens. Ezek 47:21-23 says, “So shall ye divide this land unto you according to the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that ye shall divide it by lot for an inheritance unto you and to the strangers that sojourn among you, who shall beget children among you; and they shall be unto you as the home-born among the children of Israel; they shall have inheritance with you among the tribes of Israel. And it shall come to pass, that in what tribe the stranger sojourneth, there shall ye give him his inheritance, saith the Lord Jehovah.”
The Bible and the Case of the “Illegal” Immigrant

You may ask what about the “Illegal” alien? Does justice still apply? There are many examples of people in the Bible who emigrated or immigrated secretly or against the will of the civil authorities. In the era of families and tribes, the patriarch of the family or clan was the local civil authority. Yet the Bible has a number of stories of people fleeing their families, apparently with God’s approval. Think of Jacob fleeing home and the oversight of Isaac, and then returning having escaped the authority of Laban (Gen 28, 31).

And even in the ancient world, there were nations that guarded their borders with care, and required permission to pass in or out. Think of Moses’s flight into Midian (Exod 2), and then his return to Egypt (Exod 4). And of course, there was the flight of the children of Israel from Egypt, which was very much against the will and command of the Pharaoh (Exod 12, 14). Certainly their entry into Canaan was against the will of the people already in the land (Num 13). In the story of Israel and the Gibeonites (the tribe that lied about their location), it is revealed that the existence of trickery does not justify treating a people group with injustice or inhumanity (Josh 9). In the story of David, we see him leaving Israelite territory against the will of the King, and enter into Philistine territory, not always with the permission of the Philistine leaders. Finally, Joseph, Mary, and the baby Jesus exited Israel, entered Egypt, and returned to Israel without the permission, and even against the will, of the Judean civil authorities (Matt 2).

Understanding the morality behind this illegal behavior requires us to understand the differences between various types of laws. Not all crimes are the same. There are two kinds of laws, Malum in Se, the thing is wrong itself (theft, murder, perjury), and Malum Prohibitum, the thing is only wrong because it is prohibited (speed limit, zoning codes, immigration law). Obviously, violations of Malum in Se are generally more serious, and should be punished more severely than the latter. Indeed, moral reasons, such as preserving life, safety, or health, can provide justification for violation of Malum Prohibitum laws.

Immigrants who have entered illegally, have been used by us for their labor and efforts to build our country, and benefit our businesses and homes. There is a case to be made that after a time, we have a moral relationship to treat them fairly, as a matter of Malum in Se, which outweighs their violation of the Malum Prohibitum. Further, proportionate justice requires that the punishment should fit the crime.

Almost all these laws involved state-supervised and directed redistribution of resources to both the poor and the alien. Did these principles of
redistribution and openness to strangers apply only under the theocracy of Israel? Obviously, the laws do not apply directly, but the principles, it would seem, are universal. Israel’s captivity was based in failure to follow these laws. Also, other nations are chastised and punished for ill treatment of the poor and strangers—including Sodom and Gomorrah.

Ellen White on Immigration

Ellen White wrote that Israel’s laws for the poor were examples for the nations: “The plan of life that God gave to Israel was intended as an object lesson for all mankind. If these principles were carried out today, what a different place this world would be!” (White 1905:188).

If the law given by God for the benefit of the poor had continued to be carried out, how different would be the present condition of the world, morally, spiritually, and temporally! . . . The principles which God has enjoined, would prevent the terrible evils that in all ages have resulted from the oppression of the rich toward the poor and the suspicion and hatred of the poor toward the rich. While they might hinder the amassing of great wealth and the indulgence of unbounded luxury, they would prevent the consequent ignorance and degradation of tens of thousands whose ill-paid servitude is required to build up these colossal fortunes. They would bring a peaceful solution of those problems that now threaten to fill the world with anarchy and bloodshed. (White 1890:536)

Ellen White even says that the immigrants are brought to us by God: “God in His providence has brought men to our very doors, and thrust them, as it were, into our arms, that they might learn the truth, and be qualified to do a work we could not do in getting the light to men of other tongues” (White 1918:20).

She encourages us to evangelize among these people: “Many of these foreigners are here in the providence of God, that they may have opportunity to hear the truth for this time, and receive a preparation that will fit them to return to their own lands as bearers of precious light shining direct from the throne of God” (White 1910:1). “In our own land thousands of foreigners—representatives of many nations, kindreds, and tongues—have settled. . . . The hand of God has been directing them to our shores that they might be brought under the enlightening influence of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, and become partakers of the divine nature. How many among us have been stirred by the spirit of the Master to go forth and labor for this class of strangers who have been brought to our very doors through the providence of God, that his work might be hastened in the earth?” (White 1892:1, para. 2).
Theology Meets Activism Today

It would seem to be clear that as Christians we have an obligation to look after the immigrant within our gates and that God is even sending them to us for us to minister to. When asked in 2006 if the government should make it a crime for US citizens to aid people they knew were illegal immigrants, 52% of Americans said yes (Gallop 2018). If the government were to have made it a crime, should we not still help people? In our current situation it is not a crime to help these people, yet what actions are we taking?

Regardless which side people find themselves on concerning the topic of immigration, most feel that the system is broken and in need of a more comprehensive overhaul. This brings up the question: How should our immigration policy be changed? At the United Religious Community 2018 Prayer Breakfast which took place on April 20 in South Bend, Indiana, which Janna Quetz attended, Ali Noorani the Executive Director of the National Immigration Forum, suggested that at the core of the immigration issue are three questions that people are attempting to answer. The first refers to culture: Are immigrants integrating or isolating? The second deals with security: Do the immigrants pose a threat to us or will they be protective? The final question discusses the economy: Are the immigrants givers or takers?

Based on the OECD data for 2001-2010, the US had on average the highest national inflow of immigrants of any country, with 1,050,000 immigrants moving here each year (Ozimek 2012). However, while we may accept the most people, we only accept 0.4% of our population making us the 22nd ranking country by population percentage (2012). So, how could our policy change? If we go the way of Canada and Australia, there could be a switch to a merit-based point system, however skills do not always mean there is an available job that matches (Bui and Dickerson 2018). Within the European Union the borders are fairly open, if we moved to that system we could easily expand searches for work to Mexico and/or Canada, but we would also compete against Mexicans/Canadians for jobs in the US (2018).

Japan and South Korea have a strong emphasis on protecting their culture, and hardly let any immigrants in. Those who are let in to Korea have strong family ties, take a language test, and an exam on Korean customs (Bui and Dickerson 2018). The Gulf States have a lot of immigration to keep up with the demand for cheap labor, but these immigrants are temporary and do not have many rights (2018).

Immigration reform is complicated and multiple factors must be weighed. But what can we practically do about the factors of prejudice and
bigotry against the unknown outsider? Familiarity seems to help break down walls of prejudice. As Ali Noorani said at the United Religious Community 2018 Prayer Breakfast, “People love the Muhamad and Maria they know, but fear the Muhamad or Maria they don’t.” People are more likely to fight for the rights of someone they know than to advocate for a stranger; meeting an immigrant for the first time and hearing their story can change one’s perspective. Ali has a method he calls “Bibles, Badges, and Businesses.” He encourages preachers, police, and business owners to speak to their local groups about immigration, dispelling various myths and fears. Insofar as the fears of the community can be addressed, and people can be introduced to the real stories of actual immigrants, policy can be made on a factual, rather than reactionary, basis.

The Bible encourages God’s people to help immigrants, and does not leave it up to just the state, but says the people of God should personally help them. Whatever path is taken in the future it is important to keep in mind that Christ calls us brothers, and we too should call the sojourner within our gates brother. Immigration policy is complex, and there may be no clear guidance from God’s Word on parts of it. But whatever policies are arrived at, the Christian has a role to advocate for the creation and implementation of a humane and moral policy that respects the image of God in all people of whatever nationality, race, or religion.

**Works Cited**


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In June 2018, the United Nations estimated that there were around 25.4 million refugees around the globe. If the estimated 40 million internally displaced people and the 3.1 million asylum seekers are added to this figure, it would add up to 68.5 million forcibly displaced people.

This figure does not include the hundreds of thousands—most likely millions—of those who migrate from rural areas to the cities of the world, nor those who voluntarily move from one nation or region to another.

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looking for better living conditions. Adding these categories together, a conservative estimate would be that, at any given moment, there are at least 70 million people who have left one place of residence to migrate to another. So, it is fair to assume that in this new century and new millennium the world is seeing the greatest movement of humanity around the globe ever seen in human history. God is calling the Church of Jesus Christ—and presenting the Church with marvelous opportunities—to join together in solidarity with immigrants, strangers, new-comers, and foreigners from all the nations that surround the Church in all parts of the world.

Introduction

Throughout history there have been great movements of peoples and groups from one place to another. This includes the Latin American continent where the history of many peoples, ancient and modern, tells the stories of periodic migrations of peoples from north to south, from east to west, from rural areas to the cities, from small towns to large cities, and so forth. There are immigrants who have fled very negative socio-economic and political situations. There are hundreds of thousands of people who have fled dictatorships, civil wars, and international conflicts. There are migrants who have been transported from one place to another by force as slaves. Many migrants voluntarily have left their homes seeking better living conditions. Some migrants have been forced to leave because of natural disasters. And many of these migrants have contributed in remarkable ways to the new nations to which they have gone, in terms, for example, of technology, science, industry, new cultural forms, the arts, education, and agriculture. The missions established by the missionary orders of the Roman Catholic Church in California during the nineteenth century are an example of the impact that immigrants can have on their new environments.

As we think about the subject of immigrants and strangers (I/S) we should remember that we are talking about ourselves. For example, in Los Angeles, where I lived for 27 years, we are all immigrants and/or descendants of immigrants. I am an example of this phenomenon. My grandparents migrated as young people from the Netherlands to the central part of the United States, to the states of Kansas, Nebraska, and Iowa. My parents migrated from the U.S. to Chiapas, Mexico. And I migrated from Mexico to North Carolina, to California, to Mexico, to Los Angeles, and to Michigan. I am an immigrant and the descendant of immigrants who in our history represent at least three cultures and four languages.

Generally speaking, when we think of the I/S we consider the marginalized, the needy, the minority groups, and those who are under-
represented in social, political, and economic arenas. In the Bible there exists a clear emphasis on compassion toward, and care for, the I/S’s as receptors of just and compassionate treatment on the part of the People of God, by other folks in general, and on the part of governments. These biblical perspectives concerning the I/Ss are well known and important.

When I began my search for the biblical perspectives of migrants, I assumed that the call to compassion and care of the foreigner, stranger, and migrant was the predominant view of the Bible. It was the perspective I had heard emphasized most often all my life. I decided to search out every biblical passage from Genesis to Revelation that had to do with the migrant, stranger, sojourner. I wanted to trace a thread running through the Bible with the question, What does the Bible say about the sojourner, stranger, foreigner, or migrant? I wanted to trace the narrative of the text from a canonical viewpoint, treating the text as a unified, whole entity as we have received it. Having identified over a hundred such passages, I re-read them in their historical and cultural context, with my question in hand: What perspective was offered with regard to the migrant? Much to my surprise, I found that a majority of the texts offered a viewpoint that I was not aware of, a perspective different from but alongside the call to compassion and care of the migrant. The Bible offers us other and different perspectives of the I/S as partners, co-laborers, co-participants in the mission of God to the nations.

In this short essay I will focus on the composite of viewpoints found in a large number of the texts that present the I/S as active agents of God’s mission, God’s instruments who contribute to the creation of human history, and who participate in the mediation of the grace of God to the nations.²

It is not my intention to present an exhaustive biblical theology of the I/S as found in the Bible, nor do I intend to present a detailed study or a minute examination of all the narratives or all the biblical passages having to do with this theme. Rather, I want to offer a wide panorama by following a thread of the tapestry of the Bible² that will serve as a kind of outline signaling the way in which God uses the I/S in God’s mission to the nations.

Before examining the instrumental and missionary viewpoint, we need to remember that the Bible offers several other perspectives concerning the stranger and the sojourner.

² Here I follow the spirit of Paulo Freire who taught us the important transformational dynamism of conscientizing the people such that the poor and marginalized begin to catch a glimpse of the possibility that they may themselves be active agents of their own history and creators of their own destiny. See, for example, among other related works, Paulo Freire. 1970. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. New York: Herder and Herder.

³ In relation to reading the Bible as a tapestry that presents the missio Dei in narrative form, see Van Engen 1996:17-43.
The Stranger as Enemy

One viewpoint presents the I/S in a negative light as an enemy of the People of God. See, for example, Isa 1:7, 2:6, 5:17; Matt 17:25, 26; and Heb 11:39. This view is coupled with a perspective of the stranger and of “the nations” (meaning all those peoples and cultures that are not a part of the People of God) as being unclean, sinful, and as unholy who will cause the People of God to lose their true faith in YHWH. At times the nations are represented as those who will take possession of the land and the belongings of Israel as God’s punishment for the unfaithfulness of the People of God. See, for example, Gen 31:15; Lev 22:12, 13, 25; Num 1:51, 3:10, 38; 16:40; 18:4, 7; Deut 17:15; 31:16; 25:5; Judg 19:12; Neh 9:12; Job 15:19; Ps 69:8; Prov 2:16, 5:10, 17, 20, 6:1, 7:7, 11:15, 14:10, 20:16, 27:2, 13; Eccl 6:2; Isa 1:7, 2:6, 5:17, 61:5, 62:8; Jer 2:25, 3:13, 5:19, 51:51; Lam 5:2; Ezek 7:21, 11:9, 16:32, 28:10, 30:12, 31:12, 44:7, 9; Hos 7:9, 8:7; Joel 3:17; Obad 11, 12; Matt 27:7; John 10:5. In John 10:5 the stranger is the foreign shepherd whose unknown voice the sheep do not recognize and will not heed (see also Acts 17:21; Heb 11:39).

It is important to be aware of this viewpoint. In today’s world and around the globe we can also find this negative attitude of distrust expressed on the part of the general population, the church, and some governments. It would seem that this perspective is affirmed rather often, over a long period of time, in spite of the fact that in both testaments one finds an even stronger emphasis on the role of the People of God as special instruments of God’s mission to impact and bless the nations. We need to recognize this perspective in ourselves and in others and respond to it in theological, emotional, personal, and social counter-point.

The Stranger Is to Obey the Law of God

Alongside the perspective mentioned above, a second viewpoint affirmed by God in the text is that the stranger who lives in the midst of the People of Israel is to obey the same norms and keep the same commandments that the Israelites were to keep. See for example, Gen 17:12, 27; Exod 12:19-49, 20:10, 20, 23:12, 30:33; Lev 16:29, 17, 18:26, 19:33, 20:2, 22:10, 18, 24:16, 21-22, 25:6; Num 9:14, 15:15, 16, 26, 30, 19:10, 35:13; Deut 1:16, 5:14, 14:14, 17, 21, 29, 16:11, 14, 24:14, 17, 18:43, 19:11, 22, 26:11, 27:19, 29:11, 22, 31:12; Josh 8:33, 35, 20:9 (with reference to the cities of refuge); 1 Kgs 8 (the prayer of David); 2 Chr 15:9, 30:25 (the prayer of Solomon); Ps 18:44, 45; Ezek 14:7; Acts 2:10.

By way of example, Lev 24:21-22 says, “Whoever kills an animal must make restitution, but whoever kills a man must be put to death. You are
to have the same law for the sojourner and the native-born. I am the LORD your God” (NIV).

This is a very contemporary issue. In Western Europe, the United States, and elsewhere, one hears discussions as to whether the new migrants should be expected to speak the majority language/s, and/or whether they must obey the laws of the land to which they have migrated to. This is a highly-charged discussion.

The Care of the Stranger Who Lives in the Midst of the People of God

A third perspective of the I/S affirms that God not only requires that the stranger who lives in the midst of the People of Israel be treated fairly and equitably, but God also commands that the I/S is to receive the care and compassion of the People of God. In many texts the Bible couples the idea of the I/S with reference to the orphan and the widow. Compassion and intentional care is required, especially for the orphan, the widow, and the stranger who lives among the People of God. See for example, Lev 19:18, 19:33, 25; Deut 10:18 (together with the orphan and the widow); 14:21, 16:14, 26:12, 13 (together with the orphan and the widow), 19:11, 27:19 (together with the orphan and the widow); Ps 94:6 (together with the orphan and the widow), 146:9 (together with the orphan and the widow); Prov 3:19; Jer 7:6, 22:3; Ezek 22:7, 29, 47:22, 23; Zach 7:10; and Mal 3:5. The New Testament emphasizes the love of neighbor and enemy. See for example, “you shall love your neighbor” in Matt 5:43, 19:19, 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom 12:20 (ref. Prov 25:21, 22; Exod 23:4; Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27); Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; 1 Tim 5:10; Heb 13:2; Jas 2:8; 3 John 5.

This view is commanded by God directly to the People of God. It is not optional. Our nations, our churches, and the citizens of our countries need to obey God’s command for compassion and care. And the Christian Church should be at the forefront. Christian voices should be the most strident with regard to this mandate from God. We are to care for the orphan, the widow, and the I/S in our midst.

Biblical Perspectives of the Instrumental Role of the Immigrant in God’s Mission

A fourth viewpoint of the I/S in Scripture is to see the migrant as having an instrumental role in God’s mission. This emphasis begins already with Abraham whose story is the story of all I/S, including our own stories.
My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down into Egypt with a few people and lived there and became a great nation, powerful and numerous. But the Egyptians mistreated us and made us suffer, putting us to hard labor. Then we cried out to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our voice and saw our misery, toil and oppression. So the LORD brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror and with miraculous signs and wonders. He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey; and now I bring the first fruits of the soil that you, O LORD, have given me. (Deut 26:5-10)

When the Bible first introduces us to Abram, he is presented as an I/S.

This is the account of Terah. Terah became the father of Abram, Nahor, and Haran. And Haran became the father of Lot. While his father Terah was still alive, Haran died in Ur of the Chaldeans, in the land of his birth. . . . Terah took his son Abram, his grandson Lot son of Haran, and his daughter-in-law Sarai, the wife of his son Abram, and together they set out from Ur of the Chaldeans to go to Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. Terah lived 205 years, and he died in Haran.

The LORD had said to Abram, “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. “I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.” So Abram left, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was seventy-five years old when he set out from Haran. He took his wife Sarai, his nephew Lot, all the possessions they had accumulated and the people they had acquired in Haran, and they set out for the land of Canaan, and they arrived there. (Gen 11:27-12:5)

Remember that this passage is talking about Abraham, the first ancestor of Israel. The People of Israel recognized that an important aspect of their self-understanding, their identity as a special people, derived from being strangers, sojourners, immigrants (see Job 19:15; Ps 69:8; Eph 2:12; Col 1:21). God himself says to Abram, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” (Gen 15:13-14; see also Gen 23:4, 28:4; Exod 3:13-15, 6:2-4).
An integral aspect of Abraham’s missionary call to be an instrument of God’s mission to the nations implied that he and his family would be strangers, sojourners, immigrants. See, for example, Gen 12:10, 15:13, 17:8, 21:23, 34; 23:4, 28:4, 36:7, 37:1; Exod 6:4; I Chr 29:15, 37:1; Job 19:18; Ps 39:12, 69:8, 119:19; Obad 11; Acts 13:17; Eph 2:12, 19; Col 1:21; Heb 11:13; and 1 Pet 1:1. Sharing this vision, Luke presents Jesus as a stranger in Jesus’ encounter with the two who were walking to Emmaus after the Passion Week (Luke 24:18).

In the rest of this essay, I will examine the place of the I/S as instruments of God’s mission in terms of four categories commonly used in missiology. We will examine the role of I/Ss in relation to the motivations, agents, means, and goals of the mission of God to the nations.

The Motivations of I/S in the Mission of God to the Nations

There are numerous indications in the Bible that demonstrate how God used the very history of the People of Israel as a pilgrim, immigrant people to motivate them to participate in God’s mission to the nations. For example, in Exod 22:21, God says, “Do not mistreat a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in Egypt.

In Exodus 23:9 God repeats, “Do not oppress a sojourner; you yourselves know how it feels to be sojourners, because you were sojourners in Egypt. Peter offers an echo of this same motivation to be instruments of God’s mission to the nations, drawing his vision from Deuteronomy.

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. Dear friends, I urge you, as sojourners and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us. (1 Pet 2:9-11)

This passage in I Peter was most probably addressed to the dispersed, migrant, persecuted followers of Jesus spread throughout the Roman empire. Within that framework, this passage expresses an amazingly lofty view of these Christian refugees, drawing from Deuteronomy. They are a “chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God.” Wow! What names. But we should not miss the main idea here. The whole point of the passage is to encourage these migrants, “as sojourners and strangers in the world” to be God’s instruments of mission who
“live such good lives among the pagans” that those who are not yet part of the People of God, the “nations” that surround them, will “see your good deeds and glorify God.” God’s mission to the nations is the ultimate purpose.

In addition to participating in God’s mission to the nations, the People of God were to treat the stranger who lived in their midst with compassion and justice precisely because they had themselves once been strangers and sojourners in Egypt. Thus, it is precisely because the children of Israel had themselves been I/S that they should be motivated to treat the stranger who lives in their midst with care and compassion: “When an sojourner lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The sojourner living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were sojourners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God” (Lev 19:33, 34).

Having experienced the life of the pilgrim and sojourner, the People of Israel should also care for the land with a special sense of stewardship because the land belongs to God and not to Israel. “The land must not be sold permanently, because the land is mine and you are but sojourners and my tenants” (Lev 25:23).

The judges were to judge the stranger on the same basis as the Israelite (Deut 1:16) and Israel was to love the I/S for two reasons: (1) because God loves the stranger and the sojourner; and (2) because Israel was also a foreigner and stranger in Egypt.

For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the sojourner, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are sojourners, for you yourselves were sojourners in Egypt. Fear the LORD your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. He is your praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. Your forefathers who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the LORD your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky. (Deut 10:17-22)

In Deuteronomy 23:7 Israel is commanded, “Do not abhor an Edomite, for he is your brother. Do not abhor an Egyptian, because you lived as a sojourner in his country.

This aspect of the self-understanding of Israel as a pilgrim people had profound spiritual and existential implications. In his prayer for the temple that his son Solomon would build, David recognizes the fact that the People of God are immigrants and strangers.
But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are sojourners and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. (1 Chr 29:14-15)

The psalmist also emphasizes that precisely because they are immigrants and strangers God will hear their cry (Ps 39:12, 119:19; see also Jer 35:7; 1 Pet 1:1, 2:11).

How powerful could this motivation be to move Christians and Christian churches to participate in the mission of God locally and globally, participating in the movement of the Holy Spirit in mission because we too were and are I/Ss. It seems to me a great shame—and I consider it a sinful omission—that many immigrants and descendants of immigrants in North America have forgotten that we ourselves are also I/Ss, a forgetfulness that appears to produce an attitude such that those of us who are I/Ss and descendants of I/Ss should demonstrate little or no compassion, nor receptivity, much less hospitality, for the new I/Ss who have recently arrived in our neighborhoods and communities.

The I/S as Agents of God’s Mission

A second aspect of this missiological and instrumental perspective of the I/S’s role in the mission of God has to do with the form in which various personalities are presented in the Bible as agents of God’s mission precisely because they are I/Ss. Let me highlight a few examples.

The first example we have already mentioned. Integral to his call to leave his homeland and his extended family clan and begin a pilgrimage to a new land that God would show him, and particularly as a stranger, pilgrim, foreigner and immigrant, Abraham would participate in God’s mission to the nations. To be a stranger and a sojourner was such a fundamental aspect of the self-understanding of Abraham’s family that Isaac also understood this quality as being an integral part of God’s vision for him, a self-portrait that Isaac sees as fundamental to his being an instrument of God’s mission to the nations. Thus, God tells Isaac in Gen 26:1-6:

Now there was a famine in the land—besides the earlier famine of Abraham’s time—and Isaac went to Abimelech king of the Philistines in Gerar. The LORD appeared to Isaac and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; live in the land where I tell you to live. Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. I will make your descendants as numerous
as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.” So Isaac stayed in Gerar.

This biblical perspective of the I/S as an agent of God’s mission acquires deeper roots and broader significance throughout the history of Israel. We can see how the story of Joseph sheds light on this missional viewpoint. Sold as a slave and sent to Egypt, Joseph is forced to become a sojourner, stranger, immigrant. Joseph lives through deceit, mistreatment, false accusations, undeserved imprisonment, and utter loneliness in being forgotten in prison, a situation which many of today’s I/Ss have also experienced. But precisely as an I/S, Joseph saves his family from famine, saves all of Egypt, and feeds all the peoples surrounding Egypt. Egypt grows in its international influence and power because of the work of this immigrant in the halls of power in Egypt. Joseph adapts to the Egyptian culture to such an extent that when his own brothers come asking for food they do not recognize him. In the end, Joseph himself acknowledges his special role as an I/S:

Then Joseph said to his brothers, “Come close to me.” When they had done so, he said, “I am your brother Joseph, the one you sold into Egypt! And now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you. For two years now there has been famine in the land, and for the next five years there will not be plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God.”

. . . Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them. (Gen 45:4-8; 50:19-21)

The Bible develops this missiological perspective in a significant number of narratives about persons whom God uses precisely as I/Ss. We could mention Daniel and his missionary role in Babylon, another administrator who is a special agent of God’s mission although initially he is an exiled prisoner, a cross-cultural missionary sent against his will to a strange land. Yet he devoted his life to serving as counselor and friend of the kings of Babylon and Persia even though he was a foreigner.

We could also mention the two women whom Jesus highlights in Luke 4 as special agents of God’s mission. Both are I/Ss. One was the widow
of Zeraphath (I Kgs 1:8-16), the other a young Israelite girl taken captive serving as a slave in the household of Naaman the Syrian. As an agent of God’s mission, the little girl’s simple testimony creates an international crisis, then brings about Naaman’s healing from leprosy (2 Kgs 5:1-4). Precisely as foreign women God uses them in God’s mission to the nations.

During the exile in Babylon, the People of Israel found themselves having to choose between two different perspectives. On the one hand, they could see themselves as victims as expressed in Ps 137:4 where the Israelites—as captives in Babylon—cry, saying, “How can we sing a song in a foreign land [or as foreigners in this land]?” On the other hand, they could choose a self-understanding, as active agents of the mission of God, even though they were strangers in a new nation. It is fascinating that during the exact same moment in history, with reference to the same persons experiencing the same exile, in the same context, God says to them through Jeremiah, “Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper” (Jer 29:5-7). This second perspective involves the Israelites seeing themselves as being sent to Babylon by God with a missionary purpose and as agents of God’s mission for the well-being of the land to which they had been sent.

We could mention Esther, a woman who as a descendent of I/S adapts so well to her new culture that she wins a beauty contest and is chosen to serve in the harem of the king of Persia. And even as an I/S, Esther allows God to use her both to save her people from being destroyed, and to be the catalyst through whom all Persia comes to know about the God of Israel. Mordecai the Jew, ends up exercising great influence in the realm.

If we had space, we could mention David, exiled among the Philistines, whom God uses among them. David becomes a companion at arms with, and counselor to, Achish, king of Gath (I Sam. 27). Maybe this is why the New Testament writers seem to so easily and naturally take note that Jesus himself was an immigrant, exiled as a child to Egypt. Luke brings this to mind once again on the lips of the two who are walking to Emmaus after the passion and resurrection of Jesus, describing the one who joins them as being a “stranger” (Luke 24:18).

This perspective of the I/S as an agent of God’s mission appears to be so compelling that Ezekiel speaks of God using foreigners themselves in God’s mission of judgment against Israel when Israel refuses to be an instrument of God’s mission to the nations (Ezek 28:7) This vision is echoed in Hab 1:5-6 where God says that God will use the Chaldeans in God’s
mission. Paul makes reference to this same passage from Habakkuk in his first major sermon in which he develops his mission theology (Acts 13:41). Isaiah also stated that, due to the infidelity of Israel, God would use other nations in God’s mission (Isa 61:5).

This is a truly amazing view of the I/S. The I/S is sent by God to live among other peoples with the purpose of evangelizing those nations. Can we begin to imagine what God would like to do through immigrant peoples as agents of God’s mission in the re-evangelization of North America and Europe?

The I/S as Means of God’s Mission to the Nations

A third aspect of this missionary and instrumental perspective of the I/S in God’s mission has to do with the way in which migration itself is presented as a fundamental method of God’s mission to the nations. There are indications in the Bible that on certain occasions God used migration to fulfill certain important aspects of God’s mission. Clearly there is an intimate relationship between the agents whom God uses in God’s mission and the means by which God chooses to carry out that mission. Yet in this article I will make a distinction (though it may at the outset appear to be somewhat artificial) between these two aspects of God’s mission in order to be able to read with new missiological eyes the history of God’s mission as it is portrayed in the Bible.

When one thinks of migration—that is, the phenomenon itself of being a stranger/sojourner/foreigner—as one of the methods that God uses in God’s mission, a number of biblical narratives come to mind. The first we might mention is the story of Moses. Raised in a bi-cultural and bi-lingual environment (Aramaic and Egyptian) Moses was still not a useful instrument for God’s mission. It was necessary for Moses to spend forty years as an immigrant and stranger among the Midianites, learning a third language, learning how to survive in the desert, learning how to shepherd sheep (God was preparing him to be able to shepherd a large human flock in the desert), and being shaped personally, emotionally, spiritually, and physically for the leadership role that would be his. Moses describes himself in a narration in and tells us: Exodus 18:1-3 tells us,

Now Jethro, the priest of Midian and father-in-law of Moses, heard of everything God had done for Moses and for his people Israel, and how the LORD had brought Israel out of Egypt. After Moses had sent away his wife Zipporah, his father-in-law Jethro received her and her two sons. One son was named Gershom, for Moses said, “I have become an sojourner in a foreign land.” (Exod 18:1-3; see also Exod 2:22; Acts 7:29)
The theme of the desert as the womb from which mission is born represents a strong and consistent emphasis in the Bible. John the Baptist came from the desert to begin his ministry. As Luke tells it in Luke 4, Jesus begins his ministry after surviving the temptations in the desert. And in the case of Saul of Tarsus, after being encountered by Jesus on the road to Damascus, Saul, known later as Paul, spends quite a few years in the desert rereading the Old Testament. In the desert, all are strangers. And in the desert, they are shaped, formed, and re-born to participate in God’s mission. It appears that God places people in situations of being I/Ss with the purpose of forming them in preparation for their participation in God’s mission.

A second figure we could mention is a woman, a widow, a Moabite, who precisely because she was an immigrant and stranger she was used by God to heal the bitterness of Naomi, her mother-in-law, illustrating in her person what God wanted to do for Israel. In the history of Ruth, the agent of God’s mission is combined with the means of God’s mission. Here I want to emphasize an aspect of the narrative of Ruth having to do with migration itself as a means of God’s mission.

The entire story derives from the way in which Boaz treats Ruth. Clearly the narrative is meant to be a love story in the midst of which the bitterness of Naomi (possibly representing Israel) is healed by and through the love Ruth and Boaz have for each other. But the relationship of Ruth and Boaz flows from the faithfulness of Boaz as a righteous Israelite. He knows the Scriptures. He knows that in Lev 19:10 and again in Lev 23:22 God signals the way in which the People of Israel were to treat the I/S in their midst. Ruth describes herself as a “stranger” in Ruth 2:10: “At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed, ‘Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?’”

The form in which Boaz receives her and the compassion that Boaz shows to Ruth demonstrates that Boaz was a just and righteous Israelite who follows the Levitical norms.

Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the sojourner. I am the LORD your God. (Lev 19:10)

When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and the sojourner. I am the LORD your God. (Lev 23:22; see also Deut 24:19-21, 26:12, 13)

It is important to remember what we have already noted: God has a special care, compassion, and love for the stranger, widow, and orphan.
(see, for example, Ps 94:6; 146:9.). It is precisely because Ruth is a stranger, a widow, a sojourner, that God was able to use her in the environment of the faithfulness, compassion and love of Boaz to bring about the healing of the bitterness of Naomi. The woman, the widow, the stranger is the means and the example of the compassion of God.

The New Testament offers an echo of these concepts. In Luke 17, when Jesus heals the ten lepers, only one returns to give thanks and praise God for being healed. And that one was a Samaritan, considered a stranger and sojourner by the Jews at the time of Jesus. It is precisely because he was a stranger and sojourner (in the eyes of the Jews) that Jesus points him out as an example.

Now on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus traveled along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!” When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed. One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan. Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

There are many other examples of this third aspect of immigration as a means of God’s mission to the nations. The exile itself was a means whereby God creates a great diaspora from which results the Septuagint, the synagogues, the continuing proselytism, a growing monotheism, and a network of human relationships that spreads over the entire Roman Empire. These factors created the contacts Paul would later use as the pathways for his missionary journeys.

Later in this essay I will highlight the Parable of the Good Samaritan as one more illustration of the way the stranger and sojourner are presented as examples of the means of God’s mission to the nations.

Could this biblical perspective of migration as a means of God’s mission offer us a lens through which we might better understand what is happening around the globe in this century? Is it possible that God is using migration itself as a means to proclaim in word and deed the coming of the Kingdom of God among the nations? Is it possible that one of the important means of world evangelization everywhere on the globe in this century will be God’s sending migrants as God’s means of mission? What are the implications for mission education, missiological reflection, and mission mobilization that may flow from this perspective?
The I/S As Goals of God’s Mission to the Nations

A fourth aspect of a missiological and instrumental perspective of the role of I/S in God’s mission sees migration in relation to the goals of God’s mission among the nations. Migration seems to play an eschatological role that propels God’s mission and the participation of the People of God in that mission toward the future. This futurist vision appears early in the Bible in the call of Abraham in Gen 17:8.

Abram fell facedown, and God said to him, “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you. I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you are now a sojourner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.”

Most migrants think and dream of going to a promised land that will offer better conditions of life. This hope of the future as a fundamental aspect of migration can be seen in numerous biblical narratives. For example, when God calls Moses to call the People of Israel to come out of Egypt, Moses speaks of their going to a new land.

Then the LORD said to Moses, “Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh: Because of my mighty hand he will let them go; because of my mighty hand he will drive them out of his country.”

God also said to Moses, “I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob as God Almighty, but by my name the LORD I did not make myself known to them. I also established my covenant with them to give them the land of Canaan, where they lived as sojourners. Moreover, I have heard the groaning of the Israelites, whom the Egyptians are enslaving, and I have remembered my covenant.

“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’” (Exod 6:1-8)
God’s mission toward the future is closely connected to his love of Israel as a pilgrim and migrant people. In one of his psalms, David cries out,

He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac. He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant: “To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit.” When they were but few in number, few indeed, and strangers in it, they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another. He allowed no man to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings: “Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.” Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods. For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens. (1 Chr 16:15-26)

This eschatological perspective of migration includes the hope that the nations will one day come worship the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, creator of heaven and earth. This is the vision of Isaiah:

Let no foreigner who has bound himself to the LORD say, “The LORD will surely exclude me from his people.” And let not any eunuch complain, “I am only a dry tree.” For this is what the LORD says: “To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant—to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off. And foreigners who bind themselves to the LORD to serve him, to love the name of the LORD, and to worship him, all who keep the Sabbath without desecrating it and who hold fast to my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house will be called a house of prayer for all nations.” (Isa 56:3-7)

The vision the Bible offers us is that all I/S are invited to the great banquet of the Lamb (Matt 22:1-14; Luke 14:15-24). Every stranger is invited to the table of the Lord. This eschatological perspective of the I/S is emphasized also in Revelation. Repeatedly the author of the Revelation announces that a great multitude of every language, family, tribe, and nation will gather around the throne of the Lamb (see, for example, Rev 1:7, 5:8, 5:13, 6:12, 10:6, 11:15, 14:6, 15:1, 19:6, and chapter 21). This great gathering will occur as the result of a great migration to the holy city. John describes the event.
Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. . . . The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. (Rev 21:1-2, 23-26)

What impact and what changes might there be in our Christian churches and ecclesiastical institutions if we really believed that in the final analysis, at the end of history, the I/S are specially invited to the Great Banquet of the Lamb? (see Luke 14:15ff; Matt 22:1ff.). What are the implications for our nations and our Christian churches to think that the hope of the world resides with the migrants, sojourners, strangers, and foreigners in our midst? And what if in their future we find our own global future?

Conclusion

The four aspects of the instrumental and missiological perspective of the role of I/S in God’s mission to the nations converge in the parable of the Good Samaritan. Luke places the parable within the narrative in which Jesus sends the 70 on a mission. They are sent as envoys of Jesus’ mission, which is thus their mission. And the primary example of such a mission is the Samaritan.

In the parable is listed the motivation for mission in Jesus’ response to the question posed by the young noble as to how he is to keep the law. As Jesus tells it, the “neighbor” in this story is not the one who stands beside the young noble. Rather, it is the one who acts neighborly. The “neighbor” is the one who lives out the norms of the Older Testament in being “neighborly” to others. In the parable, the one who demonstrates such a way of life is in fact the Samaritan. The Samaritan is the “neighborly one.”

The parable clearly presents the Samaritan stranger/sojourner as the agent of God’s mission. And the way Jesus tells the parable shows that Jesus wants to highlight the sojourner Samaritan as the means by which Jesus can offer the young noble a new path of participating in God’s mission.

Finally, the parable also focuses on the future. With the words, “Go and do likewise,” Jesus points toward a future in which the young noble can fully receive God’s mercy. The young noble himself will no longer be a stranger. And because of God’s mercy the young noble also can begin to create a new reality in which I/S are no longer excluded from his care, his compassion, and his love.
I believe that when we begin to fully understand the Bible’s missiological and instrumental perspectives with regard to the migrant and stranger, we may possibly gain a better grasp of, and live more fully in, the missionary vision expressed in 1 Peter 2. If the church of Jesus Christ truly saw itself as a pilgrim community whose land and nation are not of this earth, then the Christian church would begin to understand that it is itself a community of migrants—ambassadors, yes (2 Cor 5)—but even so, migrants. This perspective is not a purely managerial or activist viewpoint. Rather this presentation points us to the being, the essential nature of the People of God as a migrant community, pilgrims who know that this world is not their own. They are a migrant community of followers of Jesus on their way to a new reality, seeking the Kingdom of God.

Out of all the nations of the earth, God has chosen the Christian church to be “a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God:” chosen for a specific purpose. Chosen so that those who are not yet believers might see how we live and may glorify God by becoming followers of Jesus. This being our reality, this being our essential nature, it is not possible to reject the call of God to participate in God’s mission in this world: especially God’s mission because of, by means of, with the participation of, and on the way toward migrants and strangers. Is it possible, in this century, to express the canticle that gives concrete expression in real life to the vision of the psalmist?

Praise the LORD....
Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God, the Maker of heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them—the LORD, who remains faithful forever.
He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry.
The LORD sets prisoners free,
the LORD gives sight to the blind, the LORD lifts up those who are bowed down, the LORD loves the righteous.
The LORD watches over the sojourner and sustains the fatherless and the widow, but he frustrates the ways of the wicked.
The LORD reigns forever, your God, O Zion, for all generations. Praise the LORD.
(Ps 146:1, 5-10)
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I was sitting at a table across from a father with his 6 or 7 year old son. His boy had the most beautiful big eyes and long eyelashes. His eyes were filled with curiosity, a little apprehension, and a whole lot of energy, as you would expect from a boy that age. I was at a “parent cafe” organized by my son’s school for the first graders. As we were sitting there one of the teachers got up and wanted to show us pictures drawn by the children. I was very curious what that little boy had drawn. I anticipated some technical things, maybe a robot or something along that line, as my son loved to draw these things. The teacher got up and got one big folder with all the drawings. She opened it, turned it around so I was able to see it. On this picture, drawn by the boy, were two houses one on each side, in between the houses on the street were children playing while an airplane could be seen overhead. While the children were playing that airplane was dropping a bomb. No, this scene was not from a movie, nor is it something out of a book he read. This was his reality, his life. Mohammed, a refugee, a boy out of Syria—a Muslim. His story is only one of many, whose childhood is stained with the reality of war, violence, and death. His is a childhood filled with fear and trauma.

As I tried to catch my breath I looked to the father and tried to put myself in his shoes. What does it feel like for a parent to raise children in such a context? As a parent you want the very best for your child. But how does it feel when you cannot even offer security for the very next moment, when you cannot promise that you will be there to shelter him because any minute his life could be taken, when any moment he could end up being an orphan? What does it feel like to get the impression that the world is silent and does not care about the war? I felt a deep heaviness on my heart, but as I looked over to the boy—he was playing, finally able to play.
My son’s school organized the parent cafes in order to help immigrant refugees adjust to the school environment in Germany, which saw an increase in refugee numbers starting toward the end of 2015. In 2015 from January to December 476,649 refugees entered Germany, in 2016 an additional 745,545 came, and in 2017 by the end of December, 222,683 refugees had applied for asylum (Zahlen zu Asyl in Deutschland 2018).

With the war in the Middle East the number of refugees has significantly increased worldwide. But before going any further it is important to define what a refugee is. According to Dictionary.com a refugee is “a person who has been forced to leave their country in order to escape war, persecution, or natural disaster.” A refugee is anyone who has been forced to leave their home, their family, and their familiar environment because of a threat. Becoming a refugee is not something a person chooses but rather something a person is forced to become.

The Bible also has something to say about refugees. The most prominent story about refugees is about Jesus and his family. They had to flee Bethlehem because of a threat and were forced to live in Egypt (Matt 2:13-15). The Bible does not provide much information about how they lived or how they were treated. Yet, the Old Testament provides instructions that were given to Israel concerning how foreigners (immigrants) should be treated. “The stranger who dwells among you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (Lev 19:34). God desired that the strangers in Israel should be treated with equality, should be included in the activities of the country, and should feel welcomed. You should “love them as you love yourself” (Lev 19:34 NLT). The following quotation offers more insight concerning the instructions God gave Israel:

God sets the standard for the Israelites that the immigrants who come to dwell among them should be treated “as the native among you” (Lev. 19:34), and as he gives the Law to his people, he repeatedly states that its protections—including the right to fair treatment as laborers (Deut. 24:14), to a Sabbath rest (Ex. 20:10), and to prompt payment for labor (Deut. 24:15)—and most of its requirements (but not all: note Deut. 14:21) are meant for the immigrant as well as the native-born (Ex. 12:49). Throughout the Old Testament, the immigrant is repeatedly referenced with two other groups—the fatherless and the widow—as uniquely vulnerable and thus worthy of special care and provisions (Ps. 146:9, Zech. 7:10, Ezek. 22:7, Mal. 3:5, Jer. 7:6, Deut. 24:21). God commands his people to love immigrants both because he loves them (Deut. 10:18) and because, given their unique history in Egypt, they ought to know better than to mistreat foreigners living in their midst (Deut. 10:19, Ex. 23:9, Lev. 19:34). (Soerens and Darling 2012)
God knew how hard it would be for people to leave their homeland, their family, and everything people are familiar with behind. He calls his people to embrace the foreigners, welcome them, love them, and treat their equally.

As I was reflecting upon this I wondered why it is sometimes so hard for Christians to accept an immigrant or a refugee. What hinders us personally and as a church? After reflecting on this I came up with a couple of possible points which might be hindering us from responding to immigrants and refugees in biblical ways.

First, I believe that many people have a fear that is based on two possible sources: (1) fear about the amount of work involved with refugee work and (2) fear of the unfamiliar.

Life can be overwhelming at times with everything it brings and its responsibilities to the point that many feel they just do not have the time or energy to work with refugees or immigrants. However, if churches and communities would join together the workload does not have to be unbearable. Often refugee work involves only a few people, but if there was a larger team effort there would be benefits at several levels. First, it would reduce the workload on a few individuals, and second, in working together church and community would draw closer to each other—a process that has far-reaching benefits allowing the church to minister not only to immigrants but also understanding individual needs of community members.

A second common fear is based largely on the unfamiliar. Fear of strangers, refugees, and more precisely, Muslims keep many from engaging. The constant barrage of gristly beheadings, suicide attacks, terrorist killings, and the brutality of ISIS have impacted all of us; however, it is important to remember that Muslim refugees fled because of these same reasons and that far more Muslims have died and been threatened by ISIS than anybody else.

Germany has a long history of accepting Muslim immigrants, yet this kind of fear seems to be creeping in (and maybe it was always there to some degree). I grew up with Muslims in Germany, went to school with them, and am a daughter of an immigrant family. My father is from Tunisia and is a Muslim. I did not grow up with him since my mother and father split when I was around 4 or 5 years of age. Yet, I was always drawn to the Middle Eastern cultures and many of my friends were Muslims. My best friend was a Muslim and we grew up like sisters. The first thing you notice about a Middle Eastern family is their hospitality. As you interact with and join them, you become like family, you feel welcomed. I have experienced that over and over. Another thing you notice about Muslims is that family is an important part of what life is all about. You also will
notice their spirituality, for their belief in Allah is also an important part of daily life. I never felt threatened by their faith, so feel that there is nothing to fear but maybe something to learn from them. I have been especially impressed with their commitment to Allah. I remember I was once asked why Christians don’t pray or don’t take God and religion seriously.

An important question is, what can we do about our fear of Muslims and other refugees? There is just one solution for such fear. We have to get involved, find out each other’s stories, and learn to see refugees as people as we get to know each other.

What would happen if we would sit with children like Mohammed, how would it change our perspective on refugees? What would happen if we would sit with fathers like Mohammed’s father and listen to his struggles? How would it change our perspective of refugees? What would happen if we would sit with mothers like Mohammed’s mother and listen to her fears? How would that change our perspective of refugees? I believe that getting to know Muslim refugees as people would go a long way toward removing fear of the unknown.

The second possible hindrance keeping many from interacting with refugees is that too many people in modern societies run on empty love tanks and when people run on empty there is little if anything to share with others. A natural consequence of running on empty is that many then isolate themselves even more. But what is the solution to this?

The one who can fill us is God. Therefore, it is important to make sure we spend quality time with God in order to make sure that in our emptiness and brokenness we sit with the One who accepts us, who loves us, and wants to heal us and fill us with his love. We will have more to share when we experience his amazing love for us despite of who we are.

Recently I interviewed a volunteer who was working for a group of refugees. It soon became apparent from the tone of her voice, from her excitement, and from the satisfaction and joy that her work had transformed her. As we were speaking she told me about the many relationships she was able to form with people she normally would have never met from other cultures. She felt deeply enriched by their friendship and the cultural exchange. She also mentioned how she had experienced their hospitality.

So what is the solution? There is a relational dynamic that takes place when we engage in helping others and it actually impacts both the recipients and the providers. While it is true that most people reach out to minister because they want to give and most are not involved because they want to receive some benefit, but it happens, it comes naturally as the providers are blessed and enriched. The solution for all the possible hindrances is to just do it, get involved, and go for it.
As I was researching what my town in Germany is providing for refugees and what is most needed I realized that food, shelter, and basic necessities are provided by the government but what is really needed is integration. One statement of a psychologist makes this very clear.

Refugees face a long journey to adjust and thrive in their new resettlement country. Many have been abused, betrayed, and mistreated prior to arrival, and some may have difficulty trusting others, as they expect to be hurt again. The deepest wounds that any individual carries are relational in nature, and refugees are no exception. As a psychotherapist, I (Isaam) believe that relational wounds can be healed only by relational remedies through developing healthy relationships with God and others. In my opinion, there is no better healing experience for a refugee family than getting to know an American family that chooses to come alongside them and guide them through their new journey. When refugees are treated with love, patience, respect, and honor instead of rejection, intolerance, shame, and disgrace, past wounds heal and refugees learn to expect to be treated with kindness and dignity again. (Bauman, Soerens, and Smeir 2016:149)

God calls us to embrace the stranger and create a space for connections where people can find healing—a place with hospitality. Dan Allender describes hospitality: “Hospitality is the core of what the community of God brings, inviting people to goodness, to a feast, to sustenance, to solace, to healing” (2015). What a beautiful picture for the community of God and what it has the potential to provide for others.

Timothy Keller always speaks about “word and deed ministry” going hand in hand and as I was researching about the different programs provided in my town I came across a project called Elijah21: Jesus 4Refugees. Elijah21 is a collaboration between most churches to not only care for refugees in some way but also to introduce them to Jesus. How is that done? The idea is that one evening the Jesus movie is shown in their language and before that a meal is provided along with time to socialize. The day before the movie a verbal invitation is given to those living in the refugee housing and they are picked up the next day for the movie. If there are some who show more interest afterwards the church has some programs ready to connect them to.

When I heard about that I was very skeptical. I put myself in their shoes. How would I feel if I would be in some Arabic country and a stranger invited me to a meal and a showing of the movie about Mohammad? I don’t know about you, but I would not be going. The Adventist Church decided it just wanted to observe so one of the church elders went to the event. Surprisingly, it was well received with 30-40 people present, a mixed group
from all over Africa, Syria, etc. They were socializing and watching the movie which was shown in different rooms as different languages were provided. There was one boy, around 10 years of age who came with his mother who was so moved by the movie, that with a sparkle in his eyes he said “Mama, I want to learn more about Jesus.”

As I have testified for years, if we were quick in discerning the opening providences of God, we should be able to see in the multiplying opportunities to reach many foreigners in America a divinely appointed means of rapidly extending the third angel’s message into all the nations of earth. God in His providence has brought men to our very doors and thrust them, as it were, into our arms, that they might learn the truth, and be qualified to do a work were could not do in getting the light before men of other tongues. (White 2010:570)

The refugee crisis is being used by God in his provision to bring millions of refugees into our communities, giving God’s people an opportunity to introduce them to the loving, caring God of the Bible. God wants to reach them as he wants to give them new hope and a new life, for now and eternity. In this God invites us to be his hand, his feet, and reflect his loving heart as we interact with these new arrivals in our cities and towns. Furthermore, in reaching out to them it just might be another way God seeks to save the church from a self-focused agenda and pushing the church back towards its biblical role—to be a light to the world.

Works Cited


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Introduction

The Emmanuel family are refugees from Rwanda who resettled in the United States. I was honored to know and work with them after they fled their homeland and spent years in a refugee camp in Kenya. Sadly Mr. Emmanuel was tortured by authorities and witnessed the murders of several of his family members. Mrs. Emmanuel attempted to protect the children but lived in fear and hiding. Mr. Emmanuel suffers occasional panic attacks, loss of appetite, weight loss, depression, and a recurring sense of hopelessness, particularly during the difficult months of learning English and attempting to maintain employment. He is not alone since more than half the people who escape war zones suffer from some type of mental illness according to research done by Germany’s chamber of psychotherapists (Brenner 2016). The effect of trauma on refugees is immeasurably long lasting and shattering to both their inner and outer self (Steel, Silove, Brooks, Momartin, Alzuhairi, and Susljk 2010). Mario, a smart young man I treated in counseling, escaped from El Salvador having been a child soldier from the age of 11 years and being expected to use a machete to behead others while his family was held hostage. After walking over 3,000 miles and pleading for asylum, Mario is now attending high school in a US city with a family that is caring for him. He continues to struggle with sleep, fear, and at times is unsure where he belongs in his local church or what his understanding of God really is.

Description and Impact

Emmanuel’s and Mario’s story presents only snippets of the daunting and mostly unrecognized impact trauma has on refugees. This article will
outline how refugees have been undeniably traumatized and how lay individuals, especially within the church, can help to promote understanding and healing. A working definition of trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a brief description of trauma triggers and reactions, and some concrete ways that the healing of trauma can be supported will be discussed in this article.

Definitions

“A refugee, defined by the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees 1951 and the Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees 1968, is any person who has a well-founded fear of being persecuted because of their race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group and political opinion” (NSW 2016). This fear of being persecuted can lead to trauma which is considered to be “experiences that cause intense physical and psychological stress reactions. Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (SAMHSA 2014:7). Research indicates that most, if not all, refugees, especially children, have experienced some type of trauma either prior to being displaced or during the flight to safety. “Children and adolescents often have higher levels with various investigations revealing rates of PTSD from 50-90% and major depression from 6-40%. Risk factors for the development of mental health problems include the number of traumas, delayed asylum application process, detention, and the loss of culture and support systems” (Refugees Health 2011). Therefore, trauma can be defined as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. Similar to the above mentioned stories, persecution, watching loved ones being massacred, separation from their child, or simply not knowing if they would survive the night can cause deep distress. This level of horror and fear can affect individuals so significantly that it may temporarily or permanently alter their ability to cope. Their perceptions and self-concept can be deeply affected.

Many immigrants and refugees have diagnosable PTSD. This set of symptoms was finally named after World War II when the returned war-torn veterans showed significant difficulties coping even after arriving back on US soil and in everyday life. PTSD is defined as a mental health condition that’s triggered by a terrifying event and can be understood as experiencing or reliving a psychologically traumatic event. PTSD has been identified in large numbers of refugees who have experienced pre-migratory trauma (American Psychiatric Association 2013). PTSD can
derive from either experiencing or witnessing the event, from seeing or even learning about an event involving actual or threatened death, serious injury, or sexual violation. Most recognizable of the symptoms of PTSD include intrusive memories, avoidance of things and situations, negative changes in thinking and mood, and changes in emotional reactions.

**Impact of Trauma**

Unfortunately, there is no argument that refugees have experienced significant amounts of trauma and heavy loss. Common misconceptions seem to indicate that after the initial adaptation and acculturation to the United States no lingering symptoms should remain. This notion is derived because many refugees are not showing typical symptoms of diagnosable PTSD nor are receiving treatment and may appear to be happy. Members of the community or church working closely with refugees will commonly believe that since refugees are now safe and have their basic needs cared for, there are no lasting effects from the damage caused by the traumatic experiences. Patience is needed with the adaptation process to a new culture, but the grief, enormous loss, or the lasting impact of trauma is infrequently recognized or discussed.

Post-traumatic stress triggers changes in brain organization has been clearly established by science, including differences in the actual gray matter as well as the size and connectivity of the amygdala. Researchers, however, are only just beginning to comprehend exactly how chronic stressors create changes in the brain structure, which affects how the brain functions and which has long-standing effects (Center for Adolescents Studies 2018). The stress hormone, cortisol, is needed for the body to respond to stressful situations, which includes responses such as fight, flight, or freeze. If these cortisol levels remain high for too long it can lead to depression (Rasmusson, Lipschitz, Wang, and Vojvoda 2001). Elevated levels of these hormones for significant lengths of time can cause the prefrontal cortex to decrease its ability to make decisions and think rationally. As this higher executive thinking declines, imaging has shown signs of reduced activity in the brain, which can lead to significant dwindled ability to make decisions (Carrion and Wong 2012). Physical damage to the brain from a traumatic brain injury has been seen and documented by medical professionals for generations, but only recently have brain scan images been able to show the neurological impact from non-physical trauma, such as being witness to violence.
Therefore, the impact of trauma is especially substantial on the brains of young children as they are still growing and developing. The trauma is increased if the children are separated from their primary care takers, which will influence them for the rest of their lives. Yet, even the children who remain within their family groups and flee together display some area of concern in their development due to the primary care takers’ need to focus simply on survival. Subsequently, the children could struggle with emotional development and regulation due to the inability of a traumatized adult to meet their child’s emotional needs.

**Trauma Triggers**

Specialists who have been studying trauma and its impact have identified that trauma *triggers* can occur without warning and with no prediction as to how the individual will respond. A trigger causes an emotional response that can vary in intensity and is usually negative. This could include fear or panic and can consist of a physical response such as shaking, pain, or fainting, to name a few (Hinton, Pich, Chhean, and Pollack 2004). As a mental health therapist working with refugee children, I am continually encouraging staff to train caretakers in an awareness of traumatic triggers. Preparing affected children by educating them how to
identify triggers and how to manage their reactions is paramount as this can eliminate or reduce some of the stress responses.

Although this can take a long time and much intentional work, intentional times to prepare a child may include activities commonly thought of as positive and happy occasions. One such occasion is the 4th of July Independence celebrations in the US. The small “popping” noises from fire crackers or even the “booming” sounds from fireworks can cause a child or an adult to react in fear and hide under a bed because of a reminder of a sheer horror of the past. Although the noises are meant to be a cause of festivity, they could potentially be traumatic triggers. Consequently, while situations like these appear logical, many times a refugee’s reaction to a situation or overreaction, may not seem logical. “Who feels it knows it” is a saying that explicates an unexpected response to an event that may be considered fascinating for others.

Triggers usually come from sensory processing such as a noise, a smell, a color, or even a word. This usually occurs prior to the pre-frontal cortex processing the information. Many traumatized individuals react to small events with reactions that do not seem within expected limits. Dr. Van der Kolk, a psychiatrist noted for his research on trauma, uses a metaphor when explaining trauma reactions. He refers to the amygdala as the smoke detector in a house. For instance, a normal reaction at breakfast time if the smoke detector starts beeping during the toasting of bread would be to quickly take the bread slice out of the toaster and quickly start opening the windows. However, if during the dead of night while everyone is sleeping the smoke alarm is triggered, a different more appropriate response might be to quickly flee the house. For individuals that have been traumatized, at the first beeping of the smoke detector during breakfast, they might rapidly flee the house as the reaction in their system is not able to process the fact that this might actually be the toast burning. The brain enters survival in a fight, flight, freeze mode and may not be able to cognitively process the situation at hand. This is merely a representation of how emotional reactivity or lack thereof may be displayed for individuals who have suffered trauma even years after safety has been found (Van Der Kolk, McFarlane, and Weisaeth 2007).

Ways to Healing

It is evident that trauma impacts individuals significantly and evidence-based treatment should include counseling with a licensed therapist. Still, aside from professional interventions, what can community and church lay individuals do to help? Is there anything persons who have suffered trauma themselves can do to help their own healing process? In
this section intentional strategies that can assists refugees to start the jour- 
ney of recovery will be reviewed. These are interventions that have shown 
that brain activity can increase in positive and healing ways. Focus will be 
given to the importance of creating relationships and sharing the stories of 
struggle. Suggestions for healing that is prompted through the senses will 
be described. A final word of encouragement for advocating for a trauma 
perspective, especially for those who have taken on the mantle of caring 
and working with the healing process of refugees, is also suggested.

Relationships and Sharing the Story

Dr. Bruce Perry, a well-known trauma expert states, “Relationships 
matter: the currency for systemic change was trust, and trust comes 
through forming healthy working relationships. People, not programs, 
change people.” He continues to say, “Relationships are the agents of 
change and have the most power” (2014). The research that shows the im-
portance of relationships in healing trauma and in general human health 
and well-being is staggering and too numerous to mention. It has been 
commonly believed that every child needs six adults who are absolutely 
crazy about them to grow in healthy emotional stability, particularly as 
their brain develops. This can easily be looked at in terms of helping those 
whose brains also need to re-generate in a healthy way and the impor-
tance of surrounding them with meaningful relationships.

There are many church groups that are creating small groups for de-
veloping relationships. Many of these groups are helpful in the recovery 
of trauma since they become safe places to tell personal stories. Telling 
the stories in a safe emotional environment is an important part of healing and 
is similarly an important part of the therapeutic intervention. Evidence-
based Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy has at its core of 
therapeutic intervention the telling or the narration of the trauma story 
with another trusted individual. Although this is done with professionals, 
shared mutual storytelling is also healing when done within friendships.

Some barriers may exist in telling the difficult personal stories, as 
frequently telling the story may be more problematic for males than 
females. Sometimes cultural barriers and hesitation in being transparent 
is substantial. In addition, many well-meaning helpers do not want 
to ask questions or encourage any sort of conversation that might 
cause sadness or deep feelings for the victims. However, with a solid 
relationship in place, the telling of the story becomes manageable and 
potentially healing. Semmler and Williams (2000) suggest that “it is not 
surprising that storytelling has been found to be effective in cross-cultural 
psychotherapy” (cited in Comas-Diaz 2011:554). Dr. Dan Siegel, another
renowned trauma expert, has coined a phrase which emphasizes this importance, “what’s shareable is bearable” and he frequently shares this when he speaks. There is great significance of allowing for and creating spaces to speak about hard things as even Scripture encourages us to bear each other’s burdens.

Mariela Shaker, world known violinist and a refugee from Syria, commented to this writer after speaking at a plenary session at the Refugee Conference at Andrews University, when telling her story each time she speaks helps her to deal with her emotions. She understands that telling her story helps to heal and manage the pain, not just for her but for her listeners. Desmond Doss, Seventh-day Adventist war hero who recently was featured in a major Hollywood motion picture that was highly acclaimed, also suffered from PTSD and reportedly helped to manage it by speaking of it. “There’s no question that Desmond suffered from it. He dealt with PTSD partly by talking about it, which is effective,” reported Charles Kanpp, Chairman of the Desmond Doss Council (Weber 2016).

Continuing to underscore the importance of relationships in healing comes from the example of Jesus. He also sought relationships to help him in his humanness and moments that he needed to find strength. People may be a source either of distress or of peace. Jesus deliberately found peace with friends who brought comfort and affection to his life. This he found at the home of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. “His heart was knit by a strong bond of affection to the family at Bethany . . . often when weary, thirsting for human fellowship, he had been glad to escape to this peaceful household. . . . Our Savior appreciated a quiet home and interested listeners. He longed for human tenderness, courtesy and affection” (White 2013:524).

Healing Through the Senses

Science shows that healing of trauma can come from intentional stimulation to the senses. We know that children learn by stimulating their different sense. Jesus taught and served with sensory things. He told stories, he used sensory items to describe the kingdom of heaven as a vine with its colors and rich fruit, and he used water and bread, among other things. Over and over there are more and more studies showing the impact of music and art in development and healing even for adults. Individuals are encouraged to sing together. A refugee leader tells a story of how learning to sing hymns with a group of people helped to draw a community together, as did learning English in a group setting. Art, in all its beautiful cultural forms, can also help touch deep wounds in a traumatized person.
Current studies are being done into the impact of nature and its ability to help heal the soul and stimulate the mind. Even Jesus found time for nature, “His hours of happiness were found when alone with nature and with God. Whenever it was His privilege, He turned aside from the scene of His labor, to go into the fields, to meditate in the green valleys, to hold communion with God on the mountaintop or amid the trees of the forest. The early morning often found Him in some secluded place, meditating, searching the Scripture or in prayer. From these quiet hours He would return to His home to take up His duties again, and to give an example of patient toil” (White 2013:90).

The impact of relationships and sensory healing can beautifully be combined when groups of individuals intentionally choose to eat together. In the book of Acts, Scripture describes the early believers finding strength in being together and sharing meals. It is of critical importance that immigrants and refugees find ways to gather together in affiliation with others to develop relationships but also to share meals. The sensory richness of the colors, smells, textures and tastes of food have been divinely given as simple ways to increase healing by being in community and enjoying and stimulating sensory perceptions.

The Adventist Church has created Pathfinder clubs that can help children and the families become involved in participating in multi-sensory learning experiences. There are programs that intentionally include nature, art, cooking, and community. If these are implemented in communities where refugees are residing, the long-term positive effects will reach further than only education or only pleasurable times since they can significantly improve the healing process of trauma.

Often forgotten is the significance of simple intentional breathing. Much research has been done into the body and the brain’s need for intentional oxygen and pausing to breathe (Cerf 2017). Deliberately taking a few moments to calm the brain and body and be still in the Lord can have a positive effect. Individuals can do this alone or as a group and can also be connected to praying and meditation as well. Some are inspired to “breathe in grace” as they inhale, and then to “breathe out praise” as they exhale. Others simply say the name of YHWH with each breath—a simple calling for the Messiah.

Perception of Trauma in Caring for Others

This article has been focused on creating an understanding of trauma. Nevertheless, there are times when entities working with refugees wonder how long trauma’s residual effects last. Helpers may begin to wonder, “What’s wrong with you?” if they are seeing refugees struggling with
employment or substance abuse or with their faith. A model of care that numerous helping organizations have adopted is The Sanctuary® Model. This model is described as “a blueprint for clinical and organizational change which, at its core, promotes safety and recovery from adversity through the active creation of a trauma-informed community.” With a background of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs of the earthly sanctuary, clearly we can see how the word “sanctuary” is about shelter and relationship. The focus of this modality is promoting safety and instead of asking: “What’s wrong with you?” “What has happened to you?” The drawn meaning from the sanctuary which focused on rehabilitation, reconciliation, and restoration is evident and there is always time for this to occur until the return of Jesus.

Conclusion

Refugees have been through horrific circumstances and the impacts of trauma could be countless. Even if a diagnosis of PTSD has not been given, refugees and immigrants may still be experiencing trauma reactions and trauma triggers, which may affect their everyday life. Nevertheless, aside from professional counseling, there are steps that can be taken to increase the healing of the brain. These purposeful actions most importantly include intentional relationships, but also inclusion of time in nature, art, and simply sharing or telling the traumatic story is all imperative. Children and families can be involved in community and feel that they belong in ministries like Pathfinders.

Jesus uses sensory metaphors when he asks that Christians be a light to the world and not hidden, much like a flame. Trauma expert Bruce Perry states, “Fire can warm or consume, water can quench or drown, wind can caress or cut, and so it is with human relationships: we can both create and destroy, nurture and terrorize, traumatize and heal each other” (Szalavitz and Perry, 2007:16). He further supports the role of human connections by stating, “Surprisingly, it is often when wandering through the emotional carnage left by the worst of humankind that we find the best of humanity as well.” May we be that best of humanity.

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The Children of the East

Introduction

This article will explore the identity of “the children of the East” (bene qedem) who are mentioned at least ten times in the Old Testament (OT), and will examine the destiny of these people in the course of history beyond OT times. The article seeks to answer the question of whether the children of the East are to be identified with the Arabs, the Persians, or some other people-group. I will further examine any possible connection or relationship between the children of the East and Islam. The study will focus particularly on the biblical material relevant to “the children of the East” and Arabs, but will also summarize what can be known of the history of these people beyond biblical times.

The “Children of the East” in the Bible

The phrase bene qedem “sons/children/people of the East” occurs (by itself) ten times in the Hebrew Bible (HB), while the parallel phrase “land of the East” is found once, the fuller expression “the land of the people of the East” occurs once, and the phrase “the mountain(s) of the East” occurs twice, for a total of fourteen references. Other references about dwelling in the East which appear to be relevant will be considered.1 I will take up

1 All passages are cited from the NKJV unless otherwise noted. I do not look at Gen 2:8 where God plants a garden “eastward in Eden,” nor Gen 3:24, where cherubim are placed “at the east of the Garden of Eden,” nor Gen 4:16, with Cain’s dwelling “in the land of Nod on the east of Eden,” inasmuch as these passages are directions related to the Garden of Eden before the Flood and do not seem to be relevant to the identity of the “People of the East” in patriarchal times and later. Likewise, Gen 11:2 describes the inhabitants of the ark and their descendants traveling in an easterly direction (miggedem here with a verb of
each occurrence in the canonical order of the HB (with the exception of the reference in Job, which belongs with Genesis chronologically and by authorship) and seek to identify these people in light of the immediate context and other relevant data in the OT. Brief mention will be made of New Testament (NT) references to the “East.”

**Gen 10:26-30:** “Joktan begot Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab. All these were the sons of Joktan. And their dwelling place was from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the mountain of the east [har-hagedem].”

In the “Table of Nations” of Gen 10, the genealogy of the nations descended from Noah’s three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Shem’s son Aram and his descendants, the Arameans, are discussed below. Another of Shem’s sons, Arphaxad, begot Salah, Salah begot Eber, and Eber begot two sons: Peleg and Joktan. The location of where the various descendants of Shem settled is not given in Gen 10, except in regard to the thirteen sons of Joktan, Shem’s great-great grandson (listed above). All of these were said to have dwelt “from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the mountain of the East.” Mesha can tentatively be identified with Mesene at the northwest end of the Persian Gulf, and Sephar may be Dofar (ancient Saprapha of Ptolemy and Pliny), on the southeast coast of the Arabian Peninsula, near which is a high mountain which may be identified with the “mountain of the East” (Nichol 1976-1980:1:281). The names of Sheba (Sabaeans) motion means “eastward” and not “from the east” as in some translations; cf. Gen 13:11; (see Brown, Driver, and Briggs 1907, s.v. qedem) from the place where the ark landed, and does not describe a land or people in the east, and thus will not be considered. Many commentaries argue that “movement to the east in Genesis is in the context of judgment (4:16) or vanity (11:2, 13:11) or alienation (25:6). The same is true of Jacob. The journey to the east is filled with heartaches and is far from the ideal” (Hamilton 1995:252; Mathews 1996:257, 478; Matthews 2005:355, 461). It is far from certain that all references to “east” in Genesis have a symbolic meaning of judgment or vanity or alienation or rejection. Context must be taken into account in each case, especially since the “east” can also be the place from which deliverance comes in some passages of Scripture (e.g., Isa 41:2, 25, 46:11; Rev 16:12) and constitutes the orientation of the sanctuary (beginning in Eden, Gen 2:8; cf. Exod 27:13-16, 36:20-30, 38:13-18; implied in 1 Kgs 7:39; 2 Chr 4:10; Ezek 47:1).

2 Two of these names of the sons of Joktan are also attributed to the descendants of Cush, son of Ham, in particular Sheba and Havilah (see Gen 10:7, 29; 1 Chr 1:9, 23). Horn 1979:1016 suggests that “the Joktanite Sabaeans are probably the Saaba of northern Arabia mentioned in the inscriptions of Tiglath Pileser III (745-727 B.C.) and Sargon II (722-705 B.C.) as allies of the Aribi (Pritchard 1969:283, 286),” while the Cushite Sabaeans are associated with the Queen of Sheba and lived in the area now called Yemen (1015). Conversely, Horn 1979:464, puts the Cushite Havilah in the northwestern part of Arabia and the Joktan Havilah in southern Arabia.
and Ophir (whence came fine gold and precious stones, 1 Kgs 9:28, 10:11; 22:48; Job 22:24) are clearly associated with southeast Arabia. Hence, the first group of nomadic tribes connected with the land of the East are the Joktan tribes in the southern and southeastern part of the Arabian Peninsula.

**Genesis 25:5-6:** “Abraham willed all that he owned to Isaac; but to Abraham’s sons by concubines Abraham gave gifts while he was still living, and he sent them from his son Isaac eastward, to the land of the East [‘erets qedem]” (NJPS).

This text is programmatic for later references in the OT to the “people of the East.” The passage summarizes the fate of all of Abraham’s children. Isaac was to receive his inheritance in Canaan, and the rest of his sons, born by his “concubines” (a word that refers to both Hagar and Keturah, see Davidson 2007:186) were sent “eastward, to the land of the East.”

These sons of Abraham not born by Sarah include, first of all, Ishmael, Abraham’s firstborn son, whom Hagar, Sarah’s handmaid, bore to him. Ishmael had twelve sons who became “princes according to their nations” (Gen 25:12-16), in fulfillment of the divine promise to Hagar that God would “multiply [her] descendants exceedingly, so that they shall not be counted for multitude” (Gen 16:10), which was expanded to Abraham: “Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly. He shall beget twelve princes, and I will make him a great nation (Gen 17:20).”

According to Gen 25:13-15, “These are the names of the sons of Ishmael, named in the order of their birth: Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael; and Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah” (ESV). At least six of the twelve tribes descending from Ishmael are mentioned in cuneiform inscriptions dealing with the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula, and other tribes also can be identified with various geographical locations in the Arabian Peninsula, mostly in the northern part. The Ishmaelites are specifically indicated as living “from Havilah as far as Shur, which is east of Egypt as you go toward Assyria” (Gen 25:18). The NJPS aptly translates: “They dwelt from Havilah, by Shur, which is close to Egypt, all the way to Asshur; they camped alongside all their kinsmen.”

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3 Mathews (2005:461) speaks of the reference to “eastern” as having a “double meaning” conveying both “geographical direction” and a spiritual description of “Abraham’s rejected children.” I do not see in this passage any hint that Abraham’s other children (besides Isaac) were “rejected,” just because they were not of the special covenant line. Note especially the promises given regarding the descendants of Ishmael, discussed below.

4 For a discussion of the positive promises made to Hagar about Ishmael and his descendants, see for example Maalouf 2003:43-96.

5 The evidence is summarized in Maalouf 2003:151-156; see also Eph’al 1984:233-240.
The biblical texts show a close link and friendly relationships between the Ishmaelites and Israel during the period before the Divided Monarchy. There was intermingling between the tribe of Simeon and the Ishmaelites (cf. Gen 25:13 and 1 Chr 4:25). David’s sister married “Jether the Ishmaelite” (1 Chr 2:17). Among David’s top administrators were “Obil the Ishmaelite” and “Jaziz the Hagarite” (1 Chr 27:30-31). David seems to have had friendly relationships with the Ishmaelites, nor were they the victims of his various raids into the southern lands (1 Sam 27:8; cf. Gen 25:18).

The other sons of Abraham included in this passage whom Abraham sent “eastward into the country of the East” are the six sons of Keturah, Abraham’s wife after Sarah died (Gen 25:1). According to Gen 25:2, these included “Zimran, Kokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah.” Several of the tribes bearing these names appear in cuneiform inscriptions and geographical place names mostly in the central part of Arabia. The son of Abraham by Keturah whose descendants appear most often in the biblical text is Midian. The Midianites were a nomadic people “who ranged from the southern part of the peninsula of Sinai (Exod 3:1) northward to the Gulf of Aqabah (1 Kgs 11:18) and as far as the plains east of Moab (Gen 36:35; Num 22:4, 25:1, 6; Josh 13:21). Moses’ father-in-law Jethro was a Midianite (Exod 3:1).7

The Midianites early-on intermingled through marriage (and profession) with the Ishmaelites, descendants of Ishmael, Abraham’s son through Hagar. This is evidenced by the description of the camel caravan that bought Joseph from his older brothers, described as “Ishmaelites coming from Gilead” in Gen 37:25, but three verses later described as “Midianite traders” (Gen 37:28).

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6 See Eph’al 1984:231-233; cf. SDABC, 1:367. For examples, Zimran may tentatively be identified with the Arabian town of Zabram, located between Mecca and Medina; Asshirum is referred to in a Minaen inscription from NW Arabia. Shuah is perhaps the one exception who may not have settled in Arabia, if his tribe is identified with the people of Jasbuqu in northern Mesopotamia.

7 According to Judg 1:16 Jethro was also a Kenite, so the Kenites may have been a sub-branch of the Midianites. Some of the Kenites (descendants of Jethro) joined Israel when they settled in the Promised Land, and seemed to have dwelt in the wilderness of Judah near Arad (Judg 1:16-17). Descendants of the Kenites included Heber, who separated from the rest of the Kenites and dwelt in the north at Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh (Judg 4:11) and whose wife Jael killed Sisera, general of Jabin king of Canaan (Judg 4:18-21). Another descendant of the Kenites was Rechab (1 Chr 2:55), who along with his cousin Baanah, apparently while inebriated killed king Ish-bosheth and were executed by David for this dastardly deed (2 Sam 4:2-12). Rechab’s son Jonadab forbade his descendants to drink wine, and retreated back into the former nomadic life of his Kenite ancestors, part of the children of the East (Jer 35:6-19).
So far, in summary I have suggested that three groups are mentioned as being part of “the people of the East,” and that they settled in various parts of the Arabian Peninsula: the Joktan Arabians mainly in the south and SE, the Ishmaelite nomadic tribes mainly in the north, and the descendants of Keturah (e.g., Midianites) mostly in the central part of Arabia (Maalouf 2003:20, 21).8

**Genesis 29:1:** “So Jacob went on his journey and came to the land of the people of the East [’artsah bene qedem].” This passage is the only one in the HB which has the fuller phrase “the land of the people of the East,” and not an abbreviated phrase “people of the East” or “land of the East” as elsewhere in the HB.

The earliest reference to the land of “Qedem [the east]” in ANE materials is found in the story of Sinuhe, ca. 20th century B.C. “The statement that Sinuhe reached the Land of Qedem after leaving Byblos and continued his wanderings from there to Upper Retenu indicates that the name Qedem here refers to a region on the western border of the Syrian desert” (Eph’al 1984:10). Israel Eph’al argues that Genesis 29:1 also refers to the Syrio-Arabian desert, through which Jacob passed through to reach Haran: “The name [Qedem] has the same meaning in the Bible [as in the Sinuhe story] in the description of Jacob’s journey to Harran, during which he crossed the Land of the People of the East” (Eph’al 1984:10).9 If this view is correct, then Jacob’s relatives may not be part of the “people of the East,” but Jacob traveled through the “land of the people of the East” to reach Haran.10

Alternatively, other scholars maintain that the term “sons of the East” (bene qedem) “may refer to Arameans along the northern Euphrates” and thus “the home of Nahor may be described as among the Easterners”; even though it is not in the Syro-Arabian desert, it is still east of the Euphra-

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8 A comprehensive study of the fourteen major individual nomad groups named in Akkadian sources (and biblical references) is summarized alphabetically by Eph’al 1984:215-230, and it is remarkable to recognize that more than half can be identified with names of tribes descended from Ishmael of the sons of Keturah.

9 Eph’al further argues that “in other biblical references the term apparently lost its original meaning and was used generally to refer to the nomads in the desert regions east of Palestine.” This position is presented in conscious contrast with the view of J. A. Wilson and W. Helck, who consider the reference to “East” as “a vague term, either in the writer’s ignorance of Asiatic geography or intentionally vague for a wide nomadic area” (Pritchard 1969:19, note 10).

10 It is possible to interpret the Hebrew of Gen 29:1 this way. It reads literally, “Jacob lifted up his feet, and walked to [or through] the land of the people of the east.” Verse two then describes what he saw as he arrived at Haran, beyond the Syrio-Arabian desert.
tes (Hamilton 1995:252). If this view is correct, then this reference to the “land of the people of the East” broadens our perspective from the descendants of Hagar/Ishmael and Keturah, and Joktan’s descendants, mentioned above, to include a fourth major group which inhabited the “land of the East”—the Arameans, descended from Aram, the son of Shem. I favor the latter view, since the Aramaeans seemed to inhabit the entire region north of Palestine which now includes northern and NE Syria, and the Syrio-Arabian Desert, and Abraham’s relatives are clearly identified as Aramaeans. It is also possible that the two views may be reconciled, if the “land of the people of the East” specifically indicated the area in the Syrio-Arabian desert inhabited by nomadic peoples through which Jacob traveled on his way to Padan-Aram, and at the same time the people groups who inhabited this land were Aramaeans like Jacob’s kindred in Padan-Aram on the Tigris River (see discussion below).

The immediate context makes clear that Jacob was traveling from his home in Palestine to the land of his relatives in Haran (v. 4), specifically Laban his uncle (v. 13). A previous story involving Laban, in which Abraham’s servant came to find a wife for Isaac (Rebekah), indicates that the city in which Laban lived was Nahor (Gen 24:10), which was a separate settlement in the vicinity of Haran (cf. Gen 27:43, 28:10) “probably founded by Nahor [grandfather of Abraham] and named after him” (Horn 1979:775). Haran (and its satellite settlement Nahor) was located in Upper Mesopotamia (2 Kgs 19:12) on the Balikh River, one of the two main tributaries of the Euphrates River.

According to Gen 25:20, Laban was called “the Aramean,” his father was “Bethuel the Aramean,” and they lived in Paddan-aram. When Jacob is told by Isaac to go back to his relatives, it is to Paddan-Aram that he is directed to go (Gen 28:2). This is the name used throughout the Jacob narrative for the area where Jacob stayed for 20 years and later left to return to Canaan (Gen 28:5, 6, 7, 31:18, 33:18, 35:9, 26, 46:15). Paddan-Aram (probably meaning “route of Aram,” with Akkadian padanu meaning “road/route”) was “a country north [and east] of Palestine stretching from the Mediterranean eastward perhaps as far as the Habur River,” and the home of the Arameans” (Horn 1979:67). The Arameans were “descendants of Aram [a son of Shem, Gen 10:22, 23], Semites who probably originally came from the area inside the great bend of the Euphrates in northern Mesopotamia, the land called ‘Aram-Naharayim . . . (Gen 24:10) . . . ‘Aram of the Two Rivers’” (Horn 1979:67). The land of the Arameans eventually spread over a much larger area, including the territory north of Palestine from the Mediterranean Sea east at least to the Habur River (a tributary of the Tigris that rises in Turkey and flows through Iraq and joins the Tigris at the conjunction of Turkey, Iraq, and Syria). The Arameans were
“seminomadic pastoralists” (Freedman 1992: s.v. “Arameans”) and never formed large kingdoms but rather smaller city-states, with the strongest being Damascus (in modern Syria, mentioned in the time of David, 2 Sam 8:5, 6). Other Aramean city-states mentioned in the Bible are Aram of Beth-rehob (in northern Palestine, 2 Sam 10:6), Aram of Geshur (close to Bashan, Deut 3:14; 1 Chr 2:22, 23), Aram of Maacah (near Geshur, Deut 3:14; Josh 13:13), and Aram of Zobah (north of Damascus and the plain between the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon mountains, 1 Sam 14:47). When Tiglath Pileser III conquered Damascus in 732 BC he dispersed the inhabitants and made it an Assyrian province, but the Aramean language spread throughout the empire and became the international language of the empire (Horn 1979:67).

**Job 1:1-3:** “There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil. And seven sons and three daughters were born to him. Also, his possessions were seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household, so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the East [bene qedem].”

The introduction to the book of Job makes it clear that Job was one of the “children of the east” (bene qedem); in fact, he was the “greatest” of all these people of the East.

There is good evidence that the book of Job was written by Moses along with Genesis during his forty years in the Wilderness of Midian living with Jethro (see Nichols 1976-1980:3:493-496; White 1903:159; White 1880:1). “Job may have been a contemporary of Moses” (Nichol 1976-1980:3:494). He was not part of the Israelite line, but a true follower of God (Job 1:1) among “the people of the East” outside the covenant line of Isaac. The LXX adds an appendix at the end of the book of Job, which is stated to be a translation from (“the Syriac [Aramiac] book,” Job 42:17, LXX). This appendix adds further information about the identification and life-setting of Job. According to the LXX appendix, Job’s other name was Jobab (which appears in Gen 36:33), and he is a son of Zerah, son of Reuel, son of Esau (through Esau’s daughter born from his marriage with Basma the daughter of Ishmael). Thus Job (Jobab) was part Ishmaelite and part Edomite, the fifth generation from Abraham. The LXX appendix further indicates that Job married an Arabian wife. He lived in the land of Uz which was an oasis “on the borders of Idumea [Edom] and Arabia.” (Another tradition puts the land of Uz further north, south, and southeast of Damascus, while still another suggestion puts it in the area east and southeast of Amman.) (Maalouf 2003:124-126).
Although some have objected to the historicity of this LXX-Syriac (Aramaic) tradition, there is biblical evidence elsewhere that make it plausible, if not probable, at least in its general outline. Genesis 36 (the genealogy of Esau) indeed traces the line of Esau, and mentions Esau’s wife Basemath, daughter of Ishmael (v. 3; cf. Gen 28:9), Reuel the son of Esau, and Basemath (v. 10), Zerah the son of Reuel (v. 13), and Jobab (Job?!) the son of Zerah (v. 33), fifth generation from Abraham. Genesis 36 also mentions other places/figures found in the book of Job, such as Uz (Gen 36:28; Job 1:1) and Eliphaz the Temanite (Gen 36:4, 10; Job 4:1, this Eliphaz was probably a grandson of the one mentioned in Gen 36:4). In Gen 36:33, Jobab is said to have been one of the “kings” (melakim) of Edom and in Job 29:25 Job says, “I chose a way for them and sat as chief [ro’sh], And dwelt as a king [melek] among the troops” (NASB). Thus Job likely was a descendant of Abraham (fifth in line from Abraham, to be more precise), of Edomite and Ishmaelite stock, and by marriage an Arabian-Edomite.

The book of Job portrays not only Job but his three friends (and Elihu) as monotheists, worshipers of the one true God, whom they call El, Eloah, Elohim, or Shaddai (names also used by the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) (see the discussion in Maalouf 2003:130-132). Several parallel passages make clear that the knowledge of the one true God El was common among the children of the East during the period of the patriarchs and the time of the Exodus (Deut 32:2; Judg 5:4; Hab 3:3, 7) (see discussion in Maalouf 2003:133-135).

If Job was a descendant of Ishmael and Esau, as suggested by the LXX and comparative evidence in Gen 36, then this book is a testimony to the monotheistic worship of the “people of the East” including various parts of the Syro-Arabian desert during the patriarchal period parallel to the time between Abraham and Moses.11

Numbers 23:7: “And he [Balaam] took up his oracle and said: ‘Balak the king of Moab has brought me from Aram, From the mountains of the east [harere qedem]. “Come, curse Jacob for me, And come, denounce Israel!”’

This passage begins a series of four oracles delivered by the prophet Balaam (Num 22-24), who had been called by Balak to curse Israel but

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11 Mention here can also be made of Caleb, whose father was Jephunneh, a Kenizzite. The ancestor of the Kenizzites was Kenaz, son of Eliphaz and grandson of Esau (Gen 36:11). Caleb joined up with the Hebrews who came out of Egypt, faithfully represented the tribe of Judah as one of the 12 spies (Num 13:6, 14:6-9, 24, 30), and at the ripe old age of 85 conquered Hebron (Josh 14:10-12, 15:13-14). Caleb is another example of one of Abraham’s descendants not of the covenant line of Isaac who served the true God, and actually joined the Hebrew people.
ends up blessing them. According to this verse Balaam came from “Aram, from the mountains of the east.” This verse identifies Balaam as from among the Aramaens, which as we have seen above, was a people group descended from Aram, the son of Shem, who originally came from the area of Northern Mesopotamia inside the great bend of the Euphrates River. Numbers 22:5 gives further information that Balaam lived “at Pethor, which is near the [Euphrates] River in the land of the people of Amaw” (ESV). The Land of Amaw is mentioned occasionally in the cuneiform records, and was located west of the Euphrates River. In the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III, Pitru (the Hittite name for Pethor) is mentioned as being “on the other side of the Euphrates, on the river Sagur” (Pritchard 1969:278) which joined the Euphrates about 60 miles NE of Aleppo. Pethor is perhaps to be identified with Tell Akhmar, 18 miles south of Carchemish (Freedman 1992:5:288) in what is today NE Syria. The “mountains of the East” is “a Canaanite term for the mountainous region of eastern Syria” (Harrison 1990:309). Balaam is therefore describing the basic contours of the land of Aram, from the mountains of eastern Syria and north up to the Euphrates River, the latter of which was his own home. The “mountains of the East” thus comport with the expression “the land of the people of the East” in Gen 29:1, in describing the territory of the Arameans, in which lived Abraham’s brother Haran and his descendants.

This narrative gives indication that there were true people of God, including a true prophet of God, living among the “people of the East” in “the land of the East” Aram (Syria) at the time of the Exodus.

In the next sections I will display all the passages in Judges dealing with “the children of the East,” and then make comments on the various passages.

Judges 6:1-3: “Then the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. So the LORD delivered them into the hand of Midian for seven years, and the hand of Midian prevailed against Israel. Because of the Midianites, the children of Israel made for themselves the dens, the caves, and the strongholds which are in the mountains. So it was, whenever Israel had sown, Midianites would come up; also Amalekites and the people of the East [bene qedem] would come up against them.”

Judges 6:33 (ESV): “Now all the Midianites and the Amalekites and the people of the East [bene qedem] came together, and they crossed the Jordan and encamped in the Valley of Jezreel.”

Judges 7:12 (ESV): “And the Midianites and the Amalekites and all the

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12 Some versions translate this Hebrew expression as “his people” rather than as a proper name. If this is the meaning, it may link Balaam with the relatives of Abraham in Aram, Paddan-aram to be more precise (see discussion above under Gen 29:1.

people of the East [bene qedem] lay along the valley like locusts in abundance, and their camels were without number, as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance.”

Judges 8:10 (ESV): “Now Zebah and Zalmunna were in Karkor with their army, about 15,000 men, all who were left of all the army of the people of the East [bene qedem], for there had fallen 120,000 men who drew the sword.”

All of the above passages in Judges refer to the same series of events, in which the Midianites, along with the Amalekites and the “people of the East,” ravished the land of Israel every year at harvest time for a period of seven years (Judg 6:1), and Gideon led an army of 300 valiant soldiers which routed their armies (Judges 7 and 8). Some versions (such as the NKJV) and some commentators equate the Midianites and Amalekites with the people of the East in these passages (“the Midianites and the Amalekites, the children of the East,” apparently taking the last waw as an epexegetical “even”), but most versions (such as ESV) distinguish the three groups as separate. The NIV translates as “the Midianites, Amalekites, and other eastern peoples” (6:3, 33). Evidence that the Midianites and Amalekites were closely linked with, if not included in the designation “people of the East,” comes from Judg 8:10, where Zebah and Zalmunna, specifically identified earlier as “kings of Midian” (8:5) are in v. 10 in charge of the army of “the people of the East.” Daniel Block argues that bene qedem here “is not a proper name, nor a self-designation, but a vague gentilic label used by Westerners to denote the nomadic groups that migrated about the Arabian desert,” involving various “Bedouin tribes” which “opportunistically joined the Midianites in a confederation of desert people and crossed the Jordan with them to pillage and generally wreak havoc on Israelite settlements” (1999:252). It is suggested that Judges 6 describes “a general movement of nomads caused by a lack of rain in their own districts” (252).

Others take bene qedem as a proper name (see NJPS), translated as (people of the) Qedemites (or Kedemites), with Qedem (or Kedem) here “as a proper name designating the great Syrian Desert to the east of Moab and Ammon” (Nichol 1976-1980:2:341).

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13 Hamilton 1995:252 suggests that “the expression is a summarizing appositive for the Midianites and the Amalekites (not a distinct third group).”

14 See Block 1999:252, who upholds both possibilities: bene qedem “could serve as an explanatory designation for Midian and Amalek since these must have entered across the Jordan, or it could refer to another desert group.”

15 See also Musil 1927:494-497 for an appendix on the bene qedem, in which he equates the term with the Arabic sherk, one who marches through the region of the inner desert of Arabia, that is, “those Arabs who raise camels and dwell either constantly or at least half a year in the inner desert” (494).
A major study on the Midianites and relevant biblical passages by William Dumbrell (1970:1-183, 1975:323-337) concludes that the term “Midian” is used in the Judges narratives as a collective term for a large tribal confederation led by the descendants from Keturah (Gen 25:1-6), which included the Midianites, Amalekites, and the children of the East. This confederation controlled the areas surrounding including Transjordan, Edom, and Sinai. Dumbrell makes a good case for the fact that Gideon’s defeat of the Midianite confederacy started the decline of the Midianites as a dominant political power, and their decline gave rise to the ascendancy of the Ishmaelite tribes. In particular, the “sons of Qedar” (one of Ishmael’s sons) had predominance among the nomadic tribes of the northern Arabian Peninsula until late into the time of the Persian Empire, when the Nabateans (descendants of Nebaioth, another son of Ishmael? see discussion below) gained ascendancy over northern Arabia.

1 Kings 4:30-31 (ESV; Hebrews 5:10-11): “Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east [bene qedem] and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all other men, wiser than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Calcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol, and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.”

These two verses come in a section of 1 Kings describing the wisdom of Solomon (1 Kgs 4:29-34. Verse 29 indicates the source of Solomon’s wisdom was from God, and describes his “exceeding great understanding and largeness of heart like the sand on the sea shore.” Verses 32-33 delineate the scope of Solomon’s wisdom (3,000 proverbs, 1,005 songs, and knowledge of the flora and fauna of nature), and v. 34 informs that “men of all nations, from the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom,” came to hear his wisdom. In vv. 30-31, our present passage, the author compares Solomon’s wisdom with that of others within wisdom circles in Israel and beyond, especially in Egypt and among the “children of the East.”

Verse 31 (Heb 5:11) highlights the wisdom figures in Israel. Heman and Ethan, Chalcol, and Darda, may have been four of five brothers from the tribe of Judah, sons of Zerah (also spelled Ezra), grandsons of Tamar, Judah’s daughter-in law (1 Chr 2:6). Heman and Ethan wrote Psalm 89 and 88 respectively (cf. Ps 88:1 and 89:1). Alternatively (but less likely) Heman and Ethan here may refer to two of Israel’s great musicians from the tribe of Levi who were singers and instrumentalist choir leaders of the Levitical antiphonal choirs (1 Chr 15:17, 19; cf. 6:33, 44, 16:41-42, 25:1, 4, 5, 6; 2 Chr 5:2, 35:15).

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16 See also 1 Chr 25:5, which mentions a “Heman” as “the king’s seer in the words of God.”
In the narratives about or writings of Solomon are there representatives or samples of the wisdom of Egypt and the wisdom of the “children of the East” to which Solomon is compared? Scholars have long recognized that Proverbs 22:17-24:22 is intertextually linked with the Egyptian Instructions of Amenemope, who lived ca. 1200 B.C.\footnote{For a convenient summary of the major literature dealing with this intertextual parallel, see Maalouf 2008:282-283.} More recently, a number of studies argue that the sayings of Agur and Lemuel recorded in Prov 30-31 provide samples of wisdom literature from the “people of the East” in Arabia. The majority of scholars today concur that the word massa’ in Prov 30:1 and 31:1 should not be translated as “oracle” but rather is a proper name, Massa, referring to the kingdom of Massa.\footnote{See, for example Day 1995:55-70. For a summary of the evidence supporting this conclusion, see Maalouf 2003:138-143.} Hence Prov 30:1 should read, “The sayings of Agur son of Jakeh, of Massa. Prophecy of this man for Ithiel” (NJB; cf. RSV, JB, NEB). Similarly, Prov 31:1 should read: “The sayings of Lemuel king of Massa, taught him by his mother” (NJB). “Massa is not an unidentified kingdom; in fact, he is one of the children of Ishmael (Gen 2. 25:12-18), and his kingdom is the \textit{MaaS-‘a-a-a} that Tiglath Pileser received tribute from around 735 B.C. (Pritchard 1969:283), which was probably referred to by Ptolemy as the \textit{Masanoi} of the Arabian Desert (Ptolemy, Geography 5.18.2), and Winnett locates somewhere between \textit{Tayma’} and \textit{al-jawf}” (ARNA, 90, 101, cited in Maalouf 2003:290). If this analysis is correct, then the “children of the East” are linked with the descendants of Ishmael in the time of Solomon, as carrying on the wisdom tradition, and producing Ismaelite wise persons (including a woman, who instructed her son King Lemuel) in the Arabian Peninsula whose writings are inspired by God and included in the biblical canon.

\textbf{Isaiah 11:14:} “But they shall fly down upon the shoulder of the Philistines toward the west; Together they shall plunder the people of the East \textit{[bene qedem]}; They shall lay their hand on Edom and Moab; And the people of Ammon shall obey them.”

Isaiah 11 comes toward the conclusion of the Volume of Immanuel ( Isa 7-12), and describes the coming of the Messianic Davidic King (vv. 1-5), the Messianic age of peace and the influx of believing Gentiles (vv. 6-10), and the promised return of the scattered remnant of God’s people to their land and victory over their enemies (vv. 11-16). Verse 11 lists the areas from which the remnant of Israel will return: “from Assyria [north, Mesopotamia] and Egypt, from Pathros and Cush [all from the south], from Elam and Shinar [northeast, Mesopotamia], from Hamath [north, Syria] and the islands of the sea [west].” Verse 12 summarizes that these “outcasts of Israel” and “dispersed of Judah” come “from the four corners of
the earth.” In passing we note that the term “East” is not used to describe the various nations of this list from Mesopotamia (Assyria, Elam, Shinar).

Verse 13 indicates that Israel and Judah will at that time be in harmony with each other: Ephraim will not envy Judah and Judah will not harass Ephraim. Verse 14 describes how together Israel and Judah will recover their former territory and influence (hegemony) to the west and to the east. To the west, “they shall swoop down [imagery of a bird of prey] on the shoulder of the Philistines [the Shephelah or hill country bordering Israel and Philistia]” (ESV). This was the territory formerly controlled by the Israelites in the time of the United Monarchy under David and Solomon.

Now comes the reference to the “children of the East”: “together they shall plunder the people of the East [bene Qedem]. They shall lay their hand on Edom and Moab; And the people of Ammon shall obey them.” Even though some commentators equate the “people of the East” with the nations of Edom, Moab, and Ammon, the context and specific use of wording seems to point toward the conclusion that these “the children of the East” are to be considered separately from Edom, Moab, and Ammon (see e.g., Young 1965:399). Isaiah predicts that “together [i.e., both Judah and Israel] shall plunder [Heb. bazaz, ‘to plunder, take as spoil’] the children of the East [bene Qedem].” This language parallels the language used in Judg 6:1-6, where in the time of Gideon the people of the East (connected with or including the Midianites and Amalakites) came in to the fields of Israel at harvest time and “spoiled, ruined” (Heb. shakhat) the harvest (Judg 6:3-5). As the “people of the East” had spoiled/ruined their crops in times past, so Israel and Judah would take as spoil (plunder) their possessions. This is to be distinguished from what Israel and Judah would do to Edom and Moab: they would “lay their hand on” these peoples. The NJPS translates thus: “Edom and Moab shall be subject to them.” The idea here is control over, a hegemony with regard to these peoples, which is not the case for the “children of the East.” Likewise, “the people of Ammon shall obey them.” The NASB translates this as a parallel thought with the previous line: “the sons of Ammon will be subject to them.” In contrast to treatment of Israel and Judah toward the people of the East—lex talionis or retributive justice in plundering their possessions as people of the East had done to them but not putting them in subjection to their power—the combined nations of Judah and Israel would subject Edom, Moab, and Ammon to their hegemony as in the days of Solomon when these nations paid tribute to Israel.

19 This seems implied, e.g., by Oswalt 1986:288 who does not even mention “the children of the East” but apparently subsumes them under the reference to the three eastern neighbors of Israel.
Thus the reference to “the people of the East” in this passage are likely to the same people groups encountered in previous passages: the nomadic desert-dwellers of the Arabian Peninsula (including especially the Syro-Arabian Desert).

**Jeremiah 49:28-29:** Concerning Kedar and the kingdoms of Hazor that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon struck down. Thus says the LORD: “Rise up, advance against Kedar! Destroy the people of the east [*bene qedem*]! Their tents and their flocks shall be taken, their curtains and all their goods; their camels shall be led away from them, and men shall cry to them: ‘Terror on every side!’” (ESV).

This passage comes in the midst of a series of judgment oracles delivered by Jeremiah against the various nations/peoples of the ancient world surrounding Israel (Jer 46-51; including Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Damascus, Kedar [the “people of the East”] and Hazor, Elam, Babylon, and Babylonia). Kedar, along with “the kingdoms of Hazor” (an unidentified location in the Arabian Desert (Horn 1979:466)) are singled out as subjects of the attack and destruction at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (Dec 599 B.C.) (see discussion in Maalouf 2003:165-167). In Jer 49:28, the reference to “Kedar” is placed in synonymous poetic parallelism with “the people of the East [*bene qedem*],” thus making evident that these are to be considered as synonymous (or at least overlapping in identity); that is, Kedar was one of the nomadic tribes of the Arabian Peninsula that was known as part of “the people of the East.”

Kedar was one of the sons of Ishmael (Gen 25:13; 1 Chr 1:29), whose descendants became the frequently-mentioned nomadic tribe that roamed in the Syro-Arabian desert from southern Palestine northward to Lower Mesopotamia (see Horn 1979:639 and map XI). They seem to have been the dominant tribe in this area especially during the time of the Assyrian Empire (7th century B.C.). The cuneiform records mention this tribe under the names *Qidri, Qadri,* and *Qidarri,* and an Aramaic inscription of the 5th century B.C. refers to the tribe as *Qdr* (Horn 1979:639). According to Jeremiah’s prophecy in Jer 49:28-29, the tribe was known for its many flocks (of sheep and goats) and camels (cf. Ezek 27:21), and other passages describe Kedar as famous for its skilled archers (Isa 21:16, 17). In Solomon’s Song of Songs 1:5, Shulamit compares her own “dark but beautiful” skin complexion to “the tents of Kedar.”

In the passage of Jer 49:28-29, Kedar is the focus of an oracle of judgment in connection with devastation at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar,

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20 Not to be confused with other places in Scripture named “Hazor.”
21 Horn 1979:639, Map XI shows only this tribe of Kedar in this area of the Syro-Arabian Desert during the time of the Assyrian Empire (7th century B.C.).
king of Babylon (Dec, 599 B.C.; see discussion below). In a parallel section of oracles against the foreign nations, in Isaiah 13-23, Kedar is likewise mentioned in the context of negative judgment (Isa 21:16-17), which probably was fulfilled in Sargon II’s conquest of northern Arabia (Maalouf 2003:164). However, other passages describe Kedar in positive terms. They are summoned as witnesses in the divine covenant lawsuit (rib) against Judah in Jer 2:10. Kedar is also mentioned in connection with the coming Messianic Age. Isaiah 42:11, in the context of the coming “Servant of the Lord,” predicts that the nations surrounding Israel will rejoice, including the inhabitants of the Syro-Arabian desert east of Israel: “Let the desert and its cities lift up their voice, the villages that Kedar inhabits; let the inhabitants of Sela sing for joy, let them shout from the top of the mountains” (ESV).

Again in Isa 60:4 in the context of the Gentiles coming to the light of Mt. Zion in the Messianic age (v. 3), there is the prediction of the wealth of the Gentiles (v. 4) coming to Zion, and the animals of the nomadic tribes of the Arabian Peninsula (including those of Kedar) bringing gifts and in praise of Yahweh (vv. 5-6, ESV): “A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the LORD. All the flocks of Kedar shall be gathered to you; the rams of Nebaioth shall minister to you; they shall come up with acceptance on my altar, and I will beautify my beautiful house.” In the latter passage, Kedar is mentioned in parallel with the nomadic tribe of Nebaioth, descendants of the first-born son of Ishmael (Gen 25:13). Also mentioned in this latter passage are other nomadic tribes, descended from Abraham, who are included in the “people of the East” of the Syro-Arabian Desert: Midian (son of Abraham through Keturah, mentioned above); Ephah (son of Midian, Gen 25:4; 1 Chr 1:32, 33), Sheba (son of Jokshan, who was son of Abraham through Keturah, Gen 25:2-3; 1 Chr 1:32; probably not Sheba, son of Joktan, great-great grandson of Shem, mentioned above). Maalouf provides a thought-provoking perspective on these Messianic prophecies of the ingathering of the Gentiles, highlighting the children of the East:

As circumcised children of Abraham, the Arabian tribes mentioned in Scripture passages quoted above come first among the Gentiles in God’s plan of salvation of the nations. Their privilege as physical descendants of Abraham necessitates a theological priority in judgment and visitation. It seems that Paul caught this sequential priority of Arabs in God’s plan for restoration of the Gentiles and went first to Arabia in response to his calling to preach among the nations. (2003:186)
Ezekiel 25:3-4 (ESV): “Say to the Ammonites, Hear the word of the Lord GOD: Thus says the Lord GOD, Because you said, ‘Aha!’ over my sanctuary when it was profaned, and over the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and over the house of Judah when they went into exile, therefore behold, I am handing you over to the people of the East [bene gedem] for a possession, and they shall set their encampments among you and make their dwellings in your midst. They shall eat your fruit, and they shall drink your milk.”

This passage occurs among Ezekiel’s oracles against the foreign nations (Ezek 25-32), and specifically addressed the people of the Ammonites. The Ammonites, like the people of Edom (see Ps 137:7), gloated over Judah when its temple was destroyed by Babylon, and God’s predicted judgment is that their people and territory is to be given over “as a possession [Heb. morashah] to the people of the East [bene gedem]” (Ezek 25:4, ESV). In other words, the nomadic tribes, descended from Ishmael, who inhabited the Syro-Arabian Desert east of the land of Ammon, would encroach upon the land of the Ammonites and essentially take it over as their possession. The prophecy continues by predicting that the nation of Ammon would eventually be “cut off from the nations” by God and “perish from the countries” (v. 7), and thus their territory would be completely taken over by the people of the East.

Ezekiel 25:8-10 (ESV): “Thus says the Lord GOD: Because Moab and Seir said, ‘Behold, the house of Judah is like all the other nations,’ therefore I will lay open the flank of Moab from the cities, from its cities on its frontier, the glory of the country, Beth-jeshimoth, Baal-meon, and Kiriathaim. I will give it along with the Ammonites to the people of the East [bene gedem] as a possession, that the Ammonites may be remembered no more among the nations.” The setting of this passage is the same as the previous one, except the nation being called into judgment is Moab, Ammon’s southern neighbor in Transjordan. Evidently Moab engaged in the same gloating over the destruction of Jerusalem’s temple as did Ammon (to its north) and Edom (to its south), and the same sentence is pronounced against them as against Ammon: “I will give it along with the Ammonites to the people of the East [bene gedem] as a possession [Heb. moreshah]” (v. 10). In succeeding verses the desolation of Edom is likewise predicted (vv. 12-14), but their destruction is stated as taking place “by the hand of My people Israel” instead of being taken over by the children of the East.

These passages in Ezek 25 indicate that despite the divine judgment predicted in previous passages in Isaiah and Jeremiah (see above), “God’s judgment on the Arabian nomadic tribes was for the sake of discipline rather than complete neutralization” (Maalouf 2003:167). These tribes were to be given possession of the lands of Moab and Ammon.
References to Deliverance Coming from the East (e.g., Isa 41:2, 25, 46:11; Rev 16:12)

Several biblical references speak of deliverance coming from the east. The passages in Isaiah under consideration all predict the coming of Cyrus, king of Persia, who would deliver Israel from its captivity in Babylon (cf. Isa 44:28, 45:1; 2 Chr 36:22, 23; Ezra 1:1-4, 5:13-15, 6:3-5). The term used to refer to the “east” in these passages is mizrakh, “lit. place of sunrise,” not qedem as in the passages referring to the children of the East. Qedem is never used as a geographical location with regard to Persia or Babylon, but is a “technical term referring to the Syro-Arabian Desert” (Maalouf 2003:207). Furthermore, the context makes clear that “east/sun-rising” is used in these passages as a direction viewed from the reference-point of Babylon, since Cyrus will come from the east of Babylon, the location of Persia with reference to Babylon. The mention of the drying up of the River Euphrates, to make way for “the kings from the East” in Rev 16:12 is alluding to this OT event where Cyrus diverted the Euphrates river so that his troops could enter Babylon through the dry riverbed and conquer the city. From the perspective of Palestinian Jews, armies/kings coming from Assyria, Babylon, or Persia are never said to be coming from the east. The route for those armies to arrive in Palestine was from the north, not the east, and enemy armies are often said to be coming from the north (see e.g., Isa 14:31; Jer 1:13-15, 4:6, 6:1, 22, 10:22, 13:20, 25:9, 46:20, 24, 47:2, 50:3, 9, 41; Ezek 26:7; Zeph 2:3). Thus these passages regarding the “sun-rising/east” (mizrakh) are not relevant for our study of the children of the East.

The Story of the “Wise Men from the East” (Matt 2:1) Coming to Bring Gifts to Baby Jesus

There has been debate over the origin of the Magi who came to worship the new-born King from the East. After surveying the various options, Maalouf presents an array of evidence—from geography, from the gifts of the Magi (incense and “gold of Arabia,” Isa 60:5; Ps 72:15), from biblical typology (Isa 60:6)— to support the conclusion that the Magi did not come from Persia, but from Arabia (i.e., from among the children of the East), in fulfillment of Bible prophecy (2003:193-217).

Summary and Implications

The first people groups connected with the East in the Bible after the Flood are the nomadic tribes descended from the thirteen sons of Joktan, Shem’s great-great grandson, who included Almodad, Sheleph,
Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Obal, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, and Jobab (Gen 10:26-29). These tribes dwelt “from Mesha as you go toward Sephar, the mountain of the east” (Gen 10:30), that is, mostly in the southern and SE part of the Arabian Peninsula.

A second set of nomadic tribes connected with the “land of the East” were the descendants of Abraham through Hagar and her son Ishmael, who were directed by Abraham to go “eastward, to the land of the East” (Gen 25:6). The twelve sons of Ishmael (Gen 25:13-15) included, in order of birth, Nebaioth, Kedar, Adbeel, Mibsam, Mishma, Dumah, Massa, Hadad, Tema, Jetur, Naphish, and Kedemah, and the twelve tribes descended from these sons dwelt “from Havilah, by Shur, which is close to Egypt, all the way to Asshur” (Gen 25:18), that is, mostly in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula. The Ishmaelites (in general), and various tribes descended from Ishmael, are directly described as part of the “children of the East.”

A third set of people groups connected with the land of the East were descendants of the six sons of Abraham by his wife Keturah after Sarah died (Gen 25:1), which included Zimran, Kokshan, Medan, Midian, Ishbak, and Shuah (Gen 25:1, 20). The nomadic tribes bearing these names dwelt mostly in the central part of Arabia. The tribe descended from Keturah mentioned most often in the biblical text is Midian, whose dwelling ranged from the southern part of the peninsula of Sinai northward to the Gulf of Aqabah and as far as the plains east of Moab. The Midianites early-on intermingled through marriage (and profession) with the Ishmaelites, descendants of Ishmael, Abraham’s son through Hagar. The Midianites are intricately connected with (included in) the term “people of the East.”

A fourth group that may be connected with the “the land of the people of the East” are the Arameans, descended from Aram, the son of Shem, from which Abraham and his relatives’s people group came in Haran/Paddan-Aram (depending on the translation of Gen 29:1), who dwelt in the Syrio-Arabian Desert (and possibly in Northern Mesopotamia).

Thus, four groups are mentioned as being part of “the people of the East,” which settled in various parts of the Arabian Peninsula: the Joktan tribes mainly in the south and SE, the Ishmaelite nomadic tribes mainly in the north, the descendants of Keturah (especially the Midianites) mostly in the central part of Arabia, and the Arameans, who dwelt in the Syrio-Arabian Desert (and perhaps Northern Mesopotamia).

The term “people of the East” is not used to describe the inhabitants of Lower Mesopotamia, including Assyria, Babylonia, and (later) Persia, but is focused upon the nomadic tribes in the desert areas of the Arabian Peninsula.
Are the “Children of the East” Arabs and What Happened to Them?

After displaying all the biblical references to nomads in the regions surrounding Palestine and in the desert regions to the east and south, Israel Eph’al points out a striking conclusion that there is a significant change in terminology for these nomads in the Bible around the mid-tenth century B.C., with only one term staying constant: “the people of the East” (1984:60-63).

In the historical and literary parts of the Bible there are radical changes in the names of the nomad groups, the turning-point occurring in the mid-tenth century B.C.: thereafter Hagarites, Ishmaelites, Midianites and Amalekites do not appear (nor, it should be noted, do they figure in extra-biblical sources, either of the period of this study or prior to it). Instead, the collective noun “Arab(s)” begins to be used, and various groups (Buz, Dedan, Dumah, ‘Ephah, Massa’, Nebaioth, Qedar, Sheba, and Tema’) not in the sources for the earlier period are referred to. Only the designation “People of the East” [bene qedem] spans both periods. (Eph’al 1984:63)

Eph’al writes from a critical perspective, in which he does not accept the genealogical ancestries of the Bible as historical, but if one takes the genealogies of Genesis seriously, then the “turning point” in terminology around the time of the rise of the Divided Monarchy makes good sense. Before the rise of the Monarchy in Israel, the older designations of “Hagarites” and “Ishmaelites” and “Midianites” reflected a period after the time of Abraham when these groups were seen collectively as the descendants of their primary progenitors, Hagar/Ishmael and Keturah (and her sons Midian and Jokshan), whereas later in history the focus shifted to the individual tribes which descended from Ishmael’s sons (esp. Dumah, Massa, Nebaioth, Qedar, and Tema’) and the sons of Keturah’s sons Midian (Ephah, Gen 25:4) and Jokshan (Dedan and Sheba, Gen 25:3). In fact, it is remarkable that in the Bible “all the nomad groups known as ‘Arabs’ and mentioned in the genealogical lists appear in the lists of the Sons of Qeturah [Keturah] and Sons of Ishmael” (Eph’al 1984:231). Throughout all these centuries, the term “Children of the East” accurately described these nomadic peoples of the Arabian Peninsula, identify them as either sons of Keturah or sons of Ishmael, and as Arabs.

22 The term “Amalekites” (descendants of Amalek, son of Esau’s son Eliphaz, Gen 36:12, 13) ceases to be used after the Monarchy because the Amalekites were wiped out by King Saul (1 Sam 15:1-8) in fulfillment of the divine command in Exod 17:14.
Etymologically, the term “Arab” refers to “nomadic desert dwellers without allusion to ethnic descent or nationality” (see Eph’al 1984:6-10). The first unambiguous occurrence of the term “Arab” outside the Bible is in an Assyrian text describing the battle of Qarqar (853 B.C.), which lists Shalmaneser III’s adversaries in the battle, and includes not only Ahab the Israelite, but also mentions “Gindibu [Arabic Jundub] the Arabian” and his “1000 camels” (Luckenbill 1926-1927: par. 611 cited in Maalouf 2003:261, note 8). From its earliest mention, the Arabians are linked to desert life by the reference to camels. References to “Arabs” occur numerous times in the Assyrian royal records, sometimes as allies and sometimes as enemies of Assyrians (for discussion and examples see Eph’al 1984: 5-12, 62-64, 237-240). These “Arabs” in Assyrian records mostly deal with the nomadic desert dwellers in north and central Arabia, but the name also referred to nomadic tribes from the Sinai Peninsula and the Syro-Arabian Desert. Other ancient records besides those of the Assyrians, dating from the 9th century and onward at opposite ends of the Fertile Crescent and apparently independent of each other, refer to “Arabs” in Greek, South Arabic, and Classical Arabic. This gives indication that the term “Arab” “was the designation that the nomads applied to themselves” (7). Eph’al notes that no satisfactory etymology has yet been found, and that the Hebrew ‘arabah (one of the words for desert) is probably not the etymological basis of the word, since it is not found in Arabic or in Akkadian (7). As mentioned in the discussion above, the descendants of Ishmael (the various tribes bearing the name of Ishmael’s sons) comprised a prominent part of this group of “Arabs” and assumed leadership roles.

During the time of the Divided Monarchy and after, the Bible explicitly uses the term “Arab” or “Arabian” (Heb. ‘arabi) to refer to the nomadic desert dwellers in general: that is, Isa 31:20 (“no Arab ['arabi] will pitch his tent there”), and Jer 3:2 (“like an Arab ['arabi] in the wilderness”). Several OT passages refer to “Arabia” (Heb. ‘arab): 1 Kgs 10:15; 2 Chr 9:14; Isa 21:13; Jer 25:24; Ezek 27:21; cf. in the NT Gal 1:17, 4:25. Isaiah, as part of his “oracles against the nations,” delivers an “oracle concerning Arabia ['arabi]” in Isa 21:13-17. In the oracles that follow, Isaiah specifically mentions Dedan (v. 13), which was one of the tribes descended from Jokshan, son of Keturah (Gen 25:3), and Tema (v. 14), which was a tribe descended from Ishmael’s son Tema, as well as Kedar (vv. 16-17), which as noted above was another son of Ishmael. Hence, the inhabitants of “Arabia” clearly included descendants of Hagar/Ishmael and Keturah.

23 The term, however, does not seem to be used by the nomads in southern Arabia until at least the 3rd cent B.C. (See Eph’al 1984:8-9).
Another passage making this point clear is Jer 25:24. Jeremiah summarizes the coming divine judgment upon the various nations in Jer 25:17-26, which was probably fulfilled by the attack of Nebuchadnezzar in Dec 599 (Maalouf 2003:167). What is very instructive is that among those whom he prophesizes against are “all the kings of the Arabs” (v. 24), and the previous verse singles out representative tribes of that group: “Dedan, Tema, and Buz. As we have seen above, Dedan was the son of Joskhan son of Keturah (Gen 25:3) and Tema was a son of Ishmael. Buz was a son of Abraham’s brother Nahor (Gen 22:20, 21), ancestor of an Aramaen tribe. Thus in this list we have representatives from the major groups of “Arabs” who were relatives of Abraham and also called “children of the East”: descendants of Keturah (Abraham’s wife), of Ishmael (Abraham’s son), and of Nahor (Abraham’s nephew). Thus the term “children of the East” refers primarily to “north Arabian nomadic tribes” of which the descendants of Ishmael comprised a major part.

In the time of Assyria, the Arabian nomads in Northern Arabia were subdued by Tiglath Pileser III (745-727 B.C.), crushed by Sargon II (722-705 B.C.), ruled by Sennacherib V (704-681), harassed by Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.), and devastated by Ashurbanipal (668-627 B.C.).24 Under the Babylonians, the “Qedarites” (note the term alludes to Qedar, one of the sons of Ishmael; the Ishmaelite hegemony over the Arab tribes seems implied in the terminology) were attacked by Nebuchadnezzar in December 599 B.C., and may be seen as “heaven’s decree as a discipline on the circumcised (Gen. 17:22-25; Jer. 9:25-26) children of the East because of their deep slide into idolatry (Jer. 2:10-11)” (Maalouf 2003:165, 166). Nabonidus (555-539 B.C.) conquered the city of Tayma’ (Tema) around the year 552 B.C., and established it as his royal residence. He also established colonies in the major trade stations, along the oases, located from north to south on the incense road in the district of Hejaz, thus controlling the internal trade route through northern Arabia.25 When Persia conquered Babylon in 539 B.C., the Persian Empire established peace with the Arabs, and the Arabs were one of the few people upon whom tribute was not laid (Maalouf 2003:169).

In post-Exilic times during the Persian Empire the term “Arabia designates the (partly Edomite) province of ‘Arabia’ (cf. Neh 2:19), which, like Judea and Samaria, formed part of the Persian satrapy of Abar Nahara,


'Beyond the River’” (Horn 1979:65). The Qedamites (not to be confused with the Qedemites “Easterners”) or north Arabian descendants of Ishmael, continued to survive through the centuries as one empire gave way to another.

After the reference to northern Arabian by the Greek historian Xenophon, when he traversed the Euphrates region in 401 B.C. there is no mention in the surviving recorded history till 312 B.C. when (as described by Diodorus) the Nabatean Arabs successfully withstood an attack by Antigonus the One-Eyed, one of the generals of Alexander the Great (312 B.C.). It seems that during that “silent period” the Nabateans took the stage as the representatives of the Northern Arabian nomads, and their empire stretched across northern Arabia. With the shrinking of Edom after it assisted Nebuchadnezzar in the sacking of Jerusalem (Jer 49:7-22; Ezek 25:12-15; Obad 1-9; Mal 1:2-4), the Nabateans gradually moved into Mt. Seir with Petra as a capital, and then spread their territory throughout the Negev and Transjordan.

Meanwhile, in the southern part of the Arabian Peninsula (in the vicinity of modern Yemen), the highly civilized and wealthy Sabaean (Sheba) kingdom thrived and monopolized the spice trade of frankincense and myrrh for centuries, probably from the days of Solomon (Queen of Sheba, 1 Kgs 10:1-3) until they were replaced in 115 B.C. by the Himyarite dynasty. This dynasty was succeeded by the Ethiopians (early sixth century A.D.), and Sassanid Persians (A.D. 575).

The historical records from classical sources use the term “Arab(s)” in line with what we have seen earlier, that is, as a designation of nomadic peoples living between Egypt and the region of the Euphrates, and does not indicate a unified political-administrative entity (Eph’al 1984:192, 193).

The “Arabians” mentioned as being at Jerusalem at the time of Pentecost (Acts 2:11) “were probably Jews or proselytes who lived in the Nabatean kingdom of Aretas, which extended along the east and south of Palestine” (193). The Arabia in which Paul spent three years after his conversion was also probably “this same Nabatean kingdom, of which Petra was the capital” (193; see also Hengel and Schwemer 1997:106-126). Arabia in the first century also included the Sinai Peninsula, and thus Paul could speak of “Mt. Sinai in Arabia” (Gal 4:25).

Regarding the identity of the Nabataeans, the Greek historian Diodorus of Sicily (1st century B.C.) links them with the Ishmaelite northern Arabian tribes that were not subdued by either the Assyrians, Medo-Persians, or

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26 See also Neh 6:1-6, which mentions Geshem, probably ruler of Dedan, “an Arabic people who displaced the Edomites in the 5th cent. B.C.” (Horn 1979:65). Note that Dedan was descended from Jokshan son of Keturah, Abraham’s wife after Sarah died (Gen 25:3).
Macedonians (Diodorus 2.48.4-5, cited in Maalouf 2003:173). Thus he sees a continuity with the Assyro-Babylonian Arab tribes (discussed above) and the Nabataeans. Most modern scholars concur that the Nabateans were not of Aramaic stock but consisted of “a north Arabian tribe heavily influenced by Aramaic culture (172).” The study of Nabatean religion supports this, since their principles gods were north Arabian deities (Dushara, ’Allat, Manot, el-’Uzza, and Hobal), plus the Aramaic god from northern Syria, Ba’l Shamin “lord of the heavens” Appel 2011:174). It appears that the Nabateans, although polytheistic, did not allow graven images among them, like in urban polytheistic societies, and this “may be an indication of a dormant monotheism lying in the background of their polytheistic rituals (Maalouf 2003:175). The second-century B.C. book of Jubilees states the following about the non-Israelite children of Abraham and their connection with the term Arab:

And he [Abraham] gave to Ishmael and to his sons, and to the sons of Keturah, gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, and he gave everything to Isaac his son. And Ishmael and his sons, the sons of Keturah and their sons, went together and dwelt from Paran to the entering of Babylon in all the land which is towards the East facing the desert. And these mingles with each other, and their name was called Arabs, and Ishmaelites. (Jubilees 20:11-13)

This Jewish tradition seems to indicate that the terms “Arab” and “Ishmaelites” became synonymous. The intermarriages among the various tribes descended from Hagar and Keturah eventually tied together these tribes ethnically, and those not linked ethnically were labelled “Ishmaelite” by reason of geographical and cultural associations. Thus the historian Josephus could list all the names of the Ishmaelite tribes, and conclude that “these inhabited all the country from Euphrates to the Red Sea, and called it Nabatene. They are an Arabian nation and name their tribes from these, because of their own virtue and because of the dignity of Abraham their father” (Josephus, Ant. 1.12.4). It appears that “the Ishmaelite element in

27 See the linguistic, historical, religious, and social life arguments summarized in Maalouf 2003:172-176. Another theory is that the Nabateans descended from the Rechabites, a sub-tribe of the Midianites, after the destruction of Jerusalem when Jaazaniah leads the Rechabites back into the wilderness (2 Kgs 25:23-26), and they gradually replace the Edomites who move into the power vacuum left in Judah by the Babylonian captivity (see Appel 2011:83 who also argues that the word “Nabatean” is Arabic for “Aramean” and aptly fits the Rechabites who were an Arabic tribe but spoke Aramean from their stay in Israel. Unfortunately Appel gives no secondary sources to support his claims.
north Arabia was so prominent that it became with time representative of north Arabians in general” Maalouf 2003:176). Martin Hengel and Anna Schwemer summarize the first-century Jewish view regarding Arabs and their identification with the descendants of Ishmael.

The Jews regarded the ‘Arabs’, embodied by what was then politically the most powerful Arab people in the immediate environment of Eretz Israel, the Nabataeans, as descendants of Ishmael the son of Abraham, i.e., as kindred tribes. Another more closely related people, the Idumeans and ‘descendants of Esau’, had been converted to Judaism by John Hyrcanus I (135/4–104 BCE). So the Arab Nabataeans appeared to be the closest ‘kinsfolk’ of the Jews who were still Gentiles. . . . [T] he Nabataean Arabs remained not only the closest kinsfolk but also geographically the nearest and most important ‘neighbours’ of Israel, to whom the threat and promise of Jer. 12.14-17 to ‘my neighbours’ applied, namely that they were ‘to learn the ways of my people’. . . . Presumably Paul, as on his later missionary journeys, visited the synagogues in the larger cities during his stay of about two years, above all in the capital Petra. (1997:110, 111, 113)

Thus the continuity between the descendants of Ishmael in the OT and the “Arabians” of the NT “Arabia” is maintained in history and in the consciousness of the Jewish people of the first century A.D.28 There was a strong Jewish presence in Arabia, and many Arab-Jewish contacts. Herod the Great was half-Nabataean and half-Idumean, but also a Jew by conversion of his ancestors on Antipater’s side. He had an “Arabian bodyguard.” It was normal to find Arabian Jews and Jewish Arabs present in Jerusalem at Pentecost (Acts 2:10-11). There was indeed a remnant of monotheistic believers among the Arabs in the first century seeking God and awaiting the coming of the Messiah.

A Roman expedition against Arabia took place under Aelius Gallus (24-25 A.D.) was a failure in breaking the commercial monopoly of southern Arabia, so Rome broke the trade monopoly by reviving access to the Red Sea (by replacing the Ptolemies in Egypt) and thence to India via the Nile. This in turn weakened the Nabatean economy and Syrian gover-

28 It is tempting to equate the name “Nabatean” with the son of Ishmael, Nabaioth, and scholars of the past have made this connection. But the consensus of scholarship is that the two should not be equated, since the “t” in the word “Nabatean” is a tet, while the “t” in Nabaioth is a tau. However, the study by E. C. Broome, “Nabaiati, Nebaioth and the Nabataeans: The Linguistic Problem,” Journal of Jewish Studies 18 (Spring 1973): 1-16, suggests a possible solution to the linguistic problem that does allow Nabaioth to be the etymological derivation of the word Nabataen, thus linking the Nabateans to the stock of Ishmael. The verdict is still out on this question.
nor Cornelius Palma annexed Nabatea to Rome in A.D. 106. Various small kingdoms continued to thrive in northern Arabia during pre-Islamic times, including the Palmyrenes (with their caravan city Palmayra NE of Damascus, who produced a Roman emperor “Philip the Arab” (A.D. 224-249) the Ghassanids (descendants of a S Arabic tribe, vassal of Byzantium, adopted Monophysitism as the official religion), and the Lakhmids (vassal of Persia, which adopted Nestorianism). The suzerain states of Byzantium and Persia mistreated these kingdoms, and in the midst of social and religious disorder they were ready for a change on the eve of the birth of Islam, particularly if it came from within Arabia. Enter Mohammed, who at the age of 40, began to call the Arab people back to the one God Allah, the God of Abraham, and of their nomadic ancestors through Abraham.

**Relationship between the “Children of the East” (Arabs) and Islam**

Several studies of pre-Islamic monotheism have concluded that the monotheistic groups referred to by the Qur’an as *hanifs* (*hunafa*), who were independent from the organized religions of Judaism and Christianity, “continued a monothesistic tradition that went back to Abraham’s time.”

Montgomery summarizes:

> Mohammad had the advantage in building upon Jewish and Christian foundations, but it is being increasingly recognized that the doctrine of the One Allah had its native Arabian roots, and that Mohammad appealed to an autochthonous religious consciousness. *Allah* did not arise out of Mohammad’s original summation of all gods into one God. This was already posited in the Arab consciousness, and Mohammad’s diatribes against polytheism are similar to those of the Prophets against the cult of strange gods; their polytheism, he argued, was illogical in view of their fundamental belief in one God. (Montgomery 1934:187)

I would add that the “native Arabian roots” go back further to the progenitors of the major Arabian tribes—the sons of Abraham through Hagar and Keturah, along with Aram and Arphaxad the sons of Shem.

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The tradition is widespread in the Arab world which associates Ishmael and his descendants with Arabs in general and Muslim Arabs in particular. The esteemed Arab genealogist Ibn al-Kalbi (A.D. 737-818?) made popular the supposed genealogical link between Muhammad and Ishmael, largely through oral tradition. Whether this link is valid or not, clear and even older written records link the ancient nomadic tribes of northern Arabia with Ishmael, as we have noted above (Diorodus of Sicily, the book of Jubilees, Josephus, et al.). Arab genealogists generally trace the Arabians to two main ethnic stocks, the original Arabian Arabs from south Arabia, descended from Joktan (Gen 10:25-26), and the Arabicized Arabs from central and northern Arabia, descended from Ishmael. Other Arab genealogists suggest that the original stock of Arabs came from the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula (Maalouf 2003:44-46). In any case, the link between those known in the OT as “people of the East” and the Arabs of Islam is firmly upheld. Twelve references to Ishmael in the Qur’an and numerous post-Qur’anic Islamic traditions30 affirm the central place of Ishmael in Islam and the genealogical link between him and his ancestors to Muslims, whether by literal bloodline to Arab Muslims, or by theological and geo-cultural ties to Muslims world-wide (See Firestone 1990; Eph’al 1976:225-235).

Tentative Conclusions

1. The “children of the East” (bene qedem) and related terms in the OT refer to the various nomadic desert-dwelling tribes which inhabited the Arabian Peninsula in biblical times.

2. In OT usage the term “children of the East” includes four main groups: (a) the tribes descended from the thirteen sons of Joktan (great-great grandson of Shem through Arphaxad), which dwelt mostly in the southern and SE part of the Arabian Peninsula; (b) the tribes descended from the twelve sons of Ishmael, son of Abraham through his concubine Hagar, which dwelt mostly in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula; (c) the tribes descended from the six sons of Abraham through his wife Keturah, which dwelt mostly in the central part of the Arabian Peninsula; and (d) the nomadic tribes of Arameans, descended from Aram the son of Shem, who mostly dwelt in the Syro-Arabian Desert (and possibly in Northern Mesopotamia).

30 See Maalouf 2003:46-49 for a summary of the major beliefs about Ishmael and his relationship with Islam, including the story that Abraham personally brought Hagar and Ishmael to Mecca (see Hadith 4:583).
3. The term “people of the East” is never used in Scripture nor extant ANE records to describe the nations found in Lower Mesopotamia (such as Assyria, Babylonia, Persia), but is focused on the nomadic tribes in the desert areas of the Arabian Peninsula.

4. Several biblical references speak of deliverance coming from the east (e.g., Isa 44:28; 45:1) but all these passages predict the coming of Cyrus, king of Persia, who would deliver Israel from its captivity in Babylon, and use the mizrakh (lit. “place of sunrise”), not qedem as in the passages referring to the children of the East. Qedem is never used as a geographical location with regard to Persia or Babylon, but is a technical term referring to the Syro-Arabian Desert.

5. Many of the tribes of the descendants of Ishmael and the sons of Keturah are mentioned frequently in the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) records of Assyria and Babylonia, as well as later records of the Persians and the Greeks.

6. In the early period of biblical history (till about the mid-tenth century B.C.), references in the Bible and ANE are made to the primary progenitors of the nomadic tribes, using such terms as Hagarites, Ishmaelites, Midianites, and Amalekites, but after this period the general term “Arab” comes into use for the desert-dwelling nomads in general, and the various northern nomadic tribes are named according to the individual sons (or grandsons) of Ishmael and Keturah.

7. While the tribal names shift from earlier emphasis upon the primary progenitors to the later reference to individual sons of those progenitors, only one name remains constant throughout: “Children of the East”!

8. The term “Arab” comes into use in the mid-ninth century (earliest mention in 853 B.C. account of the Battle of Qarqar), and refers at first to the nomadic desert-dwellers in the northern part of the Arabian Peninsula, and only beginning in the 3rd century B.C. do records appear with this name in southern Arabia.

9. During the late United Monarchy and thereafter in OT times, the HB explicitly uses the term “Arab” and “Arabia” to identify descendants of Hagar/Ishmael and Keturah, and to describe these peoples as “people of the East.” Thus the “children of the East” are clearly considered to be Arabs.

10. Throughout the entire history of the “children of the East” in the OT, there are numerous examples of close and friendly relationships (and even intermarriages) between the people of Israel and the children of the East, as well as certain periods (such as during the time of the Judges) when some tribes of the children of the East engage in hostilities against Israel and vice versa.
11. The moral trajectory of the children of the East appears to mirror that of their western relatives/neighbors Israel. During the patriarchal period from Abraham to Moses, and again during the United Monarchy, while Israel largely remained monotheistic followers of God (El, also called Elohim), it seems that the “children of the East” were also for the most part monotheistic and faithful to one (and the same) God (El, also called Allah). Likewise, during the time of the Judges and during the period of the Divided Monarch in Israel/Judah, when the covenant line of Jacob turned to idolatry, the same seems to have happened among the Children of the East, although in both areas the concept of monotheism remained at least in the background.

12. Throughout the OT and intertestamental times in biblical history, the “children of the East” were often attacked by the reigning superpowers (Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Rome), but continued to survive as one world empire gave way to another.

13. In the later OT history and after OT times, the term “children of the East” refers primarily to north Arabian nomadic tribes of which sons of Ishmael (and Keturah) comprised a major part.

14. By the time of Alexander the Great (312 B.C.) and on through NT times, the terms “children of the East” or “Arabs” refer primarily to the Nabatean Arabs in northern Arabia (whose ancestry possibly may be traced to Nebaioth, the firstborn of Ishmael, although this is not certain); they were polytheistic but did not allow any graven images, perhaps because of the dormant monotheism in their cultural background.

15. The continuity between the descendants of Ishmael in the OT and the “Arabians” of the NT “Arabia” is maintained in history and in the consciousness of the Jewish people of the first century A.D. (cf. the book of Jubilees and Josephus).

16. OT prophecies concerning the “children of the East” (involving tribes descended from Ishmael and Keturah) indicated that these tribes of northern Arabia would be the first among the “Gentiles” to bring gifts to the Messiah when he appeared (see especially Isa 42:11, 60:5-7). The Magi of Matt 2 probably came from Arabia in fulfillment of this prophecy, and Paul seems to have gone to Arabia (i.e., Nabatea) for three years after his conversion at least partly in order to honor the priority of the nomadic tribes related to Abraham in God’s plan for the ingathering of the Gentiles to the Messiah.

17. Modern studies of pre-Islamic monotheism have concluded that the monotheistic groups referred to by the Qur’an as hanifs, continued a monotheistic tradition among the Arab tribes that went back to the time of Abraham.
18. The Qur’an and other Islamic traditions trace the genealogy of Mohammed and Islamic Arabs to Ishmael son of Abraham. Though the direct link between Mohammed is far from certain, the general genealogical tie between the nomadic tribes of northern Arabia at the time of Mohammed and the nomadic tribes descended from Ishmael has solid support from a biblical-historical perspective.

**Works Cited**


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Introduction

The enormity of the task still facing Christian missions is almost incomprehensible. Nearly 4.1 billion people are still in need of the gospel (Johnstone 2014:65). In some ways, the task of reaching the unreached is most difficult among Muslims. With nearly 1.3 billion adherents, Islam represents a significant challenge to the spread of the gospel. Or does it? Given the complex nature of the relationship between Christianity and Islam, could it be that the inability of Christian missionaries to shed the social, cultural, and political trappings of the West and Christendom have limited the effectiveness of the gospel? Might the cleansing of the gospel of its cultural trapping result in the release of its power among Muslims? If this is to be done, the “leaven” of the gospel must be separated from the “lump” of dough that is culture (Whitehouse 2008:7). As the gospel has spread from its origins in Judea to the far corners of the world, it has repeatedly changed its cultural form and shape. Is it time for the gospel to once again change its form and shape (Walls 1996:6)? Many who have spent time in missionary work among Muslims—who have sought to distinguish between the “leaven and the lump”—recognize the existence of what are called “insider movements” and promote them as viable contextualized models of Christian community. In this paper, I give an overview of the history of these insider movements, then describe paradigms for understanding the concept of identity as it relates to “insiders” before examining the theological lenses through which insider movements can be viewed. Finally, I will briefly address several lessons that can be learned from this overview of insider movements. I use the
term “insider movement” generically to define the broad concept of someone coming to Jesus while remaining within their cultural, social, and communal context.

**Insider Movements Among Muslims: An Overview**

One of the earliest known advocates of what would later be called “Insider Movements” among Muslims was the longtime missionary to Anatolia, Henry Riggs. Riggs was appointed the secretary of the Near-East Christian Council (NECC) (Vander Werff 1977:262). Based in Beirut, Lebanon, the NECC’s goal was to attempt to understand “the causes of the ‘relative sterility’ of efforts for the conversion of Moslems” (Riggs 1941:116). Riggs’ report was presented at the Missionary Conference at Tambaram, Madras, 1938 and published in *The Moslem World* in 1941 (Vander Werff 1977:262, 263).

The Riggs document outlines two main obstacles for the conversion of Muslims: first, “Muslim distortion of biblical ideas” and, second, communal solidarity and loyalty (263; Riggs 1941:116, 117). In order to overcome the first type of obstacles, Riggs emphasizes the need to avoid antagonizing Muslims by focusing on the person of Jesus and the reading of the Gospels. The implication being that overcoming Muslim distortions is possible if care is taken not to antagonize them (119, 120).

For Riggs, the second category of objection is far more serious and presents a greater challenge. To illustrate the gravity of this challenge, Riggs’ report expresses the sentiments of the NECC in a series of quotes that emphasizes the challenge of separating Muslim converts from their communities:

> Every convert to Christianity is a dead loss to the community.

> The Moslem Community is a noble and sacred thing, a social-political-religious fellowship for which the believer is willing to give his life.

> The greatest handicap against which the Christian Missionary has to strive is the power of Moslem solidarity.

> There are thousands of men and women who believe in Christ and are trying to follow him, but they cannot bring themselves to face the break with their own community. (117)

This need to find a way for Muslims to remain in their communities as transformed and changed followers of Jesus led Riggs to suggest a radical approach and “a way around these obstacles” (119). In this approach
converts would be encouraged to stay within their communities as hidden believers who do not publicly convert or proclaim their faith. “The purpose of such a course is to make possible a more effective witness, in life, in words, in the reading of the Gospels, to the power of Christ in their own lives” (119). The ultimate goal of such a life would be to form groups of co-believers that are essential to the life of any follower of Christ. By advocating that Muslims remain within their socio-political-religious contexts, Riggs was far ahead of his time by anticipating what would later come to be known as insider movements (Miller 2013:67).

These ideas put forward by Riggs and the NECC were soundly rejected by the Missionary Conference at Tambaran in 1938 (Vander Werff 1977:263). Additionally, Samuel Zwemer and William Hocking wrote rebuttals in The Moslem World in the same issue where the Riggs report was published (Travis and Woodberry 2015:15). In 1944 and 1947 articles supportive of Riggs and advocating further study were published in The Moslem World. But, for better or for worse, the time of insider movements had not yet arrived.

The period between the Riggs report and 1970 saw relatively little movement in creative approaches to Muslim evangelism. However, Donald McGavran made an important contribution to missiology that would eventually have an impact on the understanding of insider movements with the 1955 publication of Bridges to God. In this work, McGavran launched what would later come to be known as the “Church Growth Movement” (McIntosh 2005:17). McGavran’s key insight related to insider movements is his concept of “people movements to Christ.” Through his experience in India, McGavran noticed that in some areas whole groups of people were becoming Christian. In his quest to find out why, he came to see the importance of people remaining in their communal contexts. When people remain as disciples within their local contexts they have the possibility of having a greater impact on their family, friends, and neighbors. This influence led to group movement to Christ in ways that extraction of converts could not. Thus, McGavran became a strong advocate of discipling people within their own social contexts (Waterman 2013:292; McGavran 1955:111).

Charles Kraft’s concept of dynamic equivalence also made a significant contribution to the development of insider movements (Waterman 2013:295). Drawing on his theory of dynamic equivalence in translation, Kraft argued that the churches need to be freed from the trappings of outside cultures. They should be allowed to “make explicit the relationship between the New Testament examples of churchness and contemporary expressions” (Kraft 1973:55, 56). Kraft makes the case that the church should be malleable to any given culture. The form and shape it takes
should be based on scriptural principles but released from the trappings of the outside “missionary” culture. Combining McGavran’s emphasis on people staying in their social context with Kraft’s idea of a dynamic equivalent church, it was only an incremental step to the concept of insider movements. By the 1970s, these streams of innovation began to coalesce as multiple theorists sought to apply them to Muslim outreach (taken from Waterman’s five important factors contributing to the development of insider movements 2013).

A number of different articles pushing the boundaries of traditional mission to Muslims were published in the late 1970s and in 1976 the 3rd issue of Missiology was entirely dedicated to Muslim missions (Travis and Woodberry 2015:18, 19). Notably, Martin Goldsmith described the all-encompassing nature of Islam, the difficulties faced by a Muslim trying to leave his or her community, and the need to address the Muslim community as a means to reaching individual Muslims (1976:318, 320). John D. C. Anderson asked, “Is it possible for a man to be a child of God, a worshiper of Christ, and still fall under the broad national and cultural category of being a Muslim?” In describing the successes of Bible correspondence courses in parts of Asia, John Wilder was optimistic about the possibility of spontaneous “Christward Movements” taking place among Muslims (1977:301). Thus by the end of the decade a body of literature questioning the issues of identity and approaches to Muslim conversion started to take shape.

In 1980 Phil Parshall published his New Paths in Muslim Evangelism. This systematic outline for contextualization of the gospel for Muslims is based on his experience in Bangladesh (Waterman 2013:294). Although Parshall has been openly critical of insider movements, he advocated a culturally sensitive approach to Muslim evangelism pushing the boundaries beyond what many missionaries to Muslims had formerly thought acceptable.1 Parshall sought to deeply understand the culture of the Muslims he worked with and adapt the gospel as much as possible to their context. His approach has been used as a stepping-stone by many who promote insider movements.

Another key component in the development of insider movements was the 1981 publication of Perspectives on the World Christian Movement: A Reader. Edited by Ralph Winter Perspectives made accessible ideas of culture, contextualization, and creative approaches to evangelism to many preachers, teachers, missionaries, and lay members. Additionally, the

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founding of the William Carey Library by Fuller Seminary’s School of World Mission, and over seen by Winter, led to the publication and distribution of much ground-breaking theory on mission, including ideas of insider movements. In the early 1980s the International Journal of Frontier Missions (IJFM) was founded and Winter used it to consistently publish articles on innovations in mission practice, including articles favorable to insider movements (Waterman 2013:294).

With the increase of scholarly literature on contextual strategies for reaching Muslims generated in the 1970s and 1980s, it was only a matter of time before these approaches were tried in the field. In the 1980s missionaries and agencies began to experiment with new contextualized insider approaches. Dudley Woodberry describes the success of one of these experiments in an Asian country (1989:304-306). A Seventh-day Adventist, Jerald Whitehouse, launched a successful experimental project using insider methods to reach Muslims in 1989 (Roenfeldt 2005:34). These projects have multiplied and diversified in scope and context (Travis and Woodberry 2015:31, 32). Maturing experiments during the 1990s generated a lot of excitement from proponents as well as calls for caution from other members of the mission community. As people took sides and the debates began, it became obvious that clearer definitions were needed.

In order to describe the nature of various models of mission to Muslims, John Travis published his “C-spectrum” in 1998 (1998:407, 408). The C-spectrum will be examined in more detail in the next section but it is important to note the significance of this contribution for framing the debate surrounding insider movements.

The theological debate on insider movements continues to this day. A notable recent contribution to the debate is the book length polemic published in 2011 entitled Chrislam: How Missionaries are Promoting an Islamized Gospel (Lingel, Morton, and Nikides 2011). Another contribution is the monumental 2015 volume edited by Harley Talman and John Travis entitled Understanding Insider Movements that offers a wide range of information about the origin, nature, and theology of insider movements.

In the past 40 years numerous Muslims have come to faith in Jesus Christ. Some have moved into exile, others have joined adjacent local communities, and still others have remained in their own socio-cultural-religious context following Jesus as best they can. The proponents of insider movements would like to see this latter group nurtured and, perhaps, expanded. Everyone would like to see lives transformed as people learn about Jesus. But how far can the gospel go as it is adapted to different cultural contexts? And what does it mean to be an insider? The following section will seek to explain the complexities of insider identity.
Inside Insiderness: Understanding the Paradigms of Insiderness

In order to understand “insider movements” a clear definition of “insider” is needed. Without a clear definition, the arguments of proponents and critics have little value. What does it mean to be an insider? Defining any identity is fraught with difficulty and defining insiderness in the context of insider movements is no exception. In this section I will discuss the models created by John Travis, Tim Green, and Warrick Farah in order to better understand how insiderness has been defined. The section will conclude with lessons that can be learned from these models.

John Travis’ Model

As the pioneering insider movements began to mature in the 1990s, the need of clearly defining the terms and descriptions of the debate led John Travis to develop what has become known as the “C-spectrum (1998:407, 408). The C-spectrum was developed by John Travis as a tool to explain the different kinds of “Christ-centered” communities he had observed during his work among Muslims. In Travis’ model, C1 and C2 are generally viewed as overtly Christian communities with the main difference being the language used. C1 uses outsider language such as English or Greek (i.e., in an Arabic context) while C2 uses the local language with a distinctively Christian vocabulary. In C3 and C4, contextualization is taken more seriously. Culturally appropriate dress and forms of worship may be used. Neutral religious language may be used. In the case of C4 communities, insider religious language is used. For example, Jesus is referred to as Isa. C4 believers would not consider themselves “Christians” but rather “followers of Jesus.”

The most controversial position on the C-spectrum is C5. C5 believers would continue to identify themselves as Muslims who follow Isa. They would live and act as Muslims within their communities. Muslim theology that is explicitly against the Bible would be “rejected, or reinterpreted if possible” (408).

The C-spectrum has framed the debate about Insider Movements since its publication. Though most missiologists and missionaries have generally accepted C4 communities, heated debate surrounds the concept of C5 communities and there has been a great deal published against C5 communities (see for example Parshall 1998:404-410; Parshall, “Danger! New Directions in Contextualization”; and Lingel, Morton, and Nikides 2011). Many of these debates have happened in the context of prescriptive mission study rather than as descriptive analysis of the experience of Muslim Backgrounds Believers (MBB). Travis states in his introduction
to the C-spectrum that “the purpose of the spectrum is to assist church planters and Muslim background believers to ascertain which type of Christ-centered communities may draw the most people from the target group to Christ and best fit in a given context” (1998:407). The C-spectrum has been useful for many involved in these kinds of ministries, however, it does not fully explain the complexities of identity as experienced by a Muslim coming to faith in Jesus Christ for the first time (Farrah 2015:85, 86; Green 2013:362).

**Tim Green’s Model**

Tim Green makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of insider identity in his 2013 article “Beyond the C-Spectrum” (2013). Drawing on the social sciences, Green argues for a three-part construction of identity: collective, social, and core. Collective identity is determined by the group and answers the question, “Who are we in relation to other groups.” Social identity is determined by the individual and answers the question, “Who I am I within my group?” Also determined by the individual is core identity or, “Who am I to myself.” By splitting identity into three parts, Green’s model helps bring needed nuance to the discussion of insider identity. Figure 1 illustrates Green’s paradigm.

Using Green’s model helps us understand the complexities faced by people who come to Christ. When coming to Christ, does a Muslim need to identify as a follower of Christ on all three levels? Is it possible to be a Christian in one’s core-identity but a Muslim in one’s social and collective identity? What would a “core” Christian look like? With this model Green brings the debate to the question of personal and group identity from the emic perspective where identity is ultimately experienced.

![Figure 1: Identity at three levels. Source: Green 2013:361-380.](https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jams/vol14/iss1/11)
Warrick Farah’s Model

In an attempt to further explain the complexities of identity faced by MBBs, Warrick Farah developed what some have called a ladder of insiderness (2015:85-91). In Farah’s model there are five kinds of insiders: (1) Cultural Insiders: believers who remain in their own culture as a new believer and typically leave behind their old social and communal connections to join a new culturally similar community, (2) Sociocultural Insiders: believers who can remain in their “social networks in some contexts” (87), (3) Dual Belonging Insiders: believers who manage to identify as Christians at the core-level while at the same time remaining connected to their community, (4) Reinterpreting Insider: believers who manage to hold a core-Christian identity while reinterpreting the ritual elements of Islam in the light of orthodox Christian theology, and (5) Syncretistic Insider: Christian believers who mix Christian and Muslim theology in a syncretistic way. Farah’s chart (see Table 1) is most helpful in understanding his ladder of insiderness.

Table 1: Five expressions of insiderness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Movement</th>
<th>Five Expressions of Insiderness</th>
<th>Cultural</th>
<th>Social</th>
<th>Communal</th>
<th>Ritual</th>
<th>Theological</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0. Exile (or Refugee)</td>
<td>Cultural Insiders</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Cultural Insider</td>
<td>Sociocultural Insider</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Sociocultural Insider</td>
<td>Dual Belonging Insider</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Dual Belonging Insider</td>
<td>Reinterpreting Insider</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Reinterpreting Insider</td>
<td>Syncretistic Insider</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

i = insider; o = outsider; ? = occasional exception or ambiguous

Source: Farah 2015:86.

By dividing identity into multiple domains, Farah allows for more nuance in insiderness. Even so, some might argue that Farah’s model is reductionistic, forcing identity into a neat box. Nevertheless, this can be useful as a heuristic tool to help outsiders understand some of the challenges faced by insiders as disciples of Jesus.

Oscar Osindo offers an illuminating analysis on MBB identity in the context of discipleship. One of his key observations is that Muslims often come to belief without the help of a church or missionary. He outlines three primary sources of conversion: First, socio-political triggers. Some begin to question their own faith due to terrorism or some other experience they have had and they come to believe in Jesus Christ. Second, a
miraculous experience of God. Many Muslims have come to faith through visions, dreams, or other direct encounters with God. And third, through direct missionary effort. Sometimes this is in the form of media ministry, public evangelism, or personal evangelism. It is notable that two out of three of these causes of conversion are outside of human control. As a result, insiderness is not necessarily something planned for or promoted. It is often the result of the Spirit of God working among Muslims (Osindo 2016:229, 230).

Analysis of Insider Identity

What can we learn from all this? First, it is important to recognize that much of the discussion surrounding insider movements is descriptive rather than prescriptive. The idea of insiderness is a natural phenomenon that needs to be understood with the goal of improving the Christian experience of those whom Jesus has called to himself. The best use of insider models is as tools that help us explain and understand the complexities of the challenges faced by new believers in the Muslim context. As John Travis has stated, he intended his C-spectrum to be used as a descriptive tool for explaining the experience of MBBs (2015:358). There may be a time for the missionary or Christian agency to prescriptively plan for and support insider movements. But it is important to recognize that is has been the Holy Spirit who has often initiated such movements to Christ.

Second, insider identity must be understood to be fluid and complex. Culturally and geographically the Muslim world is extremely large and diverse. The experience of a new believer in Bangladesh may be very different from the experience of a new believer in Egypt or Turkey. The resultant identity of the new believer will depend on many social, legal, and communal factors. It is, after all, the believer’s identity. They need to be allowed to form their own identity as believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Osindo 2016:237). Farah’s and Green’s models make helpful additions to this discussion because they add needed complexity and nuance to the concept of identity and insiderness. However, I cannot help but wonder if they are sufficiently complex and nuanced. Might there be more room for work in the area of identity and insiderness?

Third, models of insider identity need to allow for a progression of discipleship. If the insider identity is constructed in such a way that it allows for change over time as new truth is acquired and the leading of the Holy Spirit is felt, then few should fear insider identity; however, if the insider identity becomes locked in to syncretism and inflexibility, then the category becomes less useful. Perhaps Farah’s model would be useful in the development of MBB discipleship paradigms and curricula. For example,
MBB discipleship could be tailored to help a level 5 “Syncretistic Insider” move toward a less syncretic understanding of the gospel.

**Understanding the Theological Lenses of Insider Movements**

The concept of insider movements has generated considerable debate in Christian mission circles. There are theological questions that need to be clearly understood and satisfactorily answered. Christianity in the West has developed such a complex milieu of belief and practice that distinguishing Christianity from Western “Christian Culture” is fraught with difficulty. The very existence of insider movements strikes at the heart of this Western conception of Christianity. In this section I will briefly review Leonard Bartlotti’s 9 lenses for evaluating Christian beliefs about insider movements before focusing on what I see as the three most important theological questions facing insider movements.

Leonard Bartlotti has provided a helpful framework for Christians who are trying to understand insider movements. Originally presented at the Bridging the Divide Consultation held in New York in 2011, “Leo’s Lenses” provide a matrix of nine areas for interrogating both our personal theologies as well as the theologies of insider movements (Bartlotti 2015:56). Bartlotti’s nine theological lenses are ecclesiology, authority, culture, pneumatology, history, doing theology, other religions, Islam, and conversion-initiation. Figure 2 provides a clear description of these lenses.

Bartlotti believes that each of the issues outlined in these nine lenses should be held in tension. It is incumbent on the holder of one extreme position to provide a theological rational for ignoring the perspective of the other side. Only after locating our own presuppositions on this scale should we then, before making any judgments, seek to understand the other perspective (Bartlotti 2015:57). I find the issues surrounding ecclesiology, culture, and other religions particularly important to the discussion of insider movements because they exert considerable gravity on the other issues. How one answers the question of ecclesiology has great import to the issues of authority, pneumatology, history, and conversion-initiation. How we define culture strongly impacts how we do theology as well as our understanding of conversion-initiation. And our conception of other religions contributes to how we view Islam.
Ecclesiology

The conception of the nature of the community of God’s people that is called the church is crucial to understanding and evaluating insider movements. In his conception of ecclesiology, Bartlotti begins with a relatively small definition of ecclesiology that emphasizes the nature and practice of local communities. The Dictionary of Mission Theology emphasizes that a right understanding of the church is both local and global (Corrie 2007:51). At the local level, a church is supposed to support the spiritual life of its members as they seek to live out God’s plan in their lives. At the global level, the church represents the unity of all believers as the “bride of Christ” looking forward to the great wedding day. It is the level of the global church where the concept of insider movements is criticized.

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**Table: Theological Lens**

| Word, sacrament, discipline, order, leadership, Pauline emphasis | ecclesiology/church | Word, Spirit, “two or three gathered,” Synoptic Jesus emphasis |
| Scripture, apostolic teaching and ministry, outside resourcing | authority | Scripture, local believers, local decisions |
| Christ **against**, Christ **over/in paradox with** | culture | Christ of, Christ transforming |
| Spirit active throughout history, wisdom tradition (creeds, councils, theologies), faithfulness, “faith once delivered” | history | Spirit active now in local context, new insights and expressions, freedom, “a new thing” |
| universal truths, Western theological tradition, “pilgrim principle” | doing theology | local (contextual) theologies, theologies from the majority, world church, “indigenizing principal” |
| discontinuity, exclusivism, radical disjunction | other religions | continuity, fulfillment, *praeparatio evangelica* |
| Event, belonging, behaving, belonging, bounded set, people of God, clear in/out markers of identity | conversion-initiation | process, belonging, behaving, believing, centered set, Kingdom of God, moving towards Christ |

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*Figure 2. Bartlotti’s lenses. Source: Bartlotti 2015:74.*
Insiders, by nature, do not identify themselves with the visible Western Christian church or the Western conception of the “global church.” The desire to remain in their community contexts often locks insiders into a social-political antagonism toward the West and therefore global Christianity. The history of Christian-Muslim relations continues to arouse feelings of antagonism among Muslims today. Starting with the Islamic conquest of Christian lands shortly after the death of Muhammed and exacerbated by the Crusades, Muslim and Christians have had a long and destructive history. The discovery and exploitation of oil in the Middle East in the 20th century has led to Western political meddling in the region that has reignited age-old antagonisms and extremism. Western mass media has fueled the view of the West, and by extension Christians, as immoral power-hungry infidels. All this history makes the idea of joining a “Christian Church” offensive to many Muslims.

Additionally, many Christians uncritically embrace their Western Christian Heritage. From the time of Constantine the Great in the 4th century, Christianity has intrinsically linked itself to Christendom as a religious and political unity. Many Western Christians simply accept the concept of Christendom as a historically sanctioned good and the “bride of Christ.” The historical triumph of good Christians over the evil pagans of Rome and nascent Europe is seen as the triumph of the church over evil. Too often, in the West, the moral authority of the United States and other European Christians is unquestioned. The Christian church in a “Christian America” is sometimes believed to be God’s tool on earth for the propagation and proclamation the gospel around the world. In this way, Western Christians often identify the church as an organization rather than as people (personal communication from Sue Russell 29 November 2017).

Many Muslims, however, rightly perceive the moral failures of the West. For them, following Jesus and joining the visible Western church is repugnant. Those favoring insider movements argue that the true global church need not be identified with the visible church (for a nuanced description of the Reformation understanding of the church and how it relates to insider movements see Travis 2015:282–83). The church is, by this definition, spiritual. Authority, pneumatology, history, theology, and conversion is worked out at the local level as Christ becomes the central focus and the Holy Spirit prompts and guides.

The implications of ecclesiology for insiders is clear. If the spiritual church is synonymous with the visible corporal Christian community, then all converts, regardless if they come from a Muslim, Hindu, or Atheist background, must publicly and knowingly join the visible church as defined in and by the West. However, if the church is viewed primarily as the spiritual people of God, without negating the need for local Christ-
centered fellowships, then the insider may be able to remain apart from and outside of the “Christian community.”

Culture

The concept and definition of culture also has a significant impact on how one understands insider movements. How important is culture as people seek to understand Christ, Scripture, and themselves? Is culture like wind that blows some branches this way and some branches the other way with the neutral, a-cultural, state of no wind being the natural position? Or is culture like the sea to the fish—all-encompassing and impossible to remove? Is the ability to create culture part of being created in the image of God? Is there a redeemed “Christian culture” to which all Christians must conform? Bartlotti uses Richard Niebuhr’s typology of Christ and Culture. Is “Christ ‘against culture’, ‘over’ culture, ‘in paradox with’ culture, ‘of’ culture, or ‘transforming’ culture” (Bartlotti 2015:60)? Identifying one’s own reflexive position on how Christ approaches and interacts with culture is the starting point. As humans, we have difficulty doing this.

One of the difficulties in discussing issues of culture is that as products of culture, humans often fail to comprehend the level to which they act in a cultural way. Similar to the fish in the sea, they swim in the water, they use the water, but they have no concept that there might be different seas. Being a fish means being in water. A fish living outside of the water is an abstraction that has no basis in reality. In 1966 Peter Berger and Thomas Luckman famously proposed the “social construction of reality” (1967). In this view, culture and society provides the very basis of reality. Consequently, when humans think about another culture they are thinking about it from within their own culture, not as neutral objective observers.

The implication of the concept of culture on insider movements is clear. If Christ functions in every culture to “transform” it from the inside, then all Christians everywhere can be identified as “insiders.” American Christians are “insiders” seeking to follow Christ as best they can in their given cultural context. Similarly, an Arab “insider” would be seeking to follow Christ and transform his own culture from the inside.

Other Religions

Coming to a biblical understanding of other religions is import in the discussion of insider movements. Those who have worked among Muslims have at times been criticized for using the world “Allah” for “God” and for reading the Quran. There is an all too common feeling among
some Christians that any religious form that is not explicitly “Christian” must be renounced.

Hugh Goddard summarizes three basic positions that have been held by Christians with regard to other religions. These are exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism (2000:150). Though these three positions may be over simplifications, they provide a helpful framework for understanding the relationship of insider movements to their religious contexts. The exclusivist emphasizes the necessity for individuals to join and become part of the sacramental church, fully aware of Christ’s activity on their behalf. The inclusivist allows for the saved to be found among any people anywhere based on an inner understanding of their own need for a savior and faith in this unknown power. The pluralist believes that if there is salvation it can be found within and through the many expressions of human religion. Consequently, though the New Testament clearly states that Christ is the only means of salvation (John 14:6), there is debate on how his grace is applied (Bartlotti 2015:66). Is it applied to anyone who knowingly or unknowingly puts their faith in him? Is it possible for someone to have “unknowing” faith in Christ? And can saving faith be said to exist within non-Christian communities?

One of the concepts that can aid in understanding other religions is the semiotic concept of “form” and “meaning” (Hiebert 1989:109). The “form” is a vehicle that can carry multiple “meanings.” What a “form” “means” is determined by the socio-linguistic context of the groups or individuals using the form. For example, the word “Allah” is used by Arab Christians to describe the Christian God as well as by Muslims to describe the Islamic God. The form of the word remains the same but the attached meaning changes. In a discussion of other religions, it is vital to be able to distinguish between the forms used and the meanings that are understood. There may be forms that are intrinsically evil, such as the temple prostitution practiced in the first century Roman world. These forms of worship must never be allowed. However, many forms are intrinsically neutral and may not need to be excluded simply because they are associated with some with unchristian ideas. Though great care should be taken when analyzing and attempting to change the meanings of religious forms, it is a necessary process as the gospel encounters any new socio-religious culture (117, 118).

The implications for insider movements are clear. Upon coming to faith in Christ, the insider then must examine his or her own religious practice and understanding. Forms that are explicitly against moral teaching or the Bible will need to be excluded. Neutral forms that are not explicitly against biblical principles can be repurposed for use by the insider. The more of these neutral forms that can be incorporated into the life of the
insider, the closer the insider will remain to his or her own community (117, 118). Closeness to one’s original socio-religious community allows the insider to witness in appropriate ways with less danger of being expelled or harmed.

Implications

Several implications can be drawn from this review of the history of insider movements, the question of insider identity, and the theological frameworks of the debate about insider movements. First, as with any appropriation of the gospel to a new context, the possibility of syncretism remains a constant challenge. Determining what is and what is not allowable by the Bible is difficult in new contexts. Those promoting insider movements, in particular, need to be wary of syncretism being incorporated into the beliefs and practices of those coming to faith in Jesus. As noted above, Farah’s 5th level of insider believer, the “Syncretistic Believer,” is one who fails to make a distinction between theologically Christian and theologically Muslim categories. While the boundaries of these categories continue to be debated, the threat of syncretism is very real. Insiders and those working with insiders need to be aware of the challenge of syncretism and plan for some sort of critical contextualization to make decisions on issues of belief and practice in context (for a discussion on contextualization see Hiebert 1987:104-112).

A second implication that arises from the history of insider movements is their inevitability. All followers of Jesus are, in one way or another, insiders. The only real question left to followers is how to be better followers in a given context. The cultural nature of humans means that people cannot help but follow Jesus within a specific culture. Thus, it is perfectly natural for a new Muslim follower of Jesus to ask, “How much of my culture do I need to leave behind?” It is unavoidable that people will attempt to reconcile their culture and habituated religious practice to Jesus and the gospel.

A third implication arises from the inevitability of insider movements. Understanding the inevitability of people following Jesus from their social and religious backgrounds, outsiders should sympathize with these followers of Jesus and seek to support them in their quest for a fuller understanding of him and his gospel. Debates about the theological frames surrounding insider movements should be allowed to continue in ways that will not harm new believers seeking to follow Christ better. Some Christians would do well to observe the advice given by Gamaliel in Acts 5:38-39, “If this plan of action is of men, it will be overthrown; but if it is of God, you will not be able to overthrow them; or else you may even be...
found fighting against God” (NASB). It is unlikely that the theological questions surrounding insider movements will be resolved through debate. Only time will show how the Holy Spirit uses or does not use insiders as a means for the evangelization of Muslim people.

Conclusion

Around the world, countless Muslims are coming to faith in Jesus Christ. For those seeking to minister to these new followers of Christ it is vital to handle identity with sensitivity. When open conversion can mean exile or even death as well as effectively limiting witness, is there a different path? Can a new believer or group of believers remain as “insiders” within their communal context and still remain faithful to their new beliefs? In the 1930s Henry Riggs and others asked this question that others are still asking today (1941). This article has examined the history of insider movements among Muslims, presented three different models for understanding “insiderness,” and discussed theological frames that bound the debate about insider movements. The danger of syncretism, the inevitability of insider movements, and the need for outside Christians to take a supportive stance toward those seeking to follow Jesus are the key implications identified in this article. I have only presented the briefest overview of insider movements in the Muslim context; however, a fuller discussion of the topic would also include insider movements to Christ that are taking place with Hindu and Buddhist contexts.

Works Cited


After receiving his MDiv from Andrews University, Richard Doss served as a church pastor in Illinois before spending 9 years as a missionary in Kenya and Egypt. He now lives in Wilmore, Kentucky, where he is working on a PhD in Intercultural Studies at Asbury Seminary. His area of research is discipleship in the hopes of better understanding how people change through the power of God. Richard is married to Hadassah and has two daughters.
Migration has been part of human history since Adam and Eve had to leave the Garden of Eden. Throughout the Bible, God wanted his people to love and offer hospitality to migrants and refugees (Lev 19:33-34; Rom 15:7). Stories of people on the move, from Abraham and Sarai to Joseph and Mary reminds us of Christ’s call to welcome the stranger (Matt 25:31-45) as central to the gospel message.

Today, due to widespread changes brought by globalization, the world is witnessing an unprecedented level of human mobility. In 2015, the number of those living away from their homeland surpassed 244 million, and the rate of mobility is growing faster than the world’s population. In other words, one out of every 30 people around the world, are living away from their homelands. This is approximately the equivalent of the population of Brazil, the fifth largest country on the planet, and Argentina, the third largest in South America (International Organization for Migration 2017).

Wars, famine, racial segregation, religious and political discrimination, natural disasters, unemployment, and the traffic of human beings are a few reasons why migration movements are often related to feelings of loss, powerlessness, and painful emotional wounds for many.

This paper explores a biblical approach for inner healing as an effective discipleship model for migrants and refugees in a church context.

Immigrants and Church Attendance

In many regions of the world, racism and xenophobia is still a reality among Seventh-day Adventists. Nevertheless, the Bible teaches that welcoming the stranger is neither optional nor conditional for any of us. For
Christ, welcoming only those who have their documentation in order or who speak our language is not enough. Welcoming strangers is not only providing food or a pair of shoes, but it is a matter of justice and an important role the church needs to assume as part of the Great Commission.

At first, after leaving their places, migrants experience a sense of loss, dislocation, alienation, and isolation, leading to processes of acculturation or deculturation. The influences of the new environment, combined with the ability to deal with feelings of loss and stress will either bring stability and balance or move the immigrant to isolation and alienation. According to Bhugra, “those who develop the sense of alienation and feelings of failure, loss and poor self-esteem will likely develop depressive symptoms, including psychosis and schizophrenia” (2004).

Migration is increasing the number of multiethnic churches around the world and many of those visiting our churches are looking for spiritual and emotional healing. They are tormented by emotional damage and sometimes by evil spirits, and deserve our attention. Healing should not be limited to the body, which can be taken care of by medical science. I believe the church needs to offer a holistic healing, including mental, spiritual, and emotional healing.

**Inner Healing**

Inner healing has to do with emotions and spirituality. The *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (2017) defines emotion as “a mental state that arises spontaneously rather than through conscious effort and is often accompanied by physiological changes; a feeling: the emotions of joy, sorrow, reverence, hate, and love.”

In her article, “What emotions do,” Muran states: “Emotions are the root cause of almost every injury and illness. Anger, fear, unworthiness and other emotions get “stuffed” into the body. Over time these limiting emotions weaken the physical body creating stiffness, aches, pain and general discomfort, which eventually can cause more serious conditions like tumors and cancer” (2013:1).

Many people’s lives have completely fallen apart and they wish they could put them back together. When life is broken people want to be made well again and thus they often seek a cure. To be cured is to eliminate a problem so that it no longer exists. Sometimes emotions cannot be completely cured, but they can often be healed.

As Johnston (2000) states, there is a difference between curing and healing: “Healing is to be made whole, and it is fundamentally a psychological and spiritual process. Healing occurs when we accept the reality of what is and continue to live a full life anyway.” This happens because a person
has experienced a fundamental change in the personality and lifestyle and moved towards wholeness.

Curing and healing can indeed be used synonymously, but they are different. The main words used in the Greek New Testament for “healed” or “cured” are: καθαίρω, σώζω, ἀπαλλάσσω, ἱάομαι, and θεραπεύω (Teknia 2017).

All these words can be used interchangeably, but with small differences of emphasis. Unfortunately, these five Greek words are often converted into two English words only: “healed” and “cured,” and sometimes, “made clean.”

An example appears in Matt 8:3 (NIV). When Jesus healed a man’s leprosy, He said, “Be clean! Immediately he was cured of his leprosy.” The word translated “clean” and the word translated “cured” both come from the same Greek word, καθαίρω, which means “to cleanse.” So this man’s “cure” was to be cleansed of an ailment that made him unclean.

When Peter and John (Acts 4:9) were questioned by the Jewish leaders about the miraculous healing of the crippled man at the temple gate, Peter used the word σέσωται from σώσω, to save, deliver, make whole, to describe the healing. Then he said, “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead . . . this man stands before you healed” (v. 10). The term used is ὑγιής, meaning “healthy” or “well.” The crippling condition this man had known since birth was not considered “unclean,” as was the case with infectious leprosy.

In summary, the English words “healed” and “cured” are used interchangeably for a variety of Greek terms. However, in Greek, different words are used for different situations, especially when there is the intention to make a difference between a condition that makes a person clean or unclean, or when emphasizing the person who is doing the healing in contrast to the person who is receiving the healing (Coleman 2011).

According to Kraft, “Inner healing is freeing people from the emotional and spiritual ‘garbage’ we accumulate as we go through life. It frees people to be what Jesus intended us to be, and it frees the Church to be what it is supposed to be as well” (2010:14).

Emotions can be utterly good or extremely bad. They are intimately related to mental and physical health. There is a long list of psychosomatic diseases; they affect virtually every system, but most often the digestive, circulatory, respiratory, and nervous systems. Positive emotional states, such as compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bring about a sense of well-being, a positive outlook and an optimal relationship with God and neighbor. (Melgosa 2010:11)
When the church becomes a center for emotional and spiritual healing the natural consequence is the mobilization of the healed members, now highly motivated to extend this inner healing to others and accomplish the church’s mission as Jesus’ disciples.

Discipleship

Discipleship is the process of becoming spiritually and emotionally mature and sharing Jesus Christ’s life with the unsaved. “Often, when we hear the word ‘discipleship’ we think of things like (a) spiritual growth, (b) discipline, or (c) our own daily work with Christ. All of this, of course, is a part of discipleship, but the New Testament concept is much more than just this” (Bock 2012:1).

The Greek word μαθητής, translated as “disciple, student, follower; a committed learner and follower” (Teknia 2017) is used over 200 times in the first five books of the New Testament. Being a disciple involves:

(a) an intimate personal relationship with a “Disciple maker,” (b) a personal commitment to be a disciple, and, (c) personal instruction by a “Disciple maker.” Viewed from a negative standpoint, these can be stated as (a) disciple making cannot be accomplished by impersonal means, (b) disciple making cannot be done without personal commitment, and, (c) disciple making cannot take place apart from personal instruction. (Bock 2012:2)

In talking about discipleship, a well-known missiologist declared:

Jesus’ understanding of discipleship differed in fundamental ways from his contemporaries but perhaps what stands out is what they were called to become disciples for. It was “to be with him” and “to be sent out to preach and have authority to cast out demons” (Mark 3:14f). Following Jesus or being with him, and sharing in his mission thus belong together. (Bosch 2011:38)

Many of us have wounded hearts as a consequence of traumas or hurtful experiences in life. As a result, we resist to become disciples as we are spiritually and emotionally damaged. It is like having a solid wall in front of us that impedes us from fully understanding the truth about God, about ourselves, and about our mission in the church community. Consequently, we do not experience spiritual growth as promised in the Bible since we are unable to walk in the paths of life having a healthy self-esteem, expressing the love of God to our fellow believers and to the world. Recent studies in this area show that “the end result of discipleship is that
we become a conduit of God’s love, one who edifies the Body of Christ and the world (Ephesians 4:12-16)” (Finding Home Institute 2013).

Healing removes the “garbage” that may be hindering our spiritual and emotional growth. As our hearts are healed, we start living in accordance to the principles of the Word of God, becoming more and more capable and active disciples of Jesus Christ, and experiencing an abundant and fulfilling Christian life.

**Theology of Inner Healing and Discipleship in the Bible**

Both the Old and New Testaments indicate clearly that there is a close connection between healing and discipleship. They formed the heartbeat of Jesus’ ministry. He said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in Him, bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). If our deepest conflicts are not resolved, our most painful hurts not healed, our inmost needs not met, we cannot be truly whole, or conquer our compulsions or love others as we should (Compelling Truth 2014).

God has performed marvelous miracles in the lives of individuals and people who were emotionally wounded. Rick Warren reminds us that Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was abused, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was codependent, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair and all kinds of family problems, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was reluctant, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health, and Timothy was timid. (2002:233)

**Inner Healing and Discipleship in the Old Testament**

Inner healing is a theological theme which runs throughout the Old Testament, especially in the book of Psalms and in the prophetic books. There are numerous biblical references about people who were broken hearted at some point in their lives. They experienced feeling such as affliction, depression, anger, vengeance, disappointment, anguish, agony, despair, and yet, after accepting God’s plans for their lives, they experienced an awesome intimacy with him and became powerful instruments in his hands. Some examples are: Abraham (Gen 15), Moses (Num 11:11-15), Jonah (Jonah 4), Job (Book of Job), Elijah (1 Kgs 19), King Saul (1 Sam 16:14-23), Jeremiah (Book of Jeremiah), and David (Ps 6, 13, 18, 23, 25, 27,
When the people of Israel was suffering in their distress as a consequence of their disobedience to God’s law, they asked the prophet Jeremiah to intercede for them with prayers, and God answered: “But I will restore you to health and heal your wounds, declares the Lord” (Jer 30:17).

John Wilkinson (1998:60) maintains that “healing in the Old Testament was expected through prayer, petition, and supplication to God. God would either heal directly, or in some cases through the prophets, such as when Elisha cured Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1-14) or Isaiah (Isa 38) cured Hezekiah.”

**Inner Healing and Discipleship in the New Testament**

Healing accounts in the New Testament are much more numerous and are always mediated by Jesus or one of his followers. A recent study found that “over twenty percent of the total content of the Gospels is devoted to healing with 41 distinct cases, and 72 duplications” (Kelsey 1973:58).

The healings cover various mental and physical illnesses ranging from leprosy and hemorrhage to demonization. Kelsey says that the healings attributed to Jesus are very diverse, but there are five dominant themes that often occur:

First, Jesus emphasizes compassion for others, emulating the Golden Rule of loving a brother or a sister as oneself. Second, Jesus performs healings to attest to the power of God’s Kingdom, in these cases faith in God is important (Luke 17:11-19). Third, Jesus sees illness as something unnatural to the body, and tied to an evil power. In such cases Jesus acts as a liberator, freeing the person from evil’s grasp (Mark 9:17-25). Fourth, sometimes Jesus’ healing comes with moral repentance, suggesting that sin is at the root of some illnesses (Mark 2:5). Fifth, Jesus attempts to teach His disciples about healing hoping that His followers will perpetuate His healing ministry (Matt 10:8). (Kelsey 1973:67)

After analyzing how Jesus related to people, having in mind to make them disciples, I believe healing is not the goal of discipleship but discipleship is the goal of healing.

If anyone wants to receive healing from emotional wounds, pain, sorrows, grief, and anguish, it is vital to take advantage of what Christ has done for us, and learn to cast our cares upon the Lord, not just some of them, but all of them, knowing that he cares for us and wants to take those things from us (1 Pet 5:7).
Jesus has already paid the price for the healing of our souls. He said, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; He has sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18, NKJV). “Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28-30). Jesus is telling us to come unto him, accept his plans for our lives, and surrender to him our pain, sadness, losses, bitterness, and frustrations.

When he says that his burden is light, it means that once we accept his peace and rest in him, allowing him to wholly heal us, his yoke will be easy and his burden light. He is not speaking about a heavy physical burden, but a burden in a person’s mind.

Abuse, trauma, hurt, and pain are all works of the devil. Paul declares, “For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind” (1 Tim 1:7). Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil and restore his children to the fullness for which he created them. When Jesus was here on earth, he was doing the will of the Father, and this included healing all who were oppressed. Peter says that “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power: who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him” (Acts 10:38).

When Paul implored God three times in prayer to heal him, the answer was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” Paul was asking to be cured but God said that he would not cure him because his grace was enough. Paul, as a faithful disciple of Jesus accepted God’s will by answering, “Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Cor 12:9).

Seamands says that “Paul applied this profound theology to a very practical area—the place where we live with our damaged emotions and hang-ups. ‘the Holy Spirit also helpeth our infirmities,’ in our weaknesses (Rom 8:26)” (1981:133).

Jesus Christ is our Wounded Healer and he fully understands us. When he was about to return to heaven, he promised that he would not abandon his friends but would continue with them through the Comforter, the παράκλητος (John 14:17-18).

In the context of the great controversy between God and Satan, God can always heal us by his grace and through the Comforter—the Holy Spirit. He will also cure us, but it may happen in three different ways,
and he is the one who chooses: (a) through a miracle, (b) through health professionals to whom he gives intelligence and through whom he alleviates peoples’ physical and emotional pains, and (c) on the occasion of his return at the end of this great controversy. At that time “we shall all be changed in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. . . . And the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (1 Cor 15:51-53).

Therefore, God may not cure us now, but surely he can heal our broken hearts and emotional wounds as Isaiah affirmed, “Gladness and joy will overtake them, and sorrow and sighing will flee away” (Isa 35:10b).

Inner Healing and Discipleship in the Writings of Ellen G. White

Ellen White wrote extensively about healing and discipleship. She said that

when the Gospel is received in its purity and power, it is a cure for the maladies that originated in sin. The Sun of righteousness arises “with healing in His wings” (Malachi 4:2). Not all that this world bestows can heal a broken heart, or impart peace of mind, or remove care . . . the life of God in the soul is man’s only hope. (1952:115)

Writing about mental depression White is very clear, declaring that “many of the diseases from which men [and women] suffer are the result of mental depression. Grief, anxiety, discontent, remorse, guilt, distrust—all tend to break down the life forces and invite decay and death” (1964:147).

When a sinner meets Jesus Christ, love is diffused through the whole being as a vitalizing power and the natural result is the transformation from indifference to a commitment to serve God as a faithful disciple.

Every vital part—the brain, the heart, the nerves—it touches with healing. By it the highest energies of the being are roused to activity. It frees the soul from the guilt and sorrow, the anxiety and care, that crush the life forces. With it come serenity and composure. It implants in the soul, joy that nothing earthly can destroy—joy in the Holy Spirit—health-giving, life-giving joy. (White 1952:115)

According to White, spiritual healing happens before physical restoration. When the paralytic was healed, Jesus wanted to teach that the burdens of a sinful life, with its unrest and unsatisfied desires, “are the foundation of their maladies. They can find no relief until they come to the
Healer of the soul. The peace which He alone can give would impart vigor to the mind, and health to the body” (1940:270).

The miracle happens when the healed becomes a healer, the uncommitted church member becomes a dedicated disciple. “Christ’s servants are the channel of His working, and through them He desires to exercise His healing power. It is our work to present the sick and suffering to God in the arms of our faith. We should teach them to believe in the Great Healer” (White 1952:226).

White recommends that we should spend a quiet moment with God in order to allow him to speak to our hearts, not only our minds. This is how he can heal our emotional wounds and equip us to be His effective disciples:

All who are under the training of God need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God. He bids us, “Be still, and know that I am God.” Ps. 46:10. This is the effectual preparation for all labor for God. Amidst the hurrying throng, and the strain of life’s intense activities, he who is thus refreshed will be surrounded with an atmosphere of light and peace. He will receive a new endowment of both physical and mental strength. His life will breathe out a fragrance, and will reveal a divine power that will reach men’s hearts. (1952:58)

Ultimately, living as disciples who have been touched and healed by the Great Healer, means that “when we see human beings in distress, whether through affliction or through sin, we shall never say, this does not concern me” (White 1940:504).

Inner Healing and Discipleship in Adventist Literature

In October 2011, a first conference on mental health and wellness held at Loma Linda University highlighted how Seventh-day Adventist health leaders were aiming to help people suffering emotional problems by removing the stigma of mental illness in the church.

Allan Handysides, former director of the Adventist Church’s Health Ministries Department, said: “We need to remove the stigma that some people have attached to emotional and mental health issues and recognize the vulnerability we all have to these issues” (Ponder 2011).

Emotional problems are amongst the most challenging and pervasive difficulties faced by our world today. In the church, there is still progress to be made in understanding the role of emotional health and
abolishing the stigma of emotional imbalance. Too often, God-fearing people tell those suffering from depression or other emotional difficulties that they just need to trust God, read the Bible more, exercise more and eat more healthfully. While these are very important and necessary for someone who has a major emotional challenge, there needs to be an approach where the grace of Jesus is reflected with an understanding of emotional health. It’s inappropriate and potentially dangerous to just tell people to throw their pills away or stop seeing a counselor when they really need the assistance. (Fayard 2011)

Studies in this area (Jong-Wook 2003:3) have pointed out that worldwide, five out of the 10 leading causes of disability around the world are the result of major forms of emotional distress.

According to Fayard, the “last few years have seen an explosion of educational programs to train professionals equipped to deliver mental health services” (2011). More can be done to strengthen our ministry:

First, resource-scarce nations do not allocate enough funding to the prevention or treatment of emotional distress. Our church has embraced a “whole-person” approach, meaning that we are interested in the physical, spiritual and emotional well-being of those that come to our health institutions. We should see that we do so everywhere.

Second, we could apply biblical truths in a more systematic and integrated way in all our educational efforts to see that the “healing ministry of Jesus” is fully realized. More help for those who suffer from emotional problems could come through the active ministry of the graduates of Adventist universities.

Third, we should work toward a “blended ministries” approach, in which educational, health and local church ministries team up to address the enormous challenges faced by the communities that surround us, and increasingly, those found within our own families.

In his thesis about emotional healing, Drumi wrote that “it is not enough for the church to be engaged in dialogue with the surrounding culture, however important this dialogue might be. A far more significant task is to be actively involved in a direct and immediate ministry of healing” (2008:184).

Jesus, when preaching about healing, declared, “For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me” (Matt 25:35-36).

Based on this text, Paulsen (2009) said: “So what does it mean to live in connection with others? It means that your problems are not yours alone;
they are also mine. It means having a sense of solidarity with humanity that makes me vulnerable, also, to its hurts and pain.”

The General Conference Executive Committee voted that through its ministry of preaching, teaching, healing, and discipling the Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to represent the mission of Jesus Christ. This is

(1) regarded globally as teaching a wholistic model of evidence based healthful living in primary health care, (2) seen at all times as a trusted, transparent ally of organizations with compatible goals and vision, in alleviating suffering and addressing basic health and well-being, (3) recognized for the unconditional scope of its embrace of all persons seeking this basic health and well-being, (4) involved not only administratively but also functionally at every level including each congregation and church member in this ministry of health and healing. (Kulakov 2013)

Kulakov, Director of Relationships Cluster, in the New Zealand Pacific Union Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, writes:

Many engagements in spiritual disciplines may not work spiritual maturity if we ignore the emotional component of discipleship in our lives. The real issue is this: is the church simply an institution in which people can come on a Sabbath to listen to what God says in the Bible and then go home? Is the church only concerned with the spiritual wellbeing of people? Can we develop and grow the emotional health of our people by sermons, Bible studies and other spiritual disciplines alone? (2013)

The answer is no. First, many of the internal problems among members of a church do not exist because of spiritual reasons, but because of emotional sicknesses. Spiritual disciplines alone cannot solve all the church members’ relational problems. Kulakov says, “While it is true that God’s power can heal a person instantly, either physically or emotionally, we need to be more intentional in our approach in dealing with people’s emotions just the same way we deal with physical illnesses” (2013).

Second, the church is not only a hospital for the emotionally or spiritually sick. It may sound redundant, but it is necessary to remind all members that the Great Commission is the mission of the church. On the one hand, the church cannot function successfully without a team of professionals who will be dealing with each other’s emotional deficiencies. But on the other hand, members must also be empowered and free to reach the lost in the community as modern disciples of Jesus.

However, this will happen only after experiencing the abundant grace of God or, what Dybdahl (2008:10) describes as the “double longing.” “We
have a longing—a deep hunger for God and a sense of his presence. As we begin to pursue that intense desire, we encounter a second even stronger longing. God’s heart desperately longs for us.”

**Missiological Implications of Inner Healing and Discipleship**

Before a church can start ministering to immigrants, leaders should ask themselves questions like: Has the church been given authority to deal with our inner life? Can people be healed from their painful traumas, depression, and loneliness? Can we expect that God will heal people who live in bitterness and anger? Can someone have his life damaged because of curses? Is it possible that a witch is powerful enough to change someone’s course of life? Can involvement in occult activities destroy someone’s spiritual and emotional life or are they just harmless past-times?

I believe the Bible’s answer is “yes” to all these questions and that in Christ Jesus we can find solutions for emotional wounds that health professionals only dream of but which we have open access.

After investigating the studies of Christian psychologist Jan Paul Hook who is a licensed clinical professional counselor and approved supervisor at Northern Illinois University, Joshua N. Hook who is an assistant professor of Counseling Psychology at the University of North Texas, and Jon L. Dybdahl who is a professor of Theology, and considered one of the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s foremost expert on world mission, I believe that church members can initiate a program for inner healing and discipleship based on an inner healing-discipleship cycle. This is a biblical model that is designed to promote healing from emotional and spiritual sicknesses leading to a stable discipling environment.

Participants work through the following steps: grace, safety, hope, vulnerability, belonging, truth, ownership, repentance, confession, forgiveness, commitment to mission, and finally leading back to grace—the gracious touch of God!

The cycle is designed to help people move from denying to accepting their own powerlessness and helping them come to understand that God will restore them to wholeness—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. It is based on five convictions: (a) people are hurting, (b) people are looking for healing, (c) healing is possible, (d) the Bible is the most important resource for healing, and (e) sharing honestly and openly with other hurting people in a caring community makes change happen.
Grace

Grace is the beginning of the spiritual journey that brings inner healing for discipleship as represented in figure 1. It points to Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross and to the fact that forgiveness and sanctification is available for all human beings. Grace is not something one learns but something one experiences in one’s heart and mind. It is foundational to the experience of Christian spirituality as the Bible teaches that God gives us grace no matter where we are in the process of healing. We are first saved by grace (Eph 5:8).

It is through grace that God heals us from brokenness and enables us to stand in relationship with him (Rom 5:2). The apostle Peter affirms that an important aspect of our spiritual growth is learning to live in grace (2 Pet 3:18).

For the apostle Paul, grace was the spark to ignite a transforming journey with God (Rom 12:2). Most immigrants experience a high amount of shame and guilt, causing many of their situations to be even more painful. It is then difficult for them to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences with other church members. Grace can jumpstart the healing process.

Figure 1. Inner healing discipleship cycle.
Hook and Hook (2010:309) say that “leaders should work to develop the skills of understanding their own experiences of brokenness, grace, and healing before leading.” Church leaders can even share parts of their stories of brokenness to show immigrant members that every single person is working towards healing.

Safety

Once people understand God’s grace, they start having a sense of safety because now they know the direction to walk. Safety solves the problem of depression, discouragement, and fear. David experienced it when he said, “In peace I will both lie down and sleep; for you alone, O Lord, make me dwell in safety” (Ps 4:8).

The apostle Paul experienced this safety when he wrote: “We were brought into God’s presence, and we are holy and blameless as we stand before Him without a single fault” (Col 1:22-23).

As immigrant members begin experiencing grace in the context of the group, they will begin to feel safe in both their relationships with church leaders and with other church members. Immigrants will not share their feelings in a setting in which they fear criticism; therefore, it is important that church leaders take proactive steps to help group members feel safe so that they may have hope. The apostle John wrote that there is no fear in love, but that perfect love drives out fear (1 John 4:18).

Warren wrote: “Real community happens when people know it is safe enough to share their doubts and fears without being judged. Only in the safe environment of warm acceptance and trusted confidentiality will people open up and share their deepest hurts, needs, and mistakes” (2002:149-150). “Do not judge, or you too will be judged” (Matt 7:1). There must be confidentiality, no judgments or criticism, no authoritarianism, and there must be humility.

Hope

Hope grows roots in the hard soil of a brokenhearted people when safety is assured. Job had this experience, “And you will be safe because there is hope; after looking round, you will take your rest in quiet” (Job 11:18). Safety awakens the feeling of connectivity with self, with others, and with God, which light up the fire of hope.

The goal in this phase of the cycle is to motivate the person to move from victim thinking to survivor thinking, which leads to empowerment and gives courage to make choices and persuade them to become actively involved in their own healing process as they search for a renewed sense of safety and hope.
Paul reminds people that “our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word” (2 Thess 2:16-17).

Vulnerability

When foreign members begin to experience grace, feel safe and have hope, they will gradually become willing to be open and demonstrate vulnerability by sharing their experiences, thoughts, and feelings. As they share in greater depth, they are able to explore their problems and receive feedback from others. Just as Jesus formed communities, churches must create and maintain small groups in order to facilitate this phase in the inner healing discipleship cycle.

The House of Bishops in the Church of England declares:

In supporting a vulnerable person we must do so with compassion and in a way that maintains dignity. Some of the factors that increase vulnerability include: (a) a sensory or physical disability or impairment, (b) a learning disability, (c) a physical illness, (d) mental illness (including dementia), chronic or acute, (e) an addiction to alcohol or drugs, (f) the failing faculties in old age, (g) a permanent or temporary reduction in physical, mental or emotional capacity brought about by life events, for example bereavement or previous abuse or trauma. (2009:2)

In this phase members feel helpless and need to receive the healing love of God through other members who act as a bridge, helping them to rebuild relationships with others or rebuild themselves, which illness, disability, or abuse may have destroyed.

Belonging

When you know that you belong to a group, you feel as if you were part of a family where everybody shares everything.

Generally, when someone says they feel like they don’t belong, they are referring to something external, such as their family, their neighborhood, or a peer group at work or school. The feeling of not belonging, no matter where it comes from, is a very painful feeling. It can be debilitating. The latest scientific research shows that the feeling of not belonging and isolation is one of the biggest causes of stress in the body. We all need to feel like we belong. The feeling of belonging is an essential part of experiencing a full life. (Swisher 2008)
Migrants who have been abused or traumatized have a longing for release from the past and are desperately looking for a sense of belonging and security, of having a role.

Peter wrote that we have everything we need to live a fully satisfying life. James told us that despite the terrible things that happen to us it is really possible to live in joy. According to Paul, we have every spiritual blessing in Christ, and we can know real peace which transcends all understanding (John 10:10, 8:32, 14:12; 2 Pet 1:3; Jas 1:2; Eph 1:3; Phlm 4:7).

Truth and Ownership

While members and immigrants share their experiences, thoughts, and feelings in a context of grace, safety, hope, authenticity, and belonging, they will discover truth about themselves. They will also be able to hear truth from others who will play the role of being a “mirror” to show clearly the truth and their need to be healed and transformed.

This process requires time. Members need to be willing to be honest with themselves and allow God to examine their heart and being willing to see what needs to be changed (Ps 139:23-24; Matt 7:5).

Jesus taught that his followers would know the truth, and that the truth would set them free (John 8:32). This is what happens in this phase of the cycle. People begin to understand that they are not exactly what they thought they were.

In this phase, “accurate and helpful feedback is an important aspect of helping people heal from emotional problems” (Hook and Hook 2010:313). The apostle Paul taught that we should speak the truth to one another in love (Eph 4:15).

Immigrant members may have heard truth spoken to them from family members, friends, or pastors in thoughtless ways. But many will probably never have experienced truth spoken to them with an attitude of love. When truth is spoken too soon and without love, it reduces the sense of safety and hope, leading to an increased feeling of hurt which will obstruct the inner healing discipleship cycle. “While it is much easier to remain silent when others around us are harming themselves or others with a sinful pattern, it is not the loving thing to do” (Warren 2002:146).

In this phase one deals with the demonic, which is the invisible battle mentioned by Paul in Eph 6. According to Dybdahl, “Not everybody has this challenge, but a lot of people living in western countries are not willing to deal with this problem. One of the ways to deal with it is to deliver people from the demonic instruments. Fifteen percent of teenagers in United States are devil worshippers through Harry Potter, films, video games, and Internet” (2012).
After accepting the truth about themselves, members will take ownership for it. Another study found that “ownership occurs when group members take responsibility for their truth and acknowledge their contribution to the cause or maintenance of their problems” (Hook and Hook 2010:314).

Healing may be more about accepting truth than about forgiving a person or a group. However, if the hurt was caused by a specific action, forgiveness will need to take place not only in one’s heart but also through biblical conflict resolution as Jesus taught: “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established” (Matt 18:15-20).

After King David sinned with Bathsheba and was rebuked by the prophet Nathan, David’s response was to take ownership of this truth (2 Sam 12:13; Ps 32:5).

This phase of the cycle is most difficult to experience because members must be able to take ownership of their part in their hurts and understand their own problems in order to experience changes. “People cannot change what they do not own” (Hook and Hook 2010:314).

Taking ownership of personal truth is scary. It is much easier to make excuses or blame others and God himself for our faults acquired during the vicissitudes of life or inherited from parents, just as Eve did in Eden. “Then the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ And the woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate’” (Gen 3:13). Accepting ourselves and others are important steps in overcoming the pain of guilty and insecurity.

Repentance

After members have taken ownership of acquired or inherited imperfections, traumas or addictions, repenting and confessing is an important next step in the healing process. People can only repent after they feel God’s love in contrast to their transgression and sin. Repentance brings freedom and solves the problem of guilt and dishonesty.

In the Bible, Noah invited people to repent before the world was destroyed (Gen 7). The prophets also preached about repentance and using the word “turn” in the Old Testament (2 Chr 7:14). “If you turn . . . I will heal” (see also Isa 31:3, 59:20). John the Baptist preached repentance (Mark 1:4), Jesus preached repentance (v. 25), the apostles preached repentance (6:12), and the early church also preached repentance (Acts 3:17-20). Paul
said, “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

Repentance is honesty, humility, and openness. If we hide and cover up the past it is like a cancer. We need to express our faults and God’s healing will happen naturally. Secrets may kill us and destroy from the inside. This is the reason for the members to keep strict confidentiality during the inner healing discipleship cycle.

Expressing feelings can make a huge difference in the repentance process. It is not only critical, it is crucial. When you confess, it allows the Holy Spirit to abide in you and transform your thoughts, words, and actions. Different circumstances of life such as betrayal, abuse, false accusation, or failure to respond to others’ expectations can cause deep emotional wounds. We need to recognize our own failings and follow the example of the repented prodigal son (Luke 15:11) and the converted Peter (Matt 26:75).

Confession

After repenting we “confess and are justified by faith and have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom 5:1). “Confession is the process of verbally acknowledging one’s ownership of their problem” (Hook and Hook 2010:315). After David took ownership of his sin against Bathsheba, he immediately confessed his sin to God and was forgiven (Ps 32:5b).

It is equally important to confess to other people. Confession to other people is helpful because it makes both guilt and forgiveness concrete. James wrote, “Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective” (Jas 5:16).

Confession is the method that God uses to convert us and change our worldview.

Conversion to Christ must encompass all three levels: behavior and rituals, beliefs and worldview. Christians should live differently because they are Christians. However, if their behavior is based primarily on tradition and not Christian beliefs, it becomes dead ritual. Conversion must involve a transformation of beliefs, but if it is only a change of beliefs, it is false faith (James 2). Conversion may include a change in beliefs and behavior, but if the worldview is not transformed, in the long run the Gospel is subverted and the result is a syncretistic Christo-paganism which has the form of Christianity, but not the essence. (Hiebert 2002:10)
Forgiveness

When members accept God’s forgiveness and feel accepted and forgiven by others, they will commit their lives to serve as disciples in their community. It is also indispensable to forgive oneself so that guilt is taken away. The apostle Paul teaches us by saying: “But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phlm 3:13-14).

Unforgiveness will hinder or block the healing power of the Holy Spirit. Consider these passages in the Bible concerning the deadliness of unforgiveness and bitterness in our lives: “And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions” (Mark 11:25-26).

Commitment for Mission

After we are forgiven, our desire is to see other people whom we love also be forgiven and receive the assurance of salvation. Forgiven people will go into the entire world and make disciples of all nations, proclaim the good news that Jesus died for their sins, and that he will soon return to take his people home.

The Great Commission is given to all disciples of Jesus Christ. It was originally given to Jesus’ first disciples. But, because it tells them to teach disciples to obey everything they were taught by Jesus, it is perpetual.

Although Jesus gave us the Great Commission we must still be led by His Spirit in what we do. We are not to take Jesus’ command and act independently. We need the Lord’s direction day by day.

In Matthew we find the scope of operations, which is all the world, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19). Looking at the Great Commission primarily as “going to preach” has caused most people to ignore it, because they think they cannot go to all the world, so they do nothing. We must not think that we all should leave the place we live now and move to another place for the purpose of spreading the Gospel.

The focus of this text is the two verbs found in the first part of the verse: the participle πορευθέντες “going out” and the imperative μαθητεύσατε “make disciples!” The Greek word “go” in this text is Πορευθέντες and it is a participle and should be translated as “going or as you go” (Teknia
It does not tell us to go somewhere else, but just as we go, tell the good news and make disciples.

“Constructed from μαθητής, μαθητεύσατε means intrans. ‘to be’ or to become a pupil, i.e., ‘to make disciples.’ Behind this peculiar NT use there possibly stands the insight that one can become a disciple of Jesus—only on the basis of a call which leads to discipleship” (Verlag 1967:461).

Hagner clarifies the task of a disciple:

The commission itself is given by means of one main imperative verb, μαθητεύσατε, “make disciples,” together with three syntactically subordinate participles that take on an imperatival force because of the main verb. The first of these, Πορευθέντες precedes the main verb. The disciples are to “go” and “make disciples.” Since the main verb has for its object πάντα τὰ ἔθνη, “all nations,” it is implied that the disciples are to go into all the world. (1995:886)

Gracious Touch

At the end of the cycle is when the miracle happens in an awesome way. You will experience the gracious touch of God and your heart will be strangely warmed! Serving the Lord will bring a joy without precedent and you will be willing to be like Jesus, without reservations. You will say like Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

Johnathan Gallagher said that “before the disciples arrive in Emmaus and finally recognize their mentor Jesus, they have already found their hearts ‘strangely warmed,’ not from the authority of the personal presence of Jesus but because of the truth and right of the evidence presented” (2001)

John Wesley was a missionary in the United States and had not yet experienced conversion and the gracious touch of God. But one day, while he was listening to a reading from Martin Luther on justification by faith, a warm feeling flooded him, and he said: “‘My heart was strangely warmed.’ From that time on, the Methodist movement became people with warm hearts who were on a mission to make a difference in individual lives and in the whole world” and as a consequence, England experienced a national spiritual renewal (Heitzenrater 2018).

Once we are touched by Jesus’ amazing grace we will start ministering God’s gracious touch to others—Christians and non-Christians—just as he has touched us.

Metzger says that “grace and truth go hand in hand and bring healing as God reaches out to touch us with his love: just as he touched Adam all
by himself in the garden, just as he touched John, just as he touches orphan babies and emotionally wounded people, like you and me” (2010:36, 37).

There can be people who were not healed during all the phases of the inner healing discipleship cycle. When the cycle does not bring results, we need to continue praying with people for healing is a never-ending process in our sinful world.

Dybdahl argues that “we should not refuse to have a healing session in our churches because Pentecostals do it, but do it because Jesus did it. Some people are nervous about this as they are not sure if God will heal the people. So, if God does not heal they are worried about themselves” (2012). When healing prayer is offered, we must remember that our job is to put the person in God’s hands. We do not know what God’s answer will be. It is Jesus who heals, not us. God is a healing God. Jesus was sent to heal emotionally, physically, and spiritually. We are all in the process of being healed and we can become powerful healed healers in the hands of God.

Recommendations

Pastors, counsellors, psychologists, social workers, and other professionals can deliberately assist immigrants in their spiritual and emotional needs.

Seminars and sermons based on the inner healing discipleship cycle must be periodically presented in local churches.

Members can be encouraged to be actively involved in healing ministries to immigrants.

Migration is a complex phenomenon which is deeply affecting our societies and our churches, and merits further reflection and discussion by churches locally and globally.

Summary

Within the Adventist Church many immigrants struggle silently with the consequences of emotional pain, fear, failure, anxiety, stress, inadequate parenting, rejection, and abusive relationships. Many try to cope with the ongoing results of involvement in the occult or other false religions, and the effects of physical illness, accidents, and trauma continue to impact their lives.

It is God’s desire that we prosper and be in good health (3 John 2) because he created us in his image. “For in Him we live, and move, and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Therefore, if we are to reflect his image we must experience inner healing and extend it to others, for “God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, of love, and of a sound mind” (2 Tim 1:7).
Spiritual and emotional healing provides a deep sense of meaning and purpose and transforms our immigrant friends into an extension of God’s healing hands for the salvation of the lost, the last, and the least. This is the “whole” life God wants for His foreign children.

Are we willing to take the necessary risks? Offering inner healing to migrants and refugees involves recognizing our own weaknesses and being open to transformation. “Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. Remember those who are in prison, as though you were in prison with them; those who are being tortured, as though you yourselves were being tortured” (Heb 13:1-3).

Works Cited


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The greatest responsibility and the highest privilege that God has given to his people, the church, is that of partnering with him in mission. Mission is an attribute of our sending God and is the essence of his loving nature. Missio Dei, a broad missiological concept, presents missions at the heart and nature of the Trinity (Bosch 1991:390, 391)—God the Father sent the Son, Jesus Christ to seek and save humanity, God the Son sent the Holy Spirit, to establish, empower, and equip the church, God the Spirit selected and sent out, and continues sending out disciples to all the nations of the earth (Van Rheenen 2014:70, 71). Similarly, each church institution should regard mission as its highest priority and greatest obligation and thereby continue to send out disciples to make other disciples for the Master from every tribe, tongue, nation, and people.

Much today is known regarding the Great Commission of Christ to the church before his ascension for which every member is called to actively engage in missions until Christ’s Second Coming. The Greek word ethne, translated in English as “nation” is better understood as people groups (Matt 28:19). The challenge and responsibility of the Adventist Church, therefore, is to reach the diverse and numerous people groups proximal and distant, by employing all possible means and methods that God has provided for this task. The assignment undoubtedly may appear daunting, however, it still is “mission possible.”

For this goal to be achieved the church, especially its leadership, needs to overcome certain barriers inhibiting effective mission. This paper seeks to highlight a few of those barriers; however, it is not exhaustive in scope due to certain understandable limitations. Its objective is to enlighten and arouse mission leadership concerning obstacles to be overcome in order for more effective mission to be conducted in all respective territories. It seeks to create awareness of the reality of the mission situation, the
acknowledgment that there might be barriers occurring within our territories, and engender action plans to rectify the present scenario.

Other literature may provide several different perspectives on this subject; however, from the present Adventist standpoint the focus is on five issues I consider crucial at this point in time. The five barriers to effective missions discussed in this paper include knowledge, timidity, identity, spiritual, and logistic barriers.

**Knowledge Barrier**

One of the primary duties of mission leaders is to determine the nature and extent of the mission task within their regions. In other words, how many unreached people groups exist within a given territory? The Joshua Project provides a global figure of 7,033 unentered people groups worldwide out of a total of 16,954 people groups. The site also supplies continental and country specific data. Its table indicates that only about 41.5% of the world’s people groups have been witnessed to (The Joshua Project 2018).

Other categories by which people groups may be viewed in addition to continental, regional, and country sub-divisions include affinity blocs, people clusters, religion, language, etc. It is essential that mission leaders map out their territories clearly, displaying the regions entered and unentered, after which they may discover their mandate and mission.

Some time ago, while serving as a conference secretary when my president and I examined an old map of our territory, we discovered to our dismay that the oldest and largest churches of our conference were all located in territories not featured in the old map of the state we had. This was very revealing to us.

If mission efforts are to be successful it would be helpful that the needs of the masses are known. This is especially vital because some in leadership may only be using familiar evangelism models, and rejecting any other form. As a result, the church may be employing in some places methods older than the leaders to reach communities that have demographics that have long changed.

Too often evangelism is conducted by people who have a solution and are looking for a problem to which to apply it! They have worked under the assumption that there is one evangelistic method and message that is appropriate for all cultures and classes. As a result only certain homogeneous units worldwide have become church members, because only certain people responded to the message and method. The church must be prepared to design unique methods geared to different cultures to reach particular kinds of people. (Schantz 1989)
Regarding the need for new methods in evangelization Ellen White suggests, “Let every worker in the Master’s vineyard, study, plan, devise methods, to reach the people where they are. We must do something out of the common course of things. We must arrest the attention. We must be deadly in earnest. We are on the very verge of times of trouble and perplexities that are scarcely dreamed of” (1946:122).

**Timidity Barrier**

Besides not having sufficient knowledge of the mission task entrusted to the church by the Lord, another critical factor impeding effective mission is a certain sense of timidity in which sometimes mission strategies seem to be executed. Strategy is the natural sequel to good comprehension of the mission task in any context. Take for instance, Coca Cola, the multinational beverage drink producer. Several years ago it had as its vision, “a can of coke in the hands of every person on the planet.” Presently, there are very few countries in the world where one cannot find a drink of coke—no matter how remote the region may be; whether accessible by road or not. God’s people need to also have such great dreams—plans bigger than their own power can accomplish—or that their limited budgets can realize. After all our Sponsor, Source, and Sender has no lack. That seems to be the principal lesson in the story of the man in Jesus’ parable who received an unexpected guest (Luke 11:8). The rationale of this story seems to teach the principle of “shameless audacity,” (in Greek, “anedia,” Luke 11:8 NIV). The rare combination of these two concepts of “shamelessness,” and “audaciousness” implies that God expects his people to do the same by asking beyond the usual, or normal. After all, the times are also unusual. Commenting on the need for greater effort in mission work, Ellen White states:

With the great truth we have been privileged to receive, we should, and under the Holy Spirit’s power we could, become living channels of light. We could then approach the mercy seat; and seeing the bow of promise, kneel with contrite hearts, and seek the kingdom of heaven with a spiritual violence that would bring its own reward. We would take it by force, as did Jacob. Then our message would be the power of God unto salvation. Our supplications would be full of earnestness, full of a sense of our great need; and we would not be denied. The truth would be expressed by life and character, and by lips touched with the living coal from off God’s altar. When this experience is ours, we shall be lifted out of our poor, cheap selves, that we have cherished so tenderly. We shall empty our hearts of the corroding power of selfishness, and shall be filled with praise and gratitude to God. We shall
magnify the Lord, the God of all grace, who has magnified Christ. And He will reveal His power through us, making us as sharp sickles in the harvest field. (1899)

Identity Barrier

Perhaps the most significant and pernicious obstacle to effective mission is the identity barrier, which manifests itself in ethnocentrism, prejudice, and various forms of bias. Human nature leads people to identify with those who have similar backgrounds, upbringing, nature, and experience such as theirs. Negative reactions to others who are dissimilar is what results in stereotyping, prejudice, and ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is a great detriment to mission effectiveness. Instead of developing mission programs for the salvation of people groups who need to be evangelized, because such people have dissimilar characteristics they are often forgotten, ignored, or avoided. In some cases, institutions that could have missional benefits to bless unreached or less reached people groups are never established in these needy areas due to ethnocentric factors. It is not strange therefore to find that some Adventist institutions are clustered around certain regions favored by the majority group in leadership. Resource allocation for programs and initiatives to groups in the margins is another aspect where ethnocentrism impacts mission negatively. If mission is indeed the *raison d'être* for the existence of the church, then funds should be budgeted for advancing the cause of God’s kingdom despite personal biases or prejudices.

Mission history amply demonstrates that greater progress is made in the advancement of the gospel whenever indigenous leadership is produced (Walls 1996:86-89). Unfortunately, ethnocentrism hinders the emergence or employment of persons who have different identities from the majority in mission leadership. In cases where indigenous leaders are eventually employed they sometimes suffer from non-acceptance or non-recognition among their peers due to ethnocentrism.

Bible history also attests to the serious challenge that ethnocentrism causes to the mission of God. For the gospel commission to be fulfilled the disciples needed to step out of their comfort zones, overcome ethnocentrism, in order to make disciples of every people group. When God sought to open the eyes of Peter to the fact that the church he sought to establish would have boundaries far wider than Judea the apostle’s reaction was, “Surely not, Lord!” (Acts 10:14). Peter’s experience is representative of many Christians, no matter their positions in the church, education, spirituality, or even cross-cultural experience. And if leaders act this way it is easy to see how church members can also fall into this default
mode. Sometimes even experienced missionaries, trained in the Institute of World Missions, look down or speak condescendingly towards some group and do nothing to bring them to Christ or belong to their inner circle of leaders.

The identity issue also reflects in church politics. This is evident when persons unfit for certain tasks are put in offices they are not qualified to fill or are sent for training for which they lack basic competencies. This results in hindering mission progress and is a misuse of funds and resources.

**Spiritual Barrier**

Another major impediment to effective mission is the spiritual barrier. Spiritual barriers have spiritual origins. As the apostle Paul acknowledges, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor 4:4). In other words, there are persons and places where the devil has established strongholds which prevent the impartation and penetration of the gospel. These strongholds of the enemy are largely ideological or philosophical in nature and stand in opposition to the truth of God’s word (2 Cor 10:4). Their nature may vary from one person to another and from one country or region to the next. In some contexts they take the form of animistic fears and beliefs, in others it may be in the form of atheism, communism, capitalism, secularism, radical religious beliefs, or occult beliefs and practices. Symptoms of such spiritual blockage include: spiritual apathy, spiritual insensitivity, worldliness, and indifference to all things spiritual (Rogers 2013).

Many of the countries and people groups in the 10/40 window dwell in regions where the spiritual barriers are ancient and seemingly impenetrable. In such territories and terrains each battle is hard fought and the stakes are high. Persecution and death are very real outcomes in the course of proclaiming the gospel. It needs to be understood that in such contexts conventional, human strategies will be of little help.

Mission leaders should however remember that the promise of victory is assured (1 John 4:4; 2 Cor 10:3-5), and God’s eternal presence and power is available (Deut 31:6; Matt 28:20). Spiritual warfare is the only viable strategy in such situations entailing earnest prayer and fasting imploring the Lord to bring down these strongholds so that his kingdom may be established (Mark 9:29). This is exactly what happened during apostolic times in cities such as Ephesus and Colossae, which were former bastions of magic and the occult. This is exactly what can occur again today. Paul’s exhortation to the Ephesian Church is a reminder of this reality and a call to arms: “For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against
principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” (Eph 6:12).

**Logistic Barrier**

There may be other times when there is understanding and willingness on the part of mission leadership to empower and deploy indigenous workers so they can establish church plants among their own people. Often, however, the main complaint is, “Where are the workers?” The logistic challenge of finding adequate, committed, local workers to engage in mission is real. Nevertheless, caution is needed lest mission leaders find themselves in God’s way blocking the channels the Holy Spirit seeks to use in doing his work. Although the task of mission may always need cross-cultural missionaries to plant the seed and establish a beach-head, caution is needed to guard against a Messiah complex and a sense of indispensability to the cause of God. Such a condition may be similar to the affliction of Elijah (1 Kgs 19:10-14).

It needs to be noted that such a notion that there are certain places where no indigenous leaders exist to carry forward the work of mission may be fallacious. It could in reality be unbiblical. The biblical doctrine of spiritual gifts indicates that the body of Christ is complete—gifted to perform every function in the church (Rom 12:4-8). Perhaps, the problem may be that of myopia, or reluctance to seek for those persons of peace that the Sending-God has providentially positioned ahead of us to fulfill his mission (Luke 10:2-7). The logistic barrier can be resolved only when true disciples are found, trained, and deployed. However, the real issue is only genuine disciples can make true disciples. If the right disciples are not being found perhaps the problem may be staring at us in the mirror.

**Recommendations**

In light of the issues discussed, if the church seeks to be successful in overcoming these barriers blocking effective missions it seems it will be necessary to take certain vital steps. A few recommendations are offered to attain this objective:

1. Each church institution should establish or update its database of unreached or the least reached territories in its area of responsibility as a prelude to witnessing.

2. Unreached people groups, such as immigrants, the homeless, and other socio-economic blocs within each field should be identified for the purpose of establishing church plants among them.

3. Because stereotypes, prejudice and ethnocentrism are learned early
and are reinforced in the course of life, regular diversity training and related programs are needed to help overcome these tendencies.

4. Beyond mere representation in the leadership and functions of the church, structures need to be established to provide a platform for minorities to speak and be heard without fear of retribution.

5. The goal of discipleship is to make believers who transcend their cultures and ethnicities; however, the sad reality is this very often is not the case. It would therefore be vital that a worldview transformational paradigm be developed for the church regarding this often ignored dimension of discipleship.

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Introduction

Urban cultures around the world share a number of common characteristics. They tend to be more technologically advanced than non-urban communities, which means they are more highly influenced by a developing global web-based culture which rejects institutionalism and demands decentralization of power and authority. Within this culture, individuals are inclined to find a direct path to what they want to accomplish, and traditional structures are often perceived as obstacles along that path. Therefore, the church, as a result of its conventionality, is not well positioned for optimum growth among urban communities. Yet the church, as a fellowship of believers, is commissioned by Christ to take the gospel to people of all nations, most of whom are now concentrated in urban populations.¹

In light of these current urban conditions, the mission of Christ requires a somewhat different approach from that which has been practiced for centuries; lay believer mobilization and believer empowerment (or more accurately, re-empowerment) must be scalable, unlike anything we have ever seen, to increasing levels of urbanization. Lay believers must be re-empowered to do all the work of disciple-making.

This paper will explore the age-old, yet still relevant question, “And who gave you authority to baptize?” (Mark 11:27-33; John 1:25). First, biblical authority will be examined regarding who is allowed to baptize. Second, the writings of Ellen G. White, as they relate to biblical

authority for baptizing, will be considered. Third, a counter-argument will be discussed. And finally, two baptismal tracks within the current conventional Adventist church system will be compared. This paper will conclude with a missional way forward that is faithful to Scripture, sustainable, scalable, and missionally effective in light of current cultural trends.

**Background**

A 2000-Year-Old Question

The question of who—or what—gives a person authority to baptize is at least two thousand years old. First century Jewish religious leaders asked this politically charged question: “Then the Pharisees who had been sent asked him [John the Baptist], ‘If you aren’t the Messiah or Elijah or the Prophet, what right do you have to baptize?’” (John 1:24-25, NLT unless otherwise noted).

The Gospel of Mark records a similar dialogue between Jesus and church leaders:

> Again they entered Jerusalem. As Jesus was walking through the Temple area, the leading priests, the teachers of religious law, and the elders came up to him. They demanded, “By what authority are you doing all these things? Who gave you the right to do them?”
>
> “I’ll tell you by what authority I do these things if you answer one question,” Jesus replied. “Did John’s authority to baptize come from heaven, or was it merely human? Answer me!”
>
> They talked it over among themselves. “If we say it was from heaven, he will ask why we didn’t believe John. But do we dare say it was merely human?” For they were afraid of what the people would do, because everyone believed that John was a prophet. So they finally replied, “We don’t know.”
>
> And Jesus responded, “Then I won’t tell you by what authority I do these things.” (Mark 11:27-33)

In spite of the implied challenge, these verses raise a valid question: Who does give one the right or authority to baptize? Some would suggest that church leaders have the authority to grant permission and to vest in certain people the right to baptize; others would contend that a believer’s authority to baptize comes directly from Jesus Christ himself.
Current Church Practice Regarding Baptism

Most denominations today, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church, see themselves as holding the authoritative right to baptize through the vesting of pastors, lay pastors, priests, or other clergy.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual states, “The pastor, with the assistance of the elders, is expected to plan for and lead out in all spiritual services, such as Sabbath morning worship and prayer meeting, and should officiate at the communion service and baptism” (Secretariat 2016:32). This serves as one policy parameter. Another parameter is articulated as a provisional plan: “In the absence of an ordained pastor, an elder shall request the conference president to arrange for the baptism of those desiring to unite with the church. An elder should not officiate in the service without first obtaining permission from the conference president” (75, italics supplied).

This policy makes it possible for a conference president to authorize an elder to conduct a baptism. But it clearly states that an elder “should not officiate” unless authorized. This would also imply that non-elders should not officiate at baptisms.

To clarify this position the Church Manual continues,

Occasionally no one possesses the experience and qualifications to serve as an elder. Under such circumstances the church should elect a person to be known as “leader.”... A leader, who is not an ordained elder [ordained by the church], may not administer baptism, conduct the Lord’s Supper, perform the marriage ceremony, or preside at business meetings when members are disciplined. A request should be made to the conference president for an ordained pastor to preside at such meetings. (77, italics supplied)

Again, policy clarifies that permission-granting authority to baptize rests with the conference president. And to further prevent any misunderstanding, the Church Manual spells out:

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Deacons are not authorized to preside at the Lord’s Supper, baptism, or business meetings and are not permitted to perform the marriage ceremony or officiate at the reception or transfer of members.

If a church has no one authorized to perform such duties, the church leader shall contact the conference for assistance. (79, italics provided)

The *Church Manual* does suggest that the gospel commissioning is given to “us.” But note that commissioning is defined in such a way that it places disciple-making under the authority of the “chief committee” when it says,

> *The Gospel Commission of Jesus tells us that making disciples, which includes baptizing and teaching, is the primary function of the church* (Matt. 28:18-20). It is, therefore, also the primary function of the board, which serves as the chief committee of the church. When the board devotes its first interests and highest energies to *involving every member in proclaiming the good news and making disciples*, most problems are alleviated or prevented, and a strong, positive influence is felt in the spiritual life and growth of members. (129, italics added)

“Involving every member” is an attempt to engage believers in making disciples “which includes baptizing and teaching,” but only a few are authorized by the church leadership to do *all* the work of disciple-making, namely those who have received church approval—the pastors.

One can reasonably discern that church policy intends that church-approved pastors are allowed to baptize and the believers are *not* allowed to baptize.

**The Developing Crisis**

A Changing Culture’s View of the Church

Urban cultures around the world share a number of common characteristics. They tend to be more technologically advanced than non-urban communities, which means they are more highly influenced by a global, web-based culture that rejects institutionalism and demands decentralization of power and authority.

This was recently recognized by the General Conference Department of Adventist Mission in an article entitled “Adventist Leaders Tout House-Churches as Way to Reach Non-Christians,” published in April 2018. The primary reason for this “touting” was included in the article’s subtitle, “The house-church model is called important at a time when many view the traditional church negatively” (McChesney 2018).
Not only do many view the church negatively, but public opinion of pastors has been on the decline since 1985. “In 2013 the clergy received its lowest score ever. The number of people who believe clergy has very high or high levels of honesty and ethical standards fell below 50 percent for the first time. But this was no blip on the radar screen. After peaking at a high of 67 percent in 1985, the decline has been a pretty steady march downward” (Packard 2015:17). No matter how one explains the details, this is a developing crisis.

**Cultural Mega-Shift**

With increasing access to the Internet, there is a developing global culture that in many ways is eclipsing local cultures. No matter where a person lives, if one is connected to the Internet, one is being enculturated to accept Western views and values (Kellerman 2012:xix).

What are some of these views and values? Award-winning Harvard leadership lecturer Barbara Kellerman,3 in her challenging book, *The End of Leadership*, accurately highlights this cultural shift. She observes, “There is less respect for authority across the board—in government and business, in the academy and in the professions, even in religion” (2012:xviii, xix, 15, 25).

This suggests that the culture’s negative view of the conventional church is not necessarily the fault of the church or its leadership. A number of secular leaders as well as church leaders recognize the attitude toward the conventional church as just one aspect of a greater “mega-shift” in attitude toward conventionality in general. Policy-based systems are slowly being replaced by relational systems where people are more important than the survival and/or maintenance of the institution they once championed.

Power and control are being decentralized, top-down supremacy is losing influence, while grassroots relational infrastructures are gaining influence. There is “a shift away from traditional management systems in

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3 “Barbara Kellerman is the James MacGregor Burns Lecturer in Public Leadership at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government. She was the founding executive director of the Kennedy School’s Center for Public Leadership and served as its research director. She was ranked by Forbes.com among the Top 50 Business Thinkers in 2009, and by Leadership Excellence in the top 15 of 100 ‘best minds on leadership’ in 2008 and 2009. In 2010 she was given the Wilbur M. McFeeley Award for her pioneering work on leadership and followership. She is author and editor of many books, including, most recently, *Bad Leadership, Followership, and Leadership: Essential Selections on Power, Authority, and Influence*” (Kellerman 2012: “About the Author”).
which the leader is at the center, to new sorts of systems, in which organiza-
tions are self-run and self-governed” (Kellerman 2012:42, 43).

As people are looking for alternative ways to build meaning and value into their lives, a number of non-institutional systems are gaining market share. Here is a sampling of some well-known conventional systems with their grassroots counterparts.

**Institutional Systems**  
*Encyclopedia Britannica*  
Microsoft Office  
Garmin, Tom-Tom  
National currencies  
Conventional school  
Big box stores

**Institutional Systems**  
Wikipedia.com  
OpenOffice.com  
Google Maps, Waze.com  
Cryptocurrencies (i.e., Bitcoin)  
Home school  
CSA (Community Supported Agriculture)

As new grassroots possibilities give ordinary people ways to bypass conventional systems, people are less inclined to “ask permission” of those who see themselves as holding the authority to give permission. This challenges a fundamental assumption of institutional system thinking, specifically the belief that people will continue to ask permission.

**The Birth of a New Revolution**

Kellerman (2012) observes that “the idea that ordinary people use unbridled access to information to judge those who are more elevated—that is nothing short of revolutionary” (48). Kellerman correctly utilizes this revolutionary theme in several places throughout her book:

First, real revolutions are rare and distinctive events, which fundamentally alter the state or society within which they take place. Second, the intention of revolutionaries is generally to redistribute power, authority, and influence, by taking some, or even all, from those who have and giving it to those who do not (10).

In the last one hundred years, relations between leaders and followers reached a turning point, if not a tipping point. Leader power and follower power became the more equivalent. To be sure, hero-leaders (Franklin Roosevelt, Winston Churchill) and monster-leaders (Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin) were still in evidence. But, increasingly, ordinary people joined forces to compel change the world over (16).

Nearly a decade and a half before the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, [the late educator and diplomat] Cleveland wrote this: ‘The
tidal waves of social change in my lifetime—environmental sensitivity, civil rights for all races, the enhanced status of women ... were not generated by established leaders in government, business, religion, or even higher education. They boiled up from the people, with the help of new, often young leaders who had not previously been heard from.’ (Kellerman 2012:46, 47)

Other researchers acknowledge this revolutionary theme and its impact on the church. In their landmark book *Church Refugees: Sociologists Reveal Why People Are DONE with Church but Not Their Faith*, sociologists Joshua Packard and Ashleigh Hope report on research they conducted which showed the impact of this revolutionary thinking on church-going. Within a sample of people who were of the same race but diverse geographically, socioeconomically, generationally, and with regard to gender, “The story that emerged from the data is that people with access to alternative ways of reaching their goals of community and social engagement are opting out of church” (2015:10).

Packard and Hope continue to emphasize: “To be clear, I don’t think this is generational. Our respondents spanned an age range from 18 to 84. The phenomenon of people walking away from congregation-based church has much more to do with how our culture has evolved over the years for everyone not simply for emerging adults” (76).

To reemphasize, the cultural mega-shift is not necessarily the church’s fault. “Technology continues to undermine the authority of the church, just as it undermines authority everywhere else” (Kellerman 2012:78; see also Shirky 2005).

This reality will call for new kinds of organization in general and a reevaluation of current institutional assumptions for those organizations that desire to stay relevant in this cultural mega-shift. John Kotter, author of books such as *Leading Change and A Sense of Urgency*, is widely regarded as one of the world’s foremost authorities on leadership and change. He insists, “The twenty-first century will force us all to evolve towards a fundamentally new form of organization” (2014:39).

This will also call for a new look at church organizational models and the assumptions, both spoken and unspoken, they are based upon. Christian author and researcher George Barna, after a careful analysis of church planting and financial trends in North America, in his 2016 *Church Start-ups and Money* report summary suggests a response to the data: “What would it look like to make a whole new model?” (2016:51).

Culture has changed around us, and with it, the culture’s view of church as we have known it. As we will soon see, the church is also changing from within.
The Church (the People) Is Changing from Within

“Predicting the future is a perilous activity. But if you look at enough data, you can see there are some trends pointing in a pretty clear direction” (Kotter 2014:173). The church is changing from within. Yet this change should not come as a surprise to Seventh-day Adventists. Ellen White and others have been sounding the warning for some time.

Before the final visitation of God’s judgments upon the earth, there will be, among the people of the Lord, such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times. The Spirit and power of God will be poured out upon His children. At that time many will separate themselves from those churches in which the love of this world has supplanted love for God and His Word. Many, both of ministers and people, will gladly accept those great truths which God has caused to be proclaimed at this time, to prepare a people for the Lord’s second coming. (White 1911b:464, italics supplied)

Notice what White says, and what she does not say: “Among the people of the Lord” is not limited to a specific denomination. It includes people of any fold, in any denomination, and it includes people outside of a recognized denomination. “Many will separate themselves from those churches in which the love of this world has supplanted love for God and His Word.” No denomination is exempt. “Many,... will gladly accept those great truths” does not say people will join or switch denominations; White simply says they “will gladly accept those great truths.” Accepting biblical truths may not necessarily mean becoming “members.”

In 1965 Billy Graham warned that

multitudes of Christians within the church are moving toward the point where they may reject the institution that we call the church. They are beginning to turn to more simplified forms of worship. They are hungry for a personal and vital experience with Jesus Christ. They want a heartwarming personal faith. Unless the church quickly recovers its authoritative Biblical message, we may witness the spectacle of millions of Christians going outside the institutional church to find spiritual food. (87)

Graham speaks about millions of people moving towards more “simplified forms of worship.” They are hungry for a vibrant relationship with God that goes far beyond religious forms.

In 2005 George Barna wrote, “Well over 20 million left the church to “go find God” (13). He goes on to say that
the Revolutionary mind-set is simple: Do whatever it takes to get closer to God and to help others to do the same. Obliterate any obstacle that prevents you from honoring God with every breath you take. Be such an outstanding example of the Christian faith that no one will question your heart or lifestyle—except those who see institutional survival as equally or more important than the alleged influence of the institution they defend. (39)

In their 2015 book entitled *Church Refugees*, Packard and Hope set out to understand the widespread phenomenon of church decline. They say that of the 318 million people in America, approximately 104 million\(^4\) (33%) have left the church (20; see also Barna 2014).

As our society approaches a post-institutional era, it’s entirely possible the near monopoly that the church has enjoyed over faithful expressions and religious connections may be coming to an end. The activities of the dechurched may be ushering in a new understanding of what religious activity means. If this trend continues, it will fundamentally reshape the way Americans experience organized religion. (Packard and Hope 2015:69)

As shocking as this research may be, Packard and Hope’s unique contribution is even more surprising. They reveal,

> Our interviews indicate that the dechurched are among the most dedicated people in any congregation. They often work themselves into positions of leadership in an attempt to fix the things about the church that dissatisfy them before ultimately deciding that energies could be better spent elsewhere. In other words, the dechurched were the “doers” in their congregations. (23)

Yet Packard and Hope are quick to clarify that “the dechurched are walking away from church work, but not the work of the church” (55). They boldly suggest, “The structures that dominate most churches work well for the large segment of the congregation that is not particularly involved or interested in being involved. But these same structures are not only ineffective for the most active members, they are actually driving them away” (56).

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4 George Barna and David Kinnaman, in their 2014 book *Churchless* argue that the dechurched represent 33 percent of the American population. Furthermore, they claim that people characterized as dechurched are the fastest growing segment of the population.
Alan Hirsh, pastor, church planter, and former director of the Department of Mission, Education and Development for the Churches of Christ Victoria and Tasmania Conference, moved to the United States in the early 2000s. He believes that the church in North America will be a major determinant for the continued sustenance and future vitality of the church in the West (2018).

In a 2010 Verge Network video blog (Hirsh 2010), and later in Hirsh’s book, *On the Verge: A Journey into the Apostolic Future of the Church* (2011), he says that of the 318 million Americans, 200 million [about 60% and rising] are not interested in walking in the front doors of any conventional church. This means that all denominations combined are, at best, able to gain a hearing among only 40% (and decreasing) of the population. And it means that the other 60% are essentially immune to their methods of communicating the message. This constitutes a crisis for the church in Western cultures.

The church is not necessarily responsible for this crisis. But the crisis calls for a response from the church. How the Adventist denomination responds is yet to be determined.

**Summary of the Crisis**

The conventional church of Western cultures is in a state of crisis as a result of recent cultural shifts. Technology is disseminating both the culture and its crisis to urban centers around the globe via the worldwide web.

The culture around the church and the people within the church have changed. As the rules are changing, church leadership paradigms and the assumptions they embrace are being bypassed. A new revolution is quietly being birthed.

I believe there is hope for both the urban and the non-urban contexts. But to reestablish relevance at a time when “many view the traditional church negatively,” the church will have to change, and do so quickly without a self-preservation agenda or—paradoxically—it will continue to dwindle, specifically among Western cultures and among those in any culture who have embraced a developing global culture. Of all entities, the church is best poised to understand the counter-intuitive kingdom principle to lose one’s life in order to gain life (Matt 10:39). I also believe there

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5 There are some who would argue differently, offering only anecdotal evidence. https://churchleaders.com/pastors/pastor-articles/328546-church-in-america-dying.html.
is a way forward that will re-empower the believers to do all the work of disciple making, thus providing a vehicle for the wildfire-like spread of the gospel message in the New Testament era to happen in today’s urban context. But this way forward will require institutional assumptions of authority and permission-giving to change.

“And Who Gave You Authority to Baptize?”

While there are a number of key changes needed in the church in order for it to effectively achieve its mission in this new context, one change is readily within the church’s reach—and that change could prove an excellent help in spreading the gospel of Christ to the unreached masses.

The church is commissioned by Christ to reach the vast urban populations. The carrying out of this commission must be based on a solid, “Thus says the Lord” in order for his church to reap his blessings and for all believers to engage in all the work of disciple-making.

In her book, Desire of the Ages, White emphasizes that “the very life of the church depends upon her faithfulness in fulfilling the Lord’s commission. To neglect this work is surely to invite spiritual feebleness and decay. Where there is no active labor for others, love wanes, and faith grows dim” (1940:825).

**Biblical Foundation**

The Bible and the Bible Only

Adventism has a long-standing theology of upholding the Bible and the Bible only as the infallible authority. While this posture reflects reformation DNA, to truly apply this legacy of the infallible authority of the Word of God as one’s only rule of faith and practice may challenge current practices.

Ellen White upholds the principle of *sola scriptura*. Drawing from church history, she warns of a tendency to lose sight of this foundation. “The very beginning of the great apostasy was in seeking to supplement the authority of God by that of the church. Rome began by enjoining what God had not forbidden, and she ended by forbidding what he had explicitly enjoined. Many earnestly desired to return to the purity and simplicity which characterized the primitive church” (1911b:289-290).

The grand principle maintained by the Reformers—the same that had been held by the Waldenses, by Wycliffe, by John Huss, by Luther, Zwingli, and those who united with them—was the infallible authority
of the Holy Scriptures as a rule of faith and practice. They denied the rights of popes, councils, Fathers, and kings, to control the conscience in matters of religion. The Bible was their authority, and by its teaching they tested all doctrines and all claims. (1911:249, italics supplied)

In our time there is a wide departure from their [the reformers’] doctrines and precepts, and there is need of a return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty. . . . The same unswerving adherence to the Word of God manifested at that crisis of the Reformation is the only hope of reform today. (204)

These warnings serve to remind modern-day Adventist church leaders and believers that a clear understanding of one’s authority and a firm allegiance to Christ and his Word are paramount to avoiding the pitfalls of the past. With this background, the next section looks at the commission behind baptism.

The Gospel Commission

Matthew concludes his gospel with the Great Gospel Commission, Christ’s final charge to his disciples. “And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” Amen (Matt 28:18-20).

As familiar as this may be to one’s ears, the scope of this commission is radically inclusive. To realize it, one must notice its parameters. Are there any limitations to the scope of the commission? In terms of territory? Time? Authority? The Bible alone must answer!

Jesus removed territorial limitations when He said, “Go ... and make disciples of all nations” (italics supplied). But was there a limit on time? Did the Great Commission extend beyond the lifespan of those who heard Christ speak it? The text itself provides an answer; Christ’s promise extends “even to the end of the age.” Thus, one is left with the question of authority.

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6 Ellen White confirms this no-territorial lines approach in Gospel Commission work. She says, “Thus Christ sought to teach the disciples the truth that in God’s kingdom there are no territorial lines, no caste, no aristocracy; that they must go to all nations, bearing to them the message of a Saviour’s love” (1911:20, italics supplied; White 1940:823).
All Authority

In order to avoid moving forward on preconceived ideas and common assumptions, this discussion must take a closer look at whom the Great Commission authorizes. How does the Gospel Commission begin? Typically, people respond with, “Go.” But that is not where the commission begins. It begins one verse earlier: “All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth” (Matt 28:18). This commission internally clarifies whose authority believers operate in as they carry out the Gospel Commission—namely, Christ’s unlimited authority.

The Commission was spoken to eleven disciples who were told to “go and make disciples.” The same commission which makes disciples also commissions disciples. And in fairness to the commission we must say that when a person is commissioned he is also authorized.

Ellen White on the Gospel Commission

Regarding the scope of the Great Gospel Commission, Ellen White’s commentary is also instructive.

Not upon the ordained minister only rests the responsibility of going forth to fulfill this commission. Everyone who has received Christ is called to work for the salvation of his fellow men. (1911a:110, italics supplied)

Those who stand as leaders in the church of God are to realize that the Savior’s commission is given to all who believe in His name. (1911a:110, italics supplied)

The gospel commission had been given to the twelve when Christ met with them in the upper chamber; but it [the Gospel Commission] was now to be given to a larger number. At the meeting on a mountain in Galilee, all the believers who could be called together were assembled. (1940:818, italics supplied)

In sweeping inclusiveness, Christ authorizes the unlikely and the undeserving. In the chapter entitled “Go and Teach All Nations” White wrote,

Those whose course has been most offensive to Him He freely accepts; when they repent, He imparts to them His divine Spirit, places them in the highest positions of trust, and sends them forth into the camp of the disloyal to proclaim His boundless mercy. (1940:826).

The Savior’s commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers in Christ to the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends alone on the ordained minister. All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in
trust with the gospel. *All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men.* For this work the church was established, and *all* who take upon themselves its sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ. (1940:822, bold and italics supplied)

A Pivotal Question

Over the past 10 years I have worked with over five hundred church leaders around the world, primarily conference presidents and their administrative teams in Western countries, helping them understand and respond to the developing global culture through the development of missionary-focused house church plants. In the course of those dialogues, church leaders often asked, “So who is allowed to baptize?” Their question is uniquely appropriate as they seek to reconcile church policy with the Gospel Commission and with Ellen White’s comments.

The answer hinges upon another pivotal question: To whom was the Gospel Commission given? If the Gospel Commission was given only to church-approved pastors, then the whole work of making disciples belongs to the elite, which in turn could be seen as discrediting the work of the lay believers who give Bible studies, “teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20).

If one accepts Ellen White’s perspective, then the Gospel Commission is given to all believers. Yet the fulfillment of one part of that commission, “baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (Matt 28:19), directly conflicts with church policy, which states, “The pastor, with the assistance of the elders, is expected to plan for and lead out in all spiritual services, such as Sabbath morning worship and prayer meeting, and should officiate at the communion service and baptism” (Secretariat 2016:32).

It is interesting to note that of the over five hundred church leaders to whom this question has been posed, only one has suggested (though it was not his final conclusion) that the Gospel Commission was given solely to church-sanctioned pastors. While this represents church leaders who are seeking to be honest with the biblical text, it does not relieve the tension between Scripture and church policy. Before resolving this tension, let us possibly complicate it as we consider the following arguments in favor of ministers being the primary ones to baptize.

7  https://www.simplechurchathome.com/
A Counter Argument

Some would assert that White makes a case that believers should baptize only if “ministers are absent.” Two instances are worth noting.

I saw that these brethren [Bean and Evans] had not understood their work fully. God has not called them to give themselves unreservedly to the work. O no, they can assist in the work and do errands for the Lord, but they should not feel to throw themselves on the church as messengers or as called and chosen servants of Jesus to travel from place to place, or state to state, to labor and preach. Their time should not be occupied visiting the different churches; they do not [do] good this way in travelling from church to church. The churches generally are just as well off without them. They have a duty to do in case ministers are absent, to baptize or administer the ordinances. (White 1859, italics supplied)

One can correctly conclude that in 1859 lay believers were authorized by the church to baptize if ministers were absent. This implies that ministers primarily did the baptizing.

If there is a minister in reach, all right, then they should seek for the ordained minister to do the baptizing, but when the Lord works with a man to bring out a soul here and there, and they know not when the opportunity will come that these precious souls can be baptized, why he should not question about the matter, he should baptize these souls. (White 1896, italics supplied)

This statement concerns Brother Tay, a missionary to Papua New Guinea, who called for a minister from the States to baptize. White counselled him that he should not have waited for a minister, but should have done the baptizing himself.

One can correctly reckon that in 1896, ordained ministers were the primary baptizers, which is why Brother Tay called for one, and that if a minister was not available, then the discipling believer could—and should—do the baptizing.

Ellen White: An Application of Principle

One could simply accept, as policy, the recommendations made by Ellen White to believers in these two instances. But it is helpful to this discussion to investigate the principles she applied in making her recommendations. Her recommendations seem to indicate the following:
First, that she upheld the prerogative of the church to organize and delegate responsibilities for effective accomplishment of the Gospel Commission. In other words, she supported the practice which the church had in place to accomplish its mission, of delegating to pastors the responsibility for baptizing.

Second, she apparently saw no scriptural reason why lay believers should not baptize in certain circumstances. In fact, she saw reason why they must baptize.

Third, those circumstances which called for an exception to the rule that pastors baptize were situations in which waiting for a pastor would hinder the fulfilment of the Great Commission and jeopardize the advance of the gospel.

Although it is often difficult to discern the fine line between methods that accomplish the mission and the mission itself, Ellen White made that distinction in these two instances and then went on to recommend that method yield to mission, rather than the other way around.

In today’s Western culture (now globally disseminated by technology), physical accessibility to a pastor usually does not become a hindrance to the advance of the gospel. Today’s hindrances are different, but just as real. The previous pages have outlined social and cultural barriers which have become hindrances to the advance of the gospel in Western cultures and urban centers. Once identified, these can be approached using the same principles that Ellen White applied.

The times and circumstances in which God’s people take up the Gospel Commission differ widely. All must be aware of the circumstances about them. Principles help to inform the methods to be used in accomplishing what Jesus commanded.

A Base Line “Ordination” Given to All Believers

According to White, there is a base level “ordaining” conferred by Christ upon all believers for the purpose of fulfilling the Gospel Commission. Under the chapter title “Go and Teach All Nations” she writes, “All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men” (1940:822, italics supplied). Uniting souls with Christ through baptism is the work of lay believers, under the authority of Jesus Christ; and “all who take upon themselves its [the church’s] sacred vows are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ” (822, italics supplied). “Christ’s name is their [the believers] watchword,” says White, “their badge of distinction, their bond of union, the authority of their course and action, and the source of the success. Nothing that does not bear His superscription is to be recognized in His kingdom (1940:826).
There is another level of “ordaining” conferred by the church upon some individuals, typically pastors. This is the rightful domain and prerogative of a given denomination. Uniting people in membership with a denomination is the work of any person to whom a given denomination assigns this responsibility within the institution. This role, in a conventional denominational system includes the role of maintaining doctrinal purity at the point of one’s profession of faith as believers join the denomination.

To clarify, church “ordaining” is for the purpose of delegating to certain individuals the responsibility for preserving denominational identity. It is not above, better than, or more desirable than the “ordaining” conferred by Christ upon all believers for the purpose of fulfilling the Gospel Commission. In other words, church “ordaining” does not take precedence over or trump the “ordaining” conferred by Christ upon all believers; church “ordaining” has a different and separate role.

Undoubtedly, church leaders and believers are to work together. “Let ministers and lay members go forth into the ripening fields. They will find their harvest wherever they proclaim the forgotten truths of the Bible” (White 1903a). Yet, in working together, the believer’s “ordaining” from Jesus Christ himself is not to be negated by a church “ordaining.” Ordained pastors are, first and foremost, ordained lay believers, who are additionally hired and recognized by a given denomination to uphold the policies of the institution and advance its mission.

Just one sentence before White states, “Christ’s name is their watchword,” she specifically clarifies, in the context of the Great Commission, “There is no place for tradition, for man’s theories and conclusions, or for church legislation. No laws ordained by ecclesiastical authority are included in the commission. None of these are Christ’s servants to teach” (1940:826).

Ellen White understood the scope of Christ’s revolutionary inclusiveness in his commissioning of the believers to do all the work of disciple making—both teaching and baptizing, and she specifically warned church leaders from adding church legislation and human traditions with regard to the Great Commission. When church leaders add additional restrictions, which may actually cause believers to disobey their Gospel Commission, then the believer is faced with trying to reconcile the tension between church policy and Scripture.

Summary of Authority

Based on the authority of Jesus Christ himself, believers can confidently move forward as they carry out the Gospel Commission, doing all the work of disciple-making, both teaching and baptizing.
Using the principle of *sola Scriptura*, based on the authority of Jesus Christ himself, believers can confidently carry out the Gospel Commission, doing *all* the work of disciple-making. As we noted earlier,

In our time there is a wide departure from their [the reformers’] doctrines and precepts, and there is need of a return to the great Protestant principle—the Bible, and the Bible only, as the rule of faith and duty.... The same unswerving adherence to the Word of God manifested at that crisis of the Reformation is the only hope of reform today. (White 1911b:204)

“The very life of the church depends upon her faithfulness in fulfilling the Lord’s commission. To neglect this work is surely to invite spiritual feebleness and decay (White 1940:825). Therefore, whatever hinders the believers from disciple-making, hinders the fulfillment of Christ’s Gospel Commission, and to that extent invites “spiritual feebleness and decay.”

In light of the urban population explosion, the developing church crisis, and the cultural shift toward decentralization of power and authority, Christ’s authorization of all believers to “co-mission” with him is a divinely-inspired paradigm uniquely suited to the challenge. Believer mobilization and believer empowerment (or more accurately, re-empowerment) must become scalable, unlike anything we have ever seen, to levels of urban saturation.

But what about the pastors? What becomes of them, since all believers are authorized by Christ to baptize? Before addressing the biblical role and spiritual gifting of pastors, the next section looks at an existing baptismal ideology which may provide a way forward that can lessen the tension between the Bible and the *Church Manual*.

**Baptismal Practices**

Within the Seventh-day Adventist denomination there are two tracks for becoming an official church member. One is to be baptized by immersion by a church-sanctioned Adventist pastor. This baptism is typically and automatically linked with church membership.8 The second option for those who have previously been baptized by immersion is to become

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8 “Baptism—A Prerequisite to Membership—Christ has made baptism the sign of entrance to His spiritual kingdom. He has made this a positive condition with which all must comply who wish to be acknowledged as under the authority of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit” (*Church Manual* 2016:43). This quotation is then qualified in the next three paragraphs of the *Church Manual* to weld together baptism and church membership.
members by a Profession of Faith—professing the Adventist beliefs. Setting aside the first option, I will focus on the second, the Profession of Faith.

**Profession of Faith**

According to the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, “A committed Christian coming from another Christian communion who has already been baptized by immersion as practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (2016:50) may choose to become an Adventist member by publicly professing the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist denomination.

While the phrase, “as practiced by the Seventh-day Adventist Church” leaves some room for interpretation, it is arguable that in most cases of Profession of Faith, the only question regarding a candidate’s baptism is, Have you been previously baptized by immersion? If the answer is yes, then the candidate has already fulfilled church membership vow #12, as stated in the *Church Manual*: “Do you accept the New Testament teaching of baptism by immersion and desire to be so baptized as a public expression of faith in Christ and His forgiveness of your sins?” (Secretariat 2016:46).

Notice what kind of questions are not required by the *Church Manual* for Profession of Faith: Who can verify that you were indeed baptized by immersion? Who baptized you by immersion? Was this person an ordained, or otherwise church-sanctioned, member of the clergy?

Why are answers to these questions not required by the *Church Manual*? Because they do not matter biblically. Adventism understands this. In other words, the Seventh-day Adventist denomination recognizes that baptism by immersion without respect to church ordination of officiants is biblical.

The first membership track requires a church-approved officiant to legitimize the baptism while the second membership track does not require validation of any baptismal credentials of any kind, per the *Church Manual*.

**A Question of Trust**

What message does the Adventist Church communicate to committed Seventh-day Adventist modern-day missionaries who are fulfilling the Gospel Commission? Could it be that, with regard to biblical baptism, church leaders inadvertently communicate that they trust those whom they have never met more than they trust their own Adventist lay members?
By contrast, Jesus’ Great Commission, with its sweeping inclusiveness and unlimited authorization, entrusts to all of God’s people all of the work of disciple-making, both teaching and baptizing (Matt 28:18-20).

Ellen White’s commentary on Christ’s Great Commission recognizes the inclusiveness of it when, under the chapter title, “Go Teach All Nations,” she summarizes:

All the believers when Christ was on earth were included in His commission.
All believers in Christ to the end of time are included in His commission.
All to whom the heavenly inspiration has come are put in trust with the gospel.
All who receive the life of Christ are ordained to work for the salvation of their fellow men.
All who take upon themselves the sacred vows of the church are thereby pledged to be co-workers with Christ. (1940:822, bold and italics supplied)

Summary of Profession of Faith

Profession of Faith serves as one of two membership tracks for a person seeking official membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. As described in detail above, the Church Manual accepts into membership by Profession of Faith any person who states that he/she has been baptized by immersion, without further investigation of the officiant’s credentials. This indicates that the Adventist Church correctly understands that church-sanctioned ordination of a pastor is not a biblical requirement for baptizing and that Christ’s ordination of the believers is the only biblical prerequisite.

This clarity on the issue of authority as it relates to the Gospel Commission is indeed revolutionary, and it helps church leaders understand the beginning of a new revolution among the believers.

What Is the Biblical Job Description of a Pastor?

Revolutions are typically not initiated by an institution. As noted earlier, “They boiled up from the people, with the help of new, often young leaders who had not previously been heard from” (Kellerman 2012:46-47). It should not come as a surprise or an affront to pastors or church leaders that they are not necessarily the ones leading this revolution. Nor does it mean that the biblical role of a pastor is obsolete (although it may undergo some “de-celebritizing”). In fact, pastors have an important and unique contribution as they come alongside the other spiritual gifts.
A Pastor’s Job Description

If the believers are authorized by Christ to baptize, then what does a pastor do? Scripture does not leave one to wonder, guess at, or invent a job description. “Now these are the gifts Christ gave to the church: the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers. Their responsibility is to equip God’s people to do his work and build up the church, the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12, italics supplied).

Much has been written regarding this passage. One must read is Russell Burrill’s seminal dissertation called “Recovering an Adventist Approach to the Life & Mission of the Local Church,” written while Burrill was a professor at the Andrews University Theological Seminary.

For the purposes of this paper, it will only be noted that Ephesians confirms, first and foremost, that the spiritual gifting of a pastor is both relevant and necessary; and second, that these five-fold gifts share a common and crystal-clear job description, namely equipping God’s people to do the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ—in contrast to doing the work of ministry while the believers watch and/or participate at a token level.

Christ intends that his ministers shall be educators of the church in gospel work. They are to teach the people how to seek and save the lost. But is this the work they are doing? Alas, how many are toiling to fan the spark of life in a church that is ready to die. How many churches are tended like sick lambs by those who ought to be seeking for the lost sheep! And all the time millions upon millions without Christ are perishing. (White 1940:825)

Summary of a Pastor’s Job Description

In short, the biblical job description for a pastor or lay pastor becomes one of coaching, mentoring, praying, and inspiring/requiring the lay believers to be the doers of all the work of ministry. In other words, pastors are no longer the providers of the ministry. Instead, they re-empower the believers to become the providers of all the ministry, including baptizing.

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Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion Summary

In Jesus’ day, church leaders raised the question, “And who gave you authority to baptize?” The question is resurfacing today in the context of cultural change and missional need.

1. Current church practice regarding baptism follows denominationally-based job descriptions which state that only church-approved pastors and lay pastors are allowed to baptize. If needed, a conference president is allowed to authorize a local church elder to baptize.

2. According to Adventist Mission’s new release, it says that “many view the traditional church negatively” (McChesney 2018). The church is experiencing a tidal wave of cultural change both from outside and from within, all of which is brewing a crisis in which a new revolution—and opportunity—is being born.

3. As new grassroots possibilities give ordinary people ways to bypass conventional systems, people are less inclined to “ask permission” of those who see themselves as holding the authority to give permission. This challenges a fundamental assumption of institutional system thinking, specifically the belief that people will continue to ask permission.

4. The question of authority is at the heart of the new revolution, both in secular culture and in church culture. The long-held belief that church-appointed pastors are the only ones authorized to baptize is being challenged. Both Scripture and the writings of Ellen White can be used to substantiate Christ’s authority given to lay believers to both teach and baptize in fulfillment of the Gospel Commission.

5. Based on the authority of Jesus Christ himself, believers can confidently move forward as they do all the work of disciple-making, both teaching and baptizing.

6. Church leaders (“the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, and the pastors and teachers,” Eph 4:11) can confidently embrace their biblical role of equipping God’s people to do his work as outlined in the Gospel Commission.

7. By way of precedent, the current church practice of Profession of Faith informs a biblically sound paradigm for discussing the question of who is authorized to baptize.

Recommendations

Before offering recommendations and a possible way forward for church leaders and pastors, an elephant looms in the room. Even if one
were to agree that believers can baptize according to Christ’s authority alone as given in the Gospel Commission, what would happen to institutional integrity, standards, and doctrinal purity if the Seventh-day Adventist Church “authorized” believers to baptize?

Before dismissing the following recommendations too quickly, one should remember that in this new cultural mega-shift the relationship between leaders and lay people has changed: (1) believers are no longer asking permission of church leaders, and (2) many believers are appealing directly to Scripture for their authority.

What Could Be Lost?

What if pastors and church leaders ignore the developments which have been described? It should not come as a surprise—or a threat—that the revolution will simply continue. Current trends show that people are re-assembling the church outside the walls of denominations.

Some believers may tentatively stay connected with their local churches in hopes of seeing revolutionary change. But Packard warns that 104 million (and increasing) “doers” have already left their local congregations.

When it comes to the question at hand—“And who gave you authority to baptize?”—what happens if pastors and church leaders choose not to uphold Christ’s authority of the believer’s commissioning, or to embrace White’s affirmation that Christ gives authority to believers to do all the work of disciple making, both teaching and baptizing? Could it be that the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an organization may forfeit the opportunity to cooperate in providing a vehicle for the wildfire-like spread of the gospel message in today’s urban context?

What Could Be Gained?

In practical terms: first, believers would continue to baptize people based on Christ’s authority given to them in the Gospel Commission.

Second, the Seventh-day Adventist Church would retain the right to examine those who wanted to become members, no matter who baptized them—a church approved membership track that is already practiced through Profession of Faith, as discussed above. It is at this point that the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s institutional integrity, standards, and doctrinal purity are preserved and maintained.

Third, the Profession of Faith membership track would be available to people who were baptized by Adventist believers.

As stated earlier, the church is not responsible for this shift in culture. But the revolution calls for a response, one which would send a loud and clear message.
A message of trust—Seventh-day Adventist church leaders hold the ability to send a message that they trust their own members to baptize new believers as much as they trust those who have baptized people becoming Adventists by Profession of Faith.

A message of being honest with Scripture—No matter what collection of Ellen White references one brings to the table regarding this and related topics, church leaders must show that White is subject to the infallible authority of the Holy Scriptures as our “rule of faith and practice” (White 1911b:249).

If one was to remove all extra-biblical references from this paper, the Gospel Commission still stands. In other words, although the extra-biblical context is insightful and helpful, it is not the final authority for answering the question, “Who gave you permission to baptize?” Christ’s authority is clear. It is the final authority, giving eachbeliever a solid foundation for doing all the work of disciple-making.

Note again that authority: “Jesus came and told his disciples, ‘I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age’” (Matt 29:18-20). If this is followed, note the potential benefits:

A message of integrity—As noted above, modern Western culture no longer recognizes the church, and specifically its pastors, as people of integrity. This is not necessarily the church’s fault. As Adventist church leaders address the discrepancy between church policy and Christ’s authority given to all the believers, church leaders and pastors would and should be applauded for their uncompromising commitment to re-empowering (Eph 4:11-12) God’s people to do all the work of disciple-making.

A message of inclusiveness—in a world where the masses are hyper-connected via technology, people are desperate for belonging. In days past the church told people when they belonged. At the time of official membership, they moved from a “non-Adventist” status to a status of belonging. They became “an Adventist.” But in today’s culture, people decide when they belong (unless some well-meaning saint informs them that they really don’t quite belong—yet). A message of inclusiveness provides

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10 Addressing this discrepancy would be considered counter-institutional, as systems development theory states that when a system (secular or sacred) institutionalizes, its primary mission is replaced by a new mission of institutional preservation. Systems development expert Clay Shirky addresses this phenomenon in his 20-minute TED Talk (https://vimeo.com/29343101).
a place where the *process* of discipleship is celebrated (as compared to celebrating membership “arrival”). A message of inclusiveness provides a place for truth seekers, both spiritually young and old, to journey together as they discover and “gladly accept those great truths which God has caused to be proclaimed at this time, to prepare a people for the Lord’s second coming” (White 1911b:464, italics supplied).

Inclusiveness means giving people a place to belong even though they are not ready to become card-carrying members—recognizing that some and possibly most may never become official members. They still belong while they grow in the everlasting gospel.

**Specific Recommendations for Division, Unions, and Conference Leaders**

Benefitting from what could be gained is much easier said than done. How could a world church, a highly complicated and sophisticated global institutionalized system, make such a significant transition?

As mentioned above, John P. Kotter is widely regarded as one of the world’s foremost authorities on leadership and change. Not only does he insist that “the twenty-first century will force us all to evolve towards a fundamentally new form of organization” (2014:39), but he is also successfully helping companies develop what he calls a “dual operating system” (DOS) to navigate this change. While his secular perspective does not inform the message or mission of the church, his contribution presents a helpful management paradigm for leaders to avail themselves of in view of the cultural mega-shift described throughout this paper.

Kotter emphasizes that “for mature organizations, the needed path today is not to shut them down or crush them. The way forward is almost ‘to the future’—but not all the way back to the time when firms were new and very small. The needed path leads to a new version of a stage that all successful organizations pass through. It is a stage in which they employ a dual operating system” (2014:73).

In short “this is not a question of “either/or.” It’s “both/and.” Two systems that operate in concert (12).
Let me be clear, I am not talking about ever more grand interdepartmental task forces, new strategy teams following new models, innovation councils, self-directed work teams, policies that give people time to work on their own creative projects, or all of the above together. These may help movement in the right direction, but they are still just enhancements to a single system. I am talking about a bigger idea, yet one with roots in familiar structures, practices, and thinking. (Kotter 2014:12, 13)

To fully understand how a “dual operating system” functions, church leaders convinced that change must happen on their watch would need to read, digest, and integrate Kotter’s book, *Accelerate*, which provides a time-tested paradigm to address highly complicated and sophisticated global institutionalized systems. To reduce his book to a short summary would oversimplify what is needed within the Seventh-day Adventist Church to successfully transition.

Specific Recommendations for Pastors and Lay Pastors

A few “next steps” are worth noting: First, using *Accelerate* as a guide, create a local dual operating system.
Second, create a local church culture where healthy organisms continually give birth to new organisms. In a local dual operating system, some of these new organisms will follow conventional church planting methods, and some may follow new methods. Either way, the message stays consistent.

Third, become a cheerleading equipper of the saints. In other words, stop doing ministry for the believers while they only watch and applaud. Teach and train the saints to preach, visit, give Bible studies, and baptize (Eph 4:12). Then let them do it.

Encouragement for All Believers

Based on the authority of Jesus Christ himself, you can confidently move forward doing all the work of disciple-making, both teaching and baptizing. Press on, trending heavenward.

White tells us that “upon all who believe, God has placed a burden of raising up churches” (1892:315). One hundred nineteen years later, Hirsh echoes this conviction, “Every believer a church planter, every church a church-planting church” (2011).

The great lesson here taught is for all time. Often the Christian life is beset by dangers, and duty seems hard to perform. The imagination pictures impending ruin before and bondage or death behind. Yet the voice of God speaks clearly, “Go forward.” We should obey this command, even though our eyes cannot penetrate the darkness, and we feel the cold waves about our feet. The obstacles that hinder our progress will never disappear before a halting, doubting spirit. Those who defer obedience till every shadow of uncertainty disappears and there remains no risk of failure or defeat, will never obey at all. Unbelief whispers, “Let us wait till the obstructions are removed, and we can see our way clearly;” but faith courageously urges an advance, hoping all things, believing all things.

The cloud that was a wall of darkness to the Egyptians was to the Hebrews a great flood of light, illuminating the whole camp, and shedding brightness upon the path before them. So the dealings of Providence bring to the unbelieving, darkness and despair, while to the trusting soul they are full of light and peace. The path where God leads the way may lie through the desert or the sea, but it is a safe path. (White 1958:290)
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