

Gary Krause

Toward an Adventist Theology of Urban Mission

Introduction

For a global church with a baptized adult membership of more than 20 million (1.2 million in North America), a large percentage of whom live in cities, the Adventist Church has done surprisingly little work in developing a theology of the city or of mission to the city. Various Adventist theologians have addressed the topic, but a comprehensive theology of Adventist urban mission remains to be developed. The dominant Adventist discourse has seen the city as an unhealthful Vanity Fair, full of amusements, temptations, and other dangers; a threat to physical and spiritual health. This perspective has been a serious impediment to ongoing engagement of any type in the city. Indeed, in 1980 Adventist missiologist Gottfried Oosterwal claimed in *Ministry*, the church's official magazine for clergy, that "with very few exceptions, no serious, creative attempts" had been made by Adventists to reach the cities (1980:19).

Although the United States is highly urbanized, Adventist sympathies, interests, and resources have historically been largely placed elsewhere. Furthermore, when Adventist churches have been located in the cities, they have often been commuter churches, with members and attendees driving to the buildings on Saturday mornings from rural or more suburban locations. With some exceptions, Adventist mission in American cities has tended to focus on short-term events such as public evangelistic meetings. This emphasis is revealed in language such as "large-city evangelism thrusts," "public evangelism campaigns," and "citywide crusades"—language better suited to short-term military strikes than long-term ministry. Of course, there are some Adventist churches that are embedded in their local urban communities, helping their communities on an ongoing basis;

however, the “large-city evangelism thrust” is more typical of an Adventist discourse which, almost by default, turns to the method of short-term public meetings or events.

A Theological Window

As the Adventist Church looks at modern cities, the vista can be overwhelming. The city is an enigmatic phenomenon, a conglomeration of hundreds of disparate cultures, languages, and people groups. It is a complex and complicated place, resistant to easy categorization or description. Just as soon as one feels one is getting a grip on the nature of a city, a street corner is turned and another unfamiliar world opens up. The way the church views the city is of fundamental importance to the way it conducts its urban mission; therefore, in this chapter I will propose a theological window that can provide a clearer vision for Adventist urban mission. The bottom horizontal side of the window, the foundation that frames this vision, will be the biblical description of Jesus looking with compassion on the crowds of people he describes as “harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd” (Matt 9:36 NRSV). I will argue that this indicates the stance and the perspective from which Adventist urban mission must be conducted. The left side of the window frame will be the doctrine of the incarnation, modeled on the biblical account of the *logos* being transformed into human flesh in the person of Jesus, who came to live among human beings (John 1:14). In this context it will be suggested that an essential part of incarnation is the principle of contextualization, the process of adapting methods and practices according to specific situations and encounters (1 Cor 9:22). The right side of the frame will be the concept of the gospel, or good news, and its meaning in terms of salvation, reconciliation, and healing. Finally, the view of wholistic urban mission will be framed at the top of the window by the instructions given to the Jewish exiles in Babylon to work for and pray for the *shalom* of that city (Jer 29:7). *Shalom* indicates a wholistic approach where urban mission should not be fragmentary or arbitrary but should seek to provide wholistic care for the community and the individuals within it.



Figure 1. Adventist urban vision.

Some might argue that the choice of these four framing concepts is arbitrary; after all, there are many other worthy principles that could be chosen from the Bible and Christian tradition that speak to the issues of this thesis. While this might be true, it will be shown that these specific choices speak from and to fundamental issues being faced in urban communities, and they resonate with relevant beliefs and values that lie at the heart of Adventist theology.

Compassion

An Adventist theology of the city must acknowledge the church's historic lack of attention to the city, address its current engagements and non-engagements with the city, and position the city in a central part of the church's locus of care and concern. Johann Metz helpfully defines compassion as the opposite of indifference: "A participatory awareness of the stranger's suffering" (2014:30-31). The New Testament describes Jesus as displaying this type of compassion as he travels through villages and towns healing people's physical needs and telling them the good news of how they can be part of his kingdom. This is an ideal and powerful foundation for starting to frame a theological window for a clearer urban mission.

When Matthew writes that Jesus had compassion for the crowds, the Greek word used for the feeling of compassion, *splagchnizomai*, does not describe some superficial feeling, a mere metaphorical nod toward caring. It denotes almost a physical reaction, a feeling deep within one's body. Amanda Miller says this Greek word literally means "moved in the guts" (2015: 465) and Daniel Louw refers to "a theology of the intestines" (2015:8). Karl Barth writes that Jesus experiencing *splagchnizomai* meant that the sufferings and needs of others "went right into his heart, into himself, so that it was now his misery. It was more his than that of those who suffered it" (quoted in Burns 2003:47).

The continuing relevance of this depth of compassion today is reflected in a recent article in *Clinical Medicine*, where John Saunders draws from two biblical stories Jesus told, the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, to argue for more attention to compassion in health care. For Saunders, these two parables illustrate compassion as a virtue, an expression of character, and an emotional, not just a rational, response. In both of these stories, *splagchnizomai* takes center stage. First, the father in the Prodigal Son story sees from a distance his son returning home, immediately feels *splagchnizomai*, and defying cultural expectations for someone of his status, runs to his son to welcome him home (Luke 15:20). Likewise, in the Good Samaritan story a Samaritan undercuts expectations and shows *splagchnizomai* to a man brutally attacked and robbed on the road between Jerusalem and Jericho (Luke 10:33). His compassion stands out in stark contrast to the lack of compassion shown by religious leaders who passed by the injured man. As Saunders and many others recognize, biblical stories such as these "have become part of our culture" (2015:121). The power of these stories is reflected in the fact that the terms "Prodigal Son" and "Good Samaritan" have entered common vocabulary, at least in the West, and are widely understood even in non-Christian contexts.

Lack of compassion is addressed in the First Testament story of the prophet Jonah, who God calls on an urban mission to warn the people of Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrians, that their wickedness will result in their destruction. The narrative describes Jonah's initial disobedience to God's call, God's intervention, and finally Jonah's reluctant acquiescence. A key theme of the story is the lack of compassion Jonah has for the residents of Nineveh (ironically the pagan sailors in the story show more compassion for the Jewish prophet than he shows for pagan Nineveh (Jonah 1:12-14)). In a further ironic twist, Jonah becomes more upset about the death of a plant that has been sheltering him from the sun than he does about the prospective death of thousands of people in the city (4:7-10). The culmination and most important part of the story is the final verse of the book, where God asks Jonah a rhetorical question: "And

should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city?" (4:11 NRSV). The Hebrew word translated here as "concerned," *achus*, can also be translated as compassion and pity. It is used to full ironic force because a few verses earlier Jonah had felt *achus* for the plant that died. In verse 11 the translation should probably be, "Should I not be *even more* concerned about Nineveh, that great city?" God's capacity for compassion is so great that it bewilders and threatens one of his own prophets (4:1-3).

This story reveals God's concern and compassion extending through and past the Jewish community to include Gentile urban-dwellers. In the New Testament, the author Luke intentionally draws on the Jonah narrative to frame his description of the early church's first Gentile convert, Cornelius. Robert Wall outlines many of the parallels in the stories. Both Jonah and Peter are in Joppa when God calls them with a larger vision. They are both told to "arise and go." God has to intervene with both Peter and Jonah to get them to go. In both stories the Gentiles choose to believe and follow God and in both cases there is a negative reaction (Jonah himself and, in Peter's case, the leaders in Jerusalem). By constructing his story in this way, Luke adds historic precedent and legitimacy to his argument that God's redemptive mission also extends outside the Jewish community to the Gentiles (Wall 1987:80).

Compassion was a notable attribute in the lives of early Christians. Susan Wessel says that compassion is "at the very heart of the Christian tradition" and that the early Christians "defined it, argued about it, urged people to practice it, and described in graphic detail how and when it must thrive. With a shared moral concern for human flourishing, they articulated the meaning and relevance of compassion for the Christian life." Further, Wessel traces the origins of demonstrating compassion, in the sense of truly feeling for someone else's suffering, to the early Christians (2016:1, 2, 24). Sociologist Rodney Stark describes how compassionate ministry fueled the growth of the early church: "Christianity served as a revitalization movement that arose in response to the misery, chaos, fear, and brutality of life in the urban Greco-Roman world" (1996:161). He adds that Christianity's doctrines "prompted and sustained attractive, liberating, and effective social relations and organizations" (211). During times of plague and sickness, pagan priests fled the cities while Christians remained to help the sick and suffering. In an oft-quoted statement, Tertullian said: "It is our care of the helpless, our practice of loving kindness that brands us in the eyes of many of our opponents. 'Only look,' they say, 'look how they love one another!'" (87). The Emperor Julian wrote: "The impious Galileans support not only their poor, but ours as well, everyone can see that our people lack aid from us" (84).

This Christian sense of compassion for “the other” is of prime importance for a meaningful Adventist urban mission today. It means that attention and priorities should be re-focused and re-aligned not only in terms of geography toward the cities, but also in terms of motivation. Historically, for example, Adventist “success” in mission endeavors has largely been measured in terms of numbers of baptisms and membership accessions. This is what is regularly celebrated in official church reports and front-cover news stories in church magazines; however, a compassion-driven mission will measure success more in terms of no-strings-attached faithfulness, integrity, and compassion. In the early 1980s the Adventist Church in North America adopted the slogan “The Caring Church” (Johnsson 1983:11). While laudatory in its aims and message, the slogan was flawed because such a slogan is not something you award yourself; it is something that must be earned. As James Cress, then-director of the Ministerial Department at the church’s world headquarters in one of his presentations wryly observed, not even Adventists believed it.

An Adventist theology of the city must have an affirmative answer to God’s rhetorical question to Jonah, “Should I not be concerned about that great city?” That question is a heuristic ending to a short story that casts a compassionate vision. That question serves as a reminder that the church’s concern must extend past its own community of faith to others from different worldviews, cultures, beliefs, and geographical locations, including the city. An Adventist theology of mission must echo God’s concern for the city and call for a larger place for the city in the church’s mission horizon.

Incarnation

Demonstrating true compassion involves intimacy and close identification, which leads to the left side of the Adventist Urban Vision frame, incarnation. The dominant Adventist discourse of encouraging church members to live away from the cities has led to an understanding of urban mission as something that should be conducted at a distance, from outside the cities. This approach often calls on an “outpost evangelism” narrative to support it. This narrative is based on Ellen White’s writing about “outpost centers,” which may be interpreted as places where “workers” could live safely away from the cities, and travel into the cities to minister. In a recent paper (2018), David Trim and Ashlee Chism argue that White’s outpost concept was more nuanced than simply a rural base from which Adventists could make safe sorties into the city. These centers were envisaged as places of rural reinvigoration, where church workers and other city-dwellers could come to be refreshed. White never departed from the

view that work would have to be done from within the cities, not just from outside them. However, as George Knight points out, the narrative of urban ministry from a distance has received most of the press within Adventism, which has downplayed or ignored White's wider perspective on city mission (Knight 2013:716).

The ministry-from-a-distance narrative has conveniently matched Adventists' preference for rural living. Trim, for example, points to a decline in Adventist urban mission in the years leading up to 1920. One of the major reasons for this is that "it was difficult, dirty, smelly, insalubrious work, involving ministry to the working classes, to immigrants, to African Americans, to the poor and the prostitutes—all this meant it attracted social stigma. But Seventh-day Adventists wanted to be respectable" (Trim 2017:13). There has also been a certain Adventist attraction to out-sourcing urban "evangelism" to literature distribution, social media, television and radio programs, or to professional evangelists who can come into the city and run public meetings for a few weeks, without any need for ongoing commitment of time and resources by church members.

However, any attempt to reduce mission to something conducted from a distance or by proxy negates the biblical view of incarnational ministry, which the apostle John describes in John 1 in terms of the *logos*. To Jewish readers, the concept of the *logos* had a direct connection to their understanding of the Word of God that created the world, as well as to his teachings, or law (Deut 32:45-47). For Greek readers, *logos* had other meanings. According to Greek philosophers, for example, the *logos* was the all-pervasive life force balancing the natural world and keeping the universe together (Hendricks 2014). The symmetry of a leaf, the harmony of the seasons, the stars in the sky, all were kept in balance by the *logos*. For both the Jewish and the Greek reader, John makes a startling claim: this *logos* became flesh and broke into human history in a specific place at a specific time with a specific purpose—to bring salvation to humanity. As John writes, "And the Word [*logos*] became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14 NRSV).

The incarnation of the *logos* is a central theme in the prolific writings of John Chrysostom, a fourth-century Greek bishop, who uses the Greek word *sunkatabasis* to capture the concept of God's considerateness and accommodation in coming to earth in human form (John 1:14). Often this word is translated as "condescension," but David Rylaarsdam argues convincingly that "adaptability" more fully represents its meaning (2000:19). It is a rich Greek word, and Chrysostom draws a direct link between the *sunkatabasis* displayed by Jesus in taking on human flesh, and the *sunkatabasis* displayed by the apostle Paul (see, e.g., Rylaarsdam 312, 320). In his first letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul describes

his mission methodology in terms of adapting to his audience. He writes: “For though I am free with respect to all, I have made myself a slave to all, so that I might win more of them. To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. . . . I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings (1 Cor 9:19-23 NRSV).

On the surface this may seem a problematic admission of dishonesty, of pretending to be somebody you are not, or acting in a way that is false. However, here Paul is not talking about deception, but rather about translation; shaping himself and his message to make it meaningful and understandable to different people groups. Chrysostom compares Paul to a physician who uses different treatments for different patients, and to a teacher who varies his speech for different students (Reis 2007:26). David Reis argues that, like the incarnation of Jesus, Paul’s methodology represents “a deliberate modification of his presentations and a lowering of his own status for the sake of connecting with the intellectual capabilities of his audience” (27). Paul follows a distinct pattern when he is ministering to Jewish people and to those who “feared God” (see Acts 17:1-3), which is vastly different from the approach he uses when talking to pagans (see Acts 14:15-17). Paul felt comfortable with sharing from the Old Testament with Jews because it was a commonly accepted text from which to work, and he then uses this text as a springboard for discussing Jesus. However, when talking to pagans he never appeals to scripture as an authority. Instead, he refers to the natural world, which he uses as a basis for talking about the creator (Acts 17:22-28).

The *sunkatabasis* or contextualization in the lives of Jesus and Paul models a depth of connection that cannot be achieved at a distance and, for both of them, the purpose of this connection was mission. Jesus’ mission involved revealing God in a way that humans could grasp, at least as much as it is possible for humans to grasp (John 14:7-11; 1:18). The apostle Paul adapted himself and his message for the purposes of his mission, which was “that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:23 NRSV). An authentic Adventist urban mission, likewise, must discover appropriate forms of *sunkatabasis* for ministry in urban communities. Although the church may not always live up to the ideal of it being a center for healing and wholeness, it still has spiritual resources to reach out to help the varieties of brokenness that are found in the city. However, it cannot do it on its own terms. It must incarnate into the community not as a rigid institution or a silver-bullet solution, but as an adaptable agency of compassion and *shalom*.

This may involve shedding cultural norms and traditions that help define a rural Adventism that may not be appropriate to the realities and

rhythms of the city. This could include a range of changes: from something as superficial as the timing of its worship services and activities to something as significant as meeting in homes or cafes rather than in church buildings with pews. It should mean that the Adventist expressions of mission should be organic so that it will look and sound different according to geographical location and the different needs of different people groups even within the same city. Centers of Influence should be embedded into the fabric of the community, ministering to and with the community, not alien imports operating on their own terms. The guiding principle is that the purpose of *sunkatabasis* is more effective mission to others, not greater comfort for church members.

Salvation

An incarnated, practising *sunkatabasis* church will seek to bring healing to the brokenness and alienation in lives and communities, a concept that frames the urban vision window on the right side. In “The Great Towns” chapter of *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, Friedrich Engels writes of “the brutal indifference” and “unfeeling isolation” that arises from humans crowded together in cities. Although Engels describes this estrangement as being part of the general human condition, he sees it manifest most markedly in cities. “The dissolution of mankind into monads,” he writes, “of which each one has a separate principle, the world of atoms, is here carried out to its utmost extreme” (1950:24).

Rahel Jaeggi argues, the concept of alienation depends on the assumption that there is such a thing as an objective human purpose or good. But such an assumption flies in the face of the fundamental liberal ideas that each individual manages her own life, and defines for herself what the good life is for her (2014:28, 29). Thus, for theorists who can no longer accept that there is some kind of fundamental human nature or essence, the concept of alienation is rendered meaningless. In other words, there is no objective standard from which alienation can be measured.

And yet the concept of alienation is such a rich tool for understanding human relations and society that theorists are reluctant to lose it. As prominent philosopher Axel Honneth says, “Our philosophical vocabulary lacks something important if it no longer has the concept of alienation at its disposal” (2014, vii, viii). Likewise, his colleague Frederick Neuhouser argues that there is a need to resurrect the theoretical concept of alienation to more sufficiently account for the various forms of estrangement faced today. These forms of estrangement include such things as a lack of meaning, indifference, and “bifurcation of the self” (2014:xi). The nature of the

city tends to concentrate and magnify these forms of estrangement, functioning almost like a human laboratory where the extraordinary density of people living in close proximity serves to, almost counter-intuitively, magnify forms of dislocation and alienation.

Lostness is a major theme in the teachings of Jesus, and in the story of his encounter with a tax collector named Zacchaeus he links it to the concept of salvation. Details are limited regarding the encounter, but in the end, Zacchaeus appears as a changed man, repenting of his past fraud and vowing to make restitution to people he has cheated. In response, Jesus declares that salvation has come to his house and, further, that Zacchaeus's experience illustrates his mission, which is "to seek and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10 RSV). The Greek word translated "lost" (and the same is true for the Hebrew word) has as its root meaning destruction. Thus, the passage seems to indicate that Zacchaeus had been travelling down a dangerous and destructive pathway, where money and possessions had become more important than people, and he was lost in his badly misguided priorities. Because of Jesus, he repents, which literally means he turns around, and starts walking in the opposite direction. The corrupt, materialistic path he had been on was one of lostness and destruction; his new path is one of healing and salvation. The good news Jesus offered allowed Zacchaeus to find a new and more flourishing or abundant life.

The Zacchaeus story is a reminder that there are various forms of lostness and it is not only the urban poor who may be experiencing the condition, but also the occupants of multi-million dollar apartments who have full bank accounts but empty lives.

Earlier in the book of Luke Jesus tells three stories about lostness (the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son), which also take place in the context of the larger etymological meaning of destruction (Luke 15). This sheep is not only lost, it would face all sorts of mortal dangers outside the safety of the sheepfold (v. 4). Likewise, the coin, although it obviously has no consciousness, completely loses its worth buried hidden in a dusty corner somewhere (v. 8). And the lostness of the son, revealed in his going to a far country and indulging in "dissolute living," takes on a harder, more dangerous edge when his money and his friends run out, and he is forced to deny his religious-cultural heritage and identity, and work in a pig pen just to survive (vv. 13-15 NRSV). The pivotal moment for the young man is when he "came to himself" and realized he would be better off even as a servant in his father's house (v. 17 NRSV).

Jesus describes the son finding his way home physically, but not emotionally or psychologically. He heads for home in great shame, with no anticipation or conception of the depth of his father's unconditional love that will be revealed in his welcome, and his father's total disinterest in

his son's rehearsed speech of contrition. When his father sees him from a far distance, he runs to him and embraces him. It is at that moment that the son begins to shed his lostness, and to bask in the joy of being where he belongs (15:17-22). In these stories, Jesus illustrates what he calls the "good news of the kingdom." The father commands the preparation of the fatted calf to care for the physical needs of his son, who no doubt has grown skinny and unwell from the nutritional limitations of eating pig food. However, the command is more than that. It is an acknowledgment that they will eat and celebrate at the table together, with all the resonances of acceptance and fellowship that accompany that act. Moreover, he is given a ring for his finger and fresh garments to wear, symbolizing celebration, acceptance, re-alignment, and a fresh start (vv. 22-24).

Jesus does not give details about the far country to which the son went. Chances are he went to a city, and the city provides the perfect incubator for losing one's identity and direction. Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard was also a frequent walker of city streets. He rarely left the city and, in fact, lived most of his life within a one kilometer radius of Copenhagen's Vor Frue Kirke. This was the church he attended, occasionally spoke at and, despite his lifelong struggles against the state church and what it represented, where his funeral was held (Lippitt and Pattison 2013:44). A popular view has Kierkegaard pounding the streets of Copenhagen day and night, literally wearing out pair after pair of shoes, while his thoughts were a million miles away. According to this view, although city streets provided the physical stage or backdrop to much of his writing, his true concerns lay elsewhere. In other words, although Kierkegaard was physically located in Copenhagen, for all practical purposes his intellectual universe was unconstrained and unaffected by what was happening around him. He was in the city, but not of the city.

Although there may be an element of truth to this narrative, it became increasingly less true the longer Kierkegaard lived in the city. Kierkegaard expressed disdain for a merely intellectual faith, and argued that the challenge was to practice Christianity "here in Copenhagen, in Amager Square, in the everyday hustle and bustle of weekday life" (quoted in Lippitt and Pattison 2013:45). In 1855 he wrote, "So preaching should not take place in churches, but on the street, in the midst of life, in the reality of the daily workaday world" (quoted in Garff 2007:703). In other words, salvation was not just a theoretical concept to bounce around in the head and on to paper but must find its meaning and expression in city streets, where people are easily lost. According to his biographer Joakim Garff, Kierkegaard's social and political conscience was transformed after the 1840s. In fact, Kierkegaard went so far as to blame the established church for contributing to the rise of the proletariat and its associated

ills. He wrote: “What is unchristian and ungodly is to base the state on a substratum of people whom one ignores totally, denying all kinship with them—even if on Sundays there are moving sermons about loving ‘the neighbor’ (2007:704, 705). For Kierkegaard an active and authentic Christianity will, as Dooley says, “involve “rethinking our identity so as to include those whom we consider alien, other, or foreign” (Dooley 2001:193).

For Kierkegaard, city streets were more than just another color to add to his literary palette; they were the location where theology should be put into action. In addition, this is the task of practical theology, to put working clothes on theology, to show how it speaks from, in, and into situations people face in their lives.

In many ways the challenges of urban life in Kierkegaard’s time are echoed in today’s cities. Silvia Walsh says that “ironic negativity, isolation, anxiety and despair, lack of passion, aimless becoming and bourgeois aestheticism” were characteristic of Kierkegaard’s time (quoted in Dooley 2001:151). This type of spiritual anomie can be traced from the biblical Garden of Eden story in the beginning of Genesis through to the restored New Earth of Revelation. Alienation remains a key theme throughout the life and history of Israel. It was naturally felt most strongly during times of physical exile, but also often existentially with feelings of abandonment and isolation from God. This can be seen most passionately in the Psalms of Lament.

Weaving through this discourse is what Walter Brueggemann calls a prominent theme of hope that, despite separation and alienation, Israel will once again experience “companionship and community.” He sees this hope reflected later in the apostle Paul’s words in the New Testament. “For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor heights, nor depths, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the Love of God (in Christ Jesus our Lord) [Rom 8:38-39]” (Brueggemann 1999:109). Importantly, rather than just hoping and waiting for an end to alienation and separation, Paul says that Jesus’ followers are to actively work for healing and restoration, “[He] gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:28). This is a helpful way of looking at salvation. As John Milbank writes, “The central aspect of salvation is the creation of perfect community between humans and between humans and God” (2009:345). Likewise Jürgen Moltmann says that salvation “offers us total life in this divided life” and is “a renewal of life” (Moltmann and Kohl 2012:37).

In some ways it is surprising that Adventism has tended to emphasize a more narrow view of salvation, focusing mainly on individuals “getting to heaven.” It is surprising because such a focus downplays many of the

important themes that run through beliefs that are so pivotal to the church such as biblical creation, the nature of humans, and the seventh-day Sabbath. These tenets of belief are rich in themes of restoration, wholeness, and renewal taking place, not just in the new earth, but here and now. It would be well for the church to listen to Johann Metz's prophetic critique of what he calls "bourgeois Christianity's" apathy in prioritizing doctrinal correctness and saving individual sinners, while overlooking social injustices and failing to show solidarity with the suffering (Wessel 2016:28).

A theology focused almost exclusively on "getting to heaven" can overlook the immediate dimensions of salvation for emotional and physical healing, the more abundant life Jesus promises, and the wider implications of salvation for endeavors such as justice, peace-making, and ecological stewardship. Adventist theologian Richard Rice points out that a wholistic view of humanity acknowledges the wide range of dimensions that make us human, "the physical, mental, emotional, social, and spiritual." Each aspect of these dimensions has been damaged, in some way, through alienation from God and his instructions. In the face of this, humans need a salvation that is also wholistic, that speaks to each of these dimensions. Rice writes: "A wholistic view of salvation will envision the eventual restoration of our humanity—in all its essential aspects. Salvation involves physical, emotional, social, spiritual, social (sic), and mental renewal" (2011:135).

Shalom

Theologian Randy Woodley describes a connection between this wholistic view of God's salvation, which includes his creative, healing, and restoring activity, and the biblical concept of *shalom*—which is the final side to complete the theological framing of an Adventist urban vision. Woodley refers to the reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles that the apostle Paul speaks of in Ephesians 2:14, and says that acts of creation, of building harmony, and of reconciliation, culminate in *shalom* (2012:43). *Shalom*, a multi-layered Hebrew word, is rich in meaning, including peace, prosperity, welfare, and wholeness. The central place it should play in urban ministry is highlighted in the experience of the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Psalm 137 sets the stage as it captures a poignant moment in the sixth century BCE as Jewish exiles sit beside Babylonian rivers, lamenting a lost Jerusalem. They are alienated emotionally, physically and spiritually from their physical and spiritual home. Their captors command them to sing, but they cry out, "How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?" (Ps 137:1-4 KJV). This is a fundamental missiological question. How do God's followers sing his song in new and unfamiliar territories, among

different cultural and religious groups, in large urban areas where they do not feel at home, where they have not yet found their voice? In the book of Jeremiah God instructs the exiles how to sing his song in their new alien urban environment. He dashes their all-consuming hope of quickly returning to their beloved homeland. Instead, he tells them to settle down, build houses, plant gardens, marry, and, perhaps most significantly, seek the *shalom* of the city: “But seek the welfare [*shalom*] of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare [*shalom*] you will find your welfare [*shalom*] (Jer 29:7 NRSV).

Walter Brueggemann and D. Patrick define *shalom* as “a harmonious, properly functioning, life-giving order to society” (2006:169). Nicholas Wolterstorff says that Old Testament writers understood *shalom* as “flourishing.” It is the life that “goes well” and is “rightly related” to God (2008:18, 19). As the exiles pray and work for the *shalom* of the city they, too, will flourish. It is one thing for the psalmist to call for people to pray for the *shalom* of their beloved Jerusalem (Ps 122:6). It is quite another thing for God to tell them to work and pray for the *shalom* of a pagan enemy, who has forced them to live in a pagan city. Also shocking is that they are not to set up a separate Jewish enclave in the city of Babylon which, sociologically speaking, would be a natural inclination for a group of refugees. After all, it would be so much easier if they kept together as a cultural and religious family. It would also be easier if they kept together as a cultural and religious family. It would also be easier to keep the Sabbath, to eat kosher food, to avoid idolatrous Babylonian practices, to sing songs of Zion together, and to comfort each other with shared memories and hopes. However, God tells them to do the exact opposite, to engage in their society, to bring *shalom* to the city. There are no specific details on how the exiles responded to this request. But in the stories of the young men Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, the ancient book of *Daniel* represents at least some of the exiles taking on political and civic responsibilities in which they could work for the *shalom* of Babylon (Dan 1:18-21, 2:48-49, 3:30, 5:29).

The Second Testament continues the theme of *shalom* and the Greek word *eiréné* carries much of its meaning, including associations with salvation (e.g., Luke 7:50). In his ministry of *eiréné*, Jesus continues the *shalom* tradition in the towns and villages where he ministered. He does teach in synagogues, but they are not the focus or center of his wholistic mission. Rather, his healing hand and voice brings *shalom* to blind men beside dusty roads, women gathered by wells, and tax collectors in trees. Ellen White summarizes his *shalom* ministry as involving five components: mingling with people, showing sympathy to them, ministering to their needs, winning their confidence, and bidding them to follow him (1942:143).

Shalom is a wholistic term, and in Jesus' ministry one can see modelled a wholistic ministry that balanced spiritual and physical dimensions. "Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom, and curing every disease and every sickness" (Matt 9:35 RSV). The official mission statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reflects a wholistic approach and lists its four major tasks as preaching, teaching, healing, and discipling. Under "healing" it states, "Affirming the biblical principles of the well-being of the whole person, we make the preservation of health and the healing of the sick a priority and through our ministry to the poor and oppressed, cooperate with the Creator in His compassionate work of restoration" (General Conference Committee 2009). The church's seventh fundamental belief states: "Though created free beings, each is an indivisible unity of body, mind, and spirit, dependent upon God for life and breath and all else" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 2015:4). Ginger Hanks-Harwood writes that this wholism is "the very cornerstone" on which much of the church's work has been built (1995:127), and a North American survey in the 1980s showed that Adventist theologians viewed "wholism" as the church's major contribution to the world (Bull and Lockhart 2008:33).

Adventists often refer to medical and health work as the "right arm of the message," an expression derived from Ellen White's writings (2002:134). As Adventist historian Arthur Patrick writes, "Suffice it to say that 'the right arm of the message' is so important to the body of Adventism that without it we would lack the wholeness and strength to aggressively press forward with our mission to bring good news to every 'nation, tribe, language and people' (Rev 14:6 NIV)" (2004). White was also the "architect and chief promoter" (Kuhlampi 2010:30) of what is today known as the "Adventist lifestyle," and her philosophy of health has been the subject of much research and discussion (see, e.g., Reid 1982; Schaefer 1997; Robinson 1955; Bull and Lockhart 2007; Numbers 2007). John Harvey Kellogg and his Battle Creek Sanitarium gave early expression to her vision, which today is reflected in the largest unified Protestant health system in the world, an international network of more than 600 hospitals, sanitariums, clinics and dispensaries. In fact, the church employs more than 93,000 people in health-related professions, which is more than the total number of Adventist pastors and teachers combined. The church's health emphasis also includes long-standing public health advocacy through a wide variety of programs and initiatives promoting a plant-based diet and alcohol and drug-free living.

The church's commitment to wholism is reflected also in its philosophy of education, which again is also heavily indebted to Ellen White. She

writes that true education “has to do with the whole being. . . . It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers” (2011:13). This wholistic approach to education is today demonstrated, to varying degrees, in more than 7,500 schools, colleges and universities around the world.

The Adventist wholistic approach to urban mission is further bolstered by three key doctrines: the church’s understanding of human nature, its experience of Sabbath, and its conviction to share the gospel in the lead-up to the Second Coming. Adventists reject the Platonic separation of human body and soul and hold to the Jewish understanding of the inseparability of human and spiritual life from bodily experience. As Richard Rice says, humans *are* bodies (they do not *have* bodies), and they *are* souls (they do not *have* souls). This is not a uniquely held Adventist view, and is now almost a theological commonplace among respected theologians, but it allows Adventists to celebrate human nature, the body, and life (Rice 2006:5, 6). From this perspective, theology should not turn into academic discussions divorced from direct application to life. In addition, a wholistic urban ministry will not be content with caring only about some special spiritual dimension in people’s lives. True mission will speak to the whole person.

The Adventist concept of the seventh-day Sabbath is also foundational to its wholistic approach to ministry (Tonstad 2009). Adventists have often weakened the Sabbath doctrine, reducing it to a debate over whether to worship on Sunday or Saturday. While not sacrificing commitment to the importance of the seventh day, in more recent years Adventist theologians have sought to also recapture the existential heart of the Sabbath and to reclaim its spiritual strength as an antidote to personal and social alienation and dislocation. Of course, it is largely a question of emphasis. Within Adventist history there has always been a rich vein of writing and thinking that explores the human benefits of the Sabbath. Decades earlier, for example, Ellen White wrote: “The Sabbath is a sign of creative and redeeming power; it points to God as the source of life and knowledge; it recalls man’s primeval glory, and thus witnesses to God’s purpose to re-create us in His own image. . . . [In the Sabbath] He preserves for the family opportunity for communion with him, with nature, and with one another” (1923:50).

A proper understanding of the Sabbath is of particular relevance to Adventist urban mission. Research shows that the combination of social density and social isolation of the city, connected to a feeling of being in an uncontrollable environment, is a significant factor in pathogenic urban stress (Adli et al. 2017:184). The randomness and unpredictability associated with urban living can, in itself, contribute to a feeling of helplessness

and lack of control. In such an environment, initiatives for coherence and organization can lower levels of stress.

Psychological studies, for example, suggest that rituals such as the Sabbath can “reduce anxiety and uncertainty” and “create meaning in life, foster personal identity, and overcome ambivalence and ambiguity.” It also plays a bonding role and can foster a sense of community (Dein and Loewenthal 2013:1383). The ritual of Sabbath provides a weekly lived experience that can provide a tangible oasis from dislocating forces in the city. Adventists see the seventh-day Sabbath as a 24-hour immersion in physical, emotional, and spiritual rest and renewal. It is a weekly time to subvert the dominance, particularly evident in urban areas, of busyness, acquisition, entertainment, business, and markets. It is a reminder that people are more important than things. Adventist theologian Sigve Tonstad, for example, says: “The Sabbath brings a message of togetherness instead of separation, permanence instead of subjugation, continuity instead of discontinuity, wholeness instead of disintegration” (2009:514). In addition, Sabbath is rich with implications for ecological concerns and social justice—concepts of increasing importance in urban areas.

The other half of the name Seventh-day Adventist suggests another central emphasis—the second coming of Jesus. In the one-and-a-half centuries since its establishment in 1863, the Adventist Church’s focus on preparing for the second coming has led it to be in a hurry and it was all but inevitable that direct evangelism in various forms would tend to dominate its agenda. The tenacity to which Adventists hold to hope in the second coming is matched by a pessimism about establishing utopia on earth. Central in their belief is that only at the Parousia will final and true justice, freedom, and harmony be inaugurated. And yet while pointing to the importance and urgency of the second coming, the church has somehow managed to also invest billions of dollars to “do business” on earth while waiting for him to return (Luke 19:13 RSV), establishing schools, hospitals, publishing houses, food companies, and numerous other endeavors. The instruction to the Jewish exiles to work for and pray for the *shalom* of the city while waiting to return to Jerusalem is a reminder to the Adventist Church to not have its sights fixed so firmly on the second coming of Jesus that it forgets its responsibilities here on earth. The promise of Jesus’ return (John 14:1-4) is also a reminder not to have its sights fixed so firmly on this earth that it forgets about that return.

Conclusion

The Adventist theological framework suggested in this chapter has as its foundation a larger Christian framework and consists largely of

insights shared with other Christians. As Adventism brings to the theological table its own touch, its own history, its own insights, its own confusions, it should do so from a stance of humility and gratitude to the wider Christian community. However, it does have its own voice, and this chapter has endeavored to suggest a way that its practice and beliefs can come together in a unique, compassionate, adaptable package that marries the spiritual with the physical, and that this can be its strength for serving urban communities. As the Adventist Church moves forward into the 21st Century, it must allow the principle of the *shalom*-making ministry of Jesus to guide its discourse about cities and mission to cities. At various points in its history, Adventists have impacted their urban communities with *shalom* and care, but too easily this has been discarded or relegated low on the church's list of priorities. Clearly, Jesus' *shalom* ministry demonstrates that urban ministry involves words and action. It cannot be done from a religious enclave or on a short-term basis with only passing contact. It involves rubbing shoulders, touching hands, looking into eyes with compassion (Matt 9:36). It is not just about *telling* people about the truth of the *logos* but *demonstrating* the truth of the *logos*. In any city, parks should be cleaner, children better-educated, the hungry better-fed, the poor less-exploited, the elderly less lonely, and the spiritually bankrupt more enriched because Adventists are working for and praying for the *shalom* of the city.

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Gary Krause is director of the Office of Adventist Mission at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, which cares for raising mission awareness and church planting. He is currently completing a PhD in wholistic urban mission through the University of Queensland, Australia.