Introduction

In 1990, when I moved to South Africa to continue studying for a Bachelor of Theology degree at Helderberg College in Somerset West, the country was in the midst of an unprecedented socio-political uncertainty. On February 11, Nelson Mandela walked to freedom after 27 years in prison and a new era started for all South Africans. For the majority, the gate of freedom began opening wide. For others, a tower of racial supremacy began falling down.

Throughout nearly 30 years of post-apartheid era the Seventh-day Adventist Church has experienced multiple challenges and changes. The country’s socio-cultural transformation, on the one hand, has brought distress, segregation, and the disintegration of strong faith communities. On the other hand, it has offered mission outreach possibilities never seen during the imposed apartheid regime. Some churches have embraced diversity and are overcoming cross-cultural barriers with a spirit of reconciliation and tolerance, while others are still battling to continue being meaningful in multi-ethnic urban centers.

Ethnic conflict became more evident with the increase of the urban population as a reaction to the end of apartheid, which had also the purpose of preventing urbanization (Collison, Tollman, and Kahn 2007). Palanivel (2017) warns that more than two-thirds of the population around the world will be living in urban settings by 2050. The fastest growth rate will take place mainly in developing countries in Africa, which is projected to jump from 40 percent to 56 percent by 2050.
The rapid demographic changes in South African urban centers in the last three decades raises several questions. How is the Seventh-day Adventist Church facing the challenges of cultural diversity and rapid urbanization? What are the mission opportunities in the post-apartheid era? Is the church leadership managing these changes well? Is the church able to maintain its unity in diversity? How do Adventist members identify themselves in the post-apartheid era?

In 2011, I returned to South Africa with my family to serve for five years as a pastor in an Anglo-Luso multicultural district in Johannesburg, composed of ethnic groups from Portugal, Brazil, Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi, and Congo. Ministering to these faith communities was for me the most rewarding and learning journey as I participated in their struggle to find identity and unity in Christ in a multicultural and complex urban setting.

This article explores the cultural-ethnic diversity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa and its development in urban centers since the end of Apartheid. It examines challenges and opportunities for the transition to multicultural churches, and concludes by arguing that the culture of racial prejudice and suspicion can only be eradicated with the weapons of trust, faith, hope, and love.

**Background**

**The Context of South Africa**

In 1652, a Dutch East India company established a trading post to resupply ships passing by the Cape of Good Hope on their way to India (Wiley n.d.). The English arrived 150 years later and tried to dominate the native population (SAHO 2016a) and the Dutch (Pretorius 2011).

After two centuries of confrontations, a strong White supremacy was enforced in the mid-1900s through the introduction of apartheid laws (SAHO 2016b). Apartheid is a word of Dutch origin, which means separateness in Afrikaans. It was the name given to the political regime that prevailed in the country from 1948 to 1990. Blacks could vote in separate rolls, they were not allowed to own land, and their pension was less than one-third of the maximum payable to Whites (SAHO 2016c). The officialization of apartheid in 1948 raised many questions all around the world. Some politicians and historians understood it “as a 20th-century development, closely linked to the peculiar evolution of South African capitalism, with its strong reliance on cheap Black labor” (Wiley n.d.).

The Whites, who were only about 20 percent of the population by the 1980s (Szayna 1997:190), controlled 80 percent of the land (History.com...
racial disproportional rights were not unnoticed by the rest of the world. The first declaration against apartheid was published by the United Nations and a special committee was created to order a South African embargo for arms, oil, cultural/sports, and it announced the South Africa’s constitution invalid (UNRIC 2018).

Nelson Mandela, the most popular critic of the White supremacy, spent 27 years in jail and was released in 1990 by F. W. de Klerk who embraced Mandela’s cause and together they wrote a brand new anti-apartheid constitution, for which both shared a Nobel Peace Prize (History.com 2010). When Mandela was elected president in 1994, de Klerk was his second-in-command; however, South African Whites and Blacks did not meld as quickly or as closely as Mandela and de Klerk.

In the past 25 years, Black income inequality remains (Mufson 2014). The right and redistribution of land was promised but the process is very slow and polemical (Stoddard 2016). This inequality has produced frustration often resulting in violence. White farmers are continuously being attacked (Chung 2017) and often being victims of robbery or rape (Dixon 2015). A strategy to combat this inequality was implemented by the South African government called Black Economic Empowerment, which “does not aim to take wealth from one group and give it to another. It is essentially a growth strategy, targeting the South African economy’s weakest point: inequality” (Schussler 2018).

As one of the most urbanized countries in the continent (Bakker, Parsons, and Rauch 2015:7), South Africa’s process of urbanization is very different when compared to other countries. With a population of around 53 million and the urban growth rate at 1.33 percent (CIA 2018), “around two-thirds of South Africa’s total population live in urban areas” (Sawe 2019 ), in the ten metropolises of Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Germiston-Ekurhuleni, Tshwane, Nelson Mandela Bay, Buffalo City, Manguang, Emfuleni, and Polokwane.

During the apartheid regime, Black South Africans were forced to live in so-called homelands and townships. During the transition to democracy, the new constitution revoked all restrictions, and as of June 1991, Black South Africans were permitted to move freely for the first time after the organization of the state in 1910. This freedom generated rapid domestic migration producing unprecedented urban challenges in areas of infrastructure, education, the health system, employment, housing, traffic, and security during the 1990s and 2000s (Bakker et al. 2015:2).

South Africa recognizes eleven official languages and is known for its diversity of cultures, languages, and religious beliefs. South Africans are
proud of their history and the richness resulting from the blend between European, Indian, and African cultures, despite often-conflictual ethnic relations.

The Context of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa

Georg Schmidt was the first Protestant missionary to arrive at the Cape of Good Hope in 1737. He found the first Protestant mission called the Moravian Brethren, followed by hundreds of other brave Europeans, like the acclaimed Robert Moffat in 1820 and David Livingstone in 1841 (Graves 2010).

Adventism arrived in South Africa in July 1887, through two missionary families: C. L. Boyd and D. A. Robinson. A few years earlier, William Hunt, a North American Adventist miner, distributed leaflets to Pieter Wessels and George Van Druten who were impressed by the truth about the Sabbath and wrote to the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church requesting a missionary to be sent to South Africa. In the mid-1870s and by 1878 several Europeans were converted to Adventist doctrines. The first Adventist church was organized by Boyd, in Beaconsfield, Kimberley (Land 2009:280-281).

Today, the Seventh-day Adventist administration is under a single organizational office located in Bloemfontein, called the Southern Africa Union Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. However, this was not always the case.

In its history the Church in South Africa, on a national level, has moved from a unitary organizational unit, formed in 1902 as the South African Conference, to a fully segregated structure consisting, firstly, of a Group I and Group II under a South African Union Conference—Group I for Whites and Group II for all other races. This evolved at a later stage to the formation of the South African Union Conference—White, Coloured and Indian—and the Southern Union Mission Conference—Black. Only in 1991 the two latter Unions merged to form the Southern Africa Union Conference—reverting to a unified organizational entity. (du Preez 2010:1)

Douglas Chalele was elected as the union president—the first non-White elected to head the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s work in South Africa. In 1994, the first merger at [the] local conference level occurred between the Oranje-Natal Conference (predominately White) and the Natal Field (predominately Black) to form the Kwazulu Natal Free State Conference. (Pantalone 1999:175)
In 1997, the South African Union Conference Executive Committee presented the following statement to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC):

We are constrained therefore by the love of God that has grown more keenly in our hearts to confess that we have misrepresented the gospel of Christ in our sins of omission and commission regarding apartheid. We realize that this has had a hurtful effect on our society, on our corporate church and its individual members. We are deeply sorry and plead for the forgiveness of God and our fellow citizens. (Pantalone 1999:310)

In 1996, the Cape Conference (White), the Good Hope Conference (colored), and the Southern Conference (Black) started talking about merging, but their agreement did not receive the required 75 percent vote from the White Cape Conference delegates (Bruyns 1996). However, a year later, the Good Hope & Southern Conferences merged to become the Southern Hope Conference. For almost 10 years, the Cape Conference continued to operate a parallel church organization in the Cape area. It was only realigned in March 19, 2006, when under pressure from the General Conference, it merged with the Southern Hope Conference to form the Western Cape Conference. The White Seventh-day Adventist church members were supporting a court-case until recently to interrogate the legality of such a process (Crocombe 2007:6). With the merger of the Cape Conference and the Southern Hope Conference, it ended the era of separation on racial grounds of the Adventist Church in the Cape area.

As for the northern part of South Africa, on March 26, 2006, the Transvaal Conference (mainly White) and the Transvaal Orange Conference (mainly Black) formed a constituency with the purpose of merging, but it failed as the delegates did not participate in the process and the meeting was canceled (du Preez 2010:5). In November 2011, a restructuring meeting was held and after two days of deliberations, Transvaal Conference delegates voted “No” for the fusion of both local Conferences based in Johannesburg. David C. Spencer, the president of the Transvaal Conference argued:

Real unity requires the acceptance of diversity. Our multicultural Church faces a tremendous challenge in this respect, as the issue is often reduced to only “Black and White.” In our Conference, we have been actively pursuing the evangelistic strategy to reach the “hard-to-reach,” the “unreached” and the “least-reached” people. We will need to exercise courage to safeguard the spreading of the gospel message
to minorities of this Conference and this country. Although many will oppose our efforts, and call us racists, UNLESS we make a special effort to retain the work amongst our minorities, soon these population groups will be obsolete. This has already happened in Zimbabwe, England and France (to name a few examples). It is already happening very quickly in South Africa too. For this reason our Conference remains relevant to the call of the Great Gospel Commission and is central to the continuance of minority work in SAU. Yet at the same time, sensitivity should be exercised, so as to not make this a racial issue. It is not a racial issue, but a concerted effort to reach all people groups with God’s end-time message! Our pastoral workforce consists of “Black,” “Coloured,” “White,” “Indian,” and Immigrant pastors. (Spencer 2013:12)

The report of the TRC presented to President Nelson Mandela on 29 October 1998, affirmed that many faith communities, “contrary to their own deepest principles, mirrored apartheid society, giving the lie to their profession of a loyalty that transcended social divisions” (29). It was also affirmed that “many faith communities focused on their acts of commission and omission, some reflected an ethos where racism was tolerated” (65).

Unfortunately, since the organization of the first church 140 years ago, racial segregation has deeply influenced the development of the Adventist Church when compared to neighboring countries like Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Angola, where the church will soon reach the number of one million members (ASTR 2018). Presently, the church in South Africa needs to continue undertaking appropriate initiatives of healing and reconciliation. Just as sanctification is not the work of a moment, an hour, a day, but a lifetime, racial equality in South Africa is a process that may take some time. After all, traumatized people are not cured from one day to the next. Despite all challenges, since the end of apartheid the church grew up from 13,500 in 1990 to 136,046 members in 2018 (ASTR 2018).

**God’s Purpose for the Church**

In Acts 2:4-11, Peter, moved by the Spirit, preached to a multitude “from every nation under heaven.” When he started preaching outside the house where the disciples were meeting, every single person heard the message in their own tongue. The miracle of Pentecost is not that the multitudes from many nations understood the language spoken by Peter, but rather they each heard the message in their own dialect.
At the tower of Babel diverse languages were used to separate people. Now, the ushering in of God’s Spirit unified God’s people, transcending this earlier separation. As a result, three thousand were converted, representing Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Pontusians, Asians, Phrygians, Pamphylians, Egyptians, Libyans, Cyrenes, Romans, Cretans, and Arabs, all of whom represented the first Christian church, probably the very first multicultural church—a paragon to be emulated by all future Christian churches. From Acts to Revelation, from the alpha to the omega, the ideal Christian church, as the body of Christ, is one that is multicultural. (De La Torre 2011:181)

Through the work of the Holy Spirit, the church began in a multicultural and multilingual environment and it will fulfill its mission through the same diversified environment. Jesus commissioned the church to go to the entire world to proclaim the gospel to all peoples (Matt 28:19). In order to accomplish this effectively, the church must deliberately overcome social, economic, political, and cultural barriers, by confessing Christ in meaningful ways in all cultural settings.

God has always taken culture seriously and the church is the instrument for his actions in this world, in spite of cultural differences. The evangelization and integration of “others” (people of different cultures, languages, skin colors, etc.) has been a challenge since the birth of Christianity. The problems between the Jewish community and Gentile members of the apostolic church is evidence of the human nature of the church (Bosch 1991:42-46).

Scherer and Bevans (1999:7) remind people that “culture must always be tested and judged by scripture.” By being created by God (Gen 4:21, 22), all have inherited a culture that is rich in goodness and beauty; however, due to the Fall, culture is also blended with sin and can even be completely demonic. The gospel does not promote the dominance of one culture over another, but it judges all cultures according to the biblical truth and righteous principles, by requiring moral absolutes from every culture in the history of humanity (1 Cor 9:19-23).

In order to relate to God, people are not required to change their language and culture. The proof is that Jesus became a Man and incarnated in order to communicate in the culture of the Jewish nation. This action of God, or missio dei, in translating God into human terms, is still the most efficient manner to present the gospel. God speaks in human languages, sits in human homes, is blessed when people sing human songs, and brings healing to all people and cultures willing to receive it. It is proper for Christianity to express itself in the local language and culture, a gesture that reinforces the cultural and linguistic identity of all human beings. The result is a bilingual and multicultural church.
For a long time the church has neglected its cultural and linguistic diversity. For too long it has been trying to impose a universal code of thought and tradition. The church has not adequately dealt with the theological and practical implications of the diversity of languages and cultures contained in God’s plan. The church needs to encourage people to communicate with God in their own heart language in order to integrate their Christian and cultural identity in such a way that their worldview is transformed to reflect the values of God’s kingdom. Through Christ God’s people have been reconciled to God and through him the wall that separates one from another is broken, allowing Christians to be one family, one people, and one church (Rom 12:5).

The Homogeneous Unit Principle

Wayne McClintock (2011:107) affirms that Donald McGavran is generally recognized as the founder of the church growth school based on the homogeneous unit principle (HUP). HUP suggested that churches should meet in segments of cultural identification where discipleship starts from a single unique unit such as a clan, tribe, caste, class, race or any other kind of social group. It assumes that people “like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers” (McGavran 1980:223).

Wagner (1984:37) affirmed that the homogeneous unit principle is the key characteristic of a growing church, despite the controversies about it. He affirmed that people should be evangelized within their group and then be encouraged to worship in a homogenous unit of their choice.

This idea, supported by many scholars and church planters, is not aligned with the spirit of the gospel because of its biblical and theological incoherence (Conn 1983:85, Saayman 1983:137, Padilla 1983:301). The diversity of the disciples Jesus chose, the nature of the church formed in Antioch, and the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ makes it very clear that the church must be one in spiritual matters. Otherwise, in places where everyone thinks the same, the gospel will be nothing but a brotherhood of equals. Multicultural churches represent heaven on earth and express “Kingdom come” (Matt 6:20), which is described in Revelation 7:9 as “people from every nation, tribes, peoples, and languages.”

Homogeneous churches exist as an inherited tradition from the spirit of exclusivity of the colonial period. The result of this model impoverish multicultural ministries. A heterogeneous approach, in turn, seems to be the ideal model for implementing multicultural ministries. Padilla (1983:287) ironically explains this principle.
No one would on the basis of this passage (Gal 3:28) suggest that Gentiles have become Jews, females have become males, and slaves have become free in order to share in the blessings of the Gospel. But no justice is done to the text unless it is taken to mean that in Jesus Christ a new reality has come into being—unity based on faith in him, in which membership is no way dependent upon race, social status, or sex.

The Heterogeneous Unit Principle

The heterogeneous approach accommodates racial, linguistic, tribal, class, cultural, and other differences in contrast with the homogeneous approach, which will only increase conflicts in worship preferences, cultural, and linguistic inclinations. The heterogeneous model does not encourage giving up one’s own cultural identity and does not push for cultural assimilation. On the contrary, the heterogeneous approach affirms and promotes unity in diversity, by allowing people to keep their self-identity (1 Cor 12:12-31). Pipim-Korateng argues that the “homogeneous unit principle creates more questions than answers on issues of racial tolerance and the unity of the church” (2001:331).

After conversion, a Christian should not continue being selective and exclusivist.

It may be true that “men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers” but that is irrelevant. Membership in the body of Christ is not a question of likes or dislikes, but a question of incorporation into the new humanity under the Lordship of Christ. Whether a person likes it or not, the same act that reconciles one to God simultaneously introduces the person into a community where people find their identity in Jesus Christ rather than in their race, culture, social class, or sex, and are consequently reconciled to one another. (Padilla 1983:25)

Aylward Shorter notes that “the African city is not a melting-pot but it could be rightly described as ‘a stew’ in which the various ingredients maintain their individual identity” and yet remain part of the whole. In other words, the heterogenous model allows the “common bond of humanity and equality of the members regardless of their racial, political, socio-economic, or any other external distinctions which tend to divide human beings from each other” (1991:26).

Ndlovu reasons in favor of the heterogeneous principle with the following biblical arguments:
a) God is the creator of all nations (Gen 1:26, 27). God’s inclusive agenda for the nations is obvious from the creation account itself as “he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (Acts 17:25); b) God desires fellowship with all humanity. In the exodus from Egypt, all nations are invited to fear the God of Israel (Isa 49:3; 56:6-8); c) God created all the nations out of love. The table of nations in Genesis 10 echoes the character a God who is the creator and sustainer of all nations; d) God blesses all the nations through the seed of Abraham. God repeatedly promises blessings to Abraham and to all those who share in his covenantal blessings (Gen 12:3; 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14); e) God’s care for Israel as a nation includes “Others” as seen particularly in the books of Isaiah and Jonah. The covenant on Mount Sinai (Ex 19:6; 1 Pet 2:9) when Israel is called to be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” has a missiological perspective; f) God manifests his love for all the nations through the particularity of Israel. The promise made to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 includes de whole humanity (John 3:16); g) God expects his church to be inclusive. The preaching of John the Baptist began “to underscore the fact that all Israel were Gentiles in the eyes of God, outside the covenant, the repentant had to submit to the rite of baptism in the same way Gentile converts to Judaism did” (Bosch 2011:25-26; Matt 3:7, 8; Luke 3:7, 8); h) Jesus gives an inclusive commission to the church (Matt 28:18-20). (Ndlovu 2013:19)

Jesus Christ’s vision for the church the night before he died, was for a multi-ethnic church (John 17:20-23) as an instrument to reach the whole world through the example of godly lives based on love and shared belief. This model of church is described by Luke when he writes about Antioch as the first multi-ethnic community of faith, missional, and the most prominent church in the New Testament (Acts 11:19-26, 13:1). Paul also recommends in his letter to the Ephesians that the church must be built on the foundation of unity and diversity (Eph 4:3).

Therefore, the biblical narrative about the apostolic church points out the heterogeneous approach as the modus operandi in the apostolic church from its very beginning. The homogeneous model is far from being a biblical approach for a Christ-centered and missional ecclesiology. The everlasting gospel challenges and enables all who trust in the Scriptures to accept Christ across all social barriers so that when believers from different backgrounds come together, their self-identity will not be destroyed but will promote a healthy celebration of ethnic heritage and God-given diversity.

Challenges

The Seventh-day Adventist Church deals with cultural diversity issues at all levels around the world, and especially in South Africa. Churches
in urban centers are rapidly becoming multicultural with members from different parts of the world. Erich Baumgartner suggests that cultural diversity creates challenges in areas like worship, leadership, gender, ministry, and evangelism (2011:57). While differences in these areas can cause tension and challenges, they also provide many opportunities for new expressions of the church.

**Multiculturalism.** Our world has never been so multicultural as it is today. Most countries are no longer made up of one main culture or ethnic group. The increased number of people moving from one continent to another forces everyone to coexist with people from different cultures and religions. “The volume, diversity, geographical scope, and overall complexity of international migration is commonly linked to advances in transport and communication technology and more generally to globalization processes” (Czaika and de Hass 2014). The processes are not always met with acceptance, nor do people want to forget who they are overnight and change their way of life. The post-apartheid rush to the cities in South Africa raised unprecedented challenges for the government, society, and especially for faith communities. The explosion of urban cultural diversity exposed the people’s own worldviews in a radical and surprising way, producing strong and conflictual emotions.

**Loss of Self-identity.** The church’s self-identity is challenged as diversity creates tension in congregations that are becoming multiethnic, multiracial, multi-tribal, and multilingual. The choice of a model for evangelism and church planting is still a major issue as members ask questions like, How can we continue growing in diversity and yet protect our identity? The church leadership has a strong tendency to promote a homogenous church model in order to safeguard identity at the cost of becoming an island, surrounded by a neighborhood not represented on the membership roll.

**Maintaining the Status Quo.** Loubser (1987:4) says that Van Riebeeck, the first missionary of the Dutch reformed church, arrived in South Africa with a “European reformed monoculture [perspective] in a multicultural country with diverse religions. When missionaries from the west arrived, they failed to distinguish between the Gospel and European culture.” This produced confusion in the minds of the new converts to Christianity as they were expected to dress and eat like Europeans and even be baptized with European names. Regrettably, this colonizer mentality has not changed much.

**Lack of Assertiveness.** Lack of assertiveness to talk about disputed racial issues develops a dangerous tolerance towards extremism and theological deviations. Not dealing with divisive questions generates a vicious cycle where feelings of unworthiness are reinforced, leaving people
less empowered to stand up and take proper care of the needs of various peoples in the faith community.

**Financial Priority.** Financial stability is a strong argument used to maintain a church under the homogenous model since most people moving from rural to urban centers are jobless and have large families. Homogenous churches have a tendency to reserve the largest part of their budget for internal spiritual nourishment instead of for cross-cultural outreach and community services.

**Laisse-faire Style of Leadership.** This leadership style is not uncommon in churches moving towards multi-ethnicity; however it produces uncertainty when members try to find unity of purpose. Most churches experiencing transition from homogeneity to heterogeneity have no one to guide and prepare the members to deal with cultural shock and diversity. There is a huge need to train members through a discipleship model in the area of cross-cultural leadership and conflict management.

**Cultural Switch.** Several churches have gone through major ethnic transformation as they move from being predominantly White to predominantly Black. This is not a characterization of transformation but rather a re-segregation of a church by a new dominant ethnic group. In the last two decades, several White churches that were not prepared for the transition became completely Black. Pipim-Korentang (2001:331) affirms:

> It is a well-documented reality across a broad range of institutions in the American society that most Whites leave when the percentage of Blacks exceeds 25 percent. Almost all of the integration that has taken place in the North American Church has been in one direction: Black Adventists joining predominantly White congregations. How many Adventist churches, Black or White would welcome a minister of a different race?

**No Church Assistance.** In order to avoid dealing with conflict, many Whites do not visit any church, although they are faithful tithe givers and members of the local conference. They prefer to be part of house churches, listen to sermons on TV and reach out to only their own ethnical group, rather than being members of a multi-ethnic church.

**Secularism.** Secularism and apostasy has been a strong challenge especially among the White English-speaking members. Their children are not being exposed to Adventism throughout their schooling years and when they enter the university they lack commitment to God and church attendance becomes completely meaningless. The worldview of the new generations of White English-speaking members will not change while a homogeneous church model is encouraged.
Opportunities

Urban churches adopting the heterogeneous unit principle have a greater potential for creativity, are exposed to fascinating differences in languages and traditions, and are enriched and empowered by diversity.

Identity. The affirmation of ethnic diversity protects self-identify and provides a sense of cohesion and belonging. However, if ethnicity becomes the central criteria for defining identity, a church risks marginalizing ethnic minorities. A believer’s true identity is in Christ, through his Word, and in service to promote his universal, multiethnic, and multilingual kingdom on earth (2 Cor 5:17).

Unity in Diversity. Churches embracing the heterogeneous unit principle will focus in celebrating unity in Jesus and will not focus on ethnic differences. They will allow diversity to emerge in an environment of respect, love, and understanding. Multi-ethnic churches are able to provide a vision of the day when people from every nation, tribe, people, and language will worship God in perfect harmony (Rev 7:9-10).

Personal Enrichment. Cross-cultural relationships enrich individuals through a strong feeling of forgiving and belonging. This freedom allows people to openly talk about culture, race, and all matters concerning diversity. Safety within cross-racial relationships is the key element for reconciliation, to the point where suspicions, myths, and awkward questions about race can be discussed in a ludic and relaxed atmosphere. The opportunity to eat different foods, discuss the troubles of one’s society, and understand someone else’s cultural heritage enhances understanding of one’s own worldview and values.

Change of Worldview. A church that intentionally promotes diversity will validate the member’s current worldview or perspective, will offer new possibilities, and will introduce a new reality. According to the apostle Paul, the goal of all Christians is not to be conformed but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom 12:2).

Rich Liturgy. A church that enforces inclusiveness and multiculturalism allows diversity in every activity through the participation of all, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit through worship, adoration, fellowship, discipleship, and preaching.

Broader System Thinking. The interaction in cultural diversity expands the system thinking of church members, helping them to commit themselves to causes that may not be obvious. It transforms mental models, boosts team learning, and improves the ability to perceive current reality and discern the purpose of the church.

Creative Tension. Diversity naturally generates and sustains creative tension, which is possible when a well-defined vision of current reality...
and an exciting vision of the future are concurrently held. This kind of environment promotes creativity, tolerance, and more relevant and realistic perspectives of the future of the church.

*Inner Healing.* When the church becomes a safe place for all, trust and love will naturally increase and will produce healing for the wounds of hatred generated by colonialism, it will promote reconciliation instead of conflict, peace in the place of revenge, racial tolerance instead of racial segregation.

*New Vision.* Churches embracing multiculturalism will be persuaded through preaching and teaching ministries to establish a biblical vision, which embodies all people. They will intentionally cultivate the seeds of diversity by working hard to sacrificially place their own ethnic and cultural pride on the altar of God’s glory. They will share God’s glory and love with a new understanding of the spiritual and emotional benefits of belonging to a multicultural community.

**Recommendations and Conclusion**

In the post-apartheid 1990s, urban churches were often the first to deal with neighborhood changes; in order to continue being relevant they had to reevaluate the purpose of their existence. Ecclesiastical contextualization was done in several ways and to varying degrees of success. The different approaches in dealing with church diversity in the post-apartheid era also resulted in different outcomes, which requires further research and consideration.

Following this research, I propose the following recommendations to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa:

*Develop and implement a comprehensive theology of reconciliation.* The Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to reevaluate existing strategies and develop and implement a more friendly and comprehensive theology of reconciliation. This is not optional; tools for producing reconciliation are vital in order for the church to grow in unity and diversity.

*Improve cross-cultural leadership.* The Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to intentionally and systematically educate and train leaders to be experts in conflict management and to know how to lead cross-cultural churches effectively.

*Change of structures, policies, and rules.* The Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to continually adjust and realign the global church structures, policies, and rules in order to continue being relevant, to foster diversity, and to affirm identity.

*Switch of church models.* The Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to plan, intentionally promote, and mentor a smooth transformation from
homogenous unit model churches to a heterogeneous unit model of church. By following biblical principles for management change, leaders will be empowered to allow diversity to flourish, while promoting inclusivism and biblical ecclesiology.

Jesus Christ is the only link that connects people with God and with other people. He has reconciled all with God and through him the walls separating us from others is broken, enabling us to be one family, one people, one church.

The church of Christ is multiracial and multicultural. It is universal, not in the sense that all will be saved, but in the sense that salvation reaches all who believe, both Jews and Gentiles. The church is the product of the greatest peacekeeping mission in history “that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity” (Eph 2:16).

Simple yet powerful advice to enhance unity in diversity and promote reconciliation in the church comes from the cross-cultural apostle James when he said, “My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (Jas 1:19).

Works Cited


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