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**Editor:** Bruce L. Bauer

**Associate Editors:** Wagner Kuhn, Lester Merklin, Boubakar Sanou

**Managing Editor:** Andrew Tompkins

**Regional Editors:** Cristian Dumitrescu, Sung Ik Kim, Kelvin Onongha, Olaotse Gabasiane

**Editorial address:** JAMS, Dept. of World Mission, Berrien Springs, MI 49104-1565

**Phone:** 269.471.6505

**Fax:** 269.471.6202

**Editorial e-mail:** bbauer@andrews.edu

**Cover and Layout:** Amy Rhodes

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et al.: Urban Mission  
*In Memoriam*



*Bruce Campbell Moyer*

Early on Sabbath morning, May 11, 2019, Bruce Campbell Moyer passed away to “his last great adventure.” In his final days he wrote: “No tears please. My life has been a great adventure with Jesus. I have few regrets, and only a couple of bucket list items, undone. I have loved my wife, family and ‘work.’ God has treated me far better than I have deserved and none of you owe me anything. I have now gone, like Reepicheep, in *Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, to my ‘last great adventure,’ when with more questions than certainties I am face to face with Jesus and all his saints.”

In his retirement, Bruce was heavily involved with Gospel Outreach, a supportive ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This work involved outreach to Muslims on three continents. He also served for many years as a doctoral adviser to numerous PhD candidates at Andrews University.

Prior to his retirement from Andrews University as a professor, he was involved in the training of cross-cultural workers and the development of cross-cultural training curriculum. He also developed and directed Global Partnerships, a tent-making program, recruiting and training people for mission in “creative access” countries.

In his early years, Bruce pastored in the Pacific Northwest, taught at both Auburn and Columbia Adventist Academies, lectured in pastoral theology at Solusi University in Zimbabwe, and was Associate Professor of Theology at Columbia Union College, now Washington Adventist University, near Washington, DC. He also served as Senior Advisor on HIV-AIDS for the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and spent eight years pastoring urban and inner city churches in both Portland, OR and Takoma Park, MD.

Bruce was also the co-founder/Director of the Center for Global Urban Mission, a research and training center that developed urban training programs, urban strategic planning, and urban mission models.

In spite of all his accomplishments and careers, Bruce was most proud of his 62 years of marriage to his wife, Shirley, his two children, Lisl and TJ, and four very exceptional grandsons. Bruce had just celebrated his 82nd birthday.

Bruce served, honorably, as a non-commissioned officer, with the United States Marine Corps and his education included a BA in Systematic Theology from Pacific Union College (1963), a MA in Systematic Theology from Andrews University (1964), and a STD in Missions and Social Ethics from San Francisco Theological Seminary (1987).

# Editorial

This issue of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* looks at the challenge of urban mission. Many Adventists struggle with an anti-city bias for a number of reasons. High on the list of reasons is the book, *Country Living*, published in 1946 in which a very unbalanced view of what Ellen White had to say about cities was presented as the ideal. In the article “Country Versus City Tension: Historical and Socio-religious Context of the Development of Adventist Understanding of Urban Mission” Allan Novaes and Wendel Lima provide excellent background material that should help Adventists better understand the basis of that anti-city bias.

Another way of looking at the urban challenge facing Adventist mission is to note the makeup of the ten largest cities in 1900 compared with 2010. In 1900 nine of the ten largest cities were Christian cities with most of them actively involved in sending missionaries to other parts of the world. In 2010, only three of the ten largest cities were Christian, with the other seven being Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu cities.

1900			10 Largest Cities			2010		
#1	London	6.48 Christian	#1	Tokyo	36.7 Christian			
#2	New York	4.24 Christian	#2	Delhi	22.2 Christian			
#3	Paris	3.33 Christian	#3	Sao Paulo	20.3 Christian			
#4	Berlin	2.70 Christian	#4	Mumbai	20.0 Christian			
#5	Chicago	1.71 Christian	#5	Mexico City	19.5 Christian			
#6	Vienna	1.69 Christian	#6	New York/Newark	19.4 Christian			
#7	Tokyo	1.49 Buddhist	#7	Shanghai	16.6 Buddhist			
#8	St. Petersburg	1.43 Christian	#8	Calcutta	15.6 Christian			
#9	Manchester	1.43 Christian	#9	Dhaka	14.6 Christian			
#10	Philadelphia	1.41 Christian	#10	Karachi	13.1 Christian			

With over half of the world’s population presently living in urban centers it is imperative that the Seventh-day Adventist Church develop a more balanced view of city work. A step in the right direction was the 2012 publication by the E. G. White Estate of a much more evenhanded approach to urban ministry titled, *Ministry to the Cities*.

Bruce L. Bauer, editor

Gary Krause

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# 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" (Kuhalampi 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.

Kelvin Onongha

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# A Theological Framework for Adventist Urban Ministry

## Introduction

Cities have existed throughout antiquity, from the times of Cain until now (Greenway 1989:5); however, they have long been a largely neglected frontier of mission. While missiologists have focused on how to win the unreached people groups of the world the population of cities around the globe had silently exploded.

Early Adventism typically advocated the need to flee the cities for simple rural living because cities were regarded as Babylon (Jer 50:1-3; Rev 18:2-3). Consequently, in those regions of the world where the church's presence has the longest history with sometimes larger congregations, many church properties are located in the countryside or rural areas. A major reason why the Adventist Church is only so lately coming to terms with the exigency of urban ministries is the deficiency of a theological framework for engagement in missions to the cities. Stone (2015) agrees that the failure to develop a theology for the cities is a factor in the inadequacy of mission initiatives in urban areas. The objective of this paper is to present a theological framework for Adventist urban ministries that will provide an impetus for effective and sustained mission programs in urban settings. This framework will be developed from a biblical study of God and the city, an examination of Ellen White's writings on mission to the cities, and an exploration of contemporary challenges cities pose to the church's task of taking the gospel commission to all regions of the world. This framework follows Van Engen's (1994:249) tripartite theology of mission model comprising an interface between the biblical text, the faith community, and the urban context.

## God and the Cities in Antiquity

It has often been stated that the human race began in a garden; however, for Greenway (1989:3) humanity's ultimate destiny lies in the city. Among the well-known cities of antiquity were Babel and Nineveh. The earliest of these was the city built by Cain and named after his son (Sills 2015:23). Sidney Rooy (1979:178) posits that "with the notable exceptions of Nineveh and Jerusalem, the building of cities was frequently construed as distrust of God's protection and often represented the incorporation of idol worship into Israel's national life (Hos 8:14)."

Among the cities of old, Sodom was associated with evil, immorality, and corruption. It is mentioned "thirty-four times in the Old testament and seventeen times in the New" (Bakke 1987:64). Its notoriety lent its name to the practice of sodomy, which eventually led to its divine destruction with only Lot's family being spared (Gen 19). Besides its obvious problem with immorality and sexual plurality, Sodom's even bigger issue in the sight of God was its arrogance and indifference to the plight of the poor and needy in its midst (Ezek 16:48-50; Bakke 1997:42).

Nineveh is another city of antiquity, regarded by some to be among the greatest city that ever existed. For Greenway (1989b:9), the call to urban mission has its origin with God's commission to Jonah to go preach in Nineveh. Nineveh was one of the three capital cities of the Assyrian empire and was well-known for its brutality, violence, and wickedness (Bakke 1987:65). Jonah's experience in Nineveh is demonstrative not only of the loving character of God, which transcends ethnic and national boundaries, but also of the profundity of God's love for cities and their inhabitants, no matter how repugnant and evil they may appear (Jonah 4:9-11).

### Babylon

Another great and influential city of antiquity was Babylon, whose ancient foundations were established by Nimrod (Gen 10:9-10). Nimrod was the founder of both ancient cities of Nineveh and Babylon (Ellul 1978:13). Babylon whose name meant "the cornerstone of heaven and earth," was an idolatrous city considered to be "the navel of the universe" (Rooy 1979:178). The neo-Babylonian city flourished and became a major empire under the reign of king Nebuchadnezzar. During his reign, Jewish exiles were carried into captivity and the vessels from the temple of God were transported to Babylon. Jeremiah's missive to the Babylonian exiles again demonstrates God's concern for cities and their inhabitants. The captives were instructed by God to seek the *shalom* of Babylon and to pray for its

well-being. This radical call from God was to a people who would have rejoiced to see the punishment and destruction of their captors, for they had laid waste their own nation, culture, and life. God desired for the Jewish refugees to see themselves as his missionaries to the city he obviously was concerned about (Jer 29:4-7). Similarly, Christians today should seek the *shalom* of the urban contexts in which they live and work, and pray for their city's wellbeing.

### Jerusalem

In the Bible Jerusalem is depicted as the city of God; "a symbol of God's presence and power in the world" (Bakke 1997:63). In contradistinction to Babylon whose citizens live in opposition to God, Jerusalem is a city where a theocracy is established, God is honored, and its citizens are in a covenant relationship with him (Greenway 1989b:7).

### Ministry in OT Cities

Ray Bakke (1987) asserts that the priesthood in Old Testament times "was an urban institution," having up to 25 different types of identifiable ministries that it performed. He further demonstrates that the greatest OT characters, such as Moses, Joseph, Daniel, and Nehemiah functioned in urban settings (69-72). Apparently, the locus of political and social activities in Old Testament times were the cities. It was in these urban contexts that the kings governed, and where the largest concentrations of people lived. As a result, even the prophets of old went to these centers of administration, commerce, and culture with messages from the Lord urging them to repent.

Ancient cities were not merely centers of commerce or government; they also had religious foundations. "Among the Gentiles, cities were religious institutions, the dwelling places of the gods whose name they often bore . . . Ziggurats, or temple towers, were a characteristic testimony of ancient Near Eastern architecture to those triumphs of the gods and the orientation of its cities to their devotion" (Conn 1979:238). As a result, cities were also places where the conflict between good and evil erupted in power encounters.

### God and the Cities in New Testament Times

Roger Greenway (1989d:13) succinctly states, "Mission in the New Testament was primarily an urban movement." The center of Jesus' ministry was Capernaum, a major city of his time. This point is buttressed by the



fact that all the epistles of Paul were written to major urban centers of his day where churches had been established. Clearly, therefore, Jesus and Paul recognized the importance of mission in the cities. Bakke (1987:78) observes that although salvation began in a garden, God intends that it ends in the city (the New Jerusalem); just as Jesus began in Galilee but wound up in Jerusalem—the “center of religious, economic and political power.”

Paul’s mission, similarly, focused around urban centers such as Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and eventually ended in the largest metropolis of his age, Rome (Bakke 1987:80). Greenway (1989d:32) observes that although Antioch was known for its corruption, immorality, wickedness, idolatry, and vice, interestingly, Luke never mentions these, rather he focuses on the spiritual activities it became known for; eventually overtaking Jerusalem to become the missionary headquarters of that age.

Christ viewed the cities as places of crises, confrontation, the cross, and where compassion was greatly needed (Olver 2010:7). The Gospels present Jesus weeping over the city of Jerusalem because of his desire to save a city that spurned his love (Matt 23:37; Luke 19:41). In Jesus’ commission to his disciples for the proclamation of the gospel around the world, it is noteworthy that the places he mentioned where they were to go included Jerusalem and Samaria (Acts 1:8). Also, significant is Jesus’ declaration in John 3:16, that “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” to save it. The Greek word, *cosmos*, translated as “world” includes the cities, and their inhabitants.

It can therefore be surmised from the above passages that ontologically God loves the cities and their inhabitants, but abhors the evil and vices often associated with urban living. Why does God love the cities? Perhaps because they have the highest concentrations of people—people whom God desires to come to repentance (Jonah 4:11). It can also be argued that if God was opposed to the existence of cities, why would he create one as the home of the redeemed for all eternity (Rev 3:12, 21:2)? Clearly, therefore, God is deeply interested in cities and desires to establish his kingdom wherever possible in the cities of the world. Similarly, therefore, the church should seek the *shalom* of the cities of the world and work to establish God’s kingdom in them.

### Ellen White and the Cities

Notice Ellen White’s comments on the mission activities that took place in the city of Antioch where believers first became known as Christians. “While it is in the order of God that chosen workers of consecration and talent be stationed in important centers of population to lead out in public

efforts, it is also His purpose that the church members living in those cities shall use their God-given talents in working for souls" (2012:17). In other words, just as it happened back in the days of the Apostle Paul, God desires to have special work done by carefully selected people in the cities.

Over a century ago White stated, "The importance of making our way in the great cities is still kept before me. For many years the Lord has been urging upon us this duty, and yet we see but comparatively little accomplished in our great centers of population. If we do not take up this work in a determined manner Satan will multiply difficulties which will not be easy to surmount" (2012:26). If a century ago the need for urban ministries was urgent to Ellen White, how much more imperative is that need in these times?

One major reason Ellen White cites for urgent missions to the cities is because, "In the great cities are multitudes who receive less care and consideration than are given to dumb animals" (35).

We are living in the midst of the "epidemic of crime," in which thoughtful, God-fearing men everywhere stand aghast. The corruption that prevails, it is beyond the power of the human pen to describe. Every day brings fresh revelations of political strife, bribery, and fraud. Every day brings its heart-sickening record of violence and lawlessness, of indifference to human suffering, of brutal fiendish destruction of human life. Every day testifies to the increase of insanity, murder, and suicide. Who can doubt that satanic agencies are at work, among men with increasing activity to distract and corrupt the mind and defile and destroy the body. (41)

She goes on to explain, "The world over cities are becoming the hotbeds of vice. On every hand are the sights and sounds of evil" (42). Thus the degenerated moral state of affairs, and the appalling social conditions present a scenario that cannot be ignored by God or his people.

Another motivation for mission to the cities is a needed response to the divine challenge. "God asks, Why are not memorials for Me established in the cities? What answer can we return? The neglected work in our cities testifies to the lack of Christ-like energy among believers. Let all awake to the need of establishing Christian missions in the cities" (49).

As Abraham and the patriarchs of old travelled throughout the land, they set up altars in worship of the God of heaven, which served as memorials to the Creator. Such memorials are still needed in the cities of the world today and should represent places where the kingdom of God has been established. Holy spaces should also serve as lighthouses for those seeking after God in a world largely under the control of the enemy.

Concerning what needs to be done about missions in the cities, Ellen White states, “As a people we are not doing one fiftieth of what we might do as active missionaries. If we were only vitalized by the Holy Spirit there should be a hundred missionaries where there is now one. In every city there should be a corps of organized, well-disciplined workers, not merely one or two, but scores should be set to work” (81-82). In a similar vein, in 1909 she wrote, “Behold the cities, and their need of the gospel! The need of earnest laborers among the multitudes of the cities has been kept before me for more than twenty years” (97).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that cities the world over are a great source of interest and concern for the Lord, which is why Ellen White was given repeated visions of this nature. More effort and focus is therefore needed in the cities than has been displayed by the church. Further, if there was a sore need for intensified effort over a century ago, how much greater is that true now.

In addition to the biblical and Ellen White admonitions, the next section explores the urban context and seeks to understand the nature of the challenges encountered by living in the world’s cities. How is God directing his church in mission activities for those cities? In other words, how can those who collaborate with God better exegete the city (Van Engen 1994:253).

### Urban Contexts

The United Nations reports, “In 2016, 1.7 billion people—23 per cent of the world’s population—lived in a city with at least 1 million inhabitants. By 2030 a projected 27 per cent of people worldwide will be concentrated in cities with at least 1 million inhabitants” (2016:3). In the category of megacities—those with 10 million inhabitants, or more—there were 31 of these, and 24 are found in the “global south.” China accounts for six and India for five (4).

The World Cities Report (UN Habitat 2016) outlines the challenges associated with rapidly growing urban communities. These include the following: urban growth, change in family patterns, increased residency in slums and informal settlements, challenges in providing urban services, climate change, exclusion and rising inequality, insecurity, and upsurge in international migration. Several of these components present significant challenges to missions in the cities, for that reason a few of them are discussed in the following sections.

## Urban Growth

Among the earliest precursors for urban growth was the age of industrialization (Joslin 1982:23). Since then masses across the world have thronged to the world's cities in search of jobs and a better life. The rate of urban growth ever since has been significant. For instance, Greenway reported, "In 1800 only 5 percent of the world's population lived in urban areas. By 1900 the figure had increased to 14 percent. In 1980 it was approximately 40 percent, and by 2000 over half of the world [was expected to] be urban" (1989c:45). This phenomenal growth has come with its own attendant tensions and evils. Resources and structures for coping with this urban upsurge in many countries have been stretched beyond limits.

## Change in Family Patterns

The traditional family with a working father and a stay-at-home mother is no longer the norm in the cities. Single parenting is no longer novel, with the single parent more often than not being a working class female. The phenomenon of latchkey children is also widespread, especially since poor single mothers have to work and have no one to leave their children with. It is also not strange to find mothers being the sole income earners in the families. One of the consequences of these changes in family patterns is the breakdown of discipline due to the absence of a father as an authority figure in the lives of children.

## Slums and Informal Settlements

Often when people relocate to the cities they arrive without the necessary resources to adequately fend for themselves. They wind up living in the cheapest forms of accommodation possible, especially if there are no relatives or friends to depend upon. These ghettos, slums, and informal settlements are hotbeds of various social vices such as rape, abuse, crime, drug, and substance vending and usage. Many who live in such places constitute the cheap labor force for construction, industry, and other domestic purposes. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates about one-third of urban populations, constituting one billion persons, are currently living in slums and shantytowns across the world (Chan 2010:iv). Slums in many cities are now the prevalent settlement of choice for the marginalized in society, although in the past this used to be the dwelling places for only a small proportion of the populace (WHO 2010:8). The UN reports that globally urban population is growing by about 60 million persons annually, many of whom end up in slums,

shanties, ghettos, or informal settlements (4). In Kenya, for instance, Amnesty International (2009:1) reports that about 2 million persons live in slums and informal settlements within Nairobi, the capital city. Some of these slums have existed since the turn of the century.

### Urban Services

Countries and governments around the world are struggling to manage the significant movement from rural to urban settings and in many cases the infrastructure and services are inadequate to cope with the flight to the cities. This is especially the case in many non-Western countries where the standards of living in slums and informal settlements are often unsanitary and unsafe. The urban services stretched to the limits in many cities around the world include transportation, shelter, energy, water, health, and sanitation. Homelessness is another feature worthy of closer consideration. An estimate of 150 million persons are homeless, composing two percent of the world's population. Another 1.6 billion people, which is more than 20 percent of the global population is without adequate housing (Chamie 2017). The lack of this most basic of human needs is a prevalent condition found in just about all the countries in the world.

### Migration

One of the most visible phenomena of this age featured regularly in the news and social discourse is migration. The International Migration Report of the United Nations indicates that the rate of international migration continues to increase, as it has for the last seventeen years, so that in 2017 there were 258 million international migrants (UN 2017:4). There are several different categories of migrants: environmental migration, forced migration or displacement, labor migration, child migration, and international students (Migration Data Portal 2017). Unfortunately, migration exposes people to situations of vulnerability such as exploitation from migrant smugglers, human trafficking, and death/disappearance in the deserts or high seas. Another major contribution to migration is the growing incidents of political and military conflicts that force victims to seek escape and asylum in more peaceful regions.

### Poverty

One of the biggest causes for migration to the cities is poverty, while at the same time one of the most visible effects of migration is a diminished status and deeper poverty. The debate surrounding the definition of

poverty still rages on. Viv Grigg, who has devoted a major portion of his life living with and ministering to the poor, lists a number of people groups found in poor slums: street vendors, street kids, drug addicts, alcoholics, prostitutes, deaf, blind, amputees, and prisoners (2005:47-50). The causes of poverty are multifaceted and very complex, as Bryant Myers wisely observes (1999: 86). He advocates for a holistic understanding of poverty that considers factors such as physical, social, mental, and spiritual causes (83-86). One additional disturbing feature about cities is that they are the abode of both the affluent and the poor; and the gulf between them is significant. Jesus' statement, "the poor you have with you always" (John 12:8) is poignant and true.

### ***Missio Dei* and Urban Mission**

The missiological concept, *missio Dei*, acknowledges that mission is primarily the initiative and prerogative of God, and that the church is called to participate in this endeavor with the Triune God (Bosch 1991:392). Before developing a theology for urban mission, it will be necessary to identify where God is already at work in the cities so that the church may follow his leading. In light of this, it is evident from the study of principal cities in the OT that God strategically called and positioned great figures such as Abraham, Moses, Joseph, and Daniel in the nexus of bustling metropolis so that a witness of the Creator God lived among all the inhabitants of these major urban contexts.

Another lesson is that for urban missions to be successful they must be incarnational. Christ and the above-mentioned characters from the OT lived and functioned in the urban settings they were called to serve in. They identified with the people and communicated in the cultural forms and modes that were completely recognizable by their audiences.

Migration is another agency that God has employed over the course of time for the purpose of mission. Migration has relocated God's witnesses to needy urban centers where there were few witnesses or has brought prospects to cities where they could be witnessed to or could encounter the power of God. These mission modes are referred to as centrifugal and centripetal mission forces, which serve to either push or pull people towards evangelization. A good recent example of this is seen in the waves of refugees from certain parts of the Middle East and Asia who have found themselves in new urban contexts where the gospel is now accessible to them.

## Adventist Theology for Urban Mission

The above sections examined the Scriptures to understand God's perspective on cities, looked briefly at the writings of Ellen White for early Adventist attitudes and practices, and exegeted the global urban context. With this as a background, it is therefore possible to develop an Adventist theological framework for ministering in urban contexts. The foregoing exercise has revealed God's passion for the cities; the immense mission needs present in the cities, where God is already working, and how the church can join in the process. An Adventist theological framework should therefore revolve around the following foci: redemption, restoration, relief, refuge, relevance, and resistance within urban contexts.

### Redemption

God's primary mission and disposition towards human beings—creatures of his greatest regard—is to redeem them. Christ declared, "The Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), and this he demonstrated throughout his mission on earth. Since the cities are where the largest concentration of people can be found in all regions of the world it is also there that God's endeavors to save humanity are focused. Accordingly, the Adventist Church should spend the most and do the most in the great cities around the world.

At Pentecost God unleashed supernatural power and produced extraordinary results because during that season Jews and proselytes from the diaspora were gathered to celebrate the Passover (Acts 2:5-11). Similarly, in urban settings where migrants and immigrants come from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people, God is demonstrating his power again. Therefore, the Adventist Church should expect, in answer to its prayers for assistance, power and grace—all that is necessary to proclaim the gospel for the salvation of the teeming hordes of lost persons in the cities. It is also noteworthy that back then when God performed his mighty signs and wonders through his servants, those powerful manifestations usually occurred in urban contexts. From the cities the events were noised abroad to other remote regions (Josh 2:8-11; Dan 3:28-29, 4:1-3). This seems to indicate that in the sight of heaven cities are and should be centers for intense redemptive activities, for it is in cities, more than anywhere else, that the densest concentration of lost humanity can be found.

### Restoration

At creation, God made humanity with the image and likeness of the

Creator; however, the entrance of sin quickly effaced that nature, so that generations later when God looked down from heaven he was grieved at what humans had become (Gen 6:5-7). The dominion Adam and Eve had was transferred to the devil. Ever since humans have been held captive to the power of Satan by their lusts and sinful desires (2 Cor 4:4). Since Eden, God has been working ceaselessly to restore in humanity his lost image. As the Adventist Church cooperates with God in his ministry of restoration and reconciliation the programs needed must be holistic in nature, embracing the physical, mental, spiritual, and psychological dimensions of the person. In urban centers the Adventist Church should establish platforms to attend to the total aspects of human needs—health and medical, addiction recovery programs, and support and counseling programs (Matt 4:24; Acts 28:8-9).

Restoration centers are desperately needed in all cities around the world due to the level of brokenness, suffering, poverty, privation, and pain prevalent there. As the church works to restore the dignity of humanity and the image of God in them it will truly be representing Christ who sought to heal and show compassion to everyone he met (Matt 9:36, 14:14).

### Relief

Another essential component of the church's ministry in urban centers should be relief activities. When Jesus fed the multitudes, he brought physical relief to hungry people (John 4, 6). Then, during the Apostolic age when there was a famine in Jerusalem, relief offerings were collected and shared with needy people there (Acts 11:27-30). Principle flowing out of these practices formed the bedrock for the establishment of the very first hospitals in existence, which were organized by Christian churches. The earliest relief and development agencies were also coordinated by the early churches.

The colossal need for relief assistance in the cities can be overwhelming, nevertheless, the Adventist Church should be at the vanguard in providing relief for the poor and needy and support for those who experience disaster or loss. When Jesus used the parable of the Good Samaritan he provided a blueprint for the church's relief mission in urban settings (Luke 10:25-37). If Christians are to be good neighbors they need to be present on the street corners, in the neighborhoods, alleys, and slum districts where the poor, suffering, and needy reside.

### Refuge

In ancient Israel God's design for the nation in the promised land



included cities of refuge (Num 35:5; Josh 20:1-2). These asylum cities were designated areas where fugitives, foreigners, and sojourners could find abode until such a time as their status was determined (Num 35:6-15). God also gave specific instructions to Israel about the care, concern, and welfare of foreigners, immigrants, and refugees. These concepts, which were to be enshrined in their national ethos, was premised upon the fact that they once also were refugees in a foreign land (Exod 22:21, 23:9; Lev 19:10, 33). God actually required his people to love the foreigner/stranger/immigrant as they loved themselves (Lev 19:34; Deut 10:19).

Seventh-day Adventist mission to the cities therefore should focus upon providing refuge, shelter, and support for immigrants and refugees. God has often brought such people to places where Christians live so that they are able to not only hear about God's love through his people but are able to experience this love in action. In the cities, there is never a dearth of people in need of refuge from life's storms. Perhaps more intentionally than has ever been done, Adventist missions to the cities should seek to provide the necessary social support and refuge needed for these strangers that God wants to incorporate into his kingdom.

### Relevance

For theology to be meaningful, it must be relevant. Similarly, a theology for Adventist mission to the cities must constantly seek relevance—to the needs of the people and for preparing them to be citizens of God's kingdom. Biblical history reveals that each time God revealed himself to humanity it was in forms identifiable to their contexts and consonant with their needs. Jesus did not merely preach about the kingdom of heaven; he demonstrated the glory of the kingdom in relevant ways wherever he went by healing the sick, comforting the weak, and showing compassion to the needy.

The Adventist Church's mission programs in the cities should be designed with this same double-pronged objective—to meet the needs of city dwellers and serve the purpose of the kingdom of God. In other words, wherever the needs are, there the church should be found fulfilling its purpose as the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt 5:13-16). Jesus also clearly explained that ultimately his people are those who cared for the needs of the poor, needy, oppressed, and downtrodden (Matt 25:31-46).

### Resistance

The Scriptures present cities as being the battleground for the conflict

of the ages between God and Satan. Timothy Keller (2018:4) sees in every city two kingdoms contending for control—the city of Baal and the city of God. Both kingdoms exist in opposition to each other. The Apostle Paul speaks about the god of this world blinding the hearts of men and women and holding them in captivity (2 Cor 4:4; Gal 1:4). As the Adventist Church seeks to reach the cities and establish the kingdom of God it will encounter opposition in various forms and from diverse quarters (McAuliffe and McAuliffe 2017:105-110) just as Christ (Mark 3:24-27) and Paul faced in their urban missions (Acts 19). For this reason, a theology of resistance is imperative; one that is countercultural and impervious to the challenges and attacks of the enemy, whatever guise those attacks may assume. Such a theology that recognizes the cities as the playground of the great controversy between God and Satan, light and darkness, should keep the church in a mode of resistance. Spiritual interventions and programs, which counteract the forces of evil, are therefore expedient if the strongholds of the cities are to be broken down and recaptured for the Lord.

### Conclusion

As the Adventist Church awakens to the awesome challenge of witnessing to the cities it needs a theology for urban missions that will motivate, empower, and direct its programs so that they may be effective and enduring. In light of this, such a theology should emphasize the following features: redemption, restoration, relief, refuge, relevance, and resistance. These focal themes, based of biblical principles and the writings of Ellen White, and an exegesis of contemporary urban contexts provide a foundation for Adventist urban engagement and a rallying point for recruiting personnel and resources for this urgent, imperative, and gargantuan task. God is waiting, is the church ready?

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Kelvin Onongha teaches missiology and cross-cultural leadership at the Adventist University of Africa in Nairobi, Kenya, where he serves as the director of the Doctor of Ministry and MA Missiology programs.

Marcelo E. C. Dias

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# Toward a Post-Religious Urban Theology: The Missionary Movement Ethos in Secularized Contexts

## Introduction

In the 21st century, the majority (55%) of the world's population lives in urban areas. That percentage is expected to increase to 68% by 2050 (almost all of that increase is projected in Asia and Africa) (UN DESA 2018). Urbanization is "the movement of people in search of social and economic well-being" (Davey 2007:419). People going through such transitions face both opportunities and challenges. Cities can be major centers of learning, innovation, and development; however, they are also characterized by many social, psychological, physical, environmental, and spiritual challenges that affect people's understanding of their identity. The urban context has become especially significant for Christian mission since it is the setting where most people live and face life's many challenges. Urban mission has considered ways to integrate evangelism and church planting with community development, social justice, and environmental concerns, as part of human transformation.

In order to better navigate the current urban context it is important to develop an urban theology that addresses those issues. "Missiological and theological training has created new awareness of how evangelism needs to be based on social analysis and the challenge to structural injustice" (Davey 2007:420), including the need to understand urban patterns of spirituality and religiosity. Urban centers are no exception for the interaction between human beings and their environment. People's ideals for humanity shape their environment. But also "cities have a vital role in shaping the human spirit for good or for ill" (Sheldrake 2014:12) Therefore, the future of the cities is more than a social and economic issue, it is a spiritual challenge.

The 20th century witnessed “a long-standing anti-urban bias characteristic of general Western scholarship” (Conn 1994:ii) that focused on the challenges of the urban setting. During the 1950s and 1960s perceptions about the city began to change even among different denominations in the United States. The next two decades saw a definite call for urban mission coming primarily from the Church Growth movement. The Seventh-day Adventist Church developed many missionary initiatives in urban contexts during the first few years of the denomination until its peak in the 1890s. After a long hiatus, only recently has the Adventist Church officially made urban mission a worldwide priority again. The release of *Ministry to the Cities* in 2012, a compilation of Ellen White writings, seems to be an important milestone in that shift. For too long the church’s traditional understanding emphasized White’s remarks about country living (Krause 2014).

Part of the explanation for the missiological anti-urban bias seems to be the “secularization theory” that was “once the dominant sociological pattern of interpretation to describe and explain religious change in the modern world” (Pollack 2013). Secularization theory focused on the decline, and eventual extinction, of religion to explain changes in society. The last two decades have witnessed the development of urban contexts that are increasingly post-religious—places where people are no longer religious and where the traditional narratives of religious faith have become less significant and binding.

Scholars have increasingly emphasized the de-privatization of the religious (José Casanova), of the return of the Gods (Friedrich Wilhelm Graf), the re-enchantment of the world (Ulrich Beck), and the de-secularization (Peter L. Berger). The focus has shifted from the decline of religion to the pluralization of religion through the simultaneity of secular and religious institutions and the coexistence of different religious worldviews in one space (Berger 2014). Post-religion, therefore, does not refer to complete secularization but an indication of diverse religious, humanist, and secularist positionalities.

This hotly debated topic in sociology of religion circles is a description of much of today’s urban mission field. The “no religion” is the world’s third-largest religious group after Christians and Muslims (Pew Research Center 2012). In Norwich, England, allegedly the most post-religious city of the UK, 42.5% of the population reported “no religion” (Keenan 2016), the majority of young people in a dozen countries in Europe do not follow a religion (Sherwood 2018), 21% have no religion in the United States (De Jong 2018), and 37% in Uruguay and 14% in Brazil have no religion (Pew Research Center 2014).

Current challenges in urban theology involve a post-religious reality. What kind of theology can become a base for understanding the urban environment in this post-religious state?

### Religion in Movement: Changes in Religious Identities

Danièle Hervieu-Léger, a French sociologist specializing in the sociology of religion, has reexamined religion and its role in modern society. She believes what characterizes religiosity in modern societies is the dynamic of movement, mobility, and dispersion of beliefs (2008:10).

She has a different perspective from past predictions, suggesting that religiosity in the twenty-first century is alive and well. Religion continues to be a part of the social-political scenario almost everywhere, however, with new players, organizations, and elements. There is a paradigm change, from the loss of religion to everywhere religiosity. There is an intense resurgence of religion in the public sphere of Western societies. There is an encounter between religions from the West and East, and there are new ethno-religions, new religious movements, and post-secular religious movements (Hervieu-Léger 2008:21).

Instead of considering a linear model of secularization, sociological studies and Hervieu-Léger point out the relation between religion and modernity through two aspects: dispersion of beliefs and behaviors, and institutional deregulation of religiosity (2008:22). Religions offer meaning to the subjective experience of people and are expressed through practices, languages, gestures, etc. Hervieu-Léger uses the term “bricolage” — something constructed or created from a diverse range of available things—to explain the new scenario.

Hervieu-Léger believes that religious modernity is individualism. There is a crisis in the transmission of values that lead to the individual construction of identity. That is why there is a possibility of believing without belonging. “The communal realization of any sort of lineage of believers that is based upon a continuity with a tradition which produces the very substance of religious bond, tends to disappear” (2001:166).

That creates tension with the typical figure of a religious person in their practicing condition. Two other figures replace that emblematic one: the pilgrim and the convert (Hervieu-Léger 2008:10). While for typical religious people their practice is mandatory, ruled by the institution, fixed, communal, territorialized (stable), and repeated (ordinary); for pilgrims their religious practice is voluntary, autonomous, variable, individual, mobile, and exceptional (extraordinary). The major difference between the two is the degree of institutional control (Hervieu-Léger 2008:98). While the pilgrim illustrates the mobility of modernity, the convert illustrates

the formation of religious identities. The convert highlights the religious conversions in modernity in three aspects: (1) there is a change in religion; (2) there is adoption of a religion; and (3) there is a reconversion.

Especially relevant are Hervieu-Léger's discussions about the role of religious institutions in the contemporary scene in the face of the pulverization of religious identities. Although all social institutions must face new scenarios, religious institutions are especially affected since the changes occurring relates to their purpose: the continuity of their collective memory. "Institutional religions, in principle, make good an institutional regime based on the validation of faith, making use of secure precedents according to the authoritative organizations proper to each tradition, in continuity with the faith lineage" (2001:168).

The collapse of regular observances, the development of an à la carte religion, the affirmation of the personal autonomy of believers, the diversification of trajectories of religious identification, religious "nomadism": all of these phenomena are indicators of a general tendency towards the erosion of institutional regimes of the validation of religious faith. (Hervieu-Léger 2001:172, 173)

Religious faith is not validated by those regimes (or by their "least common denominator of faith") anymore but often, by small-scale communal experiences. The privatization of religious identities does not result in the weakening or disappearing of all forms of communal religious life. To the contrary, "the rise of religious individualism has reinforced the pluralistic affirmation of communal regimes of faith, which contractually bind the individuals involved in the same fashion in their religious life, over against institutional definitions of formal faith shared by a congregation of believers" (Hervieu-Léger 2001:168). This leads to the importance of interreligious dialogue and cultural sensitivity.

There are two movements. One is related to "the culture of the individual which dominates in all areas, tends to relativize the norms of belief and church practices fixed by religious institutions." The other, "solidarity is collectively proven by small-scale universes of certitude which efficiently assure the ordering of the experience of individuals. The community concretizes, then, the homogeneity of truths shared by the group; and the acceptance of this code of communal faith, which embraces beliefs and practices, in turn fixes the boundaries of the group" (Hervieu-Léger 2001:174). An important question to ask is, What does it mean to have a religious identity in this post-religious context?



## Ethos as an Important Concept to Study Religious Identities

As missiologists approach a post-religious reality, new concepts and categories might prove more useful for research, study, and praxis. One of them is *ethos*, a pivotal concept for sociology of religion and of social identity that offers a way to understand the dynamic underlying collective values of a religious group through an analysis of attitudinal factors—the interaction between the cognitive and conative moments.

Ethos is often connected with and defined in relation to the concept of worldview. Majken Schultz’s description of the relation between worldview and ethos is helpful in defining these concepts. One should “distinguish between the cognitive world view that contains the . . . mental image of reality, and the ethos, which comprises the . . . aesthetic and moral view of . . . life in general” (1995:89). Religion, in this case, provides the specific content of that reality, “with the things in the people’s model of the universe and with relationships between these things” (Hiebert 1976:371).

This is the same path taken by Clifford Geertz in developing a connection between anthropology and theology in the 20th century and one of the influences in Hiebert’s studies (Hiebert 2008:25). Geertz identifies ethos with the moral (and aesthetic) aspects and the evaluative elements of a culture, and worldview with the cognitive and existential ones. His formal definition of ethos is “the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects.” Worldview defined by Geertz is a “picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order” (1973:127).

Furthermore, Geertz describes the interaction between what he calls worldview and ethos to be a meaningful interaction between a people’s values and the general order of existence—something found in all religions. Religious belief and ritual confront and mutually confirm one another. The ethos is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life implied by the actual state of affairs, which the worldview describes. Worldview is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of the actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression (Geertz 1973:127).

Since religious institutions in post-religious settings do not define religious identities, the concept of ethos that examines the identity as a way of life seems to be especially relevant. Definitions are not based primarily on a set of doctrines, rituals, and behaviors, but are based on presuppositions about the way of life. What are the characteristics of a Christian identity in a post-religious society?

## Elements of a Christian Missionary Movement Ethos

In my recent doctoral research, after conducting a biblico-historical overview of the character of Christian movements, considering definitions of socio-religious movements, their major elements, and their stages of development, I discussed a model that conceptualizes the identity of Christian movements from the point of view of their ethos. I have also applied that model to the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church in Brazil in order to analyze its various aspects.

After considering different models for the identity of Christian movements, I decided to work with one by Alan Hirsch who has received much attention for his proposal in *The Forgotten Ways* where he suggests a paradigm of “absolutely irreducible components” that are interrelated and form the principles of what he calls missional DNA, mDNA, and apostolic genius. Hirsch’s model can be pictured as a pentagram around a central element. These are the elements: (1) Confession that Jesus Is Lord, (2) Disciple Making, (3) Missional-Incarnational Impulse, (4) Apostolic Environment, (5) Organic Systems, and (6) *Communitas*, Not Community (see figure 1).

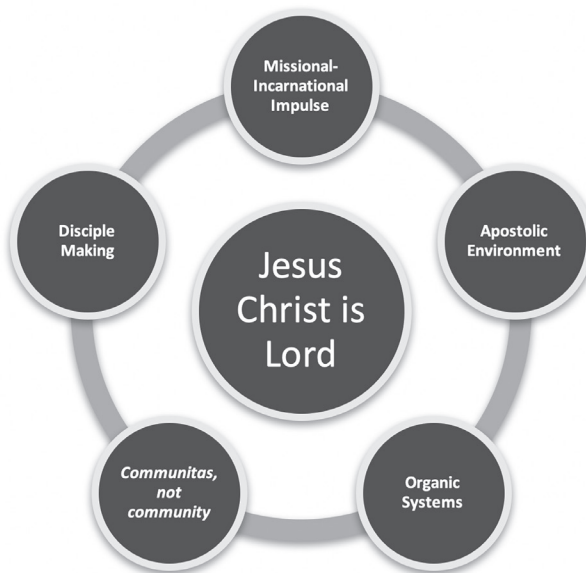


Figure 1. Hirsch’s model of a Christian movement ethos. Taken from Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 25.

At the center, there is a confession about God. Hirsch realizes the simplification of this element and does not think that one should engage in theological reductionism. However, the “definite central core” of remarkable Jesus movements, he identifies as being the confession that Jesus is Lord. This is the *narrative* that underlies the movement.

The two defining characteristics of a missional-incarnational impulse, one of the more clearly identifiable elements in Christian movements, are a dynamic outward thrust and a related deepening impulse. This element defines the *motivation* of the movement in relation to those who do not belong to it. The practical implications of this element are identified by Hirsch as, (1) being antidotes for colonization tendencies that alienate local Christians since they shape practices that embed and deepen the gospel in a people group in order to become God’s people, (2) developing reproductive capacities by the church, and (3) making it organically embedded in the fabric of the host community.

The apostolic environment element of Hirsch’s model is a combination of apostolic influence and a fertile environment. Apostolic influence, “a powerful form of catalytic influence,” is modeled after the biblical concept of apostolic leadership. This element defines the concept of *leadership* within the movement.

The structure of the movement is defined by organic systems. Hirsch draws on biblical images like body, field, yeast, seeds, trees, living temples, vines, and animals, which he considers “not just verbal metaphors that help us describe the theological nature of God’s people but actually go to issues of essence,” in order to structure the life of an organization (living systems approach).

The concept of *communitas* depicts the experience of people driven to each other through a common experience characterized by ordeal, humbling, transition, and marginalization. Hirsch uses this term to imply the most vigorous kinds of community, which takes many forms and describes the typical “communality” and “comradeship” of Christian movements. He believes that rather than a temporary experience, this is “the normative situation and condition of the pilgrim people of God” (Hirsch 2006:218, 221, 222).

Disciple making, the last element of this model, is considered by Hirsch the “most critical” and “strategic” one since this is the “essential” and “irreplaceable” task of the church. Hirsch calls the capacity to generate authentic followers of Jesus “the single most crucial factor” that affects all other elements of the Christian ethos.

Hirsch’s proposal of core principles as described is based on four assumptions. *First*, any true group of God’s people has everything needed to adapt, witness, and develop in any setting. This view is derived from

the understanding that God's people have received the gospel and the Holy Spirit, and they are sufficient and powerful enough to reach and transform people of any culture. *Second*, recovering a genuine movement ethos is essential to restoring the dynamism of important Christian movements. Hirsch's restorationist view is founded on the assumption that what Jesus began should yield dynamic missionary movements. If that is not the case among Christian movements today, it is at least in part because they have missed some essential aspects of Christianity. *Third*, organic systems should inform the structure of Christian movements. Hirsch clarifies his position in the introduction of *The Forgotten Ways* pointing out that "structures are absolutely necessary for cooperative human action as well as for maintaining some form of coherent social patterns." Along those lines, it is clear throughout his work that he holds a fierce criticism of over-institutionalization. Hirsch emphasizes that "there needs to be a clear distinction between necessary organizational structure and institutionalism," which he has come to see as a hindering obstacle to the engagement of God's people in mission. *Fourth*, intercultural mission methodology should be followed in every context. Hirsch does not make a distinction between mission contexts in the West or in other places. His assumption is that the Christendom mode of mission is not adequate to the challenges today, since even the West demands more of a "cross-cultural missionary methodology." That is exactly the need for sensitiveness in today's post-religious context.

In order to apply Hirsch's model to the Adventist church, it is important to consider the nuanced biblical narrative with major themes in Adventist theology and its implication for mission, including Jesus' priestly ministry, the Great Controversy, the imminent second coming of Jesus, the remnant (including the Sabbath and the spirit of prophecy), and the three angels' messages. Therefore, a model for a Seventh-day Adventist movement ethos would include the following six elements: confession of Jesus as Savior, Lord, and Priest; a missional-incarnational impulse of the soon coming of Jesus; an apostolic movement as part of the Great Controversy; *communitas* as a reflection of the will of God for relationships as described in God's commandments; organic systems according to spiritual gifts; and disciple making in preparation for eternity (see figure 2).

These six elements seem to be part of the essence of the ethos of any Seventh-day Adventist movement. Just as all elements of Hirsch's model of the ethos of missionary movements are interrelated, these Adventist elements are part of a whole, which could include other elements for specific emphasis. The application of Adventist beliefs has broadened and deepened the understanding of the elements of Hirsch's model and, at the same time, grounded the definitions in the Bible. One of these implications

is the fact that Adventist mission happens in the end times in preparation for the second coming of Christ and God's final judgment and, therefore, the ethos characteristics of an Adventist missionary movement should reflect that specific context. That prophetic understanding of Adventist mission, integrated with their doctrines within the framework of the three angels' messages, provided the Sabbatarians with the motive and power to sacrifice in order to spread their message far and wide.

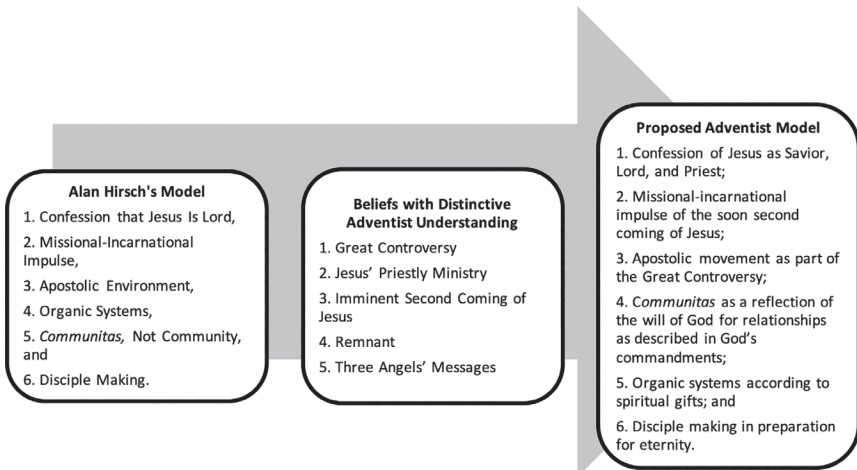


Figure 2. Toward a model of Seventh-day Adventist missionary movement ethos.

When the six principles of the model are the foundation for mission methods, important understandings become part of such strategies. "Seventh-day Adventists celebrate God's actions past, present and future; that they have a thoroughly biblical eschatology that justifies their intense and sustained effort here and now to demonstrate the character of the Kingdom of God" (Plantak 1998:180). The development of mission methods should begin with deep, thorough Bible exploration to foster a Christocentric approach for every teaching where Jesus remains the center to distinctive SDA beliefs. It should offer a real relationship to each believer, and the church should continue the preaching, teaching, and healing of Jesus.

The Adventist prophetic understanding must be translated into more than cluttered and complicated theologies that become obstacles to those who approach the church and that sometimes give members a vague sense of identity disconnected from their everyday lives. The comprehension about God's priestly ministry in heaven during the time of the

end should foster a relationship of fear, trust, and joy for Adventists. The Great Controversy belief should also give a strong basis for a non-dualistic spirituality that develops an all-of-life perspective to faith, and that fosters an ethos that takes into consideration the interaction between God, the church, and the world. It seems that sometimes the Adventist heavy emphasis on keeping the Sabbath results in a dualistic spirituality, which leads to a practical polytheism. People have one identity on Sabbath and a different one during the rest of the week. All the following aspects of the ethos depend on this biblical understanding about God.

In order to rekindle the motivation that comes from the assurance of the imminent return of Jesus, the blessed hope of the church, and the grand climax of the gospel, it is important to foster a way of being in this world that is characterized by continual expectancy, urgency, and watchfulness. There is need of a readiness that is not passive but rather responsibly active. Adventist pastors should be equipped to be intentional in the contextualization of their strategies. Because Adventists understand the earth is in the last days, in the time of God's judgment and Jesus' imminent return, they have a special message for this time, the "time of the end." "Since the Adventist objective is a certain quality of faith exhibited in all people groups so that the issues in the Great Controversy over the character and government of God are demonstrated and proclaimed accurately to all people, it is even more imperative that this faith development take place in context" (Whitehouse 2014:390). This places a heavy emphasis on being dedicated to learning the local context and the people's worldviews as part of the process of preparation for mission and the transmission of the gospel.

The realization that people are increasingly resistant and repulsed by organized religion should be a warning that the church's dependence on methods and strategies focused on attracting people to the church will limit the possibilities of evangelization. As the missional ethos of the movement is rekindled, there is a need to have leaders that are mission-minded, have an apostolic passion, and are able to pass on that passion to church members. Such leadership is less based on personality and charisma, and more based on faithfulness to the biblical vision, engagement with the stewardship of God's mission, and the mobilization of God's people. Such leaders are especially interested in the formation of new leaders found both in the denominational ranks and in the local congregations. Missional leadership would also be a spiritual-gifted leadership that recognizes every believer's empowerment for witnessing and the role of basic spiritual gifts (Eph 4:7-11: apostles, evangelists, prophets, and pastor-teachers).

Every part of a missionary movement must have a clear missionary focus. The continuous assessment of the role of every institution and the

need to study the most effective organizational structure to support a missionary movement is essential. While a non-institutional movement is not an alternative, organic systems of networks could inspire new models of structures that are better at survival, adaptation, and reproduction. These models should be simple and rely on decentralized authority, dynamic decision processes, and contextualized approaches.

The remnant-claimed identity must be demonstrated through the fostering of the values of the Kingdom of God such as a sense of justice, goodness, beauty, and truth among believers and toward those who do not belong to the faith. A way of living that truly reflects the keeping of God's commandments and the faith of Jesus would confirm that this movement's self-understanding is based on the revelation God has entrusted to the church and is not restricted to its belief statement. This would also foster unity within the movement that comes from a common mission, not just common beliefs.

The experience of Christian togetherness should not simply be for the benefit of those who are part of the Adventist community, but should seek to embrace all humanity including the public. Sabbath should be at the center of this experience as the special day to develop a kind of community based on relationships with God and with others. As Adventists live out different aspects of their doctrines, especially the Sabbath, they must also fight the bubble effect resulting from an exclusivist attitude. This would reinforce the movement's role as part of the people of God and the universal church by taking part in worldwide worship and witness that helps vindicate God's character before the universe.

Finally, at the core of the movement there has to be a disciple-making process, usually more cyclical than linear, moving people from being non-believers to disciple-makers. This disciple-making process has to begin before conversion and involve much more than baptism as one grows toward spiritual maturity.

## Conclusion

The Adventist movement was born in the rural United States of the mid-19th century amid the Second Great Awakening. Embracing that legacy, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has grown into a fellowship of about 20 million members who live in over 200 countries.

However, the SDA Church displays different levels of dynamism and vitality in different parts of the world. The church is decreasing in most of Western Europe, is stagnant in North America, but still growing in parts of Latin America and Africa. More or less aligned with mainstream evangelical theology and organized as a traditional denomination, in 2016 the

SDA Church managed to increase over four percent in church membership.

Despite claims of a Christian movement ethos, 155 years after its organization, scholars have pointed out challenging signs of institutionalization and secularization. The SDA Church struggles to maintain its identity, especially as a religious institution that mediates people's spiritual experience in an increasingly urbanized, secularized, and culturally diverse context—the challenge of a post-religious urban world.

As missiologists seek to develop an urban theology for the 21st century, it is important to acknowledge and be sensitive to the post-religious conditions of much of the population in urban centers. That implies a theology that addresses a privatized, autonomous, and fluid religiosity validated by small-scale communal experiences (instead of the religious institutions). In a fluid society (highlighted by Zygmunt Bauman, Gordon Lynch, Peter Ward, and others) "personal identity has become a more disputed territory" (Ward 2005:22), which raises challenges to modernist urban ecclesiologies that fostered a concept of a solid church.

Therefore, it also seems relevant to be able to conceptualize the identity of the Adventist movement in other ways besides the doctrinal formulations of the SDA church. Revisiting the anthropological and sociological categories such as worldview and ethos would be of essential importance, as well as following the suggested model presented in this study.

An urban theology should be the center of conversation with the current post-religious context that takes into serious consideration people's search for meaning and the new spirituality in this age. Perhaps popular culture can give clues about contemporary meaning-making as well (Shannahan 2014:207-217). On the one side, history assures that an urban setting does not need to feel like a threat to the Christian faith. "Early Christianity was primarily an urban movement. The original meaning of the word pagan (*paganus*) was 'rural person,' or more colloquially 'country hick.' It came to have religious meaning because after Christianity had triumphed in the cities, most of the rural people remained unconverted" (Stark 2009:2). On the other hand, history warns that a theology irrelevant for the current context and a Christian identity disconnected from the biblical narrative should be perceived as a real threat for the transmission of the faith and mission.

What is bothering me incessantly is the question what Christianity really is, or indeed who Christ really is, for us today. . . . We are moving toward a completely religionless time; people as they are now simply cannot be religious anymore. Even those who honestly describe themselves as "religious" do not in the least act up to it, and so they presumably mean something quite different by "religious."



What does that mean for “Christianity”? If religion is only a garment of Christianity—and even this garment has looked very different at different times—then what is a religionless Christianity? (Bonhoeffer 1971:380)

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Marcelo Dias graduated in 2016 with a PhD in Religion (World Missions) from Andrews University. Currently he is a professor of Applied Theology, supervises the MA in Missiology, and oversees the Mission Center at Brazil Adventist University (UNASP). Recently he has been involved in research about discipleship and the spreading of new Adventist church models in Brazil, a discipleship program for youth from the 10/40 window, and a movement that has, in the last four years, sent more than 600 people to mission projects in 12 countries. He is married to Ana Dias, who teaches in the School of Education at UNASP, and they have a 10-year-old daughter, Alissa Lauren.

Allan Novaes and Wendel Lima

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# Country Versus City Tension: Historical and Socio-religious Context of the Development of Adventist Understanding of Urban Mission

## Introduction

Since 2013, with the approval of the document, *It's Time: The Urgency of Urban Mission* (2013), the Seventh-day Adventist Church's worldwide headquarters has given a new emphasis in the evangelization of global metropolises. This incentive has taken place during the presidency of Ted N. C. Wilson. Wilson began his pastoral ministry in New York City in 1974 and defended his doctoral dissertation at New York University in 1981 regarding Ellen White's view on how the church's evangelistic work should be carried out in the largest city in the United States.

However, this renewed emphasis is not only due to the efforts of Wilson, but especially to the few Adventists in many large American and European cities, as well as in the urban conglomerates emerging in Asia and Africa (Sahlin 2011).

A mapping of the Adventist presence in cities around the world that had more than one million inhabitants was published in 2014. Using the studies of demographer Thomas Brinkhoff, the authors cataloged 504 cities. The most recent survey indicated (May 2019) 575 metropolises with populations of a million or more (Brinkhoff 2019). They sought to identify how many members, congregations, and institutions the denomination had in those cities. While 23.89% of the global population was living in the cities of a million or more, only 13.3% of Adventists were located in those same urban areas (McEdward and Trim 2014:8).

In population agglomerations where the church presence was less expressive, there were 119 cities with fewer than 125 Adventists and in 42 of them there were fewer than 10 members. In Brazil, where there is a more significant Adventist presence in urban centers, 26% of Adventists were living in state capitals in October 2014 (Lima 2014).

Faced with this challenging picture, there is a new moment in Adventist urban mission in which materials are being published, conferences organized, and churches as well as projects established around the world. However, it has not always been so. The Adventist engagement in the evangelization of cities has been timid and, for many decades, even discouraged by an anti-urban attitude. This mentality of criticism and resistance to the cities was largely sustained through an incomplete and/or misreading of Ellen White's writings (Jones 2013:716). This article seeks to describe Adventist rural/urban tension, the historical and social context of its origin, and how it has been softened by a contrasting broader view of Adventist urban mission.

### **Tension Between Country and City in 19th Century America: Establishing a Historical Social Context**

Christian mistrust and prejudice against large cities are not new, especially in the religious context of the Puritan matrix in the United States of America in the second half of the 19th century (Conn 1994). From Genesis to Revelation the term "city" appears more than 1,400 times in the Bible. Because of the biblical narratives such as the building of the tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:1-29), among others, cities are often portrayed in Christian and Protestant imagery as centers of opposition to God and strongholds of corruption, immorality, and violence (Ellul 2011).

Several Protestant circles recognized that cities were one of the recurring and prominent themes in the biblical narrative; however, they mainly attributed to the city negative and pejorative attributes. For most Protestants in the 19th century, the city was a symbol of everything wrong: "an alien and hostile world hopelessly steeped in rum and Romanism" (Douglass 1998:47). Between the American Civil War (1861-1865) and World War I (1914-1918), many Protestants saw the city as a theological problem, rather than a missiological opportunity. "The language of the pathologist dominated Protestant rhetoric about the city. Like historians now, Protestants then employed images of decline, decay, and denouement rather than nurture, growth, or maturity to describe their fate in the city" (Butler 1997:297).

Paul Boyer (1992) produced one of the most comprehensive studies about the understanding of the city as a source of moral problem in the United States of the 19th and early 20th century (see also Abell 1943; May 1967). During the 1900s, America underwent one of its most profound transformations, namely, the transition from an agrarian to an urban society. During this period, the process of urbanization worked as a catalyst

for both action and social speculation. “Fears about industrialization, immigration, family disruption, religious change, and deepening class divisions” were all focused on the growing cities. “Social thinkers, reformers, philanthropists, and others whose assumptions and activities seemed otherwise very different were often linked by a shared preoccupation with the city and, more specifically, by a common interest in controlling the behavior of an increasingly urbanized populace” (Boyer 1992:vii).

This growing urban population was made up not only of Protestant Americans but also by Catholics from Ireland, Italy, and other European countries. As a product of the migratory flow received by America in the first decades of the 20th century, this diversity produced cultural and religious tension in the nation. It is estimated that the population of the United States jumped from 5 million people in 1800 to 20 million in 1850, and the volume of immigration also grew from 150,000 in the 1820s to 2.5 million by the middle of the century (Douglass 1998:46).

The Protestant reaction to the moral dangers offered by urbanization was, at first, focused on punctual actions through crusades focusing on both moral and social reforms. The ineffectiveness of these events in the medium and long-term, however, convinced many religious people that more aggressive action was needed to change the urban reality. The Protestant responses to the issue of large cities were based on the idea that “the key to dealing with the urban challenge lay in re-creating in the cities the moral order of the village,” with Sunday schools and the distribution of Bibles, pamphlets, and booklets produced by the Bible Societies and religious literature of that time (Boyer 1992:2).

### Country Versus City Tensions in Adventism

As a religious movement that originated mostly among ordinary people from rural New England, Adventism inherited from the Protestant tradition both a positive view of the benefits of the countryside and a negative view of the evils of life in the cities.

Adventist sociologist Haller Schünemann, studied the beginnings of Adventism in Brazil and perceived similarities between the first Brazilian converts and the initial community of Adventists in the United States. Both groups were largely composed of small landowners with a pietistic religious background who placed a strong emphasis on a life of holiness as a preparation for the divine judgment (2003:32, 33).

Monte Sahlin (2007:16) additionally notes that both the small town and the rural church have become the paradigm of the Adventist lifestyle in the United States. Adventism was born in a rural context and the denomination’s appeal has historically been directed to those areas (25).

In studying the history of Adventism, it is possible to identify the development of country versus city tension in three phases. First, during the period in which Ellen White developed her thoughts and views about the relationship of the Christian to both the countryside and the city. Second, during the period after the death of Ellen White, in which the denomination came to emphasize an anti-urban stance, largely due to the publication of the compilation, *Country Living*. Third, during the recent period when ecclesiastical discourses and actions point to a more balanced and thoughtful view of the city.

### Ellen White's Views

As Butler (1997) and Jones (2013) have pointed out, the anti-urban mentality was not hegemonic in 19th century America—many Christians sustained an ambivalent view of the cities, and Ellen White was one of them. On the one hand, she promoted country life as an ideal for Adventists, because of its more natural and slow-paced environment. It also offered an environment where Adventist were less likely to be “infected” with crime, chaos, corruption, and health problems generally associated with cities of that time.

On the other hand, Ellen White was very concerned about urban evangelism. She was disturbed by the fact that the church leadership of her time was slow in proposing a strategy for cities that were becoming metropolises, such as New York City. Ellen White went so far as to doubt the genuine conversion of A. G. Daniells, church world president in the early 20th century, questioning whether he was able to lead the church. She refused to receive him a few times until he was able to present a bold plan to evangelize the cities (A. White 1982:239-251). For Ellen White, to see the cities being reached by the Adventist message was almost an obsession, and she criticized the neglect with which the great cities of that time were being treated by the church (Jones 2013:717).

To correct this neglect by the church was something that marked Ellen White's ministry, especially after her first trip abroad from 1885 to 1887. According to D. A. Delafield (1975:35, 44, 95), White became impressed by the social, cultural, and religious challenges of the great cities in Europe, and she anticipated the emergence of this same scenario of urbanization and industrialization in America.

Regarding evangelistic outreach in England, for example, especially in London, White showed impatience with the reduced number of missionaries and resources employed in that city. She also acknowledged that it was necessary to observe how Britain society was formed, what groups

formed it, and what different approaches were to be used for each of these social classes (White 1946:414-418).

The time has come to make decided efforts to proclaim the truth in our large cities. The message is to be given with such power that the hearers shall be convinced. God will raise up laborers to do this work. Let no one hinder these men of God's appointment. Forbid them not. God has given them their work. They will occupy peculiar spheres of influence and will carry the truth to the most unpromising places. (White 1902:40)

For White, what was under discussion was not an evaluation of *whether* or not Christians should evangelize cities, but *how* to do so (Knight 2001; Jones 2013). She developed in her writings a model of missionary work called *outpost evangelism*. This model suggested that Christians engaged in evangelistic outreach in the city should live outside it, establishing themselves in the suburbs or in rural areas. "The cities are to be worked from outposts. 'Shall not the cities be warned? Yes; not by God's people living in them, but by their visiting them, to warn them of what is coming upon the earth'" (White 1958:353).

According to Knight (2013:715), there are 22 statements by Ellen White on so-called "outpost" evangelism. Part of her counsels dealt with this, as it was a way of reconciling the ideal of living in the countryside without neglecting the mission in the cities. What many Adventists would ignore after her death, however, is the context of these statements. According to Knight (715, 716), each of these quotations refers to the establishment of Adventist medical, educational, and publishing institutions. In Ellen White's view, such institutions were to be established in the countryside or in the suburbs of large urban centers, and their staff could travel to metropolitan areas to participate in evangelistic outreach, such as churches, vegetarian restaurants, bookshops, child daycare centers, and elementary schools.

Given this evangelistic model, White made recommendations that local churches should be built within cities; Adventist institutions, however, including publishing houses, medical centers, and even training and education centers, should be established outside of them.

Repeatedly the Lord has instructed us that we are to work the cities from outpost centers. In these cities we are to have houses of worship, as memorials for God; but institutions for the publication of our literature, for the healing of the sick, and for the training of workers, are to be established outside the cities. Especially is it important that our youth be shielded from the temptations of city life. (White 1958:354)

White also understood that this orientation could be adapted according to the need of the various mission fields. For example, although she recommended that boarding schools should be established in rural areas, of which Avondale College in Australia is a classic example, it was necessary to consider the natural tensions between the ideal and real conditions (Knight 2013:715).

According to Knight, one of the “most destructive myths in Adventist thinking is that of the inflexible prophet.” In other words, it became fashionable in Adventism to use Ellen White as a radical interpreter of her own writings—the true followers of the pioneer’s instructions was to be as strict as she was. Those who adopted this view tended to defend their positions based on incisive and isolated texts from both the Bible and Ellen White’s writings that they applied in a careless way to daily life (Knight 1985:17). The result was an extreme posture.

This took place roughly in every area of Adventist lifestyle, including clothing, diet, education, and mission to the cities (Knight 1985:19). Intriguingly, this selective, authoritarian use of Ellen White’s writings was already taking place when she was alive—a position that she clearly disapproved of (White 1958:285, 286).

For this reason, it makes sense to note that between 1900 and 1910, Ellen White offered another possibility of evangelistic work in big cities. This was due to the expansion of Adventist colleges in poor regions, which at that time were largely inhabited by African Americans (who were still suffering from social and economic consequences of both the Civil War and the abolition of slavery decades earlier). In special situations, she advised, educational institutions should be established in the city.

Those who for years have been working to help the colored [Black] people are well fitted to give counsel in regard to the opening of such schools. *So far as possible these schools should be established outside the cities.* But in the cities there are many children who could not attend schools away from the cities; and for the benefit of these, *schools should be opened in the cities as well as in the country.*

The children and youth in these schools are to be taught something more than merely how to read. Industrial lines of work are to be carried forward. The students are to be provided with facilities for learning trades that will enable them to support themselves. (White 1909:175, 176; italics supplied)

White also recommended that some families move to major urban centers to develop personal evangelistic outreach. She considered the work of Pastor Haskell and his wife, Hetty, in New York City, a model that should take place in other similar contexts (Jones 2013:717).



The Haskells moved to New York and used an approach that involved various methods, such as “door-to-door selling of books, personal Bible studies, workers’ meetings to teach personal evangelism, utilization of health education to arouse public interest, printed Bible studies, evangelistic journals, contacting business and professional leaders, finding suitable sites for public meetings” (Douglass 1998:213). An evangelistic principle by Ellen White that the Haskells seem to have taken seriously was to spend less time on sermons and more on personal work for those interested in the Adventist message, whether in homes or congregations (217).

The Haskells mission team in New York eventually numbered 20 people, including nurses, Bible instructors, cooking school instructors, and young colporteurs (book and magazine sellers). The group was sustained by the salary of the couple as well as the income obtained by the sale of literature. From 1901 to 1912, the Haskells also worked in other American urban centers, such as Nashville, San Bernardino, Oakland, and Portland. One of the last major works by Stephen and Hetty was raising \$60,000 for the construction of the White Memorial Medical Center in Los Angeles (Moon 2013:404).

In summary, there are two parallel orientations of Ellen White concerning the work of the church in cities. First, Adventist institutions should be established in the countryside or suburbs, with their workers visiting the great cities from those outposts. Second, families need to be sent to the cities in order to establish churches, restaurants, bookstores, child daycare centers, and schools. However, the fact is that after her death, as will be seen below, only the first counsel of Ellen White was emphasized, while the other part was largely forgotten and neglected (Knight 2013:715, 716).

Many of Ellen White’s quotations used by advocates of anti-urban discourse in Adventism refer to what she wrote between 1901 and 1906 in the context of a conflict between Doctor John Harvey Kellogg and the world leadership of the denomination. However, from 1906 onwards, there are several statements highlighting the need to evangelize cities (Sahlin 2007:9). Again, however, only the first part of her writings has been emphasized.

Ellen White’s insistence on the evangelization of the great cities had some results in her time. It was at the turn of the century between 1890 and 1910 that Adventist mission to the cities reached its climax (Knight 1999:124; Krause 2014:51). From 1883 to 1893, the first Adventist missions in cities were established. The *Church Yearbooks* from 1885 to 1904 point out this development (Sahlin 2007:8). The 1886 record, for instance, reported the existence of 36 missionary initiatives in cities, with 102 church staff and 224 volunteers working. In Krause’s view, these numbers were significant for a church with just over 23,000 members at that time (2014:50, 51).

According to Knight (1999:124), the pioneer “proved to be a moving force in urging the denomination forward,” and Bauer (2013:996) believes that Ellen White was preeminent in shaping the Adventist vision of mission. However, other people also played an important role in this process. Among them were Doctors John Harvey Kellogg and David Paulson, who worked on the “front line” of Adventist medical care in Chicago (Krause 2014:50), and Stephen Haskell, already referred to, with his work in New York City (Knight 2001). At the administrative level, Arthur G. Daniells, General Conference president in the early decades of the 20th century helped broaden the Adventist concept of mission. During his years in administration, there was a significant increase of missionaries sent out from North America and evangelistic outreach to cities also gained new impetus (Oosterwal 1972:30).

Another noteworthy event was the holding of a five-day meeting in early July, 1910, in New York City by the executive committee of the General Conference to discuss urban strategies. Articles were presented; however, the group decided not to publish the material. It is also interesting to note that at the last General Conference session (1909) that Ellen White participated in, she made her last appeal that missions to the cities not be forgotten. However, with Ellen White’s death in 1915, Adventist urban mission lost its main advocate. Her pro-rural writings were more emphasized in the following decades and an anti-urban stance, as part of the broader Protestant tradition that was wide-spread in the 19th century, was emphasized and intensified in Adventist circles. This phase of Adventist mission history is classified by Sahlin (2007:12) as “city neglect.”

### Ellen White’s Post-death Views and Eschatological Tones

From 1913 to the 1940s, there was a shift in focus on Adventist outreach efforts in cities. The denomination prioritized work with immigrants and ethnic minorities. It was during this period that African American congregations began to grow, as well as ethnic churches among Germans, Italians, and other Europeans, especially in the northeastern cities of the country (Sahlin 2007:15).

In addition to the two world wars and all the political and social implications they brought to the religious scene of the time, the period between 1920 and 1950s witnessed major theological debates in the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States. This period was critical for Adventism because American Protestantism had polarized itself between “conservatives (fundamentalists) and liberals (modernists),” and the church was forced to position itself on that spectrum (Knight 2000:129).

For Sahlin (2007:16), the dualistic theology of American fundamentalism

influenced Adventists, as well as other Protestants, to ignore the social implications of the gospel. As a result, Adventists began to show less interest in urban mission and its complexities, as well as in humanitarian work in general. There was also growing emphasis on the importance of leaving the cities

In this period of tension between tradition and modernity, one of the major issues debated by the church was the validity, scope, and inspiration of the writings of Ellen White. In the first decades of the 20th century, Ellen White's writings acquired among most Adventists a status that rivaled the Scriptures. At a time when the literalness of the biblical text was being questioned in academic circles, theories of biblical inerrancy were applied to the writings of the Adventist pioneer. The notion that White's counsels were irreplaceable, ahead of her time, and that "all her writings came through direct revelation from heaven" (as opposed to what she herself claimed) became rooted in Adventist culture (Knight 2000:158).

This was the context that enabled a radical and selective reading of Ellen White's writings on city life. Although American Protestantism had long nurtured an anti-urban sentiment, as already described in this article, Adventism went further, adding to this posture a strong eschatological tone. This view was enabled by the Adventist apocalyptic view of a final persecution of believers. In addition to dealing with this theme in other works, it is in *The Great Controversy*, that Ellen White states that, before the end, God's people will be persecuted by the unfaithful possessors of the "mark of the beast," and that this persecution would begin in large cities (White 1911:631; 1932:166; 1992:121).

White suggests that there will come a time when Adventists should migrate from the cities to the countryside in order to seek refuge during this future period of intolerance, which may be considered as one of the more "intriguing manifestations of the exclusivist and sectarian facet of the Adventist eschatological vocation" (Novaes 2016:87). Silvia Scholtus also states that an extreme view of biblical prophecy motivated some Adventist groups to leave city life to better prepare for the end of the world in rural environments (2002:313).

This Adventist anti-urban understanding with its eschatological connotation gained more force with the 1946 publication of Ellen White's posthumous compilation of passages entitled *Country Living*. This booklet presented an "idyllic picture of the moral and social benefits of living in a rural environment" (Fortin 2013:743). Curiously, Ellen White wrote most of the material selected to compose this work between 1890 and 1910, when she most talked about urban mission.

According to Fortin (743), cities are described in *Country Living* as breeding grounds for iniquity and vice, where life is false and artificial.

He enumerates three reasons pointed out by Ellen White for Adventists to avoid living in cities. First, the rural environment is more conducive to a lifestyle marked by simplicity, self-sacrifice, and economy. Second, living in the countryside promotes integral health, which includes harmony between body, mind, and soul, a belief valued by the Adventist anthropological-theological perspective. Third, by living away from the great cities, Adventists would experience God's protection from the impeding judgments on those cities.

In the years following the publication of *Country Living* ecclesiastical leaders felt the first effects of the work upon the American Adventist community. Although the Ellen White passages used for the book were originally written in the 1910s, her advices gained further meaning for readers of the time of that publication who had experienced the traumas of World War II.

Soon, a large number of Adventist families, especially in the United States, began to move to rural areas. The migratory movement generated strong concerns among church leaders, since many families were motivated by impulse and devotion, but lacked solid family and financial planning. Faced with reports of health problems and financial difficulties among the rural migrants, church leaders in North America in 1950 published the book, *From City to Country Living: A Guide to Those Making the Change*, as a kind of guide to instruct those who were thinking of moving from urban centers to rural areas.

In 1978 the General Conference recommended that the book be republished after being updated by Ellen White's grandson, Arthur White, who was one of the original authors. The coauthor of the material was Edward A. Sutherland, an educator, pioneer of Adventist universities, and compiler of the book *Country Living*. When these books were released, Sutherland was secretary of the "Country Life Commission" at the church's world headquarters (White and Sutherland 2019:7-10). Almost 70 years after its publication in English, this work was translated into Portuguese and published in Brazil in 2019.

The book, *From City to Country Living*, was written by people who had lived with Ellen White and who had experienced life in rural environments for decades. It was a practical guide for the application of *Country Living*, helping those who chose to make that kind of lifestyle change to have a successful experience by dealing with the benefits of country life and sharing the promises of God for those doing it. It also encouraged people not to make hasty changes in this regard, described the challenges of country living, how to grow a vegetable garden, and how to develop enterprises outside the city. The book emphasized that Adventists should not seek social isolation when desiring personal survival, but should be

active in witnessing to other people. It also offered advice concerning children's access to school and ways to improve a self-sustaining lifestyle.

Even after the publication of the guide on how to move from the city to the countryside, *Country Living* had a profound impact upon the Adventist ethos, including its philosophy of education, home life, and methods of evangelism. It is largely because of the isolated reading of this work that many Adventists have nourished a certain aversion toward cities (Fortin 2013:743). In addition to the Adventist migration to the countryside, this anti-urban emphasis also encouraged the practice of homeschooling among church members and promoted the idea of establishing boarding schools away from the major urban centers.

Gary Krause (2014:52) also points out that for a long time in the history of Adventism—especially after White's death—the dominant discourse on urban mission was against cities. This scenario began to change in the 1950s when the church again started investing in ministries within large metropolitan areas such as New York and London. In the 1960s with the national context in America involved with the civil rights movement and the tragic death of Martin Luther King, Jr. Adventist African Americans promoted the need for the church's mission to include a strong emphasis on social justice (Sahlin 2007:18, 19). During that same period the church established health and wellness centers in several cities to serve the community and Adventist Community Services (ACS) were promoted in several conferences in the United States.

As Gottfried Oosterwal (1980) noted, until the 1970s Adventists had done nothing, with few exceptions, of much significance in the cities. It seems that the anti-urban perspective with its eschatological premise continued to have a strong impact in the decades following the publication of *Country Living*.

### Return to More Balanced Views of Urban Mission

As noted above, two main factors shaped the Adventist anti-urban stance: the initial resistance to the 19th century urbanization process by a church born in the American rural context and a selective reading of Ellen White's writings by many Adventists in the decades after her death. Some might think that in order to reverse this situation, it would be necessary to destabilize and deconstruct these two pillars.

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church moved from the 19th century into the 20th century, the church began to undergo an internationalization process. The denomination that was born rural and North American was becoming urban and worldwide. The global demographic movements themselves, which moved people from the countryside to the city, first

in the developed countries and more recently in the emerging nations, forced Adventists to take a comprehensive look at their mission strategies. After all, it would not make sense for a denomination with a strong evangelistic spirit to leave the cities, when much of the world's population was migrating into urban centers.

While geographical and cultural changes pressured the denomination to revise its anti-urban stance, on the other hand, it also forced the church to reread the writings of Ellen White or to understand them more comprehensively. How can Ellen White's advice to leave the cities and evangelize urban centers be reconciled? Adventist scholars have focused on this subject, notably the works of Wilson (1981), Knight (2001), and Sahlin (2007), as well as the articles by Jones, Knight, and Fortin in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, published by the General Conference in 2013.

Sahlin, for example, surveyed Ellen White's 107 magazine articles, which mention cities. He found that 24 of them emphasized leaving urban areas, 75 offered counsel to move to cities in order to evangelize them, while 8 publications criticized the conditions of the cities of that time without saying whether or not Adventists should leave them or move to them (2007:16).

In the 1980s and 1990s, churches in the United States became more concerned about social inequalities and realized that black youth living in cities did not have the opportunity to live the "American dream" (Sahlin 2007:22). During this period, Adventists established evangelistic centers in many cities and did research to evaluate the Adventist presence in urban areas. Churches started pilot projects to test new approaches and more churches mapped and studied their communities to better respond to local needs.

One of the new approaches that emerged from these "think-tanks on evangelism" was the satellite preaching campaigns entitled NET 95, 96, and 98 (Sahlin 2007:23). The intention was to transmit religious programs and preaching to the countries of North, South and Central America, Africa and Europe with simultaneous translation. These broadcasts "were not simply an evangelistic series, but a systematic method to spread Adventism around the world" (Schwarz and Greenleaf 2000:576). Despite its high cost, church leaders saw the initiative as an effective means of communicating the Adventist message, especially to the world's megacities. It is estimated that 100,000 people listened to the 1996 campaign.

After nearly a hundred years, urban mission was again the subject of a General Conference session in 2005. Pat Gustin, then director of the church's Institute of World Mission, presented a report that outlined the rapid urbanization of the world and the growth of secular people. She emphasized the rapid growth of slums in many cities and said that the

church needed to use new and varied methods to reach the large cities of the world. Shortly thereafter, the “Hope for the Big Cities” project launched, which challenged denominational leaders to establish 200 new churches in the world’s 54 largest cities by 2010 (Sahlin 2007:26).

In 2005, the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* was created with the proposal to be a forum for discussion on Adventist mission involving church leaders, academics, and missionaries (Bauer 2005:1). There are 18 articles in this academic journal dealing with urban mission, which Lima classified into four categories: demographic, sociocultural, theological, and methodological challenges. Texts about demography have to do especially with the mapping of the Adventist presence in the great cities of the world; those dealing with sociocultural challenges mainly discuss factors such as immigration, intergenerational and ethnic conflicts, and the emergence of the new cultural paradigm called postmodernity. In turn, most of the material focuses on the theological-methodological challenges of the Adventist urban mission, such as country versus city tension, a more comprehensive and holistic view of evangelization in urban areas, and the use of methods such as planting churches and the establishment of missionary communities (Lima 2018).

In addition to the emergence of academic studies on urban mission, the Global Mission program is another important element in seeking to understand the recovery of the emphasis on big city evangelism from the 1980s onward. Global Mission was partly created in response to the evangelical mission concept of the 10/40 Window, where most of the world’s unreached people were located and where few Christians lived. Global Mission was a worldwide program that sought to establish a new local church between 1990 and 2000 in each of the 1,800 segments of 1 million people where Adventism was not represented. The goal was huge, requiring one new congregation every two days.

Adventists traditionally had measured their fulfillment of the gospel commission by counting the numbers of countries in which they had established the work of the church, but this practice changed. After a sequence of brainstorming sessions and committee meetings between 1986 and 1989 church leaders called upon Adventists to visualize the world population as consisting of people groups rather than countries. These enclaves of people, defined by culture or language, existed independently or as subgroups in a country. A global strategy meeting in 1989 combined or divided these people groups into population segments, each with about a million persons. Of the 5000 segments in the world, 1800 were unentered by Adventism. (Schwarz and Greenleaf 2000:579)

More than only a program, the Global Mission initiative became a department within the Adventist Church's administrative structure that in 2005 took on a new name of Adventist Mission. Alberto R. Timm suggests that this new missionary strategy followed three previous Adventist mission phases: (1) mission restricted to North America (1844-1874); (2) mission to all continents (1874-1901); (3) mission to all countries (1901-1990); and (4) mission to all peoples (1990 onwards) (2011:21). The denomination came to recognize that the major challenges of mission were not geographical, but ethnic, cultural, and religious.

Following this new phase, Ted Wilson, the current president of the General Conference who was elected for the first time in 2010 and whose second term ends in 2020, has prioritized mission to the cities. Evidence for this is the fact that the document *It's Time: The Urgency of Urban Mission*, approved in 2013, has once again put the evangelization of cities as a priority of the church. The document recognized that the misguided view of urban centers has disrupted Adventist urban evangelism and acknowledged that while Ellen White appealed more than a hundred years ago for the church to prioritize cities, a selective reading of her writings prevented the urban work from advancing (*It's Time: The Urgency of Urban Mission* 2013). A website based on the document was launched to foster urban mission projects around the world: <https://missiontothecities.org>. The virtual space offers articles, a book with stories outlining faithful engagement in urban mission, and courses in text and video.

In 2012, another important step took place with the publication of the book, *Ministry to the Cities*. As one of the more recent compilations of Ellen White's writings, this work reflects the church's concern to return to a more balanced view of urban mission by offering a more comprehensive approach to urban evangelism (White 2012:8). The book deals with urban mission strategies, biblical examples of how God dealt with cities, the importance of church planting, and the integration of gospel preaching and the promotion of preventive health.

Two interrelated concepts were incorporated in the Adventist discourse on urban mission in this new phase—the “method of Christ” and “centers of influence.” Christ's methods refer to Ellen White's counsel for the church to evangelize as Jesus did: (1) mingling with the people, (2) showing sympathy, (3) ministering to their needs, (4) winning their trust, and (5) calling individuals to follow Christ (White 1905:143). Adventist missiologists have seen in this text the concept of “incarnational ministry,” an idea that is much present today in mission studies. Those who defend the appropriation of this concept understand that urban mission should combine gospel proclamation with service to the community, and that the gospel can only be truly understood if testimony is given through words and actions contextualized to the culture of the recipient.



The second concept, “centers of influence,” has to do with the spaces created for the “method of Christ” to be practiced. Ellen White also used that expression in speaking to Adventist leaders in her day about the need to establish vegetarian restaurants, reading rooms, healthy cooking schools, and other services in cities (White 1923:481). Those spaces did not have to be large; instead, she encouraged small facilities where community needs could be met and personal witness given regarding the Adventist message.

The most recent phase of this growing awareness and importance of city work was symbolized by the launching of the strategic plan for the quinquennial 2015-2020 entitled *Reach the World*, in which the emphasis on urban mission stands out. Two major studies involving 41,000 respondents, including church members, leaders, and former members provided the basis for the strategic plan. The document presents two major missionary challenges: the 10/40 Window countries and the world’s cities, most of which are in that region of the world where Christians are a minority. Krause (2014:53) sees in this emphasis a new wave of global mission in Adventism, which prioritizes urban and ethnic issues.

However, for Adventism to have a comprehensive role in the city it takes more than overcoming the ambivalence of enchantment versus an aversion to urban centers. According to Jones (2004), it is important to view a theology of urban mission not as a product but as a process for affecting the church’s community. It is also important to revisit and redeem concepts from the writings of the Adventist pioneers and especially from Ellen White, as a way to legitimize and consolidate this recent missionary emphasis on urban centers.

Speaking from a context of social inequality at the end of the 19th century and the beginning years of the 20th century, Ellen White did not shy away from addressing the issues of her time. In the compilation *Ministry to the Cities*, the third chapter is dedicated to the challenges of the urban context of that time. Racial tensions, the exploitation of the poor, the unnatural pace of life in the large cities, environmental pollution, and escalating crime and addiction, are mentioned, among other problems (2012:29-39).

That is why, for Krause (2014:59), the main question is not “reinventing the wheel” but rather rescuing the Adventist tradition creatively and appropriately for the today’s challenges.

### Summary and Final Remarks

This article provided an overview of how the historical tension in Seventh-day Adventism developed between the ideal of a more natural and “sanctified” life in the countryside and the challenge of preaching the

gospel in cities. When the denomination formed in the second half of the 19th century, the growing urban centers that were emerging in the United States were seen by many American Protestants as symbols of immorality and represented a break with many values of the rural lifestyle. Immigrants, especially European Catholics, threatened religious hegemony and added to the negative views of urban life.

Initially, Adventists also seemed to have manifested this anti-urban spirit; however, Ellen White, warned the denomination not to neglect the evangelization of large cities. Although White considered rural life the most appropriate for the development of spirituality and a healthy lifestyle, she encouraged families to move to the large cities in order to establish churches, schools for the poor, and centers of influence.

In short, in Ellen White's view, church publishers, boarding schools, and health clinics should stay out of the cities, while churches, schools, and centers of influence should be located in urban areas. Her appeals had more effect between 1890 and 1915, when the church's missiological vision began to expand; however, with her death in 1915, Adventist urban mission lost its main advocate.

In the following decades in the American context, a period of polarization between fundamentalist and theologically liberal Christians resulted. Adventism tended more toward the conservative group, assuming, especially in the United States, a posture with sectarian and anti-urban tones. Adventist eschatological understanding and an out of balanced reading of White's counsels concerning country living motivated an anti-urban bias. In addition the Adventist belief in the concept of the persecution of God's end-time people as spelled out in the apocalyptic imagery led many to understand that the cities should be abandoned as the best way to protect themselves from an eschatological scenario of intolerance.

The publication of *Country Living* in 1946, a compilation of Ellen White's writings on the benefits of rural life, reinforced this spirit of isolation. This material helped to shape the ethos of the movement and its missionary strategies. Ironically, for a long time in Adventism, speaking about an urban mission meant speaking against cities. This trend continued until the 1980s and 1990s, when demographic trends pointed out that the future of society is urban and multicultural. Pressed by this new context, Adventists had to rethink their position on cities. At the institutional level, this new missiological understanding was ratified with the approval, in October 2013, of a document that placed urban mission as a priority and stressed the need for implementing a worldwide program for the evangelization of large cities.

Since then, many initiatives around the world have been tried. The emphasis of this new moment is on a more comprehensive approach and

a re-reading of Ellen White's writings, produced in the context of nineteenth- and twentieth-century United States urbanization, for today's reality. In this new moment, Adventists continue to seek approaches that dialogue with the problems and challenges of the global urban context. In Latin America and in other regions marked by great social inequality, this new posture also represents a new vision of the church in relation to social justice, which would be an excellent topic for further research.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>It might be useful to note that in Ellen White's time "colored people" was the mainstream term to refer to Black people. "By the 1900s, *nigger* had become a pejorative word in the United States. In its stead, the term *colored* became the mainstream alternative to *negro* and its derived terms. After the civil rights movement, the terms *colored* and *negro* gave way to 'black.' *Negro* had superseded *colored* as the most polite word for African Americans at a time when black was considered more offensive. This term was accepted as normal, including by people classified as Negroes, until the later Civil Rights movement in the late 1960s. . . . In 1835, black leaders called upon Black Americans to remove the title of 'African' from their institutions and replace it with 'Negro' or 'Colored American.' . . . African Americans popularly used the terms 'Negro' or 'colored' for themselves until the late 1960s" (Black people, *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black\\_people](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_people); italics in original, accessed 26 June 2019).

<sup>2</sup>"A complete and unbiased reading of all that Ellen White had to say about cities reveals that she did not issue simple, unmitigated statements about them. She never unequivocally stated that Christians are not to worship or live in cities. Perhaps reflecting the complexity of the city itself, White's statements about the city are complex, though not completely ambivalent. For Ellen White the ideal was the country. Reality mandated, however, that Christians not only could live and work in the city, but whenever and wherever they had clear evidence of God's leading, should move into them with vision and purpose" (Jones 2013:717).

<sup>3</sup>See Timm (2011) on the four phases of Adventist mission history.

<sup>4</sup>According to the United Nations (UN), it is estimated that by 2030, two-thirds of the world's population will live in cities. See James Griffiths. Two-thirds of world population will live in cities by 2050: UN report. <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/05/16/world/world-population-cities-un-intl/index.htm>.

<sup>5</sup>This research is in a 2018 non-published paper by Wendel Lima for his Master's Degree program in Religion Studies at the Methodist University in São Paulo, Brazil.

<sup>6</sup>Term created by Argentine Christian missionary Luis Bush in 1990, referring to the regions located between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, in an area that was supposed to have high socioeconomic challenges and less access to the Christian message.

<sup>7</sup>See General Conference Departments. <https://www.adventist.org/en/world-church/general-conference/departments> (accessed 26 June 2019).

<sup>8</sup>See, for instance, the article by Gary Krause, director of the Adventist Mission office at the church's world headquarters, in *Ministry* 85, no. 5 (May): 6-9. <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2013/05/treading-urban-ground-like-jesus>.

<sup>9</sup>These spaces have now been called Life Hope Centers. See “Life Hope Centers,” retrieved 29 May, 2019 from <https://missiontothecities.org/life-hope-centers>.

<sup>10</sup>See the definition of “influence center” on Adventist Mission website, “Centers of Influence,” retrieved May 29, 2019 from <https://am.adventistmission.org/360-centers>.

<sup>11</sup>The strategic plan is available on “Reach the World,” retrieved June 26, 2019 from <https://www.adventistarchives.org/reach-the-world>.

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Allan Novaes, PhD, is associate professor in the School of Theology and vice-president for research and institutional development at the Adventist University of São Paulo (Brazil). He has a PhD in Religious Studies from the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo (Brazil), with a research visitor period at Andrews University and the University of Notre Dame.



Wendel Lima graduated with a Master of Religion from the Methodist University of São Paulo. He is a journalist and a pastor who currently works as a magazine editor at Brazilian Publishing House in Tatuí, Brazil.

Conrad A. R. Vine

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# From Rural to Urban: Critical Differentiations in Ministry Contexts within Rural and Urban Environments

## Introduction

As a young schoolboy, I used to wonder what challenges were left for humanity. From 1577-1580, Sir Francis Drake circumnavigated the globe. In 1953, Crick and Watson discovered the double-helix structure of the DNA molecule, and Hilary and Tenzing conquered Mt. Everest. In 1969, Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins made it to the moon. Yet, with every passing school year, I learned of the many challenges remaining for humanity. There were physical mountains that still needed to be conquered: the tens of millions who live in garbage dumps; the tens of millions of street children who roam our cities by night and day; the hundreds of millions of orphans yearning for a loving home; the millions of children who die yearly from vaccine-preventable diseases; and the tens of thousands who die daily from dirty drinking water. The list could go on. Yes, Mt. Everest may have been conquered in 1953, but many mountains still remain unconquered before humanity.

Perhaps the largest mountains facing humanity are not physical—they are spiritual. The rapid urbanization of the early 21st century is not merely a subject for intellectual discussion and debate. From a missiological perspective, the fusion of urbanization, globalization, and secularization combine to present an entire mountain range of spiritual peaks that call for our sustained prayers and renewed focus as missiologists and missionaries.

In my role as President of Adventist Frontier Missions, Inc. (AFM, see [www.afmonline.org](http://www.afmonline.org)), I am confronted daily by the need for AFM to provide focused training and meaningful counsel for front-line missionary

teams serving in urban environments. While AFM's early projects focused on ethnically homogenous and static people groups in often clearly defined geographical locations, current projects increasingly focus on ministry in large urban environments characterized by population fluidity and religious, ethnic, socio-economic, and cultural diversity.

This article seeks to delineate three critical dimensions of ministry that impact ministry strategies in predominantly rural and in predominantly urban contexts for AFM Front Line Workers (FLWs). First, the community contexts within rural and urban environments. Second, the ministry strategy considerations for FLWs in rural and urban environments. Third, personal factors impacting FLWs in rural and in urban environments. The article provides in summary form the three key critical dimensions of ministry that are shared with AFM FLWs during initial training and that are utilized post-launch by AFM FLWs with their supervisors when prayerfully demonstrating urban ministry strategies within their unique urban contexts. The article will not provide an exhaustive analysis of each of these critical dimensions of ministry, but will provide a conceptual framework that FLWs can and do utilize when prayerfully reflecting on mission strategies on the ground.

### **Critical Community Contexts within Rural and Urban Environments**

In terms of local community cultures in predominantly rural contexts (PRC) AFM's history indicates that the more rural and isolated the community, the higher the context (Hall 1976) and the more homogenous the culture, religious practices, and beliefs tend to be. In predominantly urban contexts (PUC) however, the more urbanized the community, the lower the context the community tends to be (Hall 1989) and the greater the diversity in culture and religious practices and beliefs (religious pluralism). Furthermore, the greater the impact of post-modernity, the greater the sense of alienation from God, the betrayal from broken trust, the personal insecurity due to a lack of a healing community, the lack of personal identity, and the sense of being unwanted, overlooked, and unneeded by society as a whole (Bauer 2017:74).

PRC environments tend to be relatively socially stable but are often economically tenuous. Economically active youth and adults may commute daily or for extended periods to urban areas for employment. In PUC environments however, there tend to be multiple socio-economic classes. There are often significant and stable socio-economic strata, yet there may also be significant fluid population groups, for example, migrants, immigrants, new arrivals in the urban environment, illegal aliens, people



fleeing persecution, and people trying to “disappear.” Members of fluid communities often experience social fragmentation combined with a loss of connections from their past values, faith, and underlying worldview. Many youth and other rural migrants immigrate to urban areas seeking economic and educational opportunities and to redefine themselves by leaving behind traditional religions and cultures for the modern, more democratic, technologically advanced, consumer-driven, and contemporary urban cultures.

PRC communities are often comprised of self-contained household units with land and animals. Many such communities have a tenuous hold on their land since some corporations demonstrate a willingness and ability to acquire land for private commercial exploitation by simply ignoring or overriding, through dubious legal means, the ancestral domain framework within which the PRC communities operate. PUC communities however tend to show a greater diversity of accommodation standards and provision. Other than for the upper socio-economic groups and the relative affluence and opportunity of gated communities, urban areas are increasingly characterized by high population densities. Poor urban inhabitants increasingly live in densely packed, potentially high-crime neighborhoods, with limited educational or recreational opportunities, polluted environments, inadequate transport infrastructure, poor sanitation, increased levels of poverty, and economic desperation.

At the worldview level, the more rural and isolated a community is, the more homogenous the underlying worldview tends to be within the community. This is in sharp contradistinction to what is found in PUC contexts, where the combined impact of urbanization, post-modernization, and globalization change the worldviews of urban newcomers. Pre-urban worldviews are significantly impacted by the gravitational pull of post-modernity, which is promoted by globalization and urbanization. Consequently, and consistent with secular disenchantment theory, urban areas tend to witness a greater falling away from active adherence to traditional religions and an increase of de-facto secularism when compared to PRC communities. The worldview of migrants tend to be shaped by unique multi-cultural, linguistic, and historical factors, and within a PUC context, several dominant worldview themes may coexist or converge.

The impact of urbanization on worldview and the close relationship between urbanization and secularization impact the personal selves of community inhabitants. As Smith (2014) argues in his elucidation of the writings of Charles Taylor (*A Secular Age*, 2007), the more traditional societies associated with PRC environments are comprised of individuals with “porous” selves, that is, they are more open to external influences (e.g., demons, gods, forgiveness, and grace, etc.). In contrast, the net impact

of the combined forces of urbanization, secularization and globalization result in increasingly “buffered” selves, that is, people who are closed to external influences, living in the immanent, but haunted by the gods of the past and the missing transcendent dimension of life. Buffered selves however, may become porous selves in moments of crisis, becoming more open to external influences such as grace, forgiveness, or hope, and manifest an existential yearning for positive community experiences.

The transition from predominantly “porous” selves in PRC communities to increasingly “buffered” selves in PUC communities is reflected in the evolution of community people groups and group identities. In PRC communities, these are often delineated by missiologists and AFM missionaries along ethno-linguistic lines and are heavily influenced by religious identity. In PUC contexts however, people groups tend to be multi-ethnic segments gathering in “lifestyle clusters” within an urban society. Because of shared values or lifestyle, such groups tend to associate with each other in mutually reinforcing social cycles. Ethno-linguistic and religious delineation is less significant in the PUC context due to the increased impact of secularism in urban environments and the tendency to associate by age, occupation, education, socio-economic status, shared lifestyles, media habits.

Finally, in the PRC communities, media strategies tend to be more limited in nature. Primary use is made by FLWs of local informal communication strategies. This however is changing as smart-phones become increasingly ubiquitous, even in PRC contexts. However, in PUC communities, FLW media strategy tends to be highly visual and virtual. Extensive high-visibility and targeted formal and informal media strategies become necessary for engaging distinct and differentiated lifestyle clusters and socio-economic groups. Extensive and targeted use of locally appropriate social media, video production, messaging, infomercials, and awareness raising media is needed. FLWs must have a basic awareness of the use of the media tools available to them within their PUC community.

Having provided a brief overview of critical community dimensions within predominantly rural and predominantly urban contexts, the next section offers an overview of ministry strategy considerations for front-line workers (FLWs) in rural and urban environments.

### **Ministry Strategies for Front Line Workers in Rural and Urban Environments**

Among AFM FLWs, formal community surveys are rarely used in PRC locations, but they are sometimes used to fine-tune the focus of an existing

felt-needs ministry. In contrast, in PUC locations, formal community surveys are essential for the FLWs to be able to understand the lifestyle clusters within the local community, their needs, demographic factors, religious affiliations, fluidity, and social mobility. This information is used to design felt-needs ministries and outreach strategies for each strata and lifestyle cluster of the PUC community.

In PRC communities, the location of ministry tends to be in personal homes or community infrastructure such as schoolrooms, ancestral domain land, or donated infrastructure. Particularly in indigenous communities, ancestral domain concerns require a substantial level of community support for any ministry activities. In contrast, PUC community members tend to prefer meetings in safe 3rd spaces for initial contact points, such as coffee shops, restaurants, after-school facilities, since the 1st and 2nd spaces (home and work/school) are often unsafe for initial friendships and spiritual discussions.

Language is a critical issue for FLWs. In PRC, the language used is primarily the heart-language of the community, with some knowledge of the local trade language required on the part of the FLW. The reverse holds true in PUC communities, where the FLW must be competent in the use of the local trade language, with some knowledge required of a particular heart language for specific ministry activities. Ministry may also take place in parallel language groups simultaneously, requiring intentionality in cultural sensitivity, scheduling of meetings, and identification of leaders for each ethno-linguistic group.

In addition to language, models of ministry tend to differ for FLWs in PUC and PRC communities. For those FLWs serving in PRC communities, the primary models of ministry tend to be the more traditional public meetings, church planting and worship facility construction, felt needs ministries, and one-to-one discipleship. FLWs often utilize well-tested, tried, and proven Adventist public and personal outreach models that can be learned in advance of community engagement. Sometimes the message reflects a very basic contextualization of pre-existing “pre-packaged” Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic materials.

In contrast, within PUC communities FLWs increasingly focus on (1) home fellowships, house churches, and small groups (either in personal homes or 3rd spaces) to build trusting and missional communities, (2) in congregation and worship group planting, (3) in Person of Peace (POP) and group leadership development, and (4) in operating a range of Felt Needs Ministries (FNM) and Centers of Influence (COI). Urban communities lend themselves to explicit Disciple Making Movement strategies given the higher population density, ease of communication, and relative

anonymity to be found in PUC communities. Although prayer is critical in any ministry context, PUC ministry models exhibit an explicit focus on prayer, seeking for the leading of the Holy Spirit, and the intentional learning by the FLWs of the unique social, economic, and spiritual needs and cultural access barriers of the people groups and lifestyle clusters they are seeking to reach.

The importance of Persons of Peace (POP) for community access differs in PUC and PRC communities. In PRC communities, the POP is theoretically essential for ministry development, but POPs are often not explicitly sought after as the FLW's relatively high social visibility in small rural communities guarantees them access to decision-makers and local thought leaders. In contrast, within PUC communities, the FLW is almost completely anonymous, and a POP is critical for reaching the various socio-economic groups and lifestyle clusters through the POP's social networks. An abundance of prayer and waiting on God is necessary as the FLW waits for the Holy Spirit to make divine connections. Formal surveys can also be used to identify POP who have had God-given dreams. Interestingly, rural thought leaders can often gain direct access to urban thought leaders and political leaders due to historical migration patterns and familial or clan relationships.

The significance of FNMs also differ depending on whether ministry strategies are being designed for PRC or PUC communities. In PRC communities, FNMs are needed to bring legitimacy to the FLW and create contact points and friendship with community members. In rural areas, FNMs tend to focus on the lower socio-economic or marginalized groups. Three critical factors impact FNM effectiveness in PRC communities: the duration of the contacts generated by the FNM, the personal intensity of the contacts, and the friendliness of the contacts.

FNMs however play a more significant role within PUC communities. They are needed to bring legitimacy to the FLW and create contact points and friendship with community members. Different FNMs are designed to reach lower and upper socio-economic groups, and should facilitate active participation and leadership by local lay members, new converts, and contacts, who prefer to belong before they believe. A variety of self-supporting FNMs is the ideal to reach multiple groups and provide service opportunities for all lay members. Ministries of compassion are as important as ministries of proclamation. Wherever possible, the FNMs are based on formal community needs assessments, and ideally are managed to achieve financial self-sufficiency within the local urban context. As Sabbath observance becomes increasingly problematic for new converts around the world, economically viable FNMs provide employment and both familial and social credibility for new believers who may have

lost their employment due to Sabbath concerns when they joined the local Seventh-day Adventist church.

Short-term mission trips are a common feature of many northern hemisphere churches, seminaries, and youth groups. In PRC communities, short-term mission trips tend to focus on bringing in much needed technical skills, for example, construction, well-drilling, electrical work, etc. The mission trip participants tend to focus on utilizing their technical skills themselves in construction, remodeling, or other such activities. Short-term mission trips also lead to short-term outreach activities such as leading a local Vacation Bible School program. In urban environments however, there is a greater availability of technical support and skills available at the local level. Short-term groups therefore, if they wish to “add lift” to the local missional community, find a more meaningful engagement with local community members if the short-term mission trip members tend to focus on technical training and professional upgrading of local professionals and the intentional equipping of local believers for ministry.

Finally, in PRC communities there is typically a demand for the construction of dedicated worship and ministry structures after the initial phases of the church planting process are complete. However, due to high land and construction costs within PUC communities, there is often a demand for safe spaces for worshipping groups to meet, for example. 1st spaces (homes, dormitories etc.) or 3rd spaces (local cafes, restaurants, after-hour programs in local school, etc.) Generally, these 1st and 3rd spaces already exist and do not need to be purchased or constructed. As such, the focus of the FLW is more on rental or negotiated access rather than construction and ownership for the initial years of the church planting process.

Having reviewed ministry strategy considerations for FLWs in predominantly urban and rural context, the next section focuses on personal factors impacting FLWs in rural and in urban environments.

### **Personal Factors of Front Line Workers’ Leadership in Rural and Urban Environments**

In PRC communities, the personal connections between AFM FLWs and local community members is predominantly person to person, face to face, whereas in PUC communities, there is a much greater role and need for social media and electronic communications in building a network of contacts and friendship. That said, however, person to person interaction and trust remains critical.

Traditionally, AFM FLWs conducted a “culture study” to give insights into the local worldview, and capture missiological learning for new FLWs.

These culture studies could take 1-2 years to complete when combined with traditional missional tasks such as language learning, intentional relationship building, and community outreach activities. In PUC communities however, the traditional AFM “culture study” will not capture the full breadth of diversity of the urban community, reflecting primarily the insights from the relatively limited social network the FLW develop in their first few years’ service. A guided longitudinal journal is recommended for FLWs in PUC environments that guides the data capture and prayerful reflection of the FLW. Such captured insights can be passed on to new FLW colleagues. In addition, and as stated above, a formal community survey is critical to learning the key socio-economic, demographic, religious, and other key community factors, providing essential input to FNM design. And intentional reflection on the impact of post-modernity, secularism, and urbanization on the multiple local worldviews is also needed on the part of the FLW, particularly among the younger generations within the PUC.

As stated above, in PRC contexts the FLW tends to have relatively high social visibility. Often, the FLW is the only foreigner in the community and this serves to raise their visibility higher yet. FLWs tend to enjoy relatively direct access to community civil and religious leaders. Due to this high visibility of the FLW, greater emphasis is placed on becoming as much of a community insider as possible. In contrast, in PUC contexts the FLW is often relatively anonymous with little or no access to urban leaders, and thus needs great intentionality and prayer to gain access to the religious and civil leaders. Due to this social anonymity of the FLW, greater emphasis is placed on gaining cultural competency rather than being perceived as a cultural or community insider. This is particularly true when other expatriate urban dwellers engaged in purely secular or commercial activity are making little effort to be viewed as community insiders, preferring to work and socialize within their own expatriate lifestyle cluster.

Due to these relative differences in social visibility, in PRC contexts the gospel tends to flow initially through the FLW’s own relatively new social networks and then increasingly via the POP’s social network. In contrast, in PUC contexts the gospel may flow initially through the FLW’s social network but subsequently and increasingly through a POP’s well-established social networks. With greater economic opportunities in PUC contexts, tentmaking provides a viable platform for establishing social credibility and opening new social networks for the FLW, in addition to the added advantage of easier visa access. While tentmaking provides many theoretical advantages for FLWs in PUC contexts, tentmakers must be deliberate to ensure that they do not get caught up so much in their secular employment and the sheer effort of living cross-culturally that they lose

sight of their church planting goals. This concern calls for constant vigilance on the part of FLWs and their supervisors.

Discipling new disciples can be a very intense and personal experience for a FLW. In PRC communities, the FLW tends to disciple new believers, often in a didactic manner. Local lay workers also receive and then in turn provide additional didactic instruction to others in rural settings. Such lay workers are in regular personal contact with the FLW so they can participate in a personal discipleship process with the FLW and receive regular ministry training. It is assumed, not always correctly, that the FLW in the PRC understands the local worldview and spiritual context, and is sufficiently considered a community insider for such training and discipleship to be meaningful and viable within the local context. PUC contexts require a more inductive and disseminated strategy. Discipleship often takes place through a POP and local lay leaders discipling local believers, often in an inductive manner. The FLW cannot physically cover an entire urban context, for example, due to traffic congestion, so discipling takes place in a more explicitly Disciple Making Movement (DMM) framework due to physical necessity. Outsider-driven didactic methods often incorporate alien worldviews, logic, and conceptual complexity which together can inhibit discipleship multiplication.

This may provide a conceptual challenge to a Western-trained FLW who operates in the more traditional Bible worker model normally found in North America. However, the intrinsic advantage of inductive rather than didactic teaching styles in discipleship processes is that in the inductive process the Holy Spirit is the Teacher. This can lead to more rapid multiplication of disciples, whereas in the more traditional didactic approaches, the FLW is at the heart of the process, and teaching can only progress when the FLW or a trained lay worker is present. As a result of these factors, DMM strategies are almost imposed on the FLW in the PUC contexts if FLWs are to see a meaningful impact through their ministry.

In terms of the ethos of ministry that the FLW demonstrates, in PRC communities there tends to be a focus on winning trust, proclaiming, and gaining decisions for Christ via cognitive acceptance of doctrinal instruction. In PUC communities however, and given the alienation, disillusionment with hierarchies, and personal betrayal by inwardly focused religious and civil institutions that many post-modern urban dwellers experience, there is a need for a greater and intentional focus on ways to build personal trust before decisions can be invited for God.

These differences in ethos of ministry manifested by a FLW in different contexts impact the leadership styles that are manifest. In PRC contexts, particularly in isolated regions, the leadership style among FLWs tends to be more driven, task oriented, and centralized around the person and

family of the FLW and locally hired lay workers. This may be partly because an expatriate FLW often brings specialized and much needed technical skills, which makes the FLW stand out vis a vis local community members. Among urban dwellers used to open information flows via the internet, FLW team leadership ideally fosters open discussion and democratic decision-making processes, which in turn encourages member involvement / ownership in FNMs and other outreach activities. Functional leadership tends to be more effective than appointed leadership in multiplying groups, and the intentional servant leadership development of known discipleship multipliers is more effective for catalyzing movements than appointing and mentoring formal leadership over static congregations.

### Summary

The current and rapid urbanization shift of the global population calls for an intentional focus for missionary sending organizations such as AFM in what it means to minister in the growing urban centers around the world. This article outlined three critical dimensions of ministry that impact ministry strategies in predominantly rural and urban contexts for AFM Front Line Workers (FLWs). First, the community contexts within rural and urban environments. Second, the ministry strategy considerations for FLWs in rural and urban environments. Third, personal factors impacting FLWs in rural and in urban environments. The article provides in summary form the three key critical dimensions of ministry shared with AFM FLWs during initial training and that are utilized post-launch by AFM FLWs with their supervisors when prayerfully demonstrating urban ministry strategies within their unique urban contexts.

Beyond these critical dimensions however, two factors are critical for mission for all AFM FLWs: the presence and leading of the Holy Spirit and a God-given love for the cities where they minister. These two factors cannot be programmed into people, but they can be prayed for, trusting that the promise of Jesus in Acts 1:8 will be as true in the 21st century as it was in the 1st century.



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Conrad Vine graduated with a business management degree in 1995, then served in the UK public healthcare system before working for ADRA from 1996 to 2002. Following seminary training at Newbold College (2002-2004), he and Luda began their pastoral ministry in London, UK, worked in the Middle East Union, then served 4 years in Minnesota. Since 2011 Conrad has served as president of Adventist Frontier Missions. He and Luda have two children, David and Christina.

Paulo C. Oliveira

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# The Rise of the Digital Neighbor: A Theoretical Concept for Mission Renewal in the Digital Age

## Introduction

Mission in the twenty-first century is largely an urban experience. Since mission is always relational, an underlying concern is how does God and those Christians who engage in mission with him connect with and transform communities. Missiology has attempted to answer such enquiries by conceptualizing in terms of bounded, more or less homogeneous groups of people who are organized around linguistic/cultural people groups, geographical location (i.e., islands, villages, downtown cities, inner cities, suburbia), and religions (i.e., Buddhism, Islam, unreligious/Secularism). However, with the technological revolution, particularly digital and mobile communication technologies in the last decades, these well-defined boundaries have either collapsed or become porous, allowing continuous global cultural crisscrossing. In this new global condition, it has been noted that missiological thinking focused on groups and locality becomes less important as more of the world becomes embedded in the global informational culture (Bolger 2007:188).

This paper deals with shifts in the concept of neighborhoods and communities. I propose that the field of social network studies is useful to aid missiological considerations in contemporary global societies. Furthermore, I argue for the thesis that current social shifts require mission studies to move from notions of homogeneous or quasi-homogenous geographically bounded groups, neighborhoods, and communities towards giving attention to the networks of networked individuals—the digital neighbor. The underlying question addressed is, How does this redefinition of community foster mission renewal in the digital age? Answering this question supplies rudimentary material to build a theoretical concept of mission based on a new identity, place, and modes of relationships in a digital-technological-saturated age.

In the first section, I will explore two social network concepts: a network society and networked individualism. They will ground the conversation describing contemporary global society. The second section will probe contemporary shifts in notions of neighborhood and community. In the third section, I will ask, “Who is my neighbor?” in the digital age, using the analogy from the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. In addition to social science and theological considerations, I will add a missiological dimension to help redefine and expand the concept of neighbor by expanding it to include one’s digital neighbor. The conceptual frame of the digital neighbor provides resources for missiological development and engagement in the digital age.

### Contemporary Society as a Network Society

One of those in the forefront of thinking about the global urban society in the twenty-first century is the Spaniard sociologist Manuel Castells. In his trilogy *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture* (1996:55; 2000a; 2004c) he argues that the rise of the *Network Society* is a new global social structure. He defines a *Network Society* as “a society whose social structure is made of networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies” (2004a:3). The difference between contemporary society and previous ones is not the presence or absence of networked social structures, but the presence and mediation of computers within economic and social relationships. Following Kuhn’s notion of paradigms (1962), Castells points to the emergence of a new digital information/communication paradigm impacting the contemporary network society. Together with previous revolutions in transportation and communication, computer mediated communication technologies provide the means for the reshaping of human interaction in which time and space are redefined. Unpacking this definition and exploring key elements of social networks will clarify their usefulness in missiological thinking. The task is to better define social structures, networks, nodes, flows, and information/communication.

The largest frame in his definition is the social structure in which people are organized in relation to production, consumption, reproduction, experience, and power—all of it happening within and codified by culture (Castells 2004a:3). Such structures vary according to cultures, meaning that although certain common characteristics are observed, social structures are multiple. In other words, different societies will have equally valid ways of organizing themselves. In general, contemporary societies exist in tension between local and global forces with all being influencers and influenced.

The next level of organization within a given social structure is the network, which refers to the many—*ad infinitum*—relationships within each social structure. Networks are clusters of relationships. Each network has a collection of nodes that interconnect the networks. Therefore, a network is a set of interconnected nodes.

The node is central to understanding the model (figure 1). Nodes hold the social network web together. In practical terms, a node is an actor (Hanneman and Riddle 2005) that can be a person, organization, government, stock exchange, national council of ministers, student, a clandestine lab, Christian denomination, a local church, to name a few. Nodes vary in value, increasing or decreasing according to their ability to absorb additional relevant information and process it effectively. Yet, independent of their value, all nodes are important for the performance of the network and can be reconfigured, deleted, or added to according to constant changes of power within the network. Each social context will have a variety of types of nodes, some unique, others more general.

The work of the network is to process flows, which are streams of information or communication circulating between the channels that connect the nodes. Once basic networks—as in figure 1—are connected through their flow of information/communication, a complex web of social network relations emerge (figure 2). The larger circles in figure 2 indicate the most important nodes in which and through which information is stored and processed. The larger flows (curved connections) also inform the larger traffic of information/communication being exchanged. Networks are dynamic in nature. They are open structures, with no center, constantly changing, and innovating (Castells 2000b:501). With different levels of awareness, most urban dwellers are embedded in a variety of network types as people participate in a digital-base connected society.

Despite the wide influence of the network society concept, an important critique has been raised concerning excessive attention given to digital technology (Giddens 1996). British sociologist Frank Webster charged it with technological determinism (2006:123). Castells has recognized such criticism and made significant efforts to declare explicitly his rejection of technological determinism and the notion that technology cannot be viewed as independent from social contexts (2004b:xvii). However, his very definition of a network society—“networks powered by microelectronics-based information and communication technologies”—seem to allow such a critique. Observation and empirical research suggest that a contemporary network society is not limited to computer powered and mediated relations (Campbell 2005, Campbell and Lövheim 2011, Lenhart and Madden 2007, Wellman 2001b). Offline relations are also constitutive of a network society in which online and offline are not perceived as separate realms, rather they are complementary as an online-offline reality.

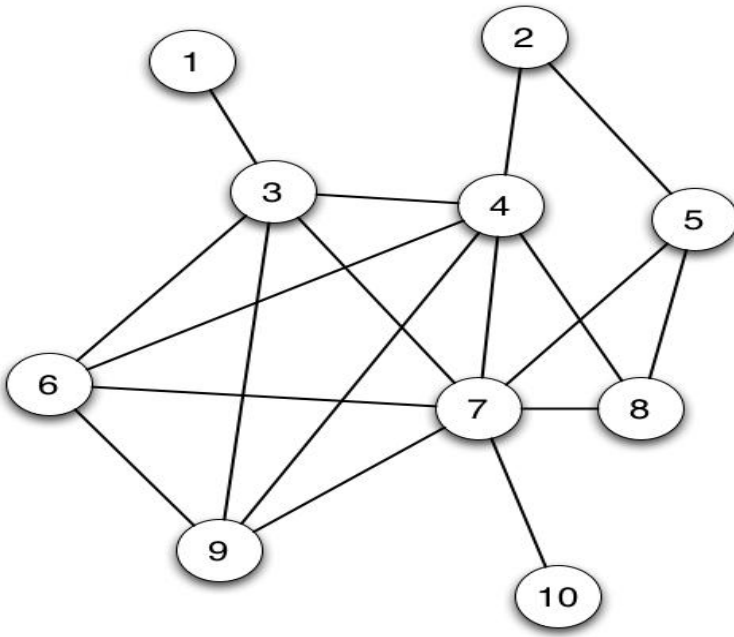


Figure 1. Basic network of nodes.

With these qualifications, I find in Rainie and Wellman a complementary concept that is helpful to zoom in to a network society to the level of relationships in which mission engagement happens. They suggest that the technological development of computer-communication networks has contributed to the rise of what he calls network individualism (Wellman 2001a:2), which is the new social operating system within a network society (Rainie and Wellman 2012). They argue that society has experienced a shift from the household and workplace as primary units of activities to the individual as a unit of activity within a network.

This shift has been afforded by the deployment of digital and wireless technologies. In other words, home and workplace used to be the portal of communication through which individuals were contacted. With the rise of digital and wireless networks, the home and work place gave way to the individual as the portal of communication. Nowadays a home phone number has mostly lost its function, having been replaced by personal, individual cell phone numbers.



Figure 2. Social network constellation. Taken from <http://geocachinglibrarian.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/MLA-out-degree.png>.

It is almost a given in our society that people will have a cell phone number. Recent Pew Research reveals that 84% of American households own at least one smartphone and some 18% are considered “hyper-connected” households, with 10 or more online connected devices. Over half of all households no longer own [a] landline/home phone connection. (Olmstead 2017)

The technologies referred to by Wellman are encapsulated in the concept of new media described by Heidi Campbell, scholar of new media, religion, and digital culture, as “that generation of media which emerges on the contemporary landscape and offers new opportunities for social interaction, information sharing, and mediated communication” (2010:9). Following Campbell, I will use new media to refer to a variety of interwoven contemporary communication technologies and devices such as the Internet, social media, smartphones, streaming, online gaming, virtual reality, the web, etc.

Through the diffusion of new media, the individual assumes a new level of centrality in a network society. Again, it is not the case that complex social networks are anything new, but the advent of new media allows them to be “the dominant force of social organization” (Wellman 2001a:2). While the concept is useful, Wellman’s choice of calling it network individualism can be misleading. Individualism is an excessively loaded word. It communicates the notions of social withdrawal and lack of collaborative intention. The problematic nature of the term, individualism, can be perceived in the conversational work by Henry Jenkins, Mizuko Itō, and Danah Boyd, in which the term creates the following reactions: Boyd asks, “How do we engender public-good outcomes when our tools steer us towards individualism?” She continues, “The notion of ‘networked individualism’ . . . is super convenient, but it is also seriously narcissistic.” In response to her comments, Jenkins calls the concept “paradoxical” and “oxymoronic” (Jenkins et al. 2015:22).

In my view, the strength of Wellman’s argument is weakened by the use of loaded terminology. Yet, further exploration through his work reveals that his emphasis is on the shift towards a society largely influenced by individual agencies through direct access, at any time or place, to information and communication. Not just access, but also the ability to interact in terms of consumption and production within networks. Wellman has referred elsewhere to network individualism as “individualized networks” (Wellman 2001b), which seems preferable. In addition, he declares explicitly that this new world is not the world of “autonomous and increasingly isolated individualists. Rather, it is the world according to the connected Me, where people armed with potent technology tools can extend their networks far beyond what was possible in the past” (Rainie and Wellman 2012:19). In short, people are functioning more as connected individuals and less as group members.

In this section I have described what I believe is a valid and helpful way to explain contemporary global society as a network society permeated by the power of new media. Digital-mobile communication technologies have created such a social transformation that urban conglomerates such as Los Angeles, Tokyo, Dubai, São Paulo, Beijing, London, Beirut, Nairobi, Manila, Tehran, and Lagos allow people to function in online-offline networks. This is the milieu in which Christian mission is engaged. With this set of concepts, I next ask the question, How does such a reality reshape notions of community and neighborhood?

### **Shifts in Notions of Community and Neighborhood in the Network Society**

In 1979 Wellman published an important article entitled *The Community Question* in which he examines the sociological concern for declining

community in neighborhoods in North America. He researched a group of 845 adult residents of East York, Toronto. He suggested that most sociologists researching urban contexts were functioning within a paradigm that took neighborhoods to be local areas marked by physical boundaries, much as missiologists do, as pointed above in the introduction. Communal interaction and sentiments in the old system were measured, assuming that an urban population's primary ties were organized by geographical locality. Consequently, when studies reported a decline of primary ties within certain neighborhoods it drove the logical conclusion towards the notion of community decay. Wellman, however, took a different approach that informed by the concept of social networks through which attention was given to relationship ties instead of solidarities. The data revealed an alternative reality. "The great majority of East Yorkers' intimate networks are not organized into local solidarities. Few have more than one intimate who resides in their own neighborhood" (1979:1214). Such a conclusion led Wellman to describe a new emerging—at the time—conceptualization of urban social arrangements. He proposed that while neighborhoods are still important, community has moved beyond geographical boundaries and the physical neighborhood is only one aspect of a person's community. The data suggests a "ramified, loosely bounded web of primary ties, rather than a aggregation of densely knit, tightly bounded solidary communities" (1216). These "networks of networks connects individuals, clusters, and collectivities in complex ways" (1226). It is also important to notice that Wellman's conclusions are pre-digital new media.

What was happening in the 1970s in the urban scene and detected by Wellman's research, was, in great measure, the impact of the transportation revolution and widespread ownership of family/personal cars that facilitated mobility beyond geographical neighborhoods.<sup>1</sup> Another factor working in tandem with increased mobility was the technological revolution with household telephones. In the 1960s over 40% of Americans had no telephones in their homes; however, by 1990 that figure dropped to 5.2% (United States Census Bureau). This allowed for speedy and expansive communication beyond geographical boundaries. Both technologies are responsible for the spatial expansion of intimate networks from a particular geographical neighborhood to metropolitan webs and beyond. By the 1970s, Wellman reports that telephone contacts were more frequent between intimate networks than in-person contacts (1979:1213).

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<sup>1</sup> US government data suggests that between the decades of 1960s and 1980s, the number of households owning three or more vehicles grew from 2.5% to 17.5% of the population. In the same period, the percentage of Americans who owned at least one vehicle grew from 78.5% to 87.1% (Oak Ridge National Laboratory, 2019, Tennessee).



Wellman suggests that in 22 years, with the raise of new media, that networks have become the new dominant system of social organization in North America (2001a:2). He uses the metaphor of “little boxes” as the starting point to explain the social shift underway. The metaphor is taken from activist and songwriter Malvena Reynold’s 1963 song in which she applies the expression to refer to the houses of American suburban middle-class. He incorporates the image to denote people who are socially and cognitively encapsulation in homogeneous unit groups. This is how Wellman describes people’s lives within the conceptualization of the little-box social model:

They work in a discrete work group within a single organization; they live in a household in a neighborhood; they are members of one or two kinship groups; and they participate in structured voluntary organizations: churches, bowling leagues. . . . These groups often have boundaries for inclusion and structured, hierarchical, organization: supervisors and employees, parents and children, pastors and churchgoers, organizational executives and members. In such a society, each interaction is in its place: one group at a time. (2001a:1)

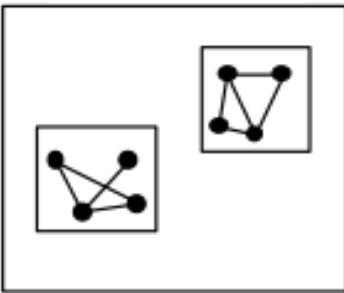
Figure 3 helps to explain how this historical paradigm shift happened or is happening. In the little-box social model, people used to visit each other through a door-to-door movement. Communities were limited to physical neighborhoods or villages and most relationships happened within such geographical constraints and rarely went outside them. Then, there was a transition to *glocalization*—local and global interactions. (Robertson 1995:25-44). Relationships transitioned from settlements (geographical neighborhood) to the household and workgroup as the primary units of activity, driven by transportation (family/personal cars) and communication marvels (home/work/ telephones). Already during this stage, it was noticed that “most North Americans have little interpersonal connection with their neighborhoods” (Wellman 2001a:4). Then with the rise of new media, a profound shift took place from Place-to-Place based relationships to Person-to-Person interactions (Wellman 2005:55). “It is I-alone that is reachable wherever I am” (Wellman 2001a, 5).

Throughout these transitions, geographically located neighborhoods became increasingly diminished in importance and influence as communities based on individual networks. Most readers will relate to this notion since the new media accounts and mobile numbers people use today are person-based and not place-based. This represents a significant shift in the nature of a community from one based on social networks of households and or workplaces to social network of individuals. Such person-to-person relationships are now globally based since this new

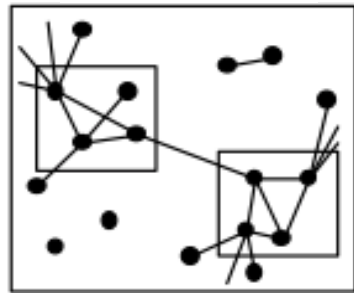
model of human relationships establishes connections from culture to culture in the network society (Castells 2000b:508).

Such a shift in conceptualizing urban communities and neighborhoods is underscored by a triple revolution of social network. First, people individually reach beyond the world of tight groups such as church and family. Second, the emergence of the Internet that has resulted in massive changes in the ways of production, consumption, and reproduction of information, content, and culture. Third, the mobile revolution, which communicates a sense of continuous presence and awareness of the network (Rainie and Wellman 2012:11, 12). Time and space are less important and so are bounded physical neighborhoods that are being replaced by communities of networks. This has huge missiological implications because of the changing nature of communities and neighborhoods.

### Little Boxes



### Glocalization



### Networked Individualism

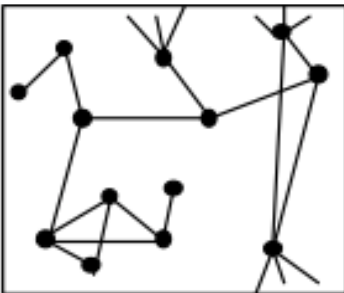


Figure 3. Three models of community and work social networks. Taken from Wellman 2001a:3.T

Wellman defines community “as networks of interpersonal ties that provide sociability, support, information, a sense of belonging and social identity” (2001b:228). Notice that his view expands the notion of community to beyond neighborhoods. While this definition is helpful, I suggest that instead of separating community from local neighborhoods, it is more helpful to recognize that there is a change in the nature of neighborhoods and not just in the nature of community. In the past, a physical neighborhood encapsulated community while in the network society community encapsulates neighborhoods. My community becomes my neighborhood, as Rainie and Wellman assert: “The new media is the new neighborhood” (2012:13). New media is not just a new *cyberplace*, but an extended place intertwined and entangled with daily life. The boundaries between on-line-offline are undefined.

My argument is that individual network communities contain neighborhoods that are fluid, allowing people within the network to take advantage of physical and cyber neighborhoods beyond their physical or cyber home neighborhood. Any community tie regardless of where it is located is an expansion of a person’s own neighborhood. Physical neighborhoods continue to hold peculiar characteristics, but notions of exclusion and inclusion have become much more nuanced. Through individual networks, one’s neighborhood has expanded, which also communicates an extended sense of belonging. Such an expansion is possible through the sharing of one’s neighborhood and community with those within one’s individual networks.

For example, I am writing this paper from Pasadena, California. At the same time, I am planning a trip to Brazil, with a layover in Bogota, Colombia. One of the nodes in my networks is a family in Bogota who will take me around to see the interesting places in their city while sharing their city, community, and neighborhood. Later, in Brazil, I will be staying in Juiz de For in the state of Minas Gerais. However, at some point during my trip, I will have to visit the U.S. embassy in the city of Rio de Janeiro, which is located some 90 miles from Juiz de Fora. While in Rio, another network node will provide our family a place to stay and will drive us to our appointments. All this while both our families enjoy each other’s company and strengthen our proximity ties. That family will share their neighborhood as insiders in the city. They will also offer us added security, since the city of Rio de Janeiro is filled with urban criminals who especially target those perceived to be outsiders. Through that network, we will live as a sort of hybrid insider-outsider in the city.

My individual networks do not just provide support to solve problems, they also introduce me to their physical neighborhoods in which I am more or less accepted and included because of the reality of unbounded

community networks—networks maintained and expanded through online-offline relations.

Robert Sampson, analyzing networks, neighborhoods, and crime, suggests that physical neighborhoods are, in fact, connected and they should be conceptualized as nodes within a large network of spatial relations (2004:157, 158). In a world where the line between online-offline has become blurred, a neighborhood loses its geographically defined nature to become, together with someone else's community, part of a larger network. It has been argued that communities are about social relationships and neighborhoods are about boundaries (Wellman 1999:xii). Yet, in the network society, every edge and limit is porous; boundaries are permeable (Castells 2000c:696).

The permeability of current reality in the network society can be demonstrated through studies of online and offline relations. At first, researchers conceptualized the two as separate realms, each with their own communities and neighborhoods all neatly arranged. Nowadays, scholars consider them to be one (Lenhart and Madden 2007; Campbell 2005; Campbell and Lövheim 2011). It has been documented that online and offline, or computer-mediated relations and non-computer-mediated relations, are not two separate realms but expanded realities in which the offline informs online practices and also conversely (Wellman and Gulia 1999; Gruzd, Wellman, and Takhteyev 2011). It is not that face-to-face relations and information exchange have disappeared. On the contrary, offline relationships is a key element for the formation of online communities (Boyd and Ellison 2008).

How does all of this relate to the rise of the digital neighbor and mission renewal? The social shifts demonstrated in the discussion above underline the need to shift mission attention from bounded physical neighborhoods and groups of people to individuals in connected networked cultural contexts. Neighborhoods no longer restrict actors to a bounded physical space. Rather, today's neighbor is now the digital neighbor, who is both physically and/or digitally next-door in our networks. The next section explores the missiological dimensions of the rise of the digital neighbor and asks several questions. How does this shift inform mission? How does it foster renewal in mission? How is the mission of God taking place in contemporary hybrid global societies? What does faithful mission engagement look like in this new setting?

### **The Digital Neighbor and Mission Renewal**

The discussion so far has demonstrated the emergence of a new social reality in which physical and virtual realities are entangled and

are informing, forming, and transforming each other. Technological revolutions are reshaping the way people live. However, even more important, they are reshaping the way people relate to each other.

I believe that such a social shift stimulates missiological renewal through new challenges and opportunities as God's people seek to understand the mission of God and its implications in this new social context of the network society. Such renewal benefits the intellectual pursuit of missiological clarity and practical mission engagement by fostering possible innovations in mission theory, evangelism, social transformation and justice, mobilization, interfaith relations, ecclesiology, to name only a few.

In this article, I have taken the analogy from the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 in which a Jewish expert on the law asks Jesus: "Who is my neighbor?" How should one proceed in answering this question from a missiological perspective in view of the current network society? How does the network society expand our understanding of the mission of God? What are the insights that can assist missiological reflection and engagement?

Theologian Lynne Baab offers a springboard as she reflects on the parable's question within the context of technology and theology in the network society. She makes the case that while the expert of the law asked the question in an attempt to have Jesus define categories of people who would fit in the classification of neighbor, Jesus changes the argument to emphasize a category of actions or the actions of being neighborly. Therefore, our task, Baab suggests, is not to find out who is a neighbor so we can love them, but to figure out when and how to be a good neighbor (2011:111). While I affirm the proposition that there is a Christian responsibility to action as a good neighbor, it is also important for mission studies to move beyond recognizing that clarification or redefinition of the category of neighbor.

The place in which Luke chooses to locate this narrative in his Gospel points to the importance of expanding the definition of the category of neighbor. Jews considered Samaritans worse than gentiles and the clarification of neighbor points to the mission of God beyond Israel and towards a global intercultural scope that includes gentiles and Samaritans alike. The disciples were Jews and shared similar views regarding non-Jews. This is reflected in Luke's choice to include Peter's words in the book of Acts: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation" (10:34, 35). If not for this clarification and expansion of "who is my neighbor?" the first century mission expansion would have been compromised and a significant part of the world's population would have been left out of the missionary efforts of the church—at least out of the church's missionary imagination. I argue, therefore, that

the current social shift also requires a redefinition and expansion of the category of neighbor to avoid the risk of mission blindness in which the *cyberplace* is dismissed as virtual and non-real or as a threat to “real” off-line life.

In this context, Bosch raises an interesting point in conversation with theologian Mazamisa and his text *Beatific Comradeship* regarding the figure of the digital neighbor. He concludes that “it is not the ‘human’ [real] in Jewish society who takes pity on the man who has fallen among robbers, but the ‘non-human’ [virtual]” (1991:90). The “non-human” Samaritan was invisible to the disciples, as far as mission goes. If not for Jesus’ redefinition and expansion of the concept of who a neighbor was, mission engagement by the early church would have been compromised.

I think it is fair to say that the same applies to the digital neighbor. If present day Christians do not recognize the need to relate and witness to the virtual/digital world, then their view of the kingdom of God is also compromised. In the same way the parable moved the neighbor beyond Israel’s boundaries, so does the concept of the digital neighbor move present day Christians beyond physical bounded reality. Do those living in virtual reality stand in need of mission? Is God active in mission online just as he is offline? Does God reveal himself through hypertext? Is face-to-face witness a requirement for Christian witness? Is the digital neighbor human and real? These are just some of the many questions demanding missiological reflection in this age of the network society.

Heidi Campbell, scholar of Religion and New Media, and Australian theologian Stephen Garner have collaborated—or should I say networked—to produce one of the first attempts to construct a theological framework for understanding the intersection between new media and Christian theology. In *Networked Theology* (2016) they construct a frame to theologize about the digital, technological, and network society. Speaking of the digital neighbor, they focus the conversation around three fundamental questions. Who is my neighbor? Where is my neighbor? How should I treat my neighbor? I will use their frame but will move the conversation a little further by adding a missiological dimension to the discussion.

### Who Is the Digital Neighbor?

Campbell and Garner suggest that a theological starting point is to see the neighbor as everyone because of humanity’s common source. As a primary theological disposition, human beings are made in the image of God (Gen 1:26-28) and still reflect his likeness in human nature, in social relationships with God and others, and in their creative agency as co-creators with God. Furthermore, the Trinitarian God is a relational being, which makes humans relational at their core (2016:74).

<https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jams/vol15/iss1/17>

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In addition to the principle of humans made in and reflecting the image of God, missiology has also convincingly made the case of *missio Dei*. As part of his attributes, God's love and mission is part of a divine movement emanating from God to the world (Bosch 1991:390). The church, in Christ and through the Holy Spirit, should also be moving towards the world. Unfortunately, the world and the neighbor are often taken to be the object of mission. Campbell and Garner suggest that the notion of being neighbor implies a kind of relationship that fosters well-being and nurtures life. Such relationships are only possible when God's people humanize the other, as indicated by Bosch and Mazamisa. In such a case, the neighbor is a subject in which an inherent worth is recognized and located, instead of the object of mission. This principle runs in two directions: Christians recognize the *self* as being a neighbor but also the *other* as neighbor (2016:77). Both the digital-Christian-witness neighbor and the digital neighbor have great worth because they are made in God's image. Any engagement in God's mission to people in networks must be rooted in this biblical position.

Today's Christianity is embedded and entangled in and with the network society; therefore, the digital neighbor must also be part of the focus of Christian mission. Studies have shown that Christian communities do not exist outside of the new reality of network societies. Christians are as networked as anyone else (Horsfield and Teusner 2007; Campbell 2005). To the extent that Christian mission engagement happens in the network society, the question as to who my neighbor is, is a question of identity of *others* but also of the *self*. Without capitulating to technological determinism, it is clear that new media is a force that shapes identity (Lövheim 2012) as part of the social cultural matrix (Horsfield and Teusner 2007:279). Although some fear that current realities are negative towards religious identities, studies indicate that the separation between online vs. offline, real vs. virtual, and physical vs. digital are artificial boundaries in the network society. Lövheim reports that religious identity online is not that different from the identity of the every-day life (2012:52).

In short, the digital neighbor is both the Christian witness agent and the subject of God's mission. It is the *self* and the *other*. The digital neighbor is the one who interacts at some level within various communities. As Christian witnesses, God's people are called both to love the digital neighbor and to be a loving digital neighbor. A missiological concept of the digital neighbor insists that she reflects God's image, is part of God's community, and the subject of God's mission.

## Where Is the Digital Neighbor?

In the network society, place has been reconfigured to encompass an online-offline continuum in which time and space have been redefined. Human experience in place largely determines our understanding of whom we are as well as our place in the world—where we belong. Boundaries play an important part in these human constructions. When place undergo such pervasive shift, it is only natural that what follows is disorienting, but hopefully also reorienting. The rise of the digital neighbor calls for renewed mission reorientation.

Campbell and Garner indicate that in the parable of the Good Samaritan Jesus collapses the boundaries that defined identity and belonging. After all, it was the “outsider” who showed love to the Jewish (“insider”) traveler (2016:79). The parable underscores the limited and limiting notion of place and neighborhood in human-constructed boundaries. In the network society, cultural and geographical boundaries are porous and are crossed daily. The digital neighbor lives in the online-offline reality of daily urban existence. It is into this reality that incarnation mission happens.

The Gospel of John says, “The Word became flesh, and dwelt among us” (NASB). The Message renders this text as “the Word became flesh and blood, and moved into the neighborhood.” The missiological concept of incarnational mission as translation has something to say in this setting (Walls 1996:27). Beginning with Jesus, the missionary movement has been involved in translating the gospel message, for translation always happens as the gospel finds itself in a new reality or culture. This has been called the “translatability of the gospel” (Sanneh 2009:1). The digital neighbor exists in the network society in the expanded reality in which interpersonal encounter and experience happens—the social space of connection (Bolger 2007:189) or the space of flows (Appadurai 1996:33). If the incarnation of Jesus takes God’s presence to every corner of human existence and activity, then God is present in the relational/informational flows. Incarnation also understands boundaries as porous since the spiritual becomes physical, crossing between realms. There is no limit to restrain the incarnation of the Word and his action in mission. Physical and digital boundaries collapse allowing movement amid various contexts.

Where is my neighbor? is a question that has at least two possible responses. First, the digital neighbor is at the heart of God. Humans find their original and perpetual location, value, and genesis in God. When Jesus disorients his listeners in the parable of the Good Samaritan he does so for the purpose of situating the essential place and value of people as



in the One in whom all find their center and source: “In him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Second, the digital neighbor exists in the extended physical-digital world. The networked individual lives his life in a hybrid reality. The church is also embedded in the same hybrid reality in which it is called to be incarnated with Christ. It is in the midst of human activity in the relational flows that the church must witness and flourish, both offline and online. The communities of the church and its neighborhoods are the communities of the hybrid reality where Jesus and Christian witnesses are already embedded.

### How Should One Relate to the Digital Neighbor?

If the digital neighbor—as both the Christian witness and the subject of mission—reflects God’s image, is part of God’s community, and is the subject of God’s mission, then, the same rules of the kingdom that apply to physical relationships must apply to virtual ones since both are intertwined in continuity. Campbell and Garner, reflecting on the Deuteronomy commandment, conclude that love for the digital neighbor is inseparable from the love for God. Moreover, it “is worked out through a combination of orthodoxy (right belief), orthopraxy (right action), and orthopathy (right feeling)” (2016:84). The emphasis on the role of the emotional dimension in this conclusion is important.

Contrary to popular assumption, empirical research has indicated that in the network society people are not losing their social connections. On the contrary, at least in North America, people reported having more friends than in the past, both online and offline. Heavy online users had the most social connectivity in the expanded online-offline life (Wang and Wellman 2010). It was also found that there is no significant difference in social network interaction between people living in urban, suburban, or rural areas (Pew Research Center 2018). Hence, in general, relationships are not declining, only changing. Emotional attachment in the digital age is a reality.

Complementary to orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy, missiologists have suggested *orthopathos* as another dimension (Tan 2014; Sunquist 2013) helpful to move the conversation one step further. The concept of *orthopathos* seeks to focus attention on human suffering and the action of solidarity. It helps people to recognize human suffering in the digital realm. Suffering is readily associated with a physical experience, but not so naturally recognized in the digital arena. Suffering calls attention to minorities and marginalized who often experience poverty, exile, homelessness, voicelessness, despair, etc. Human suffering in the digital realm has not been fully articulated and many questions remain unanswered.

What does it mean to be digitally poor? What does homelessness look like in the network society? How is despair manifested in the physical-digital reality? What is marginalization in the digital age?

Tan argues that orthopathos needs to be a bridge to integrate the gospel's orthodoxy to the orthopraxis of human action as mission engages the digital neighbors in daily life encounters (2014:150). Orthopathy (right feelings) and ortopathos (solidarity with suffering) are also functions needed in human interactions with the digital neighbor. To locate the digital neighbor at the heart of the Trinitarian God is to locate the digital neighbor in Christ for Christ's experience is one of suffering and glory (Sunquist 2013). Solidarity and participation in the suffering of the digital neighbor bridges and integrates orthodoxy and ortopraxis in mission. Loving God and the digital neighbor are inseparable concepts. Orthodoxy, orthopraxy, orthopathy, and orthopathos collaborate to inform and shape mission engagement in the network society.

Such a framework helps people recognize that God is just as present and active in the virtual world as he is in the physical world. Psalm 139:7 (NLT) says, "I can never escape from your Spirit! I can never get away from your presence! Just as the network society has forced people to recognize a new reality with community existing with porous and permeable boundaries, so it is with the notion of sacred places. The new media-saturated contemporary society must be recognized as a realm where God is present and active. The extended online-offline is a holy place where God is active in mission. Salvation is the theme of the Good Samaritan parable and offers a backdrop for understanding the Christian responsibility towards the digital neighbor. Actions of salvation in mission are expected in networked interactions. They can be as casual and superficial as driving by the digital neighbor's house on the way to work, saying hello at the elevator, exchanging small talk about the weather, seeing posts on Snapchat, reading a comment of a friend of my friend on Facebook, or receiving messages on Hangout or WhatsApp groups. In the network society all God's people are called to join Christ's mission in our networks and neighborhoods for the glory of God.

## Conclusion

The aim of this article has been threefold. First, to introduce social networks as valuable conceptual frames for missiological reflection. They offer a new panorama of social reality to focus mission studies on relationships between networked individuals instead of groups and geographical locations. Second, to call the attention for the need to take technology, particularly new media, seriously in missiological theory, strategy, and

practice. Third, to build on one of the first attempts to provide a theological response to technology and society—namely networked theology—by adding a missiological dimension to the conceptualization of the digital neighbor. This provides a workable resource for mission renewal in the digital-technological-saturated age.

In the network society, willingly or forcefully, lives are so integrated and connected with new media that computer mediated human interactions often occur unconsciously and with little reflection—much like a cyborgian existence. Digital technology and human life coexist in extension. Siri and Alexa are no longer science fiction. Missiological reflection must happen within this new social reality. The theoretical concept of the digital neighbor has the potential to foster renewal in three main areas. First, by creating new missiological identities. The digital neighbor is both the self and other; the Christian witness both engages in mission and is the subject of God’s mission. This perspective has consequences for one’s self-image, actions, and interactions within individual networks. Second, by creating a new missiological orientation concerning place or location. Mission engagement is not online or offline but on works in the expanded hybrid network society. It is not here or there, but everywhere. The missiological emphasis must shift from place-to-place to person-to-person. The individual agent, the digital neighbor, and his/her relationships are the new focus of attention in mission engagement. Third, by creating new missiological actions or engagement one becomes conscious of the expanded reality and begins to devise responses to the new challenges and opportunities. The expanded reality offers expanded perspectives. From these new areas, missiological imagination and work will need to focus on new research agendas, theories, strategies, and practices.

Bolger (2007) suggests a mission approach focused on practices that bind people in time and space as a viable way of doing mission in the digital age. The model presented above believes that practices are encapsulated within relationships in the space of flows. The digital neighbor holds the potential to provide a conceptual image to bind people in relationships in which practices take place.

This article does not seek to answer all the questions raised. However, it intends to point to exciting possibilities shaping the missiological agenda, research, and practice in the network society. I offer the following questions as possible paths for further missiological research.

1. How does the rise of the digital neighbor influence social power dynamics?
2. How does the digital neighbor concept reshape the church’s community engagement?

3. How should the digital neighbor concept reframe pastoral missiological training?
4. How does the digital neighbor concept affect mission engagement with people of other faiths?
5. What does incarnational mission look like in the network society?
6. How can churches articulate its location as extended hybrid entities?
7. What are the principles of missiological ethics in the network reality?
8. What are the implications of sacred places in the extended hybrid network society?
9. What does mission mean in a technologized and media-saturated world?
10. What does it mean to be a missionary in a network society?
11. What is the *mission Dei* in a network society?
12. What are the new tools and systems of oppression in the network society that need to receive missiological attention if justice is to be served?
13. How does the concept of the network society change the notion of the poor? Who are the poor in the network society?

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Paulo C. Oliveira is a Ph.D. student in Intercultural Studies at Fuller Theological Seminary and an urban pastor in Los Angeles. His current research interest focuses on the intersection of digital communication technology, emerging adults and religion, particularly Islam. He holds a Doctor of Ministry in Global Mission from Andrews University and has served as a missionary in the United Arab Emirates and Oman.

D. J. B. Trim

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# In These Cities Are Jewels: Lessons from Adventist City Missions—1880–1915

## Introduction

As an introduction to this topic I begin with a powerful testimony of Ellen White's that is a familiar one now for all advocates of urban mission. "There is no change in the messages that God has sent in the past. The work in the cities is the essential work for this time" (White 1932:304). But let's dig deeper beneath that memorable statement. Notice those words: "there is *no change*" in God's messages about big cities. This comes from a letter to the leaders of the General Conference (GC) written in June 1909 immediately after the close of that year's thirty-seventh GC Session, held at the church's headquarters in Washington, DC. The letter was composed before Ellen White returned to California. The timing reflected her frustration at the session's failure to act for the cities, which she expressed very frankly, rebuking the General conference president, A. G. Daniells and vice president, W. W. Prescott by name (White 1909 Letter 47). In particular, she observed, "As I look over the past testimonies, I see that *for years* the importance of working the cities has been urged. But . . . excuses have been made, and this great work has been sadly neglected" (Letter 47). Note that she does not say the cities have *never* been worked; instead, they have been neglected, but there is "no change" in God's messages.

As Ellen White's words of 1909 imply, urban-focused mission has a long history in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. It goes beyond the work of Dr. John Harvey Kellogg in Chicago, the one exemplar which is reasonably well known but which comes with proverbial baggage, given what happened with Kellogg. I will touch on the Chicago mission, but it was not unique; in fact, our pioneers established many city missions. And while they stressed practical experience they also valued analytical approaches. For example, in 1910, the first two days of the annual council

were given over to what was essentially a scholarly conference, with papers read by various proponents and veterans of city missionary activity, crystalizing their experiences and lessons learned for church leaders to take away and apply.

In this article I will simply delineate the main contours and draw out some points that are potentially relevant to urban mission today. Adventist history has much to offer, and not only in terms of learning lessons—our history can inspire us, but it can also chasten us and I hope this article will do both. As you will see, historically Adventists have engaged with the cities—sometimes—and sometimes in innovative and creative ways. City mission is *not* something new, *not* something that is a distraction. It is something that is deep in Adventist DNA; however, admittedly for many decades obscured. It is important to recover that heritage, to recapture the enthusiasm some Adventist leaders showed for city mission along with the creative and comprehensive methodologies some of them developed.

The first two decades of Seventh-day Adventist mission reflected the largely rural nature of American society. In 1882, Ellen White published a testimony in which she counselled Adventist families to leave cities (White 1889:232-233). However, it did not end Adventist interest in evangelizing cities. On the contrary, the next year saw the beginning of the golden age of Adventist urban mission.

At the 22nd GC Session in 1883, the minutes record the following. “The subject of organizing a city mission in Chicago was introduced, and interesting remarks relative to this were made. The brethren in Illinois have about \$3,000 ready to start this work, and probably more could be raised if the work were commenced. On motion, the matter was referred to the General Conference Committee” (Oyen 1883:741).

No GC Committee minutes survive from those early years, but the Committee did follow up, for within twelve months the denomination had a Chicago Mission and a New York City Mission. From presidential correspondence it is clear that the “Michigan [Conference] gave \$1,000, [the] Wisconsin [Conference] \$500 and Illinois [Conference] \$1,500, to start the Mission” (Butler 1885).

The Chicago Mission’s day-to-day operating expenses were funded by the International Tract Society, which meant it had a GC connection rather than only being an Illinois Conference institution, though in practice this caused some friction between the Illinois Conference and General Conference (General Conference Proceedings 1883:741). The New York Mission was at least partially funded by the General Conference, for it spent \$3,004.52 on the mission in 1884. That, incidentally, was 23% of the GC’s annual budget.

In November 1884, at the round of meetings associated with the annual



(as it then was) General Conference Session, the International Tract Society's annual general meeting received reports on newly founded missions in Oakland, Portland, and Denver, and discussed prospects for founding one in New Orleans (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1885:39-41). What, however, did these city missions actually *do*? Reports to the Tract and Missionary Society meeting reveal that "city work" largely meant systematic visitation of people's homes to conduct Bible studies (39-40). But the early city missions were also already trying to meet a range of felt needs, including social ones. Thus, in the 1884 report, it was noted that

donations of bedding, fruit, flour, potatoes, etc., would be very acceptable, and it was recommended that persons desiring to make donations of this kind, should send them together as much as possible [and] that the donors should pay the freight. . . . It was thought that most of them [the missions] might be largely sustained in this way. Many persons, especially farmers, could make donations from their large supplies, and never feel it, excepting in the way that "it is more blessed to give than to receive. (45)

This represented a good way to utilize Adventism's strength in farming areas and apply it to the needs of cities. In seeking to meet more than spiritual needs, urban missionaries were doing something different by Adventist standards; yet that was also true of their emphasis on evangelizing through visitation and Bible study, for, as leaders of the time recognized, this approach in big cities differed from that used in smaller towns, which revolved around series of public lectures in halls or tents (42, 44). Thus, Adventist urban mission, even in its earliest days, was innovative.

Only a few months after the 1884 Session, Ellen White for the first time addressed the subject at length in a testimony, written to R. F. Andrews, president of the Illinois Conference, to reprove his lukewarm or negative attitude towards the Chicago Mission. Later in 1885, that message was published in *Testimonies for the Church* (White 1889:368-385). Ellen White poses several rhetorical questions, following up with powerful reproofs.

What account shall we give for the men and women who have died without hearing the sound of present truth, who would have received it had the light been brought to them? My spirit is stirred that the work in [Chicago has] been delayed so long. The work that is now being done there might have been done years ago . . . it must not be left undone now. "Shall the prince of darkness be left in undisputed possession of our great cities because it costs something to sustain missions? Let those who would follow Christ fully come up to the work, even if it be over the heads of ministers and president. (1989:369)

Some months later, in November 1885, the 24th GC Session took up city missions with enthusiasm. A committee of nine was established (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1886:26), which reported back with no fewer than 14 recommendations that were accepted. The first was that “each conference [with large cities], have in its bounds at least one mission”—this would be ambitious today! In addition, at a time when the whole denomination employed fewer than four hundred workers (26), the session mandated the despatch of considerable personnel resources to big cities. The New England and New York Conferences between them had a total of 20 workers but they were instructed to “furnish at least half a dozen” more for the New York City Mission. There were just three ministers and four local churches in the entire Virginia Conference, and no churches or workers in Maryland, but two ministers and two nurses were newly assigned to Washington, DC. There were only three ministers across the whole of the Deep South but three ministers were allocated to start work in New Orleans (38-40).

One has a strong impression of a rolling stone that was gathering momentum. Urban mission was the new “in thing” for Adventists. The 1886 *Yearbook* included a first-ever report of “City Missions” as of 1885, listing thirty separate missions: 25 in the United States, plus five overseas, in Copenhagen and Stockholm in Scandinavia, Liverpool and Grimsby (in England), and Richmond, in Victoria, Australia (12-13). An overall statistical report for the 25 North American missions was included which states that these 25 missions served a cumulative population of 5,041,318 people, with a total workforce of 76 “experienced workers,” thanks to whose labors a total of 446 people had “embraced the truth during the year” (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1887:52-53).

The 26th GC Session was the first to meet in a large city, convening in Oakland. It created a new officer position, that of “Home Mission Secretary,” who was instructed to “devote his time principally to the furtherance of the city mission work during the coming year” (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1887). The same year, the *Yearbook’s* list of city missions included six more in North America (11-12). The next year, 1888, the session again went to a major urban area, meeting in Minneapolis. While the twenty-seventh session is generally remembered for theological and inter-generational conflict, it was notable for a report delivered by the Home Mission Secretary, E. J. Farnsworth, specifically on work in US cities for a nine-month period ending June 30, 1888, which reported twenty-two city missions, with “131 workers engaged in Bible work some time during the year,” who had “made 43,021 visits, with 10,353 families.” There had been 258 baptisms during the nine months covered by Farnsworth’s report, and he believed that “fully 1,000 persons have been converted since these missions began their work” (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1889:64-66).

Earlier that year, the fifth annual “European Council of Seventh-day Adventist Missions” in June 1888 took an action “that a . . . city mission should be established [in Hamburg] as soon as possible” (75-76). In November, delegates in Minneapolis approved a resolution with the same wording (Thirteenth Day’s Proceedings 1888, Nov. 2:1). Work had already begun in other major European port cities, but the decision about Hamburg points to the way in which denominational leaders were now thinking strategically about reaching big cities including those beyond North America. The strategic thinking is also evident in the 1888 GC Session’s decision to shift a team of seven colporteurs from rural Iowa to “the city of Baltimore” (Thirteenth Day’s Proceedings 1888, Nov. 1:1). The horizons of urban mission were thus being expanded geographically. They were also expanding in other ways.

The next year, 1889, the emerging work among colored people (to use the language of the time) also influenced denominational evangelistic strategies. In the Deep South of the United States the black population was heavily rural; but though slavery had been abolished its legacy continued. In the face of increasing white oppression and a need for better, consistent employment, Blacks began to migrate to the growing cities. In 1889, notable evangelistic efforts were held in St. Louis, led by Charles Kinney (the first Black Adventist ordained minister) and in Louisville, led by Alonzo Barry. Missions aimed at Blacks used public evangelistic methods, literature evangelism, and personal visitation; but they also utilized soup kitchens and adult literacy classes to supply the immediate physical needs of a community, which by definition was impoverished and lacked social support networks.

The more socially inflected and comprehensive approach to urban ministry, introduced in working for African Americans, was adopted more widely in Adventist city missions. In 1893, it was implemented in Chicago with the creation of the Lifeboat Mission, sponsored by the International Medical Missionary and Benevolent Association, which was led by Dr. John Kellogg. This model spread and was given prophetic endorsement. In the winter of 1894-95, the *Review and Herald* published a three-part series of articles by Ellen White, who was now serving as a missionary in Australia, with the title “Our Duty to the Poor and Afflicted.”

In the first article, White quotes Isaiah 1:17: “Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow.” She then starkly declares: “Can we wonder that the curse of God is upon the earth, upon man and beast, when his law is set aside as a thing of naught, and men are following the imagination of their own hearts, as did the inhabitants of the world before the flood? All this foretells the coming

of Christ and the end of all things" (1894:785). What is highly unusual by the standards of Adventist theological discourse is that here, Ellen White links "setting aside God's law as naught" not to the fourth commandment, or indeed to any of the Ten Commandments, but rather to failing to live up to Old Testament injunctions to care for the widow, the orphan, and the immigrant. Ellen White drives the point home: "Through selfish pride, through selfish gratification, the blessing of God has been shut away from men and from his professed people, because they have despised his words and have failed to relieve the sufferings of humanity" (786). Ellen White is telling us that the test of whether we are guilty of selfish pride and selfish gratification, and of despising God's words, is whether we do or do not "relieve the sufferings of humanity."

These articles deserve to be read and re-read but they have never been reprinted in any compilation. Perhaps Ellen White is too radical for us. At the time, though, John Kellogg declared that he would use "Our Duty to the Poor and Afflicted" as a blueprint for the Chicago Mission (Butler 1970:41-51). A year later, in 1896, the Lifeboat Mission created a maternity home for prostitutes who gave birth out of wedlock and a workingmen's home for unemployed laborers (Harris 1897:340).

In 1897, the earliest Adventist welfare organization outside America was founded in Hamburg, Germany (Community Services 1996:401). In 1898, the Bow Bazaar Mission in Calcutta, headed by Dores Robinson, included an orphanage, a vegetarian restaurant, cooking school, and a monthly magazine (Olsen 1926:517-520). In 1897 and 1898, city missions in Portland, Salt Lake City, and San Francisco, according to an official report, were places "where unfortunates can find food and lodging. Many have been supplied with clothing, and made comfortable during sickness" (Breed 1899:19). Elsewhere in the US West, there was a workingmen's home in Spokane; but there was also one in Melbourne, Australia (Breed 1899:19; Directory of City Missions 1901:547). In 1899, in Montgomery, Alabama, a Black pastor, T. S. Bucknor, opened the Montgomery Charity Mission, which not only disbursed aid to the African-American community, but also included a school for them (Buckner 1903:17).

Meanwhile the San Francisco mission had expanded. Its origins lay in an 1887 initiative by the San Francisco church that won the support of that year's GC Session held in nearby Oakland (The General Conference 1887:776). In the late 1890s it expanded, operating a "hygienic restaurant," health "food store," "treatment rooms," workingmen's home, sailor's ministry, a school, and an orphanage (The Vegetarian 1899:52; *General Conference Bulletin* 1902:6-7). Ellen White commended on what was happening in San Francisco and urged that this approach be widely emulated (White 1900; Krause 2013:6-9).

That these were concerted efforts, not outliers, is evident from an address to the 1899 GC Session by the GC president George Irwin. He stressed medical missionary work and addressing socio-economic ills and needs, and he averred, with evident pride, that “this work has spread *until now medical and rescue missions have been established, and are being successfully carried on, in nearly all the prominent cities in the United States*. Thousands in this way are being clothed and fed, and souls are being rescued from sin and degradation” (Presidential Address 1899:6). City mission was no longer only primarily about personal visitation and Bible studies. It had become almost identified with medical mission, though one should stress that this was medical mission broadly conceived—what is presently promoted as a “comprehensive health ministry.”

The obvious question to ask at this point is, How did things change so much? This is a question both about the long term and how quickly Adventists caught the vision for city work. How was it that Adventists largely abandoned cities, except for the comfortable suburbs, and then had to re-spark urban mission in the last decade? But even more, it is about the short term—how did things change so much just in the ten years, between Irwin’s words in 1899 and 1909, when the lack of work in cities led Ellen White to issue the stinging rebuke to church leaders mentioned at the beginning of this article.

For all the activity and for all that was being done right and done well, some things were going wrong. One was theological missteps. Crucially, under Kellogg’s influence, the distinctively Adventist character of the flagship mission in Chicago had gradually been abandoned. Kellogg increasingly portrayed the mission as a Christian one, not an Adventist one, and restructured its governance so that the American Medical Missionary College (which he had founded and led) was the mission’s parent. He had also amended the governance of the college and the Battle Creek Sanitarium so that they were no longer Adventist controlled. In 1900, Ellen White raised concerns over the non-denominational nature of the Chicago Mission. Over the next few years Kellogg would be at loggerheads with her and with the GC officers over his doctrinal views and over control of the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Relations were very strained and the city mission continued to be a source of friction.

The controversy over Kellogg, which ultimately led to his being disellowshipped in 1907, discredited, to some extent, the methods of the Chicago Mission, even the concept of city mission itself, as they were tarred with the Kellogg brush and deemed guilty by association. This can be overstated. It is true that the last time city missions had their own separate report was in the 1904 *Yearbook*, which listed missions in just six cities, three in America plus one each in Australia, New Zealand, and Sweden.

But we *know* that at this time there were missions in several other cities in the US (Nineteenth Meeting 1905:10), as well as in South Africa and Canada (Elder Goodman's City Mission 1905:1-5; Fortner 1905:1-2). It seems more likely that in 1904 there was a change in reporting, rather than that there was an immediate collapse in the number of city missions. More striking is that some dropped the nomenclature of "city mission." This fact suggests that the leaders of city missions felt the potential for being tainted by association with Kellogg and the Chicago missions so it was worth dropping that name.

In 1909 and 1910 there was a revival in urban mission, thanks to the emphatic encouragement of Ellen White. In December 1909, the GC Committee voted to allocate \$18,000 for city missions — no small sum — adjusted for inflation it would be around half a million dollars today. Furthermore, world evangelistic appropriations in 1909 totaled \$214,000. Just over one twelfth of that went to six US cities: Baltimore; New York City; Philadelphia; Portland, Maine; Richmond, Virginia; and Washington, DC (General Conference Committee 1909:149-150). New York got \$12,500 or over two thirds of the total appropriation for urban mission and the GC president Arthur Daniells himself went to New York City to evangelize in the city.

Yet by the end of the 1910s, there had been a definite decline in urban missions — not just in the nomenclature of city mission but in the substance. My staff and I have only been able to identify a handful of urban missions in the 1920s. So, why did all the effort of 1910 and 1911 ultimately end in disappointment, with the Adventist Church ending up focusing, yet again, on rural areas and small towns?

I propose there were five factors. First, an enduring perception that Kellogg's methodology was tainted, not just his theology and ecclesiology. Second, the death of Ellen White in 1915, which removed the foremost and most eloquent advocate of city work. Third, the immense distraction and destruction of the First World War. Fourth, the influence, in the decade following the First World War, of Fundamentalism, to which Adventists were not immune, and which tended to affirm positions that were socially and politically (not just theologically) conservative. This mattered because of the fifth factor, which I want to stress, and which was the nature of city work. It was difficult, dirty, smelly, insalubrious work, involving ministry to the working classes, to immigrants, to African Americans, to the poor, and to prostitutes — all this meant it attracted social stigma. But Seventh-day Adventists wanted to be respectable.

The evidence that the decline in city mission was associated with more than Kellogg is partly statistical. In going back to 1900, it is notable that the *General Conference Bulletin* reported city missions in 24 cities in 17 states and in three countries outside the United States. These numbers do

not reflect any significant shift from 1888. The expansion in city missions of the previous decade had stalled and plateaued before the crisis with Kellogg over control of the American Medical Missionary College and the Chicago Mission.

There undoubtedly were other difficulties and challenges. One of these was the expense of working in big cities—a recurrent problem still faced today. A report to the 1889 GC Session acknowledged: “Some excellent results have been seen from city mission work in the past; but it has proved too expensive for the various State Conferences to establish and maintain missions in all their large cities” (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1890:144). In 1910, when city mission underwent a brief renaissance, veteran church administrator Allen Moon presented a paper on finances to the annual council. He declared: “The mistake of years ago in this matter was in securing expensive properties for city missions, involving conferences in debt. This discouraged the people and led to the dropping of this line of work” (General Conference Committee 1909:301).

Another problem was the pronounced perception that urban ministry primarily meant ministry to ethnic groups. In the mid-1890s, Chicago had two missions: the first was the main mission, led by Kellogg, often called the English Mission: that is, English-speaking. There was also the Scandinavian Mission, which focused on people who spoke Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish, which eventually became known as the Swedish Mission (*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1887:52-53). When a new city mission was founded in Winnipeg in 1897, the Canadian leaders asked the GC to send “a German colporteur: and a Norwegian “laborer,” for these were the ethnic groups they wished to focus on, especially “the Norwegian settlement” (General Conference Committee 1909:301). The same year, work in Louisville and Chattanooga was begun by an African-American pastor, Lewis Sheafe, while in 1900 a new mission was established in Atlanta by a White northerner, M. C. Sturdevant; however, all three missions ministered only to local blacks (Sturdevant 1901:6). Nine years later, after Ellen White’s post-GC Session testimony to GC leadership, with which I began this article, the same leaders brought proposals to the 1909 Fall Council. One stressed the need for greater resources for city missions in the large cities of the northeastern United States, but on the grounds that: “There is in Greater New York and other eastern cities a vast foreign population of all nations and tongues, who must soon hear the truths of this message” (General Conference Committee 1909:117). Thus, it seems that city work meant black or immigrant work. It was niche work, specialized work—and often not respectable.

The impact that this could have is evident when looking more closely at what city missionaries actually did and at the *sort* of work that was involved in city work.

In 1905, Ellen White visited the Lifeboat Mission and the Workingmen's Home in Chicago, and lauded their ministries (1905b:8). In 1909, Illinois Conference leaders moved Chicago's "Rescue Home" for prostitutes to Hinsdale, which today is in Chicago's suburbs, but then lay outside the city's metropolitan area. In addition, it was repurposed to become a home for foundlings. But this meant it still had a social function, and Ellen White addressed the home's personnel and patrons at the new site's dedication (W. C White 1909:7). Her visits in 1905 and 1909 show that she retained her views from 1885 about "relieving the sufferings of humanity." She condemned Kellogg's theology, his bizarre and objectionable racial and sexual theories, his determination to work unilaterally, and his refusal to submit to the authority of the GC. Yet crucially, she did not condemn his methods of ministry in cities. It is deeply unfortunate that many Adventists apparently assumed that anything associated with Kellogg had to be abandoned. This was not what Ellen White wanted—just the opposite.

Indeed, at the 1910 Spring Council, Allen Moon, a veteran member of the GC Committee, "spoke of an interview in which Sister White said that it was not so much by public evangelists that the work [in cities] was to be done as by seeking out the people one by one through Bible work and canvassing effort, and medical missionary work" (General Conference Committee 1910:199). These words are similar to those in *Ministry of Healing*, published a few years earlier in 1905, where Ellen White writes not only of how Christ "mingled with men as one who desired their good. . . . [and] ministered to their needs," but where she also states, "There is need of coming close to the people by personal effort. If less time were given to sermonizing, and more time were spent in personal ministry, greater results would be seen. The poor are to be relieved, the sick cared for, the sorrowing and the bereaved comforted, the ignorant instructed, the inexperienced counselled" (1905a:143).

Church leaders, however, were not listening. Seven months after Moon shared Ellen White's counsel to him, a large part of the Autumn Council was devoted to city mission. Papers were based on experience not theory, but they went in a very different direction to that urged by Ellen White. Rollin D. Quinn (1869-1928), who twelve years earlier had served in the Salt Lake City Mission and was now president of the Greater New York Conference (Gosmer 1928:22; *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* 1910:22), presented a paper on the "Methods and Agencies in City Work," in which he declared, "The experience in New York City has convinced the workers that a strong, well-organized public effort . . . is of the highest efficiency in



reading the public.” He argued explicitly: “Well-advertised, well-manned and well-organized public effort in tent and hall . . . is the *chief* means of reaching the public of the great cities” (General Conference Committee 1910:295-297). This was the opposite of Ellen White’s counsel.

This was not the end of matters, though, for George B. Starr, who had been involved with city work for 24 years, read a paper entitled “How to Conduct a City Mission,” in which he emphasized “the combination of evangelistic and medical work,” but also “suggested the elimination of the word ‘mission’ from our city efforts as that name has come to signify work for the depressed classes.” Evidently the lower classes were not who Starr wanted to reach. Hetty Haskell, who had experience in New York City and who presented a paper on “City Mission Training Centers,” began by urging that “a respectable quarter of the city should be the location” (General Conference Committee 1910: 302).

The views of Quinn, Starr, and Haskell all suggest that the focus of city mission was no longer on the majority of a city’s inhabitants, those with the greatest needs, or on ministering *to* their needs, as Ellen White had urged. Instead, Adventists sought to reach the prosperous middle classes, even though these were everywhere a minority of city dwellers. The switch in focus was betrayed by Quinn in making another point: namely, that his preferred “method in tents and halls this year has brought 200 new members, and raised the title \$4,000” (General Conference Committee 1910:297). By 1913, outreach by the Scandinavian Mission in Chicago, in contrast to earlier work in Chicago, was largely a matter of door-knocking—this and the doors being knocked on were only those of suburban Swedish speakers (Nord 1913:60).

The nature of city work had shifted from its initial focus on personal visitation and Bible study to one of “relieving the sufferings of humanity” in Ellen White’s words. The poor were clothed and fed; illness was treated, and wellness promoted. However, the new aim was, in George Irwin’s words, to rescue from sin and degradation. Then the focus shifted again, to providing spiritual comfort to those who had no real physical wants, and who could, in exchange, provide the funds needed to maintain expensive urban and suburban institutions.

And in some ways, this trajectory is understandable. As far as one can tell, most Seventh-day Adventists in early twentieth-century North America were of Anglo-Saxon or Northern European ethnicity who stressed education. To go back to the Swedish Mission in Chicago, I do not doubt that hard-working middle-class people of Swedish descent were easier to deal with than the denizens of the teeming city streets where once the Lifeboat Mission had been a veritable lighthouse in the dark. With hindsight, one can see that Seventh-day Adventists had abandoned the city to

Satan. And Chicago was not alone. Adventists did not want to deal with dusty, dirty, gritty, smoky, unhealthy downtown neighborhoods or their equally soiled, filthy, foreign, illiterate, intoxicated inhabitants, many of them Italians, Jews, and Blacks. Sometimes the most seductive temptation is respectability—and that is as true in the early twenty-first century as the early twentieth century. That, it seems to me, is one of the main lessons to be learned from the rise and fall of Seventh-day Adventist city missions.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Twenty-Third Session, 5th meeting, Nov. 3, 1884

<sup>2</sup>Although the published testimony was addressed to “Brother M.,” records in the White Estate show it was sent to Elder R. F. Andrews regarding the Chicago mission. It is likely that the “Br. N” mentioned in the first sentence was the GC President, G. I. Butler; the White Estate has a letter from him to EGW dated Feb. 18, 1885, in which he shares a letter from Andrews with her about the Chicago Mission. This provides parameters for the date of composition: it must have been between Butler’s Feb 18 letter and the publication of this testimony in mid-May of 1885. (I am obliged to Tim Poirier for these facts.)

<sup>3</sup>Although this is a diary entry, her words here would be printed in numerous publications. For a brief discussion see Gary Krause, “Treading urban ground like Jesus,” *Ministry* 85, no. 5 (May 2013): 6-9.

<sup>4</sup>This probably partly reflected the realities of race laws; a decade earlier Adventist ministers in the South were already commenting on how preaching to African-Americans and Whites provoked strong feelings among the latter: see J. H. Howard to O. A. Olsen Nov. 3, 1889, Presidential Incoming Letters, GC Ar., RG 11, box 3059, folder 11. Howard was then pastoring in Washington, D.C.

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D. J. B. Trim is Director of Archives, Statistics, and Research at the Seventh-day Adventist Church world headquarters. His PhD is from the University of London (2003) and he is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Anthony WagenerSmith

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# Urban Church Planting: Three Functional Shifts from the New Testament

## Introduction

While the rural context remains important to church planting (see Nabel 2002), today more than 50% of the world's inhabitants live in urban areas, from both the global north and the global south. Utilizing the criteria by which individual countries define an "urban area," the United Nations has documented the unprecedented growth in these areas from 751 million in 1950 to 4.2 billion in 2018 (UN DESA 2018). This vast group represented 55% of the world's residents in 2018 with an estimated surge to over 68% of global population by 2050. When contrasting the impact of Seventh-day Adventist mission in the countryside and villages with that of the great cities of the world, the challenge has appeared overwhelming and unnerving since the late 19th century: "Our workers are not branching out as they should in their efforts. Our leading men are not awake to the work that must be yet accomplished. When I think of the cities in which so little work has been done . . . I feel an intensity of desire to see men and women going forth to the work in the power of the Spirit, filled with Christ's love for perishing souls (White 2012:142).

And yet there is cause for hope. If, before the second advent, the Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel to all people groups in the setting of the three angels' messages will take place (Matt 24:14; Acts 1:8; Rev 14:6-12), the multiplication of churches in unentered urban contexts must become a reality. You cannot have the global spread of a message without tangible groups of believers that speak and embody the message in every domain of life.

Indeed, the very pulse of Adventist ministry beats strongest through apostolic mission. A basic consideration of the practical and exegetical link between the second advent of Christ and the apostolic witness for

Christ<sup>1</sup> must generate significant shifts in thinking and practice. Describing these as *functional shifts* rather than paradigm shifts—to emphasize the connection between theology and practice—what better framework to reflect upon urban church planting than that of the New Testament Church. Looking through a disciple-making and church planting lens, one can be challenged by three functional shifts for urban mission today: from places to people, from performers to equippers, and from affinity to diversity.

### From Places to People

The mere mention of planting a new church evokes two inevitable questions: “Where will it be?” and “When does it start?” Such a response demonstrates the prevailing paradigm among believers and non-believers alike; namely, that church is a program implemented in a building on a weekly basis. In spite of the best missiological thinking and practices around disciple-making and all-of-life evangelism, if there is no building and weekly program, then to most there is no real church. Christians have often drifted to the place where their theology of church is greatly hindering the mission of church, particularly in urban areas considering the high cost of renting or owning physical space. While in no way minimizing the significance of programming, as well as the biblical injunction to not forsake assembling together (Heb 10:25), a functional shift in church planting from places to people will result in more rapid multiplication of new churches and—ironically—a mission-focused context to the purpose and function of church buildings themselves.

#### Temple as the Place where Heaven and Earth Meet

The temple as a place where heaven and earth meet was God’s idea. In the Exodus experience, the Lord instructed Moses: “Let them construct a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell among them. According to all that I am going to show you” (Exod 25:8-9 NASB used throughout). Often referred to as the “tent of meeting,” it was filled with the glory of the Lord at its completion (Exod 40:34-35), and became instrumental in prefiguring God’s plan of salvation, as its priestly services were a copy and a shadow of the heavenly sanctuary (Heb 8:5). Originally designed to be a portable meeting place (Exod 40:36-38), it later became a stationary temple in Jerusalem. Angel Rodriguez—while describing the physical sanctuary itself—also demonstrates how God’s plan to meet with humanity spilled out far beyond physical space, even in Exodus.

Through Moses, God made an appointment with the Israelites at Sinai (Ex. 3:12). They traveled to that mountain, prepared for the meeting (Ex. 19:10-11), and on the third day met the Lord (verse 18). Sinai became the first Israelite sanctuary (verse 12; 24:2-5, 12). The Hebrew sanctuary perpetuated the Sinai experience, a place where God met with His people (Ex. 29:43; Ps. 68:17). (cited in Dederen 2000:381)

While a synthesis of common themes between sanctuary and the creation narrative suggest a much broader concept for the tabernacled of God with humanity (Rodriguez 2002), in the course of God's redemptive mission in the Hebrew Scriptures, the physical temple became the primary sacred space through which heaven and earth would collide.

### The Church as a Living Temple

By intentionally ripping the earthly temple's veil at the time of Christ's sacrifice (Matt 27:50-51) and subsequent founding of his church, God established his people as the primary vehicle through which heaven and earth intersect. Out of multiple metaphors used for church in the New Testament, the temple imagery is central to mission, and repositioned in the light of Christ. The lives of those who form this new reality—built upon Jesus Christ, the chief cornerstone, and filled with His Spirit—function as his temple both collectively and individually depending upon the context (1 Cor 3:16, 6:19; Eph 2:20-21; I Pet 2:4-6, etc.). The shift in emphasis from holy places to holy people in the New Testament Church, far from a disjunction, is indeed the realization of God's vision for a sacred people as communicated in the Old Testament (Exod 19:5-6; Lev 20:26; Deut.7:6, 26:18-19).

The biblical teaching of church as people on mission, rather than a program in a building, complements temple imagery as the foundation for a functional shift in church planting. Used 115 times by the writers of the New Testament, the word for church (*ekklesia*) never once refers to a physical building. Geographically it is used in the context of church as a universal reality (Matt 16:18; Eph 1:22-23; Col 1:18), church as those with city-wide affinity (Acts 8:1, 11:22; 1 Cor 14:23) and church as those groups that also meet in homes (Rom 16:5, 16:23; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phil 1:1-3). The *ekklesia* is a living and dynamic expression of those gathered in Christ's name, functioning as his post-resurrection body through which he fills all things in all places (Eph 1:22-23), not merely a building on the seventh-day of the week. While looking at the New Testament's particular expressions of church as descriptive rather than prescriptive, the underlying values that produced missional effectiveness must be recaptured (Allison 2012:45).

## Shrink-Wrapping a Living Temple

While far more complex than a single person or event, the Roman Emperor Constantine, through the nationalization of Christianity in Europe, played a central role in the degradation of church as a living temple. In AD 313, he declared Christianity the official religion through the Edict of Milan. In AD 327, he began an aggressive project to construct Christian temples after the pattern of pagan temples in honor of their gods and goddesses. Such a move likely received strong support by his relic-collecting mother Helena, having recently returned from the “holy land” (Barna and Viola 2008:20-21). For at least one hundred years, Christians had already been gathering at the graves of dead martyrs, which were considered holy places. Consequently, the first “Christian temples” were built on top of the supposed graves of these dead martyrs. Subsequently they bore the names of the dead martyrs over whose supposed graves they rested: St. Peter’s, St. Paul’s, Church of the Holy Sepulcher (supposed graves of Peter, Paul, and Jesus), the Church of the Nativity (supposed site of Jesus’ birth), and others.

In spite of the historic Protestant Reformation, the Christendom shrink-wrapping of a living temple into a physical building is still the dominant understanding of church today. Darrell Guder documents how this reality is in part shaped by the reformer’s view that a legitimate church is both the place where religious things happen (what specific religious things happen according to various traditions), and as a vendor of religious goods and services (1998: 79-84). Broadly speaking, the five primary left-overs of Christendom, which still undercut mission today are the parish mindset, the perception that church is Western, a reductionist gospel as personal salvation only, consumerism, and missions as that which happens exclusively in foreign lands (Wood 2006:12-14). Because of a partial reformation in ecclesiology, the case can be made that the concept and function of today’s Protestant pastor is, in many ways, that of a slightly reformed Catholic priest (Barna and Viola 2008: 127-141). Given the historical paradigm of church in a box, the biblical teaching that after Calvary there is no designated holy place on earth, must reformulate our praxis of mission. God’s design that heaven and earth intersect through the individual and corporate lives of all believers—as a living temple—disrupts all of urban mission, particularly church planting. In addition, out of all Christian groups, should not the Seventh-day Adventist Church, with its emphasis on the heavenly sanctuary as the holy space in heaven, be on the cutting edge of such a movement?



## Implications of a Living Temple for Church Planting

As a first consequence for church planting, God's people must always communicate about the church biblically when building teams and casting vision. Given the ties between use of language and culture modification, the phrase "go to church" should be eradicated from our vocabulary. Far beyond an exercise in grammatical policing, people simply cannot visit something that they already are. People can go to the church building and can go to meet with their church family, but they cannot go to a physical space that sections off their spiritual life from their everyday life and call that church. Rather than tearing down, such biblical communication actually builds up a healthy context for church gatherings and physical spaces. While it is possible to build a church without building a building and it is also possible to build a building without building a church, it is impossible to build a church without building up people. Even where resources exist to purchase first-rate buildings in urban areas, if the founding members cannot functionally be the church without a building, then their missional impact and multiplication potential—not to mention their very survivability—is low.

The elevation of ministry in everyday life is a second basic consequence. Since a new church launches in the gathering of believers on mission, not merely the beginning of a worship service, it is helpful to think of ministry planting rather than church planting. Establishing missional rhythms among the original team members in the spaces where they live, work, recreate, and study, sets the pace for a healthy culture. Most churches use the phrase "involved in ministry" only in the context of volunteerism for official church programs (without most of which the worship service cannot function). However, developing a ministry presence among a particular group does not exclusively happen in organized ministries but in identifying and celebrating intentionality in everyday life as being "involved in ministry." One of several ways to establish this environment is to create new metrics around church engagement. For example, on a weekly basis the number of intentional discipling relationships going on between the church's members and non-members—rather than how many people attend a program called worship—is a much greater measurement of missional impact and capacity. Stated simply, this elevation of mission in everyday life must disrupt the prevailing paradigms of church planting, leadership competencies, and how the affirmation and celebration of mission helps establish a multiplication DNA.

As the common adage says, "The goal of a new church is to become a mother church, not a mega church" (unknown). In addition, given the ways in which church as a living temple can integrate biblical reflection

and praxis, the limiting factor in urban areas can become the number of leaders rather than the number of dollars that a new church can raise.

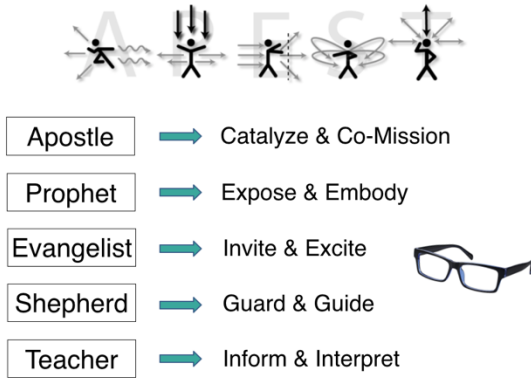
### From Performers to Equippers

Emerging in the late 20th century, the German-coined term, “*Eierlegende Wollmilchsau*” —literally an egg-laying, milk-producing, woolly pig—describes the concept of a single individual or device that can do it all.<sup>1</sup> While googling images of a hybrid animal containing these unique features of a chicken, cow, sheep, and pig might look ideal, it is in fact a myth. In the areas of mission and ministry, a similar idealization is observed as leaders are also expected to be experts and deliver unrealistic results in a variety of functions. The biological fact is that no animal has it all, and the spiritual reality is also that no human leader can do it all. This is particularly relevant for the success of church planting within multifaceted urban contexts. Providentially, because of the resurrection and ascension of Christ, unique aspects of the ministry of Christ have been gifted to the body of Christ to be planted across the diverse and multidimensional cities of the world.

While pneumatology appropriately ranks among the most mysterious of biblical doctrines—and appropriately so due to the uncontainable power and incomprehensible workings of the Holy Spirit (John 3:6-8; Acts 1:8)—the fivefold giftings in Ephesians are a foundational equipping paradigm for planting and growing churches. A central chapter within Paul’s rationale—Ephesians 4—declares that unity in Christ (Eph 4:1-6) through diversity in gifting (Eph 4:7-12) is that which will create maturity in mission (Eph. 4:13-16).

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ . . . we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ. (Eph 4:11-13, 15)

While the overlap between the fivefold “APEST” giftings (apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds/pastors, and teachers) and the traditional spiritual gift passages (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12; 1 Pet 4:10-11) is outside the scope of this chapter, the uniqueness of the Ephesians 4 framework generates radical applications for mission. In synthesizing J. R. Woodward’s treatment of APEST, five specific functions emerge (as pictured) (Woodward 2012):



### A New Pair of Glasses

Reading through the gospel stories, a helpful team-building activity is to discuss how each of the fivefold giftings was perfectly expressed in the person of Jesus Christ. As the resurrected Christ gave these gifts to all believers after his ascension, the body of Christ now reflects the fullness of Christ to the degree it collaboratively carries out all five functions. In contrast to the sociological phenomena called “founder’s trap”—where the passion and function of a movement’s founder is unsuccessfully transmitted after death to the followers—the recapitulation of APEST in the church is the concrete expression of the risen Christ (Hirsch 2017:83), and part of the constellation of missional DNA which Hirsch describes as “apostolic genius” (Hirsch 2016:78-81). Viewed primordially through Old Testament archetypes and throughout Holy Scripture, some go as far as positioning APEST as a Christocentric hermeneutical key to reading the Bible. This set of glasses, although incomplete on its own, offers creative insights into how the fivefold giftings as a system are grounded in God Himself (theology), threaded by God into creation (cosmology), expressed the clearest in Jesus’ perfect life (Christology), made tangible in and through God’s people (ecclesiology), activated by the Holy Spirit (pneumatology), and fulfilled in God’s eternal purposes (missiology and eschatology) (Hirsch 2017:27-28, 60, 61).

### Movement, Equilibrium, and Decline

The recovery of APEST in facilitating mission becomes a pressing need when viewed through the historical devolution of the fivefold functions in general Christian mission and that of Seventh-day Adventism. Within the

Christendom adoption of state-based church membership and nationalization of Christianity. the apostolic, prophetic, and evangelistic functions were rendered unnecessary.

And herein, my friends, lies the rub: the historical reduction of ministry down from the fivefold ministry of the New Testament to that of Christendom's twofold function of shepherding and teaching has bequeathed a fatal and degenerative dis-ease into the Body of Christ. The genetic codes have been corrupted. The result is that almost all churches in the West only operate with two of the fivefold functions of Jesus. No wonder we are frustrated, broken, and alienated from each other. We have an autoimmune disease, we are a body divided against ourselves. (Hirsch 2017:13)

The historical removal of the "A-P-E" functions and the fusion of the shepherd and teacher into a single office (the use of "teacher" in Eph 4:11 has no definite article in Greek)—in spite of its theological and exegetical problems (Cole 2014:225)—has become an inherited dysfunction in today's post-reformation Protestantism. The thesis that every multiplication movement in the history of Christian mission functioned strongly in all five APEST giftings then moved towards equilibrium, decline, and sometimes death by elevating the "S-T" (shepherd and teacher) functions alone (Hirsch 2017:100), deserves further study in Seventh-day Adventist history specifically. In early Adventism, the tithe system was developed to fund apostolic and evangelistically oriented church planters while volunteer elders and deacons primarily took charge of existing churches. The rapid growth and role of the "A-P-E" functions are well documented and the eventual shifts whereby "paid clergy" became paid caretakers resulted in a historic low point—at least in North American Adventism. In 1995 the number of churches at the end of the year was less than at the beginning, and it took 122 paid pastors in order to raise up one new church (WagenerSmith 2016:87-92).

While today no one can meet the specific stated characteristic of apostles in the New Testament, and the office of apostle is, in a strict sense, not operable (Allison 2012:205-211), the case can be made that Seventh-day Adventist ministry has instead institutionalized or at least programmatized APEST gifting. Today—in spite of the fact that the Greek term for pastor/shepherd (*poimen*) was never a biblical office and is only used once in the entire New Testament to describe a physical human being (Eph 4:11), we have enshrined the title on all paid leaders in a local church—lead pastor, administrative pastor, children's pastor, music ministry pastor, media pastor, etc. The primary domain for teaching is our schools and universities, the apostolic is primarily expressed through

mission agencies, the prophetic though the life and writings of Ellen White, and the evangelistic typically through our supporting ministries and large-scale evangelism platforms.<sup>3</sup> In order to avoid the multiple pitfalls of strict cessationism with its discounted version of the Holy Spirit, the extraction and institutionalization of the “A-P-E” gifts out of the local church, and the hazards of identifying the giftings as strict offices, the following recommendations are given.

### Implications of Ephesians 4 as an Equipping Paradigm

To plant a movement, not merely a church, every believer must see themselves as an equipper. This is not only pragmatic, but is also exegetically and contextually supported. The setting for APEST is what is given “to each one of us,” as Christ gave gifts to “men” (Eph 4:7-8, 11). “The literal word is *anthropos*, which means human beings as a whole (including both men and women). So, from the very beginning, Paul is *ordaining* the entire body of Christ into the work of ministry. Add to this the truth that recipients of this letter included slaves, women, and people of different races (Eph 2:11ff, 5). These were ordinary people, not a group of ordained leaders” (Hirsch and Catchim 2012:26). Therefore, Paul’s statement in Ephesians 4:11 that Christ gave “some as apostles, and as prophets, and as evangelists, and as pastors and teachers” is not evidence of a “clergy-laity” divide but rather the indication that no one person is an *Eierlegende Wollmilchsau* who has it all. In addition, since the purpose of APEST is to equip the body towards maturity in mission, if you are a believer then you are an equipper of ministry and not merely a performer. This understanding transforms Ephesians 4 from a leadership text into a ministry text. If every believer has the capacity to equip, then the question arises, “Why pay anyone to lead?” One of the pieces to a biblical justification of this is that there are those who particularly excel at equipping. In order to empower ordinary believers to develop a church planting culture, the Seventh-day Adventist Church, particularly in the West, needs to stop hiring performers and start hiring equippers.

A second practical application of APEST for urban church planting is building teams and making disciples. While the available APEST assessments and inventories—like any tools—should be used to start conversations and not create self-fulfilling prophecies, the author has found it effective for members of church planting teams to understand their APEST profiles. The purpose is three-fold: self-awareness of each member’s gifting to leverage their unique contributions, prayer for and recruiting of team members with different giftings to create a multifaceted mission (i.e., a strong evangelist looking to intentionally identify and empower

a gifted shepherd to develop a system of nurture), and working contextually in the initial assessment and ministry design of a new church. In other words, assessing what the apostolic, prophetic, evangelistic, shepherding, and teaching response of the church should be given the unique makeup of a particular urban space or people group. Since the planting of new churches facilitates disciple making, the education, assessment, and implementation of APEST functions is a critical component in discipleship. Follow-up coaching for new disciples should include both how to function best in organized ways (official church ministries) and in organic ways (everyday life). Regarding organized ministries, special attention must be given to avoid replicating the institutionalism of the fivefold giftings by placing individuals into silo ministries. Rather, affirm and value how different giftings can reflect the fullness of Christ (i.e., shepherds may drift towards a hospitality team and go deep with those they already know, whereas a winsome evangelist intentionally ignores deep friendships to welcome a total stranger). Regarding organic ways, as a prophetically oriented disciple serves together with the local community, and as a family generates interest in the values and identity of the church plant, they can relationally connect that family with another disciple gifted in teaching. Whether through educating and affirming the fivefold functions within every believer, building healthy teams, assessing and responding to the community, designing a holistic preaching calendar, or ensuring major decisions are bathed in prayer and their impact considered from all five angles, APEST as a biblical framework aids in developing an equipping DNA for mission.

### From Affinity to Diversity

Due to multiple factors including immigration, gentrification, and rural-to-urban relocation, cities are increasingly diverse population centers. A movement of new churches must be planted with the capacity to make disciples among such a range of differences including diversity of economics, diversity of thought and politics, diversity of religious and non-religious worldviews, and diversity of ethnicity. While much can be said about this shift among urban areas as well as Christian believers in general across continents (WagenerSmith 2016: App F), it is important to ground the planting of diverse churches as a response to biblical teaching, not merely shifting demographics or political correctness. In the global fulfillment of the great commission, within the setting of the three angel's messages, Seventh-day Adventism is prophetically positioned for a movement of new churches as a foretaste of John's heavenly vision of the bride of Christ:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations. . . . And I saw another angel flying in midheaven, having an eternal gospel to preach to those who live on the earth, and to every nation and tribe and tongue and people. . . . After these things I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no one could count, from every nation and all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the lamb. (Matt 28:19-20; Rev 14:6, 7:9)

The choosing of Abraham's descendants as a vehicle of blessing to the world was never compatible with an exclusive and ethnocentric nation. The prophet Isaiah, in one of a number of key Old Testament passages, which also prefigures Revelation 7, relates this diverse design for the people of God:

"The time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see my glory. I will set a sign among them and will send survivors from them to the nations: . . . and they will declare my glory among the nations. Then they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as a grain offering to the Lord . . . on my holy mountain Jerusalem," says the Lord. (Isa 66:18-20)

Contrary to the assumption that the multiethnic imagination was developed in the New Testament, Stetzer and Im suggest, "God was actually concerned with all cultures from the moment he created the first one" (2016:102).

In the New Testament, the vision for God's Kingdom as a multiethnic community was envisioned by Christ. At the end of his earthly ministry, after praying to the Father for himself (John 17:1-5) and on behalf of the disciples (vv. 6-19), he prays for all future believers (John vv. 20-23). Three times he prayed specifically that they would "be one" (v. 21), "be one" (v. 22), and be "perfected in unity" (v. 23), so that the world may believe in Jesus and know that God loves them (v. 23). In John 17:21 and 23, the English "so that" forms a *hina* clause in Greek ('if x happens, then y will be the result') (DeYmaz 2007:9). In other words, Jesus is saying that there is no guarantee future believers will become one. But if they do, two things will result: people throughout the world will believe Jesus is the Messiah, and respond to God's love.

Having been envisioned by Christ, the first multiethnic church was demonstrated at Antioch. Broadly speaking it was Antioch—not Jerusalem—that became the prime New Testament example of a missional church plant and missionary base (WagenerSmith 2016:106-111). Whereas Jerusalem was financially generous internally among its members (Acts 2:44-45), Antioch was financially generous externally as the first church

to give an external mission offering (Acts 11:27-30). While the Jerusalem church grew by addition, keeping its best leaders (Acts 1:8; 8:1), the Antioch church grew by multiplication and intentionally sent its best leaders (Acts 13:2-4). And—as a demonstration of the functional shift from affinity to diversity—in Antioch, the “followers of the way” (Acts 9:1-2, 19:9, 23, 22:4,14, 24:22) were given the name “Christians” (Acts 11:26) as the first fully integrated Jewish-Gentile community. One of the reasons the church at Antioch cared about all nations was because its five-person leadership team listed in Acts 13:1 was composed of all nations: two Africans (Simeon from Niger and Lucius of Cyrene), one European (Paul from Asia Minor), a Middle Easterner (Manaen from Judea) and an Islander (Barnabus from Cyprus).

While Luke specifically mentions the cultural background of the Antiochan leaders, APEST gifting was also clearly in play. Paul self-identifies as an “apostle” in the opening to all of his letters except those he co-authored (Philippians, 1 and II Thessalonians, and Philemon), Barnabus functioned in a critical shepherding role as a “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:36), and the text identifies key “prophets and teachers” both in the leadership and the church at large (Acts 13:1). Certainly, the biblical marks of a diverse mission team are observed not only in diversity of ethnicity but also in diversity of function. Both-and not either-or.

The multiethnic church is envisioned by Christ, demonstrated in Antioch, and prescribed in principle through Ephesians (DeYmaz 2007:27-370). In Ephesians 1, all believers (Jews and Gentiles) are part of one family called to demonstrate unity for all (vv. 15-16). In chapter two, Paul argues that through Christ’s removal of the “dividing wall of hostility,” both Jews and Gentiles now form one new group (vv. 12-16). In chapter three, while praying for the Ephesians (vv. 3:1, 14-19), Paul establishes the “mystery of Christ” (v. 4) not as a generic reference to the death and resurrection of Jesus but rather the new reality “that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel” (v. 6). This “mystery of Christ” (see also Col 1:24-27) was central to Paul’s ministry, and identified as the very reason behind his imprisonment (Eph 6:19-20; Col 4:3). The second half of Ephesians is the practical outworking of such ethnic unity in the mission and ministry of the church. Believers are to “live a life worthy of the calling they have received” (Eph 4:1), a diverse and integrated community as a powerful witness to the “mystery of Christ.” While this unity was commended by Paul in his letter to the Ephesus in the early AD 60s, a few decades later Jesus’ rebuked the Ephesians for having left their “first love” (Rev 2:2-5). The comparison between Revelation 2:2-3 and Ephesians 1:15 is striking: in both passages the Ephesians are commended for their faith and in both their love is mentioned, whereas in Ephesians they loved “all the



saints” and Revelation simply states they left their first love. The biblical picture of God’s love for all people, as demonstrated in planting diverse Christian communities, is a key ingredient for credibility and evangelistic capacity. “I believe the homogeneous church will increasingly struggle in the twenty-first century with credibility, that is, in proclaiming a message of God’s love for all people from an environment in which a love for *all* people cannot otherwise be observed” (DeYmaz 2007:14).

### Implications of the Shift—Affinity to Diversity

The practical outworking of the Bible’s multiethnic vision for mission has been significantly shaped by the pervasive notion of the “homogeneous unit principle” in the modern era. Developed by Donald McGavran primarily through field research in India’s caste system during the 1930s, it was observed that new churches grew fastest when the fewest barriers must be crossed by new believers. McGavran stated that people “like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers” and then after conversion they would grow to reach out to different ethnicities and cultures (1990:163) In the late 1970s McGavran issued a prophetic caution relevant to our age which, particularly in the West, normalized attractional church growth methods and the minimized the cross-cultural realities of being a disciple of Christ. “Do, I beg of you, think of it primarily as a missionary and evangelistic principle . . . [for] there is a danger that congregations . . . become exclusive, arrogant, and racist. That danger must be resolutely combated.” (McIntosh 2015) While being clear on who a new church is called to reach is essential, the “who” is radically changing in urban areas leading some practitioners to develop heterogeneous churches that also contain homogeneous cells targeting specific people groups within a larger diverse body (see DeYmaz n.d.).

Circumstances alter cases. If planting for the majority culture in a homogeneous rural location—even if a separate ministry is launched to serve a small minority—the expectation of a multiethnic church is not realistic. If planting for an unreached people group that requires a mother tongue other than the majority language—even if other ethnicities are engaged in sponsoring and supporting the new work—it likewise will be and stay a mono-ethnic plant, particularly if failing to adapt its language and methodologies to the 2nd and 3rd generations. However, given the changing distribution of Christian believers across continents (WagenerSmith 2016: App. F) and the fact that in countries such as the United States the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the most racially diverse religious group (Lipka 2015), intentional design must be given to new urban church plants as a reflection of unity. This can be done by starting

with diverse leadership teams, placing themselves geographically at the intersection of ethnic and socio-ethnic boundaries, and navigating tension that will arise through consistent visioning and regular conversations (see DeYmaz and Li).

While the fact of human preference and affinity is a sociological statement not a soteriological judgment, the overarching angle of Adventist missiology as a remnant group to uniquely participate in God's redemption of all nations radically challenges the long-term evangelistic wisdom of planting homogeneous churches within the increasingly heterogeneous demographics of the world's urban centers. Motivated by God's mission and sustained by his Spirit, special consideration must be given to diversity—not as the goal of the Church but the means through which the Lord reconciles all people to himself.

## Conclusion

Today's unprecedented demographic and cultural shifts in urban areas offers the greatest challenge and opportunity for Adventist mission. Given the inseparable link between the return of Christ and the Church's apostolic commission, a global message requires the worldwide multiplication of churches among unentered urban areas and people groups. Within this great work, the deliberate integration between theology and practice plays a critical role in Adventist church planting as it shifts the focus from places to people, from performing to equipping, and from affinity to diversity.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>The New Testament consistently connects the second coming of Christ with the global task of disciple-making and witness to all people groups and places. Some examples include: the signs of the second coming with the parables of readiness and engagement with the world (Matt 24-25), the "end of the age" coupled with disciple-making of all people groups (Matt 28:18-20), the ascension promise of Jesus' return and global witnessing to every place on earth (Acts 1:8-11), resurrection at the second coming and full commitment to the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:51-58), the global proclamation of the gospel with the harvesting of the earth (Rev 14:6-40), etc.

<sup>2</sup>See [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org), [www.dw.com/en/eierlegende-wollmilchsau/a-6616972](http://www.dw.com/en/eierlegende-wollmilchsau/a-6616972), and other online articles.

<sup>3</sup>While the cultural expectations for strong shepherds is particularly pronounced in Western Adventism, different regions and cultures within the Adventist Church—while inheritors of the term pastor for a congregation or district leader—do place greater expectations and accountabilities (regardless of the motivations) around evangelistic and apostolic functions.

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Anthony WagenerSmith is associate director at the North American Division Evangelism Institute, and assistant professor of Christian Ministry at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary. Previously he served for many years pastoring and planting churches in Florida. He and his wife Lianro have two-children, Levi and Sage.

Michelet William

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# Youth Participation in Urban Mission and Ministry

## Introduction

Youth participation is a basic concept in the circle of human rights practitioners and advocates. Theories and praxis in the domain of youth participation are generally anchored in two international frameworks—the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which affirm the right of young people to participate in family, social, and political life. Mary Kholer views youth participation as “the involvement of young people in responsible, challenging action that meets a genuine need, with young people having the opportunity for planning and decision-making that affect others in an activity that has an impact on others (people or community), but definitely beyond the young people themselves” (1983:67). Kholer also states in Patricia A. Vardin and Ilene N. Brooks, that “young persons must be given the opportunity to learn through participating in decision making that affects their lives and through performing significant service that affects others” (1979:145). Drawing on these definitions, two criteria for authentic youth participation stand out: (1) being a key player in the planning and implementation of the action, and (2) being among the recipients or beneficiaries of the outcome of the action.

In this paper, I will use the two above criteria to discuss youth participation, not from a human rights perspective, but rather from a mission perspective using the Holy Scripture as the primary framework. I will argue that young people are entitled to meaningful participation in mission, particularly in an urban context, on the basis that they have always been both key players and primary recipients in God’s mission (*missio Dei*), understood by David Bosch as “the movement of God’s love toward people” (2009:390).

## Definition of Terms

A *child* is defined as “every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (United Nations 1989: article 1). However, in Judaism during biblical times, girls reached majority at the age of 12 and boys at the age of 13 (Wigoder 1989:159). A *youth* is someone in the period between childhood and maturity (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*). *Millennials* (also called Generation Y) are those born from 1980 to 1994. They may remember the pre-Internet era and the time where smartphones did not exist yet (White 2017:37). Although there is no consensus around the dates, *Generation Z* is considered the generation that essentially includes those who were born after Generation Y, so approximately 1995 to around 2010. They are now collectively under the age of twenty-five. “They are growing up in a post-9/11 world. They are experiencing radical changes in technology and understandings of family, sexuality, and gender. They live in multigenerational households, and the fastest-growing demographic within their age group is multiracial” (39).

## Young People as Key Players in Scripture

Scripture points to the fact that God has consistently picked young people and those who are faithful, diligent, and obedient, as his chosen instruments to carry out the work related to redeeming fallen humanity.

### Old Testament Examples

In the Old Testament, God chose Jacob, the younger of the two sons of Isaac, when he was but a little boy under the care of his mother to become the father of the nation of Israel (Gen 25, 27-28). Joseph was also the second youngest son of Jacob, after Benjamin. God called Joseph, not Ruben, the oldest son, to be the means by which he would save Egypt and the surrounding nations from an unprecedented famine. But above all, Joseph witnessed to the greatness, the sovereignty, the wisdom of Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac and Jacob. Samuel was a child when God called him to become a prophet (1 Sam 3). Gideon was a young man, the youngest in his house, when God called him to become judge in Israel (Judg 6). The young Israelite slave girl at Naaman’s house was the instrument by which the Syrian general came to Israel to be healed from leprosy and took his witness of the greatness of the God of Israel back to his country (2 Kgs 5). Esther, as a beautiful young girl, was God’s chosen one to advocate for the lives of her people and overthrow Haman’s malignant plot to

annihilate all Jews in the nation (Esth 1-10). These stories indicate that it is not age that qualifies one to participate in God's redemptive plan, but a person's obedience and faithfulness.

Joash was seven when he became king (2 Kgs 11:21) and Josiah was eight (2 Kgs 22-23). Among their predecessors was Solomon, whose reign was long, prosperous, and successful. Solomon was David's youngest son when he was anointed as King of Israel, rather than his older brother Adonijah (1 Kgs 1). At his death, Rehoboam, who was also young and inexperienced, replaced him. Unfortunately, Rehoboam relied on advice from inexperienced young men his age, causing the nation of Israel to split into two kingdoms (1 Kgs 12). Later, God called Jeremiah who believed he was too young for the difficult task of bringing the Lord's word of judgment to the corrupt and wicked leaders of Israel. God's response was to rebuke him, "Do not say, 'I am a youth,' For you shall go to all to whom I send you, And whatever I command you, you shall speak" (Jer 1:7.)

God's approval of youth participation transcends cultural barriers and the cultural traditions of biblical times, which was marked by a high degree of gerontocracy whereby leadership was generally reserved for elders. Respect for the aged was a cherished value and the very fact one had grown old conferred merit (Berlin 2011:23). Youthfulness in many contexts was a disadvantage, especially in the context of the administration and leading of a nation's affairs. Being young was viewed as being inexperienced, unstable, and ignorant. Those below twenty were not counted in a census and were not allowed to go into battle (Num 1:45). They were not to teach or hold public meetings. Because of this, all who listened to Jesus "were astonished at His understanding and answers" because he was only twelve (Luke 2:47). King Saul, along with the sons of Jesse (David's older brothers) and Goliath looked down on David because he was but a youth (1 Sam 17:28, 33, 42). A "child in age," according to Flavius Josephus (Caspi and Greene 2012:x), implies that David was thirteen or below (Wigoder 1989:159). It was probably because of the prejudice of society against young people that Paul exhorted Timothy to not let anyone despise his youthfulness by setting "an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (1 Tim 4:12). Yet, against such cultural suspicions regarding the youth in biblical days, God kept raising up young people to leadership positions during critical periods in the history of Israel.

### New Testament Examples

In the New Testament, by the time he turned twelve, Jesus was already busy about his Father's business (Luke 2:49). Jesus officially launched his

public ministry at the age of thirty. Jesus offered an opportunity to a little boy to be part of his compassionate ministry when he blessed and multiplied the fish and bread the young lad brought for his lunch, resulting in lunch for 5,000 people, not including children and women (John 6:1-14). Then he called twelve disciples to be with him in ministry. Although Scripture does not reveal their exact age, there exist a significant number of pointers leading many to believe that some of them could have been between thirteen and twenty-nine years old. Here are some hints. First, the disciples often called Jesus *Rabbi* (Matt 23:7, 26:25, 26:49; Mark 9:5, 14:45, etc.). The term was applied to a Jewish teacher in biblical times, and after AD 70 became a technical expression for those ordained in the rabbinic movement (Keener 2014:785). Although no historical data is available on the required age to be a rabbi, the sociology of the New Testament context, in which respect and obedience were due to the eldest, makes it hard to believe that a master could be younger than his followers. Knowing that Jesus started his ministry at age thirty (Luke 3:23), the disciples were probably twenty-nine or younger. Second, traditionally, a young man was expected to marry around his late teens or early twenties (Collins and Harlow 2010:630). Among the disciples, Peter is the only one the Gospels report to have a wife (Matt 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-30; Luke 4:38-39). There is a probability that many among the Twelve, except Peter, were below twenty. Third, a young man needed to be at least thirteen and above to be allowed to leave his house and follow a master (Collins and Harlow 2010:563), because below thirteen he was still considered a child (Berlin 2011:167). Fourth, again, based on the sociology of the New Testament, by calling the disciples "little ones" (Matt 10:42, 11:25) Jesus could have offended them if he was not the oldest among them. Fifth, it is mentioned that James and John, the sons of Zebedee, were fishing with their father as apprentices, which could indicate that they were not mature and experienced enough to go on their own (Matt 24:21-22). Sixth, when Mrs. Zebedee intervened on their behalf, it was probably because she felt it necessary to speak up for her sons requesting that they should be seated, one at Jesus' right and the other on his left (Matt 20:20-21). This was probably because of their teenage status and dependence on their mother's care and protection.

Some young people's actions went unnoticed. One example is Paul's nephew, who remains anonymous, in spite of his heroic act. Without his prompt, tactful, and timely intervention, Paul's mission would have ended prematurely. Luke records the story of a conspiracy by a group of Jews who bound themselves under an oath to not eat nor drink until they killed Paul. The young fellow, the son of Paul's sister, heard about the plot and quickly went to the barracks where Paul was being held while awaiting his court appearance the following day. After listening to him, "Paul



called one of the centurions to him and said, ‘Lead this young man to the commander, for he has something to report to him’” (Acts 23:17). After talking to the boy in private, the commander gave orders to safeguard Paul and made arrangements to transfer Paul to Caesarea early the next morning (Acts 23:12-23). God’s providence positioned the boy to be at the right place and at the right time to prevent Paul’s journey to Rome from failing. His safety also ensured first-century Christians and subsequent generations the benefit from his epistles to the Ephesians, the Philippians, and the Colossians (Swindoll 2005:10). A similar story is found in the Old Testament where Jonathan sent a “little boy” to collect the arrows that he shot and called after him “Hurry! Be quick! Do not stay!” as a signal informing David about Saul’s plot to kill him (1 Sam 20). The dedicated service of this lad, whose name is not even mentioned, and who was unaware of what he did, helped keep the future king alive and the ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ alive.

The Bible says that in the end time the Holy Spirit will empower young people, both males and females, to work hand-in-hand with adults in the proclamation of the Gospel. “But this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God, That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh; Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, Your young men shall see visions, Your old men shall dream dreams’” (Acts 2:16-17).

### **Young People as Recipients of God’s Mission in Scripture**

The above sections illustrated how young men and women have participated as key players in God’s redemptive mission. This section looks at cases where young people are the focus or recipients of God’s salvific work. In Deuteronomy, God shows prominent attention to the formation of children. Patrick Miller (2008) says, “No single book of Scripture attends more directly and so often to the education of the children in the community of faith than Deuteronomy” (cited in Brawley 2014:75). The books of wisdom, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, were written with young people as the primary recipients in the mind of their authors. In the prologue of Proverbs, it is written, “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching” (Prov 1:8). The intention of Solomon was for the youth to acquire wisdom not only by listening to their parents, but also by heeding the Word of God, which was the source of wisdom par excellence. In Proverbs 22:6 he recommends to “start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.” In the same way, Ecclesiastes was primarily addressed to young people, as indicated in the last chapter. “Remember

your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, “I find no pleasure in them” (Eccl 12:1). Jesus reached out to children and youth to bless, heal, and teach them. The disciples were often upset by the presence of children coming into contact with him. They rebuked the kid’s parents who brought them; however, the Gospel of Mark reports that Jesus “was greatly displeased and said to them, ‘Let the children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. . . . And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them’” (Mark 10:14-16, cf. Luke 18:15-17). On another occasion, Jesus healed the daughter of a non-Jewish woman, a Canaanite (Matt 15:22-29; Mark 7:25-30). He brought back to life the only son of a woman from Nain, saying, “Young man, I say to you, arise” (Luke 7:11-17). He also restored to life the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus, the ruler of a synagogue, saying, “‘Talitha, cumi,’ which is translated, ‘Little girl, I say to you, arise’” (Mark 5:21-41). Young people attended Jesus’ rallies and were encouraged by his teaching. One day, a young boy, who was in the crowd listening to the Lord’s instruction, freely offered his snack—five barley loaves and two small fish—to be multiplied by Jesus (John 6:1-14).

God has set the example as the Promoter of authentic youth participation by calling them to play key roles in his mission and reckoning them as primary recipients of his loving attention and care. No wonder Satan relentlessly attacks young people. The above discussion highlights a few examples that serve as rationale for a theology of mission that seriously advocates a youth-focused approach whereby young people are both key players and recipients in all interventions.

### **Young People in the Cities: An Incentive for Youth-Focused Urban Ministries**

Roughly 55% of the world’s population live in urban contexts. In places like the United States, Canada, and Europe—Western countries in general—the urban population rate has in recent years reached peaks as high as 80% and above. Rather than slowing down, urbanization is expanding and increasing at an annual rate of around 2% (CIA World Factbook 2018). The US Environment Protection Agency (EPA) reports that as of 2010, 81% of the U.S. population lived in urban centers. The EPA also indicates that since 1910, the urban population has grown by nearly 500% while the rural population has grown by only 19% (EPA 2018).

Parallel to this trend is the massive migration of young people to the cities. Pete Sanders wrote in *Forbes* that “Millennials, those persons roughly between the ages of 18 and 34 as of 2015, have become the nation’s

largest generation cohort, surpassing Baby Boomers in 2016. . . . Many cities are pinning their future hopes on attracting and holding on to Millennials for decades to come” (2017). The UK edition of a renowned newspaper reported that “the number of 22 to 29-year-olds living in large city centres in England and Wales has nearly tripled as young, single, highly educated ‘millennials’ flock back to urban areas, according to analysis by the Centre for Cities” (The Guardian 2015). The Centre for Cities, a specialized group focused on research to help cities in the UK improve their performance, observed that “city centre living has boomed in Britain since the start of the [21st] century, with young people leading the move back into urban areas” (2015). Millennials have a preference for “dense, diverse urban villages where social interaction is just outside their front doors,” according to Nielsen, a global measurement and data analytics company. Nielsen notes that these youngsters are breaking from previous generations and are “transitioning from the white picket fence in the suburbs to the historic brownstone stoop in the heart of the city” (Nielsen 2014).

Life in the cities tends to cut people off from God. In most Western cities, according to Skip Bell, “there are new gods usurping the primacy of Christian faith. Those gods can be thought of in terms such as opportunity, wealth, technology, or art” (Bell 2016). Alejandro Bullon offers a bleak description of life in the mega cities of the world.

People who live in today’s mega cities are sad, lonely, filled with fear and anxiety. They live packed into large ‘sky rises’ and yet they scarcely know each other. They are always on the run, not knowing sometimes, where they are going. Whoever stops is overrun by those who come from behind. The strongest and quickest survive, leaving the rest in a valley of despair. There is no time for anything, and if by chance there should be some free time, this is completely taken by the media, which has placed itself in charge of forming the individual’s opinion of life and the world. Generally, this opinion is full of the relativism and materialism that characterize the period in which we live. (2001)

The context as described above represents a major challenge for every Christian, but particularly for young people, their faith, and their church attendance. Roland Allen notes that “St. Paul established his churches at places which were centres of the world’s commerce” (1969:16). Those cities were not only provincial centers but “through some of them the commerce of the world passed” (17). Following Paul’s methods, the Adventist Church in the twenty-first century needs to be strategic and focus its attention on urban centers where the majority of the world’s population lives, where social and spiritual needs are enormous, and where millennials and Generation Z are concentrated.

## Effects of Youth “Alienation” on the Church and Society

Even as young people seem to flourish in the cities, the Adventist Church seems unable to retain them. Yuri Drumi is concerned by the prospect of an aging church in the Euro-Asia Division. He is nostalgic of the church he knew that was a community of young people. Sadly, today’s churches in all four of Russia’s unions consist of “more and more graying heads and many gloomy faces” (Drumi 2017:2). In 2000, Roger Dudley found that “at least 40 percent to 50 percent of Seventh-day Adventist teenagers in North-America are essentially leaving the church by their middle 20s” (Dudley 2000:35). Loren Seibold deplors that “too many of our young adults aren’t staying: the average age of church members in all but a few areas of Adventist concentration is about 50.2” (Seibold 2010). It is quite possible that in 2019 this figure will be higher and closer to the average age of “ordinary church members” in Japan, which is over 65 (McChesney 2018).

Dudley’s concern went beyond just membership. “It’s one thing to be listed as still a member of the church. It’s quite another to be an *active, participating* member” (2000:35: emphasis by author). Dudley’s research indicated that the percentage of teenagers holding church office, serving on a congregational committee, or participating in outreach activities was less than 25%. He also asked the question, “Why do Adventist youth leave the church?” Four main reasons came out: alienation, irrelevance, intolerance, and convenience. Many young people feel alienated and not trusted or valued. Supporting or promoting youth participation is vital for their self-esteem and their motivation to continue attending a church.

A year and a half ago, I was very active in the church by being chair of the nominating committee, Sabbath school superintendent, and church pianist. I was on the rostrum during the divine service every other week, a Sabbath school teacher, etc. Instead of putting the same clique of older people in all the leadership positions (which occurred as long as I could remember), the nominating committee decided to inject a mixture of older people, youth, and woman into leadership positions. The older clique was infuriated, refused to participate in the position for which they were nominated, and attended other churches. I had supported them for years, and when they had an opportunity to support me, they basically thought I wasn’t ready to be so active. I had gone to an Adventist academy for four years, and my mother raised us strongly in the faith. I had just as much knowledge and desire as they did. (Dudley 2000:62)

A contrasting experience to the previous one is revealing as to how young people's active participation in church life is key to their retention: "I've never dropped out, because a few older people always made sure I was involved while I was younger (teen). I got used to that and had fun, so I stayed while though I thought of leaving" (62). Dudley states that "The disengagement of such a large percentage of well-educated young adults who should now be assuming leadership in the church threatens the future viability of our movement" (2000:36).

Besides its negative effect on church membership and vitality, from a social angle, the alienation or marginalization of children and young people represent a threat for order and stability in society. Numerous studies show that when young people are denied the prospect of effective participation, they often turn to criminality or militarism. Nanette Davis studied the "gang problem" in the United States and found that they represent a parallel pseudo-community, as they replicate the social and economic order of society. Gangs are very attractive to alienated youth, giving them a sense of belonging, but at the same time, they have a "propensity to disruptive, antisocial or criminal behavior" (1999:231). The director of a renowned humanitarian organization focused on children and youths in Haiti noted that "the excitement of armed confrontation and the possibility of looting and kidnapping may be sufficient to mobilize unruly mobs of youth" (Tefamariam 2008:1). When young people's energy is not mobilized for constructive actions and channeled into peace and development, it is easily exploited by unscrupulous adults for violence and destabilizing movements. Tangible examples can readily be found in places like *Cite Soleil*, *Martissant*, and *Bel-Air* in the metropolitan area of Port-au-Prince/Haiti, which have become out-of-control zones. Cynical gang leaders in these places provide frustrated and uneducated youth with weapons and give them access to drugs, thus creating a new class of malignant hordes of armed bandits with no agenda other than to steal, murder, and destroy. The "marginalization [of young people] from mainstream economic life, political acknowledgment, and civic responsibility represents a potential threat to peace and stability in South Sudan" (Ensor and Reinke 2014:85).

### **A Youth-focused Approach for Meaningful Youth Participation**

A child-centered approach is an important concept that has emerged internationally in the context of the movement for the rights of children. It means, "taking the needs of the child into account, stemming from the child's interests when making decisions about the child. It also includes active involvement of the child in planning the activities concerning him/

her and inclusion in the decision-making process” (Toros, Karman, and Koidu 2013). This “theoretical shift in the sociological study of childhood . . . has led to the re-positioning of children from passive recipients of adult socialization to social actors in their own right” (Toros et al. 2013). The concept has been extended to include young people. A blog post defines a youth-centered approach as a process that “involves viewing, listening to and supporting a young person with a barrier based on their strengths, abilities, aspirations and preferences to make decisions to maintain a life which is meaningful to them” (*Youth Special* 2018). Young people become the focus, the actor, and the primary recipient of all actions. Considering that children or young persons do not develop in a vacuum, but belong to a family, a community, a culture, and a nation, it is important to act “in alliance with their family, friends, stakeholders and other experts, but with their permission” (*Youth Special* 2018).

### Youth Ministry Paradigms in Urban Context and Youth Participation

Fernando Arzola (2008) in *Toward a Prophetic Youth Ministry* describes and discusses four paradigms of youth ministry currently operating in urban context: (1) the Traditional Youth Ministry Paradigm, (2) the Liberal Youth Ministry Paradigm, (3) the Activist Youth Ministry Paradigm, and (4) the Prophetic Youth Ministry Paradigm.

The Traditional Youth Ministry Paradigm emphasizes a *youth ministry* in the urban context with no consideration for the specific reality of urban youth. Youth workers in this model are looking for the best and most effective programs/curricula for their youth. The main concern is the ministry program itself and its effectiveness in meeting the spiritual needs of the youth in general. Priority is given to activities such as Bible studies, worship services, evangelism, fellowship, and Sunday school. In evaluating the ministry, leaders ask the following question: How effective are the programs in the youth ministry department? (Arzola 2008:20-21).

The Liberal Youth Ministry Paradigm emphasizes a *compassionate ministry* in the urban context. This paradigm has a psychological focus: the felt-needs of the youth, with particular attention to the personal needs of urban youth. Priority activities include support groups, counseling, mentoring, choirs, trips, family services, music, and art. In evaluating this type of ministry, leaders ask, How are the needs of urban youth being met? (Arzola 2008:22-23)

The Activist Youth Ministry Paradigm stresses an *urban ministry* for youth. This paradigm has a sociological/anthropological focus: the issues experienced by youth. It is interested in knowing how the issues impacting

urban youth are being responded to? The program will include social action, after school tutoring, ethnic celebrations, economic empowerment, food pantry, and job training. In evaluating the ministry, leaders ask, How are the issues which affect urban youth being responded to? (2008:23-25).

The Prophetic Youth Ministry Paradigm emphasizes a *Christian ministry* for urban youth. This paradigm has a holistic focus of Christ in youth. Its concern is more holistic encompassing the spiritual, personal, and social needs of urban youth. But it does not start with programs, personal needs, or the social needs of urban youth. It starts with Christ, and “from Christ the ministry reaches out to address all three of these needs” (2008:24). The ultimate goal is the transformation of young people. In evaluating the ministry, leaders ask, How is Christ growing, deepening, and manifesting in the lives of urban youth? (2008: 25-28).

While acknowledging the important role of the traditional, liberal, and activist urban youth work, Arzola recommends considering a transition toward becoming more prophetic and Christ centered. He wishes that “urban youth ministries in cities around the world [would] transform into dynamic and holistic prophetic youth ministries addressing the spiritual, personal, and social needs of urban youth” (2008:186).

My first critique of Arzola’s analysis is that it is oblivious to the notion of youth participation. Looking at his discussion of the four above paradigms, none of them seems to be concerned by the issue of participation whereby young people are both key players and recipients. They focus more on the content rather than the process in the context of urban youth ministry. They see young people just as recipients but not critical players in all stages of the ministry cycle (planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation). A second critique is the fact that these paradigms operate from a paternalistic ideology. They all seem concerned by the question, “How best can youth ministry leaders address the needs of young people?” Even the prophetic youth ministry paradigm seems only to focus on how leaders can make sure Christ is central in the lives of young people. There is no indication that the youth will be invited to join the initial discussion or be given a voice that could influence the frame of the ministry. In fact, Arzola seems to write from the perspective of the youth worker, as he hopes that, with his proposed framework, “the prophetic youth workers in the urban context feel affirmed, empowered and energized to continue this most holy and important work” (Arzola 2008:186). Finally, I am worried that the paradigms, even the prophetic one, may lead to the implementation of stand-alone youth ministries, with no integration and no synergy with the overall mission strategy of the church. Segregation by age in evangelical churches is a wide-spread problem, according to Mike King (2006).

Another huge problem within evangelical ecclesiological practice is the propensity to segregate youth ministry from the rest of the church. . . . Much of youth ministry practice places value on creating youth centers and programs, resulting—by default or intent—in separated generations. How do we expect to fulfill the biblical model of young women and men learning from older women and men?" (King 2006:33)

Below, I summarize two approaches to youth ministry that seem to better reflect the concept of authentic participation.

### Youth Ministry Models Promoting Youth Participation

*Accommodative Youth Ministry.* Gareth Crispin advocates a theology of accommodation that can help integrate youth and children in an inter-generational church. In the same way Christ accommodates us in Christ, Crispin calls those with authority and knowledge in the church to accommodate youth and children. For Crispin, accommodation implies the inclusion of youth and children in all aspects of church life. Young people may not be able to participate in certain ordinances, like the communion service due to their lack of familiarity with the form being used. Yet, "accommodation will imply including young people in the discussion about which forms are appropriate" (Crispin 2017:19).

*Adoptive Accommodative Youth Ministry.* Chap Clark writes on the concept of Adoptive Youth Ministry and provides useful ways to integrate young people in the family of faith. His strategy includes five levels: outreach, welcoming level, engaging level, diverse relationship level, adoption level. In the last level, which is the summit of the Adoptive Youth Ministry model, members gather as an inclusive community, and in whatever they do—worship, missions, and service, both internally and externally—they experience the reality of a family. For example, when worshipping, they do not have only certain songs with a certain flavor because "gathering together is a comprehensive communal opportunity to collectively thank the Father who calls us his own" (Clark 2015:20). Mark Cannister states in Chap Clark that "transformation happens most deeply in the lives of teenagers when they are engaged in the broader life of the church and connected to a network of caring adults" (Clark 2015:136).

### Best Practices in Urban Youth Participation

There are several best practices in urban youth ministries that are important when developing an overall approach.



*Understand and meet the social and spiritual needs of urban youth.* Remember that genuine participation requires the participant to be among the primary recipients of the action. This implies that the needs of the participants must be known and understood. Jon Middendorf, in *Worship-centered Youth Ministry*, identifies three characteristics of millennial teens. First, moral relativism. They “tend to believe that the source of moral value judgments lies inside of them” (2000:31). Second, spiritual hunger. “They are starving for personal encounters with the living Christ who makes a difference today, in the real world” (38). Third, desire to belong. “Because our teens feel isolated from and wounded by the adult world around them, they deal with their problems by belonging” (38). Taking these characteristics into account, Middendorf argues that worship is a response to the millennial, postmodern mind-set, a worship inspired and fueled by the stories of God’s faithfulness and love (53). Such worship is not a religious act, but is rather a relationship (55) and a lifestyle (56). Middendorf describes the role of the youth worker as learning the biblical story, telling the story, and inviting participation in the story (2000:107-110).

Skip Bell notes that in the West “cities are dominated by secular culture, and lifestyles are often anything but Christian” (2018:6). He invites the churches located in urban contexts to be more concerned about the basic social needs of the people. “God desires us to seek shalom for the cities of our world today. . . . We are to prayerfully work for the common good of those who gather in urban environments. . . . He [God] does intend for us to transform lives in the city” (6). Bell exhorts the church to build relationships, get involved in the issues of the community, be incarnational by living, working, learning, playing, and engaging in dialogue. He adds, “There is little need for us to judge the effects of secularism in post-Christian culture. Instead, we can serve as advocates for justice, for the poor and abused in our culture” (7).

*Integrate postmodern values.* A youth-centered ministry in an urban context is more likely to be successful if it integrates postmodern values: experiential, spiritual, pluralistic, relative, altruistic, communal, creative, environmental, global, holistic, and authentic (Jones 2001:31-37). Tony Jones emphasizes three major elements where postmodern values can be integrated: community, evangelism, and recovering narrative.

*Community:* “In this postmodern time, youth workers must recover the communal spirit of the Christian faith through worship, a reliance upon the Trinity, and other community-based activities” (80). Jones states that “Salvation is a ‘we thing’ and not a ‘me thing.’ We accomplish God’s dream together. We exist to be a community” (108).

*Evangelism:* “We ought first to evangelize experientially and teach the content of the faith later! After all, Jesus says to his disciples, ‘Follow-me!’—not ‘Do you accept me as your personal Lord and Savior?’” (111).

*Recovering narrative:* “Let’s teach our students whole books of the Bible instead of verses here and there. And let’s teach them the whole story of Scripture by *telling them stories*” (205).

*Let them belong without restriction.* For Mike King, it is okay for young people to belong without a total commitment to Christ. He states, “Allowing youth to belong in our communities without pressuring them results in authentic decisions to follow Jesus” (2006:37).

*A focus on social justice.* Sharon E. Sutton’s study examined programs in America that sought to address issues affecting low-income and minority young people aged 12 to 28 living in oppressive urban conditions who often assumed adult responsibilities as teens. The study shows that urban adolescents encounter multiple forms of oppression, which some respondents describe “as a situation or dynamic in which certain ways of beings (e.g., having certain identities) are privileged in society while others are marginalized” (Sutton 2006:25). Young people need learning opportunities enabling them to “understand, question, and seek to change oppressive social conditions” such as racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, and so on. Sutton recommends applying socially critical pedagogies, which are methods of engaging youth in critical reflection and action, as well as activities that connect young people with their communities and, at the same time, providing them with meaningful opportunities for personal growth (25).

## Conclusion

The God of Scripture consistently called faithful youngsters to participate in his redemptive mission on earth. The mission of God is not only carried out by young men and women but also intentionally aims at reaching out to them. Drawing on biblical examples, this article advocates a youth-focused approach to urban ministry whereby young people are both actors and recipients of all activities. Youth participation is beneficial for society because their alienation is a cause of social and political disruption, of gang formation and criminal behavior in many contexts. Youth participation is beneficial for the church because, as reported in Roger Dudley’s 10-year study published in 2000, youth alienation pushes them away out of the church, while their active involvement enhances their retention. The article argues that a youth urban ministry is more likely to succeed if it integrates best practices such as meeting the social and spiritual needs of urban youth, the integration of postmodern values, a focus on social justice, and allowing the youth to belong without restriction.

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Michelet William (MSA, MDiv) is currently pursuing his PhD in Mission and Ministry at Andrews University. He and his wife, Tamara E. William, are from Haiti, but temporarily live in Berrien Springs, Michigan. Michelet has 20 year experience working with international humanitarian organization such as ADRA, World Vision, and Plan International, and is the founder of Team in Action to Save Kids (TASK), a ministry focusing on children's needs in Haiti and Mali. He is committed to preaching, teaching and social advocacy.

Diói Cruz

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# Multicultural Urban Ministry in the Post-apartheid Era: A Search for Identity and Unity in Diversity

## 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 being 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 re-supply 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

2010), and about 70 percent of the country's wealth (Simkins 2014). These 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, Pamphyliaus, 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.

*Laissez-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-identity 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 multi-lingual 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).

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Diói Cruz, MBA, DMin, PhD (in progress) has been a missionary in Africa and Asia for the last 20 years. Presently he is an assistant professor of Applied Theology and director of the Doctor of Missiology and Intercultural Studies program at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies in the Philippines.

Boubakar Sanou

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## Discipleship in Urban Contexts

### Introduction

Cities around the world have become a concentration of the world's population as tens of thousands of new people move to them every day. It is estimated that today, more than one half of humanity is living in cities (Massey, Allen, and Pile 1999:1). Because of his love and care for all his creatures (John 3:16), God definitely loves city dwellers and is sensitive to their spiritual needs. That is why he sent Jonah to Nineveh and also inspired Paul and his companions to minister in cities like Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, and Thessalonica. He is also interested in today's city dwellers' spiritual wellbeing. They are part of the people of all nations Christ commands us to disciple.

With the Great Commission, Jesus set the agenda for the *raison d'être* of the church. In a sort of farewell speech, he said to his disciples: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Matt 28:18-20). The task of making disciples is placed right at the center of the Great Commission as an imperative for the church in all ages and contexts. Christ's command was so central to the Early Church's identity that each of the four gospels ends with a version of it (Matt 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-20; Luke 24:45-49; John 20:21-23). Giving one's ultimate allegiance to Christ and leading other people to make the same decision is still expected from all professed Christians today, no matter the challenging contexts they live and witness in.

This paper discusses three essential dimensions of biblically shaped discipleship, the challenges of discipleship in urban contexts, and then offers suggestions for developing effective discipleship models.



### Three Essential Dimensions of a Scripture-Shaped Discipleship

Jesus' call to disciple all nations has been interpreted and applied differently over the history of Christianity. However, any approach to and practice of discipleship must be firmly rooted in principles derived from Scripture. My survey of discipleship literature revealed the following three essential dimensions that should be emphasized in every effective approach to helping believers become committed followers of Christ: the rational, relational, and missional dimensions (Wilkins 1988; Hull 2006; Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen 2014; Hirsch 2006; Harrington and Absalom 2016; Melbourne 2007; Barna 2001; Willard 2006; Putman 2010).

The rational (communion) dimension of discipleship is where a believer intentionally learns from Jesus. In its original context "disciple" (*mathetes*) referred to "someone who was either an apprentice in a trade or a pupil of a teacher" (Harrington and Absalom 2016:20). That person would attach themselves to a teacher for the purpose of acquiring both theoretical and practical knowledge (Brown 1975:484). The rational dimension stresses the need for a continuing transformation and growth even for those who have already become disciples. It is a call to all believers of all ages and in stages of spiritual growth to continue their journey of discipleship. Because faith is formed and grows by the knowledge and application of the Word of God, meaningful ongoing communion with God through his Word, soul searching prayer, and other spiritual disciplines help consolidate the need for believers' continuing spiritual growth and transformation. Since "teaching" in Matthew 28:19 is an ongoing process, the rational dimension of discipleship refers to "a kind of evangelism that does not stop after someone makes a profession of faith" (Blomberg 1992:431). It should however be noted that the goal of this continuing learning is not to just impart knowledge but to rouse total commitment to Jesus (Wilkins 1988:159).

The relational (community) dimension of discipleship develops in the context of a supportive community where accountability can take place. The New Testament portrays a very dynamic communal culture in the Early Church because of their understanding of disciple-making as a relational process. Because of its Old Testament roots, the Early Church continued to emphasize kinship as one of its core values. What was different about this new community was that kinship was no more defined in terms of blood lines and ethnicity but rather in terms of shared faith and fellowship in Christ. The church became an environment of inclusion, acceptance, and unity without discrimination on the basis of race, gender, or social status (Gal 3:28). Membership was open to all on the

basis of professing faith in Christ as Savior and a public demonstration of complete allegiance to Christ through water baptism (Acts 2:37, 38). The Early Church expressed its values of corporate solidarity and kinship through the use of motifs such as the body of Christ and family of God to describe the interdependence between its members and to convey the close bond that enabled them to treat each other as family members (Rom 12; 1 Cor 12; Eph 4; Gal 6:10; Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 4:17). Their concern was not power but the development of a lasting sense of interdependence, corporate solidarity, and accountability among believers. This interdependence suggested that each member of the body had a unique role to play and yet was dependent upon all other members. By demonstrating a new way of living, multitudes were attracted to this new community of faith (Acts 2:46, 47). In such settings, being a disciple was not synonymous with only accepting abstract propositional truths about Jesus. Being a disciple of Christ was about learning from Jesus and modeling in life what they knew about him. Their brand of discipleship was both what they did on behalf of Christ and how they represented Christ in the world (Melbourne 2007:10). This communal culture of the New Testament, where believers were integrated members of supportive groups, became a fertile ground for the seed of the gospel to be sown and nurtured.

The missional (commission) dimension of discipleship is concerned with understanding the call to “make disciples” (*mathēteusate*) in Matthew 28:19 as essentially a call for believers to duplicate themselves through their engagement in mission. This is the primary command of the Great Commission and it must remain the primary responsibility of the church in every context. Believers of the New Testament linked together their belonging to a community and their responsibility to share what that community stood for. Mission in the context of the Great Commission was understood as more than a call to share the gospel with those who do not know Christ. It was understood as both a call to share one’s faith and to disciple interested recipients to free them from the grasp of the devil so that they could fully and continually devote themselves to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Hence, the New Testament uses the word disciple to indicate a lifelong process rooted in a relationship with and total commitment to Christ. This comes as the result of learning and internalizing Jesus’ teaching, being changed by constantly growing in his knowledge (2 Pet 3:18), living a life of total submission to his lordship through the power of the Holy Spirit in the context of a loving and supportive community (John 15:1-17; Phil 3:8), and helping others begin to taste, trust, and follow Jesus (2 Tim 2:2). In other words, discipleship refers to the way Christ’s followers put their beliefs into practice in their relationship with Christ, each other, and how

they are to practically reflect the kingdom of God to the world they are called to witness to. From this perspective, discipleship is not to be understood as a church program, because it is not an event in time. It is rather about believers embracing the lifelong journey toward fullness in Christ that transforms their cognitive, affective, and evaluative perspectives on life. Disciples of Jesus do not just profess certain cognitive beliefs in God; they also apply those beliefs to every aspect of their daily life.

### **An Overview of the Current State of Discipleship**

There is an agreement among Christian discipleship scholars in the West that compared to the New Testament, the current practice of discipleship has, to a great extent, lost its primacy of focus among Christians. A Barna report produced in partnership with The Navigators on the current state of discipleship in the United States points out that only one percent of church leaders (senior pastors and discipleship leaders) agree that “today’s churches are doing very well at discipling new and young believers” (The Navigators 2015:9, 10). The making of disciples has largely been watered down to merely moving converts to Christianity into church membership (Ogden 2016:22-39; Lear 2016; The Navigators 2015; Willard 2006; Putman 2010:21). Thus, some scholars perceive current church growth as largely numerical and statistical growth without much spiritual depth (Ogden 2016; The Navigators 2015). From his international ministry experience, Greg Ogden posits that generally speaking, Christians are much better at converting people than they are at helping these converts become disciples of Christ. He justifies his remarks about the lack of depth of transformative discipleship in Christianity by pointing to the weak impact Christians have on the moral and spiritual climate of their contexts even in countries where the vast majority of the population identifies itself as Christian (2006:23; The Navigators 2015; Willard 2006). This echoes Bill Hull’s claim that “the crisis at the heart of the church today is a crisis of product” (Hull 1988:14). For Dallas Willard, there is a relationship between churches’ failure to make discipleship a core condition of becoming a Christian and the false but widely accepted assumption among a significant number of churchgoers that one can become a Christian without necessarily having to become a disciple of Christ. He observes that among too many professed Christians,

One is not required to be, or to intend to be, a disciple in order to become a Christian, and one may remain a Christian without any signs of progress toward or in discipleship. Contemporary American churches in particular do not require following Christ in his example,

spirit, and teachings as a condition of membership—either of entering into or continuing in fellowship of a denomination or local church. . . . So far as the visible Christian institutions of our day are concerned, *discipleship clearly is optional*. (Willard 2006:4, emphasis in original)

The above comment only seems to be one of the symptoms of the lack of drive on the part of many Christians to prioritize an investment in their spiritual growth (The Navigators 2015:11, 12).

### Some Contributing Factors to the Current State of Discipleship

Several factors contribute to the current low state of discipleship in Christianity. The first four of the factors that will be considered here are typical of urban contexts. Although no two cities are the same, there are a number of key features that are common to urban contexts. These factors may present challenges for making disciples. The remaining three factors are related to approaches to discipleship among Christians. It is not my intension to attempt to cover all those possible contributing factors in this paper.

#### The Impact of Secularization

The interrelationship between urbanization and secularization is a consistent theme in urban literature. Harvey Cox points out that “the rise of urban civilization and the collapse of traditional religion are the two main hallmarks of our era and are closely related movements” (2013:1). He links the collapse of traditional religion to secularization which he defines as “the loosing of the world from religious and quasi-religious understandings of itself, the dispelling of all closed world-views, the breaking of all supernatural myths and sacred symbols” (2). As a result of the interrelationship between urbanization and secularization, many urban dwellers are turning away from anything that has something to do with organized religion or even belief in God. Instead, their attention is often turned toward self and what life has to offer them.

#### An Isolationist (Loner) Approach to Spiritual Growth

By focusing on “the immediate world as the ultimate reality and the individual as the center of authority,” secularization has also contributed to the “disruption of community life and fragmentation of family relationships” (Van Gelder 2000:69). It is estimated that more than 32 million

Americans live alone today compared to only 4 million in 1950. These singletons “represent 28 percent of all households at the national level; more than 40 percent in cities like San Francisco, Seattle, Atlanta, Denver, and Minneapolis; and nearly 50 percent in Washington D.C. and Manhattan” (Klinenberg 2012:208). They seem to value nearness to conveniences like stores, restaurants, and gyms more than communal commitments (Dever 2016:12). Because of this growing trend in urban settings, many believers have also relegated spirituality to the private realm. Forty-one percent of professed Christians see their spiritual life as entirely private (The Navigators 2015:108). Thirty-seven percent opt for a loner approach to discipleship (109). In a research on the state of discipleship, only 18% of the participants strongly agreed that a believer cannot be complete and mature in their spiritual journey without the influence and support of a community of faith (Ogden 2016:28, 33). It is disconcerting that while a community of faith is central to God’s plan of salvation (Acts 2:47; Heb 10:24-25), many Christians choose to pursue spiritual growth on their own.

### Consumerism

Consumerism in the context of this chapter refers to “the belief that meaning and satisfaction in life are to be found through the purchase and use of new consumer goods” (Goodwin, Nelson, Ackerman, and Weisskopf 2008:4). Although this phenomenon is of global scope, it is much more accentuated in urban contexts where a multitude of consumer items associated with success and wellbeing are more readily accessible through the “buy now, pay later” options offered by stores and credit card companies. Because of this obsession with the acquisition of the latest consumer goods, people’s quality of life is often measured by what they consume or the latest gadgets they possess (Twitchell 2002:1).

A consumerist lifestyle thus poses a challenge to discipleship because of its competition with biblical values of stewardship, contentment, and simplicity. Because the consumerist mentality teaches people that they can have whatever they want, whenever they want it, and at the least cost to them (Metzger 2007:40), some believers become church shoppers in the sense that their “relationship with a church is based on whether it meets [their] needs or checks the boxes of what [they] are looking for in a church” (Ogden 2016:33). Whenever such believers are challenged to make spiritual commitments that are not in harmony with their personal preferences and the comfort they seek, they move to another church. With so many churches competing for members, congregants can easily be perceived as consumers to be wooed (Finke and Stark 2005:8-9). As a result, some churches can become so concerned with satisfying worshipers’

needs and preferences that they fail to focus their ministries on making biblically-faithful disciples (2 Tim 4:3-4).

### General Busyness of Life and Lack of Commitment to Spiritual Growth

Participants in the Barna Group's 2015 study on the state of discipleship in the United States were all in agreement that the general busyness of life and the lack of commitment to discipleship are the two most significant barriers to spiritual growth among American Christians. While the general busyness of life is typical of living in an urban context, the lack of commitment to discipleship is an indication of most Christians' lack of drive to prioritize their spiritual growth when confronted by existential needs (The Navigators 2015:56, 57, 101). Another sign of spiritual disengagement among American Christians is that 64% of practicing Christians feel comfortable with where they are now spiritually. Therefore, they do not feel compelled to progress in their spiritual life, 23% do not see spiritual progress in their lives as very important, and 24% do not even see the benefit of trying to make progress in their spiritual life (106, 118).

### Professional Monopoly on Ministry

Despite the teaching of the New Testament on ministry as the function of the total church membership (1 Pet 2:9-10; Sanou, Campbell, and Williams 2017), by the end of the first century, a shift from spiritual giftedness to that of formal church office as the basis for ministry had begun. Ministries that members of the Christian community once performed without official appointment started to be clericalized, and liturgical actions were turned into permanent offices. As a direct result, the possibility of lay people exercising individual ministries sharply declined, even to the point of extinction (Bradshaw 1982-1983:52). While the first century church was marked by a people without the hierarchical distinction between clergy and laity, in the second and third centuries a definite clergy/laity distinction was gaining ground. By the fifth and sixth centuries, the cleavage between clergy and laity had become entrenched (Stevens 1999:39). In the Middle Ages, with the establishment of a sacerdotal system of mediated grace, the laity became a submissive, docile part of the church with the priest holding authority over souls (Borchert 1996:556). A sharp differentiation between clergy and laity had thus developed, degrading the ministries of the lay people and emphasizing the special function of the clergy. During this period, the laity became dependent upon the clergy for access to God's favor. Although the Protestant Reformation recovered much of the

New Testament teaching (e.g., Lutherans, Calvinists, and Anabaptists), nevertheless, the laity were still often considered, and even considered themselves, a lower grade of Christians than the ordained ministers (Richardson and Bowden 1983:318-319). For example, despite their strong emphasis on the priesthood of all believers, to some extent, the Reformers maintained a clear and rigid distinction between the role of the ordained minister and that of the rest of the believers in congregational involvement in worship. The ordained ministers were there to minister and the congregation was ministered unto (Bradshaw 1982-1983:56).

Regrettably, the same trend in ministry lives on in many Christian circles today. Instead of fulfilling their divine calling and giftedness to equip believers for the work of ministry (Eph 4:11-12), the majority of pastors continue to monopolize almost all the ministry responsibilities assigned to the entire body of Christ. By creating a dependency of congregants on them for all aspects of spiritual care, pastors implicitly teach believers that they pay to be ministered to. Greg Ogden is right to compare the contemporary approach to ministry to “a football game with twenty-two people on the field in desperate need of rest, and fifty thousand people in the stands in desperate need of exercise” (2016:25). This approach to ministry, which fosters a spectator mentality on the part of the vast majority of believers, runs counter to the core principle of the priesthood of all believers. As a result of spiritual caregiving being solely assigned to ministry professionals, the majority of believers are neither using their spiritual gifts nor maturing in their discipleship experience.

### Discipleship through Church-Centered Events

Spiritual caregiving is often monopolized by ministry professionals so they are unable to invest quality time in building strong relationships with each of their congregants to help them grow toward maturity in Christ. Instead of adopting the scriptural model for growing disciples through intentional transformative relationships, most congregations have centered their approach to discipleship on “programmes and finding ways to attract people to their physical building” (Lear 2016:8). Although such activities can, to some extent, contribute to discipleship development, they neglect person-centered growth as the central ingredient in discipleship. As such, they are unable to address spiritual growth factors particular to each congregant (Ogden 2016:45). Besides, there is a steady decline in church attendance in America. Recent research on church attendance reveals that far less than 40% of American Christians attend church at least twice a month (Lear 2016:8, 9; Shattuck 2018). That means that church-centered events do not even reach the bigger segment of those they were planned for.

In addition, many people who show interest in becoming Christians are taught the fundamental beliefs of the church they want to join and then baptized. Because there is often no or little personal follow up, the event of baptism marks the end of the discipleship process for the majority of new members. Once accepted into church membership, there is an assumption that by regularly attending weekly worship services and other programs the church organizes, new converts “will naturally know what it means to be and how they are to practically live as disciples of Jesus Christ” (Lear 2016:8). Unfortunately, the sharing of Christian principles in these kinds of events usually does not effectively address the spiritual growth needs or deep issues some of the believers might be struggling with. These events also tend to focus heavily on cognitive knowledge with the assumption that a sound and articulate presentation of the Bible will inevitably lead to transformation and right Christian living. Sadly, there is no automatic transfer from cognitive knowledge about Christian beliefs and lifestyle to the actual practice of these aspects of Christianity. Thus, a person can fully ascribe cognitively to a set of right scriptural teachings without ever having their lifestyle transformed by them (Jas 2:14-26).

Making disciples is far more than simply presenting biblical truth no matter how crucial that truth is. The process of discipleship involves more than just doctrinal correctness in information transfer. I agree that before surrendering their lives to Christ, people need a certain level of understanding of scriptural truth and need to know the requirements of being Christ’s disciples (Luke 14:25-34). Jesus himself spent an important part of his ministry in teaching truth (e.g., the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5-7; the parables in Luke 15; 18:1-14; 19:11-26; Matt 11:1; Luke 4:31-32; John 15:1-17). His intention was for his hearers to grow in their understanding of the person and will of God in order for them to have an informed and better relationship with him. However, he taught the truth as knowledge grounded in a relationship and experience with God rather than a mere cognitive understanding of the Word of God (John 8:32, 15:1-10). He always challenged his hearers, especially his disciples, to apply their intellectual knowledge to their day-to-day experiences (Matt 7:24-27). To help his disciples understand the implications of his teachings for their lives or to further explain his teaching to them, Jesus often gave them private tutorials (e.g., Matt 18:1-5; 24; Mark 9:28-29; Matt 16:13-20; Mark 8:13-21; and Luke 22:35-38). These kinds of follow up to church programs are still important for growing faithful disciples today.

### Lack of Personal Discipling Experience

Another contributing factor to the low state of discipleship comes from



the fact that only a very small percentage of Christians have personally been in intentional discipleship relationships in which other believers have walked alongside them over time with the express intention of helping them grow toward spiritual maturity (Ogden 2016:56). With only 23% of all Christians surveyed in the United States being personally discipled by someone else, it is not surprising that only 19% of them are active in discipling others (The Navigators 2015:50). Not having been personally discipled, many Christians perceive themselves as unequipped to disciple others.

### **Addressing the Current State of Discipleship**

In the face of the reality about the current state of discipleship and some of the factors that contribute to it as described above, it is important to think about ways to reshape the practice of discipleship as intended by Jesus in the Great Commission. Before suggesting useful steps toward developing a scripture-shaped discipleship model, I will draw some biblical discipleship principles from 1 Thessalonians 2:7-13.

#### **1 Thessalonians 2:7-13: A Biblical Model of Discipleship**

A biblical model of discipleship that stand out to me is depicted in 1 Thessalonians 2:7-13. This text compares discipleship to a process of spiritual parenting. Paul uses the parent-child metaphor to describe principles of discipleship by referring to familiar things of life, which both the direct recipients and the wider readership of his epistle were conversant with. This parent-child metaphor is still a powerful means of impressing on people's minds important spiritual principles about Christian discipleship. This approach to discipleship can help achieve four things: (1) the teaching of biblical truth; (2) modeling a spiritual walk with God to mentees; (3) personal attention to believers' spiritual growth needs; and (4) a long-term commitment to the spiritual welfare and growth of believers.

#### **The Teaching of Biblical Truth**

"And we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word, but as it actually is, the word of God, which is indeed at work in you who believe" (1 Thess 2:13). Conforming themselves to the command of Matthew 28:19-20, Paul and his companions made the Word of God an essential element of the Thessalonians' discipleship process. They taught biblical truth using illustrations and metaphors their hearers were

familiar with (2 Tim 2:3-5). This not only helped their hearers relate to their teaching but also to easily remember them.

### **Modeling a Spiritual Walk with God**

“Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you. You are witnesses, and so is God, of *how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed*” (1 Thess 2: 9, 10, emphasis added). Paul’s missionary team strove to be role models to the new believers through their shared life with them. If Hampton Keathley’s perspective on discipleship is correct, about 90 percent of what a disciple learns or applies is caught from the discipler’s life rather than from his/her teaching. As a result, he argues that “we should place our emphasis on being a friend and let people see how we deal with things, how we study, how we pray, how we love, etc. We don’t want to just give him all the facts. We need to allow him to see how we work through various issues and help him work through the issues himself” (Keathley 2013). Without any doubt, this was what happened in Jesus’ discipling ministry of the Twelve and his other early followers who so faithfully imitated him that when those who had observed them found no other way to call them but Christians (Acts 11:26).

Following Jesus’ example, mature Christians are called to be pacesetters, positively influencing new believers in their spiritual growth. Paul’s understanding of this principle of Christian growth led him to ask the Corinthian believers to imitate him just as he himself imitated Christ (1 Cor 11:1). He later challenged Timothy to “be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim 4:12). This is a challenge to all mature Christians and church leaders to keep on growing in their relationship with Christ so that they can manifest godly character worthy of being imitated.

### **Personal Attention to Believers’ Spiritual Needs**

“For you know that *we dealt with each of you* as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Thess 2:11, 12, emphasis added). Paul’s team gave believers individual attention and instruction as a father would do to his children with the intention to help each of them with their unique needs. They understood that each believer’s uniqueness meant individual attention.

Hampton Keathley illustrates the need for personal attention to believers as follows:

When we bring a newborn home from the hospital, we don't just put down the infant and say, "Welcome to the family, Johnny. Make yourself at home. The towels are in the hall closet upstairs, the pantry is right here, the can opener is in this drawer. No crying after 10 p.m. If you have any questions, there are lots of people in the family who would love to help you so don't be afraid to ask." You laugh and say that is ridiculous, but that is what usually happens to new Christians. Someone gets saved and starts going to church but never gets much personal attention. We devote 18 years to raising our children, but don't even spend six months helping a new Christian get started in understanding the spiritual world. As a result, many people have been Christians for many years, but have not grown very much. Hebrew 5:12 refers to this phenomenon. So, new believers need someone to give them guidance and help them grow. Like a newborn, they need some personal attention. (Keathley 2004)

Keathley's illustration highlights the fact that discipling converts is costly in terms of personal and time investment since it requires that each of them be given personal attention in such a way that their unique growth needs are understood and adequately addressed. Jesus' three-and-half year, day and night investment in his disciples proves that there is no alternative to person-centered growth as a means of helping others mature as disciples of Christ. Disciple-making is not an event limited to a two-to-three-week evangelistic series or something that is taken care of in a formal teaching setting (e.g., baptismal class). This makes mentorship inseparable from discipleship. Since the call to "make disciples" (*mathēteusate*) in Matthew 28:19 is essentially a call to duplicate one's self, mentorship is inseparable from discipleship. A spiritual mentor is someone who is committed to a healthy spiritual relationship with another person for the purpose of mutual accountability and growth in Jesus Christ. This type of spiritual relationship between a mentor and a mentee can help keep both of them on track as they become accountable to one another.

### **Long-term Commitment to the Spiritual Welfare and Growth of Believers**

"Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, so we cared for you" (1 Thess 2:7, 8, emphasis added). The process of discipleship requires the investment of quality time in those being disciplined. Paul and his missionary team cared for the believers in the congregations they established as a responsible mother would care for her children by intentionally committing themselves

to their spiritual growth and welfare. This would have involved tenderly and patiently teaching the Thessalonians to walk with God. Their long-term commitment to the welfare of the believers at Thessalonica echoes Jesus' long-term concern for the growth of his disciples. Before ascending to heaven after three and half years with them, he assured his disciples of his continuing care with these words, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. . . . I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:1, 16-18). An important implication of these two examples is that it takes time and personal attention to make disciples.

First Thessalonians 2:7-13 clearly shows that although the teaching of biblical truth was essential, it was not the sole component of Paul's missionary team's discipleship strategy. While the teaching of biblical truth is an essential component of discipleship because a convert cannot fully mature spiritually without understanding biblical principles, it must also be acknowledged that a convert may have considerable biblical knowledge and yet remain spiritually immature. For this reason, the teaching of biblical truth must always be balanced with other components of biblical discipleship such as an intentional commitment to the spiritual growth and welfare of new believers, a modeling of a spiritual walk with God, and personal attention to each believer's spiritual welfare and growth needs. Congregational and small group teaching and personal attention of the believers are needed to encourage them along the road to their Christian maturity. Just as a baby needs an additional amount of attention, new converts also need someone to provide them with attention and guidance in the maturation process.

### Suggestions for Developing an Effective Discipleship Model

Below are ten suggestions for developing an effective discipleship model in local congregations that takes into consideration the essential components of discipleship. These suggestions are like ingredients that different master chefs would use to produce different but top quality dishes.

#### **Develop an Equipping Model of Ministry**

Scripture does not support the view that only the paid ministry professionals should do the work of ministry while the rest of the church

membership merely warms the pews and waits to be fed. Because both groups make up the church, they are called to minister according to their spiritual giftedness. From the perspective of the New Testament, every believer is equipped by the Holy Spirit to minister for other believers' edification in the body of Christ. First Peter 2:9, 10 and Revelation 1:5, 6 are two important texts that helped shape the New Testament perspective on the priesthood of all believers. Peter points out that it is the entire church membership that is now called, commissioned, and empowered to perform the task of priests. For John, the eligibility in this new priestly order is no longer determined by gender, ethnicity, or position in the church, but exclusively determined by faith in Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

One way God has equipped every believer for his or her priestly ministry is through spiritual gifts. The fact that each believer has received at least one gift from the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 4:10) is an indication that each member of the body of Christ has a ministry to perform. An expectation from those in pastoral leadership is to resist the temptation of monopolizing ministry. Instead of doing all the work of ministry themselves, for whatever reasons, pastors and other official church leaders must be faithful to their calling "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph 4:12). This equipping of believers for the work of ministry starts by helping them discover their spiritual gifts. However, the process of spiritual gifts discovery should not stop with merely naming and defining believers' gifts. They should be coached on how to effectively use them. Believers' awareness of their spiritual gifts can also contribute to the establishment of gift-based ministries in the church (Dick and Miller 2003:29). Placing believers in their area of giftedness is vitally important for effective ministry in the local church. If they do not have a passion for the area in which they serve, they will see their responsibilities as burdensome rather than joyful. Gift-based ministries can fulfill a twofold function: (a) help each believer become an active participant in the body of Christ and (b) pay personal attention to spiritual growth factors unique to each believer in the body of Christ.

### **Prioritize a Personal Commitment to Developing a Growing Relationship with God over Participation in Church Programs**

Although involvement in church programs may influence spiritual behaviors, only God can transform the human heart. The goal of any approach to discipleship should not be to keep church members busy by a plethora of activities, but rather to help them embark on a quest for a growing relationship with Christ (John 15:1-8). Also, the weekly worship

gatherings should not be the main focus of discipleship. Discipleship is not pulpit-centric. Dallas Willard rightly observes that “one of the greatest contemporary barriers to meaningful spiritual formation into Christlikeness is overconfidence in the spiritual efficacy of ‘regular church services.’ They are vital, they are not enough, it is that simple” (2002:250). To be effective, the impact of worship services and other church programs needs to be designed in such a way that they address believers’ spiritual needs, challenging them and suggesting to them practical ways and tools to take the next step in their spiritual journey.

### **Do Not Make Numbers or Regular Church Attendance the Only Standard for Measuring Success in Discipling Others**

Membership and church attendance are not sufficient measures as to whether or not people are becoming more like Christ in their spiritual journey. The health of a church “is not just about the numbers. It’s about the movement of people toward Christ, toward deep love for God and genuine love for others” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007:8). Bigger is not always better. Quality should be preferred to quantity alone. Our motivation should be to see hearts grow and not to simply see numbers grow. In discipling others, the How many? and Where are they spiritually? questions need to be addressed together. While the How many? question helps evaluate the statistical impact of an activity, it is the Where are they spiritually? that will help measure the spiritual impact of that same activity. In discipleship, numerical and spiritual growth should not be seen as two separate agendas. Both belong to the same agenda. It is this misunderstanding of the correlation between evangelism and discipleship that “has given rise to churches that produce large numbers of converts with little depth, converts who could hardly be called disciples of Jesus Christ. . . . Conversely, there are also many churches that emphasize great teaching and theological depth but fail to see God use them to bring very many, if any, new believers to faith in Christ” (Rainer 2016:11). A biblically-faithful approach to discipleship seeks to find a balance between attracting numbers and at the same time helping those numbers grow to maturity in Christ.

### **Balance Any Seeker-Sensitive Approach to Discipleship with a Concern for All the Overall Spiritual Growth of the Congregation**

Well-established believers as well as religious explorers need to be comprehensibly taught all that Jesus commanded (Matt 28:19) and not

primarily what they want to hear or what they feel good about. This is important because whenever the primary energies of a congregation are spent on well-crafted program productions solely focused on meeting the needs of people who are still exploring what they believe about Jesus and Christianity, then only secondary energies are left to help both those seekers and the other congregants grow in their spiritual journey. Sometimes, it becomes very challenging to help the religious explorers who are used to big event gatherings to find God in other “less significant” gatherings if the church programs somehow already communicated to them that God is found and experienced only through sophisticated weekly programs (Sparks, Soerens, and Friesen 2014:78).

### **Approach Discipleship as a Life-Long Process**

Being a disciple of Christ is a lifelong journey, not an event in time. It is about “*becoming* a disciple rather than having been *made* a disciple” (Hull 2006:35, italics in original). As a process of becoming Christ-like, “discipleship isn’t a program or event; it’s a way of life. It’s not for a limited time, but for our whole life. Discipleship isn’t for beginners alone; it’s for all believers for everyday of their life” (24). Since “the path to spiritual maturity is not correlated to age” (Hawkins and Parkinson 2007:33), every church member needs to be constantly challenged to grow in their love for God and other people. The fact that the role of the church in helping nurture a growing relationship with Christ decreases as people move along the later stages of the spiritual continuum should not lead to a congregation’s total disengagement in the spiritual welfare of those along those stages (42). Adequate attention and resources should be available to congregants at every stage of their spiritual journey to help them continue growing in Christ.

### **Make Mentoring an Essential Component of the Process of Discipleship**

Beside the formal teaching settings, spiritual mentors should be available to share their spiritual journey and experiences (both positive and negative) with new converts. I once invited a renowned Adventist preacher to share her spiritual journey with a group of students I had mentored. She explained to us that throughout her life she always sought to be happy. Before she became Adventist, she searched for happiness through wrong means to no avail. When she was converted and later became a pastor, she unsuccessfully sought happiness in the applause and approval of other people. One day, she finally found the answer to her quest in the

following statement: “God made man perfectly holy and *happy*” (White 1999:9, emphasis added). It was only then that she understood that true happiness is only found in fully surrendering one’s life with its past mistakes to God. My students really appreciated our guest being vulnerable in sharing her life experience with them. They understood that she did not get where she is currently in her spiritual journey at a click of a button. They also understood that they are not the only ones struggling in their spiritual journey. As a result of this open conversation with our guest, we all resolved not to let our past mistakes determine who we become in life. Rather, we need to daily open our heart to the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

### **Motivate Believers to Invest in Intentional Spiritual Growth Practices**

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-25, Paul uses the disciplined training of an athlete as an image for Christian living. Just as record-winning athletes are disciplined in their training, he encourages believers to be more so since the prize they have in view is eternal. The correct understanding of this training in the process of spiritual growth is rightly captured by Dallas Willard when he states that “grace is opposed to earning, but is not opposed to effort” (2006:61). This diligent training for spiritual maturity can be enhanced by giving due consideration to the practice of spiritual disciplines. Spiritual disciplines refer to deliberate self-imposed spiritual habits for the purpose of nurturing spiritual health, thus fostering spiritual growth and maturity. They constitute concrete expressions of our decision to place ourselves before God for him to change us into his likeness (Calhoun 2015; Whitney 2014; Dybdahl 2008). Spiritual disciplines help us check our spiritual life for toxins (Groeschel 2012). Examples of spiritual disciplines include the study, memorizing, and meditation on Scripture, journaling, prayer, fasting, service, etc. A word of caution about the practice of spiritual disciplines is that it does not automatically result in spiritual growth, especially if they are practiced for self-glorification (Luke 18:9-14). By opening our eyes, our hearts, and our minds to the cleansing power of God’s Spirit and truth, spiritual disciplines place us before God where genuine transformation can only take place.

### **Approach Mission as Disciples Making Other Disciples**

By commanding his disciples to “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19), Jesus was basically telling them “to make more of what they are



themselves” (Wilkins 1988:162). The primary focus of a congregation should not be on what happens at its facilities. Although we find the “Come and See” method of evangelism in the New Testament (John 1:39), the church was mostly expected to go out, mingle with people, and sow the seeds of the gospel. The emphasis on “come and see” puts the responsibility on individuals to come and hear the gospel rather than on the church to take the gospel to them (Hirsch 2006:275). “When Jesus delivered the Great Commission, he revealed God’s plan for his church as well as for individual disciples. He charged the church to go to the world, because the world has no reason to go to church” (Hull 2006:254). According to the parable of the lost sheep, it is the church, not the unchurched, who are supposed to be the “seekers” (Luke 15:1-7). As such, “we are not to wait for souls to come to us; we must seek them out where they are [because] there are multitudes who will never be reached by the gospel unless it is carried to them” (White 1900:229).

### **Local Congregations Should Become Genuinely Welcoming and Loving Congregations**

People were irresistibly drawn to Jesus because of the unselfish love and concern with which he treated them. In the same way, sincere and loving Christian communities can become fertile ground where people grow in their relationship with Christ. As young adults account for the majority of urban congregations, hospitality, authenticity, and vulnerability should be among a local congregation’s key values (Lear 2016:14). Since “the strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian” (White 1909:470), it is right to say that it is believers rather programs that are the most effective bridges to Christ. As a loving community, the church becomes not only a true reflection of Jesus Christ but also an answer to Christ’s prayer for unity among his followers (John 17:11, 20-23). While life has become so politicized around ethnic, racial, and national identities, the church, through genuine and loving relationships between its members, is able to irrefutably show our fragmented world that “a community of diverse persons can live in reconciled relationship with one another because they live in reconciled relationship with God” (Van Gelder 2000:109).

### **Become Sensitive and Respond to Community Needs**

A biblical perspective on discipleship indicates that ministry success also relates to the positive impact believers have on the larger community they live in. From that perspective, Christ’s model of discipleship as

expressed by Ellen White should be adopted by local congregations: “The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (1909:143). Just as Jesus was incarnational in his ministry, so should we. We can be confident that such an approach “will not, cannot, be without fruit” (144).

## Conclusion

With the current state of discipleship, congregations can no longer afford to rely on their church-centered programs as their main means of growing disciples. Programs do not disciple people; people disciple people. Becoming authentic communities who create intentional spaces where believers of all ages and stages in their faith journey can effectively and meaningfully connect with one another and with God, grow spiritually, and reach out to the world around them is of vital importance in urban discipleship. With the imperative to share the gospel in the cities, urban congregations need to objectively do their own discipleship reality assessment in light of Jesus’ example and command. A thoughtful assessment of the gap between Jesus’ intention and current practices will help them make necessary adjustments to their approach to discipleship.

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Boubakar Sanou is an assistant professor of Mission and Leadership at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.

Sven Östring

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# Missional Apologetics: Keys to the Hearts and Minds of Urban Young Professionals?

## Introduction

The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the West faces two significant missional issues. First, the growing demographic of people who no longer identify with any organized religion, including Christianity. Young professionals are especially represented among this demographic group. This means that an increasing number of young adults no longer hold a biblically-shaped worldview and are not attracted through traditional evangelistic approaches that assume prior knowledge of, or commitment to, biblical concepts. Another consequence of this reduction in religious commitment among young adults is that the Adventist Church faces the reality that it is growing older. Second, the balance of the world's population is shifting towards major urban centers. Therefore, it is important to effectively reach urban young professionals in ways that connect holistically with their hearts and minds. A research study in Australia indicated that one of the top spiritual repellents for non-Christian people is a focus on philosophical discussions and debating ideas. In spite of this, a significant percentage of Australian young professionals are still willing to consider changing their worldview if presented with the right circumstances and evidence. This article explores how apologetic material can missionally connect with the hearts and minds of urban young professionals. The Greater Sydney Conference and the South Pacific Division Adventist Media Center developed this approach based on a preliminary qualitative research study of an evangelistic series.

## The Third Best Spiritual Repellent on the Market

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) conducts a census of the Australian population every five years. Almost without fail, this inspires

a flurry of demographic studies and analyses, including research studies into the spiritual landscape of Australian society. The 2016 Australian Census was no exception. Just a little over five months before the ABS was scheduled to officially release the 2016 Australian Census results, the McCrindle Research began its own national study on religion, spirituality, and worldview trends in Australia. Although working with much smaller sample sizes, involving a national survey of 1,024 Australians and focus groups with 26 non-Christians, as compared with the total national population of 26.4 million people who completed the census survey, the McCrindle Research team uncovered some fascinating insights. The results of the McCrindle Research Report are available on their website as the *Faith and Belief in Australia* national study (2017).

It is fairly clear from the report that one of the motivating reasons for the Christian ministry organizations that funded the McCrindle Research to undertake this research study was the highly anticipated results that would show an accelerating number of Australians who self-identify as having “No Religion.” Social forecasters were not wrong. The 2016 Australian Census showed that an additional 2.2 million people in Australia publicly declared that they had no religion, a percentage jump from 22.3% to 30.1% of the Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017). This openly irreligious demographic was most strongly represented among young adults in the 18-34 age bracket. The census revealed that 39% of young adults in Australia report that they have no personal commitment to any religious organization. While anticipating and confirming this sobering result, the McCrindle study also offered unique windows into the spiritual soul of Australia and suggested opportunities to connect with Australians on topics of faith.

One of the topics that the McCrindle research team addressed was the top repellents to religion and spirituality (McCrindle 2017:26). The 1,019 respondents in the research study identified the following top repellents: (1) hearing from public figures and celebrities who are examples of faith (27%), (2) miraculous stories (26%), and (3) philosophical discussions and debating ideas (19%).

While the Seventh-day Adventist denomination may be relieved that there are very few public Adventist figures and celebrities which can be placed on a spiritual pedestal, and the denomination has not deliberately promoted miraculous stories like Pentecostal movements have, the third top repellent does hit a nerve for Adventists. Australians dislike philosophical discussions and debates when it comes to religion and spirituality, and it is easy to understand why. It conjures up memories of heated discussions in university dining halls and office lunchrooms, with two or more otherwise sane and sensible people getting red in the face, arguing

past each other about topics like the scientific evidence for creation versus evolution. Alternatively, another mental picture may be of an evangelical Christian dogmatically running through the points in an argument about the existence of God, to which his skeptical opponent retorts that God is simply an emotional crutch that believers use to prop up their delusional understanding of life. These are not pretty mental pictures in a person's spiritual album.

If there is one word that seems to encapsulate the third top repellent it is "apologetics." What is the Christian discipline that is defined and embraces "philosophical discussion and debating ideas" more than any other? It is apologetics that focuses on these very things, the third top repellent for non-Christians in Australia. Avery Dulles has clearly identified the stereotype that often accompanies apologists. He said an apologist is usually thought of as an "aggressive, opportunistic person who tries, by fair means or foul, to argue people into joining the church" (2005:xix). Gregory Koukl paints a decidedly Anglo-American picture of the stereotypical apologetic engagement. "Circle the wagons. Hoist the drawbridge. Fix bayonets. Load weapons. Ready, aim, fire. It's not surprising, then, that believers and unbelievers alike associate apologetics with conflict. Defenders don't dialogue. They fight" (2009:19). One is very tempted to conclude that apologetics is a set of tools and techniques that should be left on the shelf. As Rick Richardson famously advocated, belonging comes before believing (2006:27). It also follows then that the church should simply allow secular young professionals to belong in our church groups and then, simply by unconscious osmosis, they will begin believing as we do.

A careful read of the McCrindle *Faith and Belief in Australia* report will caution, though, rushing to cast apologetics onto the garbage heap. The McCrindle study states that almost "one in two (49%) non-religious Australians prefer a scientific and rational, 'evidence-based,' approach to life" (14). Even more promising is that the study showed that "half of all Australians say (52%) they would be open, to some extent, to changing their religious views given the right circumstances and evidence" (2017:17, 18). When the responses to this question are analyzed further, it is very encouraging that "younger generations are more likely to be very interested or quite open to changing their current religious views (20% Gen Z, 19% Gen Y, cf. 12% Gen X, 4% Baby Boomers, 6% Builders)" (17). This demonstrates, that even in the midst of a growing demographic slide towards "No religion" in Australia, there is still reason for hope and redoubling of our collaboration with the Holy Spirit in growing the kingdom of God among the younger generations of Australians.

The fact that many Australians prefer an "evidence-based" approach to life and that they would be open to changing their religious views, given

the right circumstances and evidence, suggests that evidence is still a very useful tool in winning the hearts and minds of urban young professionals. The Christian discipline that focuses on providing evidence for Christianity, including interpreting scientific evidence within a theistic and biblical framework, is that previous suspect—Christian apologetics. Thus, it appears that it is not the use of Christian apologetics *per se* that is the true spiritual repellent, but rather the approach that is taken. In this article, I explore how missional apologetics can provide keys to the hearts and minds of urban young professionals.

### **Apologetics: A Captivating Christian Treasure**

While in some people's experience, apologetics may conjure up unpleasant memories and associations, Alister McGrath believes otherwise. In the introduction to his book on apologetics, which he wrote to train Christians in how to use apologetics effectively, McGrath explains, "Apologetics is to be seen not as a defensive and hostile reaction against the world, but as a welcome opportunity to exhibit, celebrate, and display the treasure chest of the Christian faith" (2012:11). This metaphor of apologetics being about the business of exhibiting Christian treasure draws our attention to the immense value of what Christians are sharing. This material definitely does not belong on the garbage heap, nor should it be relegated there. Furthermore, it intimates that a genuine response to an apologetic message could even be one of awe and even intense desire—a diametrically opposite reaction to that of being a spiritual repellent. Finally, it strongly suggests that there is need for the apologist to select carefully and intentionally which pieces of treasure she will exhibit, in order to engender the positive response that she is seeking. Thus, there is a need for the apologist to understand her audience so that she might know which Christian treasures to select for the person or audience that she is communicating with at that particular moment. As McGrath observes, "In each case, we are forced to think about how we can best communicate the Christian faith in terms that will resonate with the experience and knowledge of our audience" (36).

### **The Importance of Apologetics**

Not only should apologetics be deeply attractive and desirable to urban young professionals, but it is also very important, even vital, as William Lane Craig maintains. Craig identifies three key roles apologetics can play. First, he points out that it is "the broader task of Christian apologetics to help create and sustain a cultural milieu in which the gospel can be



heard as an intellectually viable option for thinking men and women” (2008:17). From a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, this may seem like a typical evangelical attempt to gain cultural or even political control of the society. However, it is in harmony with the Adventist focus on religious liberty, which seeks to establish a social framework, through both legal and cultural means to provide people with the freedom to be able to choose to hold a worldview which they personally believe is rational and true and maintain the practices which they understood to be morally and personally appropriate.

Second, Craig confirms the important role that apologetics plays in strengthening the faith of believers. He notes that “contemporary Christian worship tends to focus on fostering emotional intimacy with God. While this is a good thing, emotions will carry a person only so far, and then he’s going to need something more substantive. Apologetics can help to provide some of that substance” (2008:19). The role of strengthening the faith of Adventist youth has been acknowledged within the Seventh-day Adventist Church, particularly within the context of secular cultures, like those found in Europe (Kemez 2016). However, this role of strengthening the faith of believers is not just an individualistic focus on building up Christian believers themselves. Craig goes on to identify the evangelistic value of strengthening the faith of believers. “Apologetics training is a tremendous boost to evangelism, for nothing inspires confidence and boldness more than knowing that one has good reasons for what one believes and good answers to the typical questions and objections that the unbeliever may raise” (2008:21).

Finally, Craig reminds Christians of the importance of using apologetics in reaching unbelievers. He personally testifies of the people who have come to faith through his global apologetic ministry. He concludes, “When apologetics is persuasively presented and sensitively combined with a gospel presentation and a personal testimony, the Spirit of God condescends to use it in bringing certain people to himself” (23). Considering that Craig categorizes apologetics as a theoretical discipline and is widely known for his ability to logically dismantle the arguments of his opponents in debates, it is very significant to note the wholistic approach that he is advocating, which focuses on the emotional and spiritual aspects as well as the intellectual and logical.

C. S. Lewis summarized the need for Christian apologetics with a very sobering and incisive observation. “To be ignorant and simple now—to not be able to meet the enemies on their own ground—would be to throw down our weapons, to betray our uneducated brethren who have, under God, no defense but us against the intellectual attacks of the heathen.

Good philosophy must exist, if for no other reason, because bad philosophy needs to be answered" (1980:59). This is also true for new and young Christians, whom we would leave defenseless if we did not provide the good philosophy, logic, and evidence they need when they head back into their secular classrooms, workplaces, and friendship circles.

### Attractively Packaged Apologetics

It seems apparent that apologetics is desirable, valuable, and even essential in our mission to reach urban young professionals. The key is how to package apologetic material so it really is viewed as attractive and valuable. There are two key ways that apologetic material can be truly missional.

First, *Heart-Felt Needs*. By definition, apologetic material is a theoretical discipline that seeks to address the intellectual questions that secular people have. These include questions like Does God exist? How can a loving and all-powerful God allow pain and suffering? Is the Bible historically reliable? Is belief in supernatural miracles plausible in the face of the incredibly successful scientific enterprise? Did Jesus really rise from the dead? Is Christianity the only way?

Addressing these apologetic questions only from an intellectual perspective can often result in playing philosophical games. For this apologetic material to be truly transformational, it must address the emotional and spiritual needs and desires of the individual.

Second, *Illustrative Stories*: Apologetic material becomes much more accessible and memorable when packaged with illustrative stories, particularly personal testimonies. The Christian use of stories to illustrate the nature of the kingdom of God traces directly back to Jesus Christ himself. However, as we have seen, Craig recommends this approach as well. It is fascinating to note that one of the greatest Christian apologists of the twentieth century, C. S. Lewis, utilized stories very effectively to convey not only the Christian message but Christian apologetics in particular (Feddes 2012; Ordway 2016). More recently, Ravi Zacharias and Norman Geisler have developed an international apologetics ministry that makes extensive use of story (2003). No doubt this can be partly traced to Zacharias' Indian cultural background, but the success of his ministry demonstrates the effectiveness and fruit of this approach.

In the biblical text that articulates most explicitly that apologetic mandate, Peter identifies the need for a wholistic approach that includes the emotional and spiritual dimensions. He says, "But in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it

with gentleness and respect” (1 Pet 3:15 ESV). Ellen White suggests that Peter’s inspiration and example for this apologetic approach was how Jesus himself modelled the most effective way of communicating truth. “He spoke as one having authority, and His word was with power; yet in all His intercourse with rude and violent men He did not use one unkind or discourteous expression. The grace of Christ in the heart will impart a heaven-born dignity and sense of propriety. It will soften whatever is harsh, and subdue all that is coarse and unkind” (2002:515). It would be well for Adventist apologists to follow Jesus’ example.

### Introducing the I Am Series

The Greater Sydney Conference is acutely aware of the need to reach secular young professionals and to equip Adventist youth. Like Christian churches around the world, the Greater Sydney Conference is ageing demographically, so there is a need for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Greater Sydney to grow younger. The Growing Younger study has identified six essentials strategies that a church needs to grow younger: (1) unlock keychain leadership, (2) empathize with today’s young people, (3) take Jesus’ message seriously, (4) fuel a warm community, (5) prioritize young people (and families) everywhere, and (6) be the best neighbors (Powell, Mulder, and Griffin 2016:42, 43).

The Greater Sydney Conference is committed to developing evangelistic strategies and resources that will grow and extend the kingdom of God. One of the key essential strategies is to take Jesus’ message seriously. This is the aim of Christian apologetics through the use of evidence and logic. Unfortunately, though, many of the evangelistic resources that are available within the Seventh-day Adventist Church have not been developed with the specific intention of reaching secular young professionals. Frequently, evangelistic resources are repackaged Adventist prophecy seminars. It needs to be emphasized that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a distinct and important prophetic message to share with the world. However, many of our prophecy seminars assume a significant amount of biblical knowledge, which many secular young professionals do not have. In addition, many traditional Adventist evangelistic seminars exploit the uncertainty that people are feeling in the midst of current world events to lead them to trust in the Bible and Jesus. However, the McCrindle *Faith and Belief in Australia* study showed that the top prompt for thinking about spiritual things among younger Australians is conversations with people (see figure 1).

Rank	Gen Z	Gen Y	Gen X	Baby Boomers	Builders
1	Conversations with people (39%)	Conversations with people (39%)	Conversations with people (27%)	Global and national issues (26%)	Conversations with people (28%)
2	Social media (32%)	Reading a book or article (25%)	A major life crisis (21%)	A death in the family (24%)	Global and national issues (22%)
3	Mainstream media (30%)	Personal unhappiness (22%)	A death in the family (19%)	Conversations with people (24%)	A death in the family (18%)

Figure 1. The top three prompts for generations thinking about spiritual things (McCrinkle 2017:19).

Thus, while global and national issues prompt Baby Boomers and Builders to think about spiritual things, they are not the most significant prompts for Generations X-Z. Instead, the top prompt is conversation with people. Thus, there is a need to develop an evangelistic approach and resource that utilizes this prompt for Generations X-Z.

With this view in mind, the Greater Sydney Conference initiated a significant evangelistic project to reach secular young professionals. Based on the conclusions of the demographic studies, the following essential characteristics were identified:

Component	Features
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simple meal together</li> <li>• Use of light-hearted humour to provide a relaxed environment</li> <li>• Open conversations with friends and peers</li> </ul>
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Testimonial stories</li> <li>• Illustrative stories</li> <li>• Intentional and well-planned use of apologetic material</li> </ul>
Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring whether there is more to life</li> <li>• Use of historical evidence and logic to strengthen presentations</li> <li>• Experiencing the spiritual journey in the context of relationships</li> </ul>

Figure 2. Features of the I Am series.

We hosted a series of focus groups with Adventist young professionals in order to understand and create the persona of the demographic that we are aiming to reach. From these focus groups, we identified the following profile:

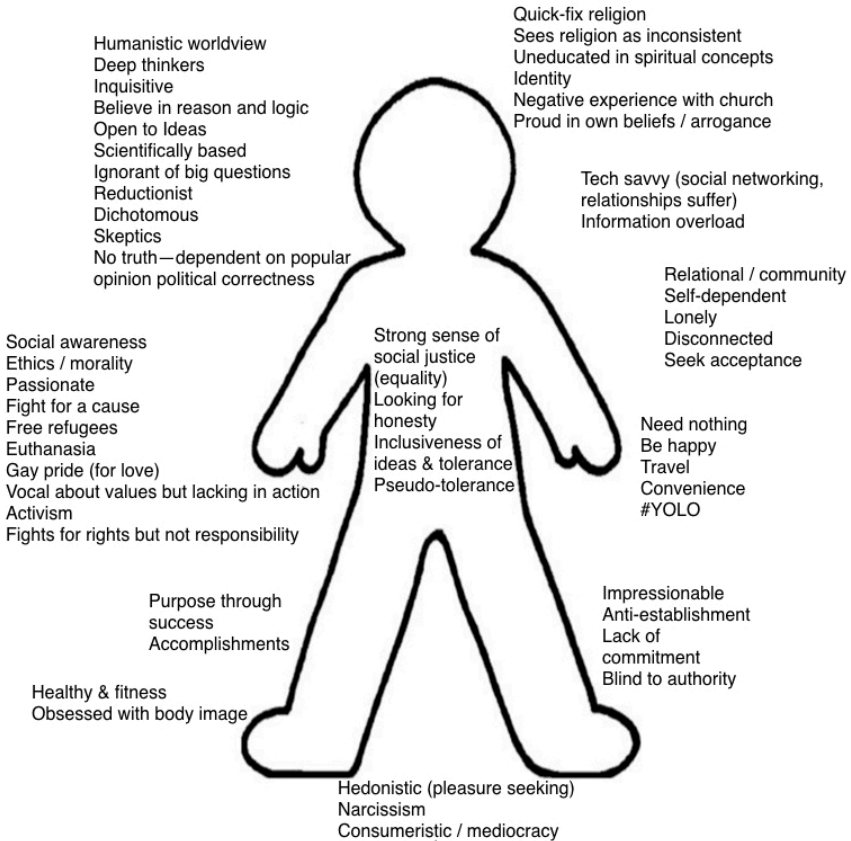


Figure 3. Profile of Australian secular young professionals based on focus groups.

This profile allowed us to proceed to develop the overall framework and the title of the I Am series. There is a significant trend within advertising and branding to use the “I Am” theme. It represents the self-confidence that young adults have, their desire to be themselves and to express themselves, as can be seen in the profile in Figure 3. However, as students of the Bible well know, the name “I Am” (Hebrew: *אני*; Greek: *ἐγώ εἰμι*) is very significant in the Bible. God told Moses to tell the Hebrew slave it was “I Am” who sent him. It is also a highly theologically and metaphysically significant name that Jesus claims for himself, as the Jewish leaders

themselves understood (John 8:58, 59). Within the self-confident, yet existentially insecure, culture in which we live, we want to introduce urban young professionals to the greatest I Am who can truly fill their spiritual hunger and quench all of their ultimate desires.

We benchmarked this outreach series with a number of widely used evangelistic series:

*Alpha Course:* A series which explores the Christian faith. The Alpha Course was developed by Holy Trinity Brompton of the Anglican denomination in the United Kingdom (2018). Over 24 million people have attended an Alpha Course, due to its international marketing strategy.

*Christianity Explored:* A course that leads people through key Christian concepts based on the Gospel of Mark (2018). The course was developed by the All Souls Church in London in response to concerns that the Alpha course did not adequately address the biblical concept of sin.

*Beyond the Search:* An Adventist evangelistic series produced by the South Pacific Division Adventist Media Centre (2018) based on the original Search series.

*Hope Trending:* An Adventist evangelistic series with Dwight Nelson as presenter and Ty Gibson as the host of an interactive panel of young professionals (2018).

Based on the profile of secular young professionals in Australia and proven evangelistic series, the topic sequence of the I Am series was established as follows, together with the foundational Christian apologetic material that was integrated into the presentations.

No.	Topic	Application Question	Apologetic Material
1	More	Is there more to life?	The meaningless of life without God
2	Pain	What's wrong with the world?	The moral argument for the existence of God

No.	Topic	Application Question	Apologetic Material
3	Jesus	Who was Jesus?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Extra-biblical historical evidence for the existence and key details of the life of Jesus</li> <li>• Manuscript evidence for the reliability of the New Testament</li> <li>• Evaluation of alternative explanations for the NT reports of the resurrection of Jesus</li> <li>• Cosmological argument for the existence of God</li> <li>• Teleological evidence for the existence of God</li> </ul>
4	Cross	Why did Jesus have to die?	
5	Spirit	Who is the Holy Spirit?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fulfilled Biblical prophecy</li> <li>• Messianic prophecies</li> </ul>
6	Bible	Why is the Bible important?	
7	Prayer	How can I pray?	
8	Sabbath	What is the Sabbath?	
9	Healing	Does Jesus care about my health?	
10	Death	What happens when I die?	
11	Hope	When will Jesus return?	
12	Share	How can I share the good news about Jesus?	
13	Church	Why join a church?	

Figure 4. Topic sequence for the I Am series and specific apologetic material for each episode.

The episodes were filmed as a joint project between the Greater Sydney Conference and the South Pacific Division Adventist Media Centre. The Greater Sydney Conference also produced participant's guides for the series, which include summaries of the presentations, thus providing participant's with outlines of the topics, including the apologetic material.

### Piloting the I Am Series

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the I Am series in communicating the Christian gospel and core Seventh-day Adventist beliefs to its targeted demographic and leading secular young professionals to make a commitment to Jesus, the Greater Sydney Conference initiated a pilot study. Seven church pastors from Australia agreed to join. The Australian urban centers and the types of groups involved in the pilot study are outlined in figure 5.

Group	Urban Center	Demographic Description	Status	Session Completed
1	Sydney	Mixed aged male group	Completed	13
2	Sydney	Teen group	Completed	13
3	Sydney	Online group	Discontinued	2
4	Sydney	Ethnic young professionals group	In progress	6
5	Melbourne	Majority culture young professional group	In progress	5
6	Adelaide	Youth Sabbath School class	In progress	12
7	Perth	Asian young professionals group	In progress	11

Figure 5. Location, demographic profile, and status of groups involved in the pilot study.

The number of sessions completed by each group as of 2 August 2018 is included, which demonstrates that all of the groups completed all the episodes with clearly identifiable apologetic material (see figure 3). Note that the entire pilot study was scheduled to be completed by 7 July 2018. However, due to difficulties in getting some groups started or receiving commitments to attending weekly, leaders of some of the groups requested that they be allowed to commence later or schedule their sessions fortnightly rather than weekly. Because the primary aim of the pilot study



was to be evangelistic and lead people closer to Jesus, permission was granted to these leaders to vary the program. Hence, this article reports on preliminary results from the pilot study and is intended to indicate the direction and shape that a more extensive and rigorous research study could be undertaken.

An orientation was provided for the pastors about the structure of the I Am series and how to form their groups. It was the responsibility of each pastor to build a missional team and equip the team to invite their friends to join the I Am series. Each pastor was also given freedom to decide on the location and schedule for their particular I Am series.

A series of online surveys was developed to analyze the demographics of the people participating in the I Am series pilot study and to gauge their response to the material as well as the environment in which the series was held. An analysis of the results of the entrance survey revealed the following demographic and missiological information:

**Table 1.** Demographic Information from Entrance Survey for I Am Series Pilot Study

Research Category	Research Data
Total Number of Participants	49 participants
Gender Mix	Female 43.1% Male 56.9%
	Under 18 5.9% 18-29 62.8% 30-44 19.6% 45-59 11.7% Over 60 0.0%
Relationship Status	Single 39.2% Dating 27.5% Married 27.5% Separated 0.0% Divorced 2.0% Other 3.8%

Research Category	Research Data	
Spiritual Background	No religion	3.9%
	Uniting Church	2.0%
	Christian	5.8%
	Jewish	2.0%
	Seventh-day Adventist	84.3%
	Other	2.0%

What is of particular interest is the participant's motivation in attending the I Am series. Participants were asked what was the most significant reason why they decided to attend the I Am series. The results from the survey are in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Analysis of Most and Least Significant Reasons for Attendance at the I Am Series

Ranking	Research Data	
Most Significant Reasons for Deciding to Attend	My friend's invitation	31.0%
	My church leader	28.6%
	My church	21.4%
	My group of friends	7.1%
	Other	11.9%
Least Significant Reasons for Deciding to Attend	I Am series trailer	0%
	Facebook promotional ad	0%
	I Am series postcard	0%

It is important to note that the I Am series trailer, Facebook promotional assets, and postcards provided valuable supporting material that reinforced the invitation for participants to attend the I Am series. Thus, it would not be correct to conclude that these materials had no value in promoting the series and therefore should not be used. However, it confirms that an invitation from people whom participants have a relationship with remain the most significant reasons why people decided to attend the I Am series. Thus, it is essential that this critical insight be shared with pastors, youth leaders, and young adult teams who are planning to utilize the I Am series to introduce their secular young professional friends to Jesus.

## Response to Apologetic Material

The focus of this particular research study is to evaluate how participants responded to the apologetic material in the I Am series. It is important to note that this project is truly a work in progress. As mentioned in figure 5, there are still groups hosting the I Am series. However, all of the groups have completed the key topics that included significant apologetic material, namely episodes 1-3. In addition, there is value in assessing the effectiveness of the process in real-time. The I Am series will be officially launched at Wahroonga, Sydney, NSW on Sabbath afternoon 1 September 2018, so the development team was committed to refining and improving the series to maximize its effectiveness for reaching secular young professionals in Greater Sydney, across Australia, throughout the South Pacific Division, and indeed around the world.

We are presenting these preliminary findings as motivation to guide and shape more rigorous and extensive research studies searching for effective ways to introduce secular young professionals to Jesus and lead them to make a personal commitment to join the Seventh-day Adventist discipleship movement.

Four additional aspects of the I Am series that need more research include the following. First, the process of training leaders and building missional teams of Adventist young professionals. Second, effective ways of engaging and building spiritual relationships with secular young professionals, including the use of social media. Third, the topic sequence in the I Am film series and its effectiveness in discipling young professionals in community. Fourth, effective follow-up strategies and resources after completing the I Am series.

This research study explored the use of Christian apologetic material in the I Am film series to see how the participants responded to it. As indicated in figure 4, there was Christian apologetic material in episodes 1-3, with the most extensive use of apologetic material in episode 3, which focused on introducing participants to Jesus Christ and the reasons why we can be confident in who the Bible claims that he is. Since, all of the groups involved in the I Am series had completed the first three topics in the I Am series (with the exception of the online group in Sydney that was later discontinued), we were in a position to obtain some valuable research material on this topic.

A qualitative research study was undertaken, which involved personal phone interviews with participants whom the leaders of the groups selected. A randomly generated number was attached to each response in order to protect the anonymity of each interviewee. Interviewees were also made aware that they could withdraw from the interview at any point

during the phone interview if they wished to do so. The demographic analysis of the selected participants in this qualitative research study is outlined in table 3.

**Table 3.** Demographic Analysis of the Participants

	Research Data	
<b>Number of Selected Participants</b>	8 participants, 16.3% of all of the participants involved in the pilot study	
<b>Age Range</b>	18-29 years	
<b>Average Age</b>	22.5 years	
<b>Median Age</b>	22.0 years	
<b>Standard Deviation</b>	4.2 years	
<b>Gender Ratio</b>	Female	50.0%
	Male	50.0%
<b>Relationship Status</b>	Single	37.5%
	Dating Relationship	25.0%
	Engaged	25.0%
	Married	0.0%
<b>Education Level Achieved</b>	Completing High School	12.5%
	High School	25.0%
	Bachelor	62.5%
<b>Spiritual Commitment</b>	Not Baptized	37.5%
	Baptized	62.5%

From the data it is clear that the group of participants, who were approached by I Am series leaders to be interviewed, match the target demographic, namely young professionals.

When participants were specifically asked about the use of the apologetic material in the I Am series, the response was uniformly positive (refer to responses in appendices A and B). Christian participants were particularly positive. They stated that the apologetic material was very valuable for confirming their faith by providing evidence for their beliefs. They also viewed apologetic material as valuable for their non-Christian friends and colleagues, because they saw the apologetic material as providing evidence that non-Christians could consider and make a more informed choice about the Christian worldview and the gospel. However, they clarified that apologetics needs to be utilized in the context of personal relationships and testimonies for it to be attractive and connect with their secular friends and colleagues.

The non-Christian participants, who were not actively involved in church, showed a much lower personal connection with the apologetic material and attached a lower value to the material. However, the participants still indicated that they found the material interesting and it satisfied their curiosity. It is important to note that non-Christian participants did not state that apologetic material was of no value or that it had a negative value. The key is to discover what evidence is meaningful in the context within which to share it, including within a personal relationship, with personal testimonies, and prayer on the part of the Seventh-day Adventist Christian believer.

### Conclusion

There is a great need for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to intentionally focus on reaching urban young professionals because of the growing number of young people who do not identify themselves with any organized religious group and the global population shift towards urban centers. While Australians find philosophical discussions and debates spiritually repelling, they are open to considering worldviews, such as the Seventh-day Adventist worldview, in the right context and given the appropriate evidence. The article explored this possibility using a preliminary study of the I Am evangelistic series that the Greater Sydney Conference developed in partnership with the South Pacific Division Adventist Media Center. This series was intentionally developed to connect with urban young professionals. A qualitative research study demonstrated that urban young professionals relate positively to Christian apologetic material and see it as valuable, where the value they place on the apologetic is dependent on their own spiritual position and commitment. We recommend that Seventh-day Adventist leaders, who feel called to reach urban young professionals, utilize Christian apologetic material by presenting it in the context of spiritually supportive and encouraging relationships and with personal testimonies, which demonstrate the practical relevance and transforming power of the Christian message.

## APPENDIX A

Responses Indicating the Relevance of the Apologetic Material  
Used in the I Am Series

	How did you relate to the apologetic material in the I Am series?
Female, Baptized	For the moral argument in response to the problem of pain and suffering, I didn't react badly. About whether Jesus is real, a lot of people can say that there are reasons to explain the historical evidence. There are just as many arguments from the other side. It does help giving them reasons. For problem of pain and suffering, it was the testimonies that really resonated with people. Although facts and figures are important, people were really drawn to the testimonies. It was valuable having both.
Male, Not Bap- tized	The evidence for Jesus' existence was quite sound, including the historical and the manuscript evidence, and the comparisons with Plato and others who we believe. If we are confident in those other classical authors and writings, then we should be confident in the New Testament as well.
Female, Baptized	I got thinking a lot about the ancient history that I studied at high school and university. There were references to the historians I already knew about, so I was thinking that there are a lot of people who believe those historians but they don't believe in Christian. It got me thinking how the material in that episode related to Jesus.
Male, Baptized	Some of those reasoning I resonate with. Particularly with Jesus, not many historians will say that Jesus did not exist. If Jesus did not exist, then we would sound like a bunch of lunatics, but if He did exist and the people in the Bible matches what the historians say. For me, even if He didn't rise from the dead, but there is no disputing that He really did exist.
Female, Baptized	I was able to relate to all of the apologetic material. For me, I was able to apply what I had learned from other Bible studies. I am also hearing what I have been studying in the other Bible studies, and I hear it again in the I Am series. It is really important because it is evidence for our faith. If we dig deeper, those things are proofs that Jesus exists and that the Christian road makes sense.

	How did you relate to the apologetic material in the I Am series?
Male, Non- Christian	This thing never up came up for me before. You just take it as it as. I have never considered where the seven day week came from. Like the Chinese calendar, it is such a common thing that there could be other reasons why the seven day week exists. It is one why you need to look into it. To me it is not super convincing.
Female, Not Baptized	I really like listening and getting to know the historical evidence. It backs up what the Bible is saying. It gives more evidence. We know it is there in the Bible. It gives more evidence. It helps on journey of belief.
Male, Baptized	I could relate to it as a Christian, because I have been told these things by my pastors and other churches. Then I explored the history for myself and just explored the evidence, and this showed that Jesus actually existed. This confirmed that Christian history is true and that there are historical facts to back it up. The episodes reaffirmed the things I had been taught.

## APPENDIX B

Responses regarding whether Christian apologetic material is valuable

	From your perspective, how valuable is Christian apologetic material?
Female, Baptized	It is a fundamental aspect of my life, so it is important for what I believe. A lot of people are arguing about what is true and not. At the same time, we need to take a step back from that, and I need to worry about my relationship with God. God will help me determine what it is true. I do place a lot of value on what is true, but a lot of it comes down to my relationship with God.
Male, Not Baptized	It is valuable.
Female, Baptized	I find it really valuable, because it makes us think more and it can relate to other people who don't have a background in Christianity, because it is just history, it can get other people to be interested in it.
Male, Baptized	Very valuable because today we don't question how the Bible relates to our lives or that God worked in peoples. The question is not what the Bible teaches, but is the Bible real. People will say I don't believe. Before we can tell them what the Bible says, we need to demonstrate that the Bible is true. The Bible has not just been designed to get people to believe. If I can give them intellectual grounds to show them that the Bible is real. They don't accept the basis of the Bible. We need to show them the reasons why we Bible. For me, having these reasons why Jesus exist that we didn't just make it up. We struggle to explain the Old Testament, but because there is so little evidence. It is much easier to prove the NT, than it is much easier to prove the OT, because the NT is much closer to us. It is much easier for people to say that, yes, the NT is real. If you prove that, then it is much easier.
Female, Baptized	It is really, really valuable because most of the time people don't know, they lack the knowledge. It is both intellectual and experiential, many times people don't believe because they just don't know. It is hard to explain to someone if you don't know anyone. If someone asks you something, then you have an opportunity to share.



	<b>From your perspective, how valuable is Christian apologetic material?</b>
<b>Male, Non-Christian</b>	For me, I think it is a question of curiosity. It would be interesting to find out. I have no drive to find out the truth. If I find it out, it was interesting to find out. It is more of a curiosity thing.
<b>Female, Not Baptized</b>	It is really valuable, it acts as evidence. It is more than one source providing that. Especially for people who are just coming to church. It is very important for them to know that there is more than one source, there is evidence to back it up.
<b>Male, Baptized</b>	This material is quite important, you can't bring people to God if they don't have a foundation of why it is true, there will be no firm foundation, because they don't know, and then they will fall short because they will not understand what is being said. The episodes introduces it quite simply and the facts are shown. Shows history and Bible how line and then allows them to make a decision.

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Sven Östring completed his PhD in computer networking at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, New Zealand, then became a postdoctoral fellow in the Computer Laboratory at the University of Cambridge. While living in Cambridge, he was challenged to provide evidence for the existence of God. This apologetic question became the catalyst that led Dr. Östring to head into ministry. After completing a Graduate Diploma in Theology, he worked as the Adventist University Chaplain in Perth, Western Australia. Currently, Dr. Östring is the Church Planting Director in the North South Wales Conference and is planting a church near Newcastle in Australia.

Sherene Hattingh, Phil Fitzsimmons, and Paul Hattingh

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# Short Term Travel to the Holy Land: Questions of Potency, Pilgrimage, and Potential

## Introduction: A Deeply Personal Focus and Form

The purpose of this article is to unpack the findings of a qualitative pilot study that investigated the impact on two participants undertaking a tour of the Holy Land. This developed into a methodological pastiche of autobiography (Nueman and Newman 2018:1) and collaborative auto-ethnography (Chang, Ngunjiri, and Hernandez 2012:17). Initially, the aim was to understand the overall “travel effects” as understood by a larger cohort organized by the South Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Australia. A total of 22 Adventist workers travelled through Israel for 10 days, however as the volume of data collected, which included “sensorial qualities of place and place-making, urban spaces and places, walking as relational practice, thinking photographically, the creative and narrative qualities of Flâneurial walking, and issues of power, gender, and class” (Cuthcer 2018:viii), it became almost overwhelming. Hence, we decided to take up Speedy’s (2015:101) recommendation that we commence “deliberately small, partial, contingent and particular.”

This autobiographical approach uses an intersection of “writing through diary eyes” (Higgins and Madden 2018:22), “intimate and vulnerable auto-ethnographic reflections” (Boon, Butler, and Jeffries 2018:15) and “gateway to storying photographs” (Langman and Pick 2018:4). Although focusing on “self as researchers” we deemed this approach was the most appropriate first step for the investigation “in order to interrogate and elucidate broader social processes” (Boon et al. 2018:7).

Given the choice of methodology, the modality of this article is very different. There are several points contributing to this which we believe need to be made clear from the outset. The first relates to the bricolage of autobiographical method chosen. This design is not an approach that seeks to use large sample sizes and make broad “bell-curve” generalizations. Instead, it seeks to “understand projects that deal with personal experiences that we want to understand more fully, deeply, and meaningfully” (Adams, Jones, and Ellis 2015:47). These kinds of investigations deal with the “intimacies cultivated alone” (Thompson 2017:32), or of one or two participants as they “consider the way that narratives of the self construct and reproduce identity” (Thompson-Lee 2017:20). This design was chosen because in the initial stages of developing this project, it became clear that the research discussions were constantly returning to narrative type language and form due to the anticipated personal nature of the actual experience, as well as the excitement of actually walking in spaces that had only previously been ideationally realized through studying scripture.

The second caveat needing clarification is the written means through which blurred autobiographical data is represented. As this form of research relies on deep personal reflexivity, connecting “the lived, inside moments of experience” with “an ‘epistemology of insiderness’ of being” (Adams, et al. 2014:31) the data is portrayed narratively as “deep emotional terrain” (Smartt Guillion 2016:25). Indeed, all sections of this paper are very different to the standard modality of journal articles, incorporating “writing that enables intimacy in the study of culture” (Goodall 2000:14).

Hence, this article is descriptive and analytical, focusing on the moments of transformative learning which the researchers as participants have undertaken (Olson 2015:717). It is about the changes that are experienced and noted through the writing of the participating researchers. As Heitmann (2011:31) states, “At a personal level, no two individuals are alike and there are significant differences in attitudes, perceptions and motivation. An individual’s perception of travelling depends on the individual’s perception of the world, but is further determined by a range of external factors such as their childhood, family, work and the media, as well as wider societal and cultural influences.” Interestingly, all of these external factors play a significant part for each individual.

Within many Adventist societies and cultural influences the main focus of the spiritual journey is on building a personal relationship with Jesus. Ellen White makes a contributing Adventist statement: “Walk in Jesus’ footsteps, not by visiting where He lived, but by working as He worked — Among our workers are some who feel that a great object would be gained if their feet could tread the soil of old Jerusalem. But God’s cause and work will never be advanced by His workers wandering about

to find where Jesus travelled and wrought His miracles” (1995:224). This statement assumes that religious trips to the Holy Land focus on seeing and touching sacred artefacts not essential in building a personal relationship with Jesus or “working” as he did. This view is noted by Yaakov (1996:51) in a book review where Seventh-day Adventists are excluded as a religious group with a “messianic belief and literalist attitude towards the Bible . . . [and who] did not care much for the land of Israel.” Which then begs the question, why would a religious trip be of significance to an Adventist? In addition, how can a short ten-day Holy Land tour impact the spiritual journey of an Adventist individual?

### **Literature Review: Adventist Group Travel as Pilgrimage or Spiritual Parsimony?**

Aligned with the aim of this study, this review of the literature focuses on the concept of short-term faith-based group travel, as embedded in the overarching findings of travel and tourism as a whole. Up until recently, researchers had a particularly dim view of short term and group travel (Heitmann 2011:33). Increasingly there has been a shift in the researchers’ perceptions given an increasing popularity of short-term faith-based group and individual travel that has occurred since the turn of this current century, and a corresponding change of research understanding (Rountree 2002:476). However, Timothy and Olsen (2006:xiii) point out this is the least understood form of travel despite the pervasiveness of religious tourism and spiritual connections to a sense of commemorative places (Potter and Modlin 2015:1) or memory spaces (Hoelscher and Alderman 2004:349), relatively “few scholars have explored the multitudinous and multifarious relationships between religion, spirituality, and tourism” (Timothy and Olsen 2006:271).

Although the overall research focus related to travel is still in its comparative infancy, and bound by “positivist tradition” (Ryan 1997:x), two key aspects have begun to arise out of the research field that are vitally important, and frame this literature review. The first point is that there is growing recognition that the experience of travel as a whole is an extremely subjective experience (Gieryn 2000:465). Notwithstanding the complexity of this point, it would appear that such travel experiences are therefore mediated interactions, with any outcome the result of the intersection of psycho-social processes located at the very least between intersubjective cross currents of situated encounter, cultural perceptions, historical counterpoints, and ideological frameworks. Bremer has argued that while negative issues and concerns always arise in any travel experience, the previous points have the potential to produce “subjective agency” (2004:28). To

draw on, and summarize the work of Hollinshead and Suleman (2018:74), the term agency in this instance can also be defined as “reflexively developing plural knowabilities.”

While this notion of reflexive subjectivity appears to be the core of all positive travel experiences, the second, and intertwined point related to this notion is that it is becoming generally accepted that travel is an extremely social-emotional activity (Aziz 1987:259; Crouch 2013:579). In their seminal work on the travel experience, Turner (1973:214) and Turner and Turner (1978:13) believe religious travelers often experience “emotional liminality” or an in-between state of mind with the shift to a new place and the awareness of new ways of being. In essence tourists and religious travelers sense a new “emotional, interpretative and phenomenological dimension” (Leppakari and Griffin 2017:4). While initial culture shock (Milstein 2005:221) can be a component, McKenzie and Fitzsimmons (2010:50) found that in the five reactive stages to a new culture, this aspect can become a positive aspect if short-term travelers are supported through constant reflection and social emotional support by other group members.

Several researchers believe that this process of entering new understandings is similar to that of pilgrimage, others believe it is a deeply embedded natural awareness related to “spiritual development,” or what Costa, Quintela, and Mende (2015:21) have termed “spiritual balance.” While this may be the general experience for travelers as a whole, certainly for those embarking on a religious trip, this concept is particularly relevant. Over a decade ago, Bremer viewed religious travel experience in much the same way believing that these trips forced “place and identity to emerge together in a relationship of simultaneity” (2004:73-74). While space allows for only the briefest of summaries regarding this notion, suffice it to say that the collisions between an individual’s imagination, visual elements, social interactions, and memories have the potential to shift previous attributes related to self and the site of visitation so that there is a reflective refraction of personal narrative related to the transformation of personal meaning (Ratz and Milchalko 2011). Notwithstanding the complexity of this shift, Ratz and Milchalko (2011:344) further contend that religious travel adds to a participant’s sense of subjective well-being.

Specifically undertaking a tour to the Holy Land is termed a pilgrimage, as there is an emphasis on the subjective individual experience over the objective perspective (Collins-Kreiner 2010:442). Tours to popular religious centers are characterized by a combination of tourism and pilgrimage where the tourist seeks to identify with places of cultural and historical significance thereby linking the person’s expectations, experiences, and perceptions as their beliefs and worldview. Religious sites are some

of the most visited and appreciated destinations by tourists as well as by pilgrims (Nyaupane, Timothy, and Poudel 2015:343). People's experiences at sacred places will most likely be different based on their religious affiliation or lack thereof. "While journeying in a physical environment the pilgrim is also aware that s/he is observing and discovering the landscape of the soul, the emphasis being on finding the self and its linkage to the surroundings, the linkage between the spiritual invisible and the material visible" (Sharma 2013:23).

The tourist, who therefore opens themselves to the sacred power and embraces the landscape establishing rapport that is spiritually empowering, is on a pilgrimage. According to Kindsley (1998:235), "An underlying assumption of pilgrimage seems to be that the land cannot be intensely known and experienced from a distance; it can be fully known, its story deeply appreciated, only by travelling the land itself. . . . The experience can be lasting, transforming one's perspective permanently." The pilgrimage or sacred journey is "about self-transformation and the gaining of knowledge and status through contact with the extraordinary or sacred" (Collins-Kreiner 2010:443). It is not just a case of being in the place, but reflecting on previous understanding and experience in a highly personal way forming a sense of meaning and identity (Rose 2015).

This links directly with attitudes and preferences, which are based on cognitive appraisal, which each individual determines based on idiosyncrasies (Heiphetz, Spelke, Harris, and Banaji 2013:560). Interestingly, it is reported that individuals employ religious ideas to assist them in understanding other people, their families, and themselves (560). This means that the individual experience is based on religious commitments. These individual religious commitments are based on the experiences that are socially generated and relationally interpreted by each person. As such religion links with various elements of people's lives as a fundamental element of culture (Nyaupane, Timothy, and Poudel 2015:344) impacting upon dress, social and political views, food and drink, social attitudes and travel motivations and behaviors (344).

According to Shinde (2012:90) pilgrims need to talk about the tour and the land, recounting or writing about the landscape and the stories so that the narrative synergizes and allows the individuals to heighten their experiential sense. "Alongside time, space, journey, and motivation, mediation of these aspects by external agencies and context all become significant factors for the exploration of the travelers' engagement with the landscape" (91). At the level of the individual visitor, interpretation is claimed to be an important part of the visitor experience contributing to making a visit meaningful, interesting, and rewarding or enjoyable (Moscardo 2014:465).

## Methodology: Framing the Focus

The qualitative methodology implemented was that of collaborative auto-ethnographic, inside outside research where the researchers were participants, active collaborators and critical analysers undergoing transformative learning as part of this study and on their own personal life-journey. The researchers' experience was pivotal to this study and provided the data for analysis. Data were gathered by two of the researchers who were observing, taking notes, reflecting, interpreting, sharing, collaborating, and then representing their experience of a ten day tour of the Bible Lands. This was done by keeping an individual diary of their daily highlights and any other interesting aspects from each day. That means that the data collected was that constructed by the participant-researchers through their diaries and photographs taken during this tour.

As an auto-ethnographic study the data is written in the first person, with emotion and "self-consciousness as relational and institutional stories affected by history, social structure and culture" (Ellis and Bochner 2000:739). The purpose of conducting this research was to connect the personal to the cultural by placing "self," through the researchers, into the social context. This was achieved through a substantial analysis of the personal accounts of the writer as part of a group and/or culture and the process of explaining this to others who are not in the group and/or culture.

In order to understand the implications and individual experience of a Bible Lands tour it was important for the researchers to each have a first-hand encounter and to document their individual expectations, understanding, journey, thoughts and reflections of the process. One of the researchers had already been to the Bible Lands on a number of times and so it was decided that the two researchers, a husband and wife, who had never been would document their first tour. It was important in this data generating phase for the two researchers to uncover their ideology, prejudices, and tacit knowledge. This was achieved by keeping a diary and participating in retrospective sessions on their return with the other researcher. Reflexivity was an integral part of this research and required the researchers to discuss the data and reflect on what happened and why.

As this study has a subjective approach it was important to note pre-assumptions, pre-judgments and any other harbored prejudices by the three researchers. All three researchers are Adventists with an Adventist worldview. As part of the data analysis process it was important for the researchers to embark on a rendering by sharing through discussion, reflection, questioning and confirmation as an important element of the coding process. The element of the human as instrument as proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1989:175-176), was incorporated through the reflection,



sharing, discussion, and writing phases of the data analysis process. The researchers conducted debriefing sessions with intentional periods of reflection with follow-up opportunities on their return home. The research stories (Appendices A and B) were coded for themes and these were discussed and again reflected on. As a result the findings and discussion are presented below.

## Findings and Discussion

Throughout the stories six themes emerged: contextualizing through a visual perspective, deeper understanding with meaning, personal journey, prior to trip planning, tour group membership, and, unlike any other trip. These six themes encapsulate the two researchers' experience and journey through the Holy Land. Each of these themes are addressed below in the order that they emerged from the data.

### Contextualizing through a Visual Perspective

In the researcher stories both researchers refer to this theme seventeen times. The aspect of *being able to contextualize the surroundings as well as "experience" the feel and atmosphere* (Researcher 1) demonstrates the fact of physically being there and actually seeing and experiencing what they had read about. *I really felt like I was experiencing the Bible in a 3-dimensional perspective* (Researcher 1). Further to this, Researcher 2 added that, *The pictures in the Arthur Maxwell published series of Bible stories depict biblical Israel through the European lens of rolling green hills, lovely clean white sheep, people dressed in well-fitting garments with European features. The real Israel is quite different.* The experience of being there and "experiencing" what had been read about and linking everything to beliefs and *having a mental picture of what I saw* (Researcher 1) provides real-life confirmation and cultural realignment. Another reflection was that *Size and topography was another shock to the system* (Researcher 2). Memories have been realigned and by being there, a realigning has happened in regards to spatial orientation and where biblical stories are located and the whole perspective has been reoriented. This aligns with the 'spiritual balance' (Costa et al. 2015:2) and what Bremer (2004:3) referred to as the 'relationship of simultaneity' where there is a reflective refraction of the personal narrative contributing to transformative learning. These experiences are individual and subjective confirming prior research in this area (Kindsley 1998:235; Nyaupane et al. 2015:344; Sharma 2013:23). There has been an internal discourse and essentially a reframing of the spiritual in relation to the biblical narrative and understanding which in turn has contributed to spiritual reframing

and reforming of the persona. This aspect of understanding links directly with the next theme of deeper understanding with meaning.

### Deeper Understanding with Meaning

The researchers' stories show they are aware and have knowledge on topics but that throughout the tour this awareness and knowledge grew and value-added to their faith and spirituality. The researchers covered this theme seventeen times in their narratives reflecting on their own understandings. The Dead Sea swim experience had Researcher 1 contemplating oil. She also commented that *the biggest aspect for me throughout this trip was the amount of "me" that was invested in this trip and I did not realize the significance of seeing some of these sites and how they would impact on my spirituality* (Researcher 1). Researcher 2 also experienced this, *You gain an appreciation for why there was the custom of foot washing because walking in the dust with sandals on your feet they get very dirty very quickly*. Deeper understanding with meaning happened continuously across the Holy Land tour where Researcher 1 stated, *I have been able to build a better understanding and have a mental picture of what I saw*. The fact that this researcher had not contemplated the aspect of biblical sacrifice and *needing doves as part of this now makes so much more sense as to why they would need to farm and keep doves in caves and essentially underground where it is cooler and easier to manage*. The realization of this fact certainly shows a deeper understanding with meaning added for this individual.

Researcher 2 experienced a deeper understanding with meaning during the visit to the Garden Tomb where, *according to the guide, people were crucified at ground level so that people looked the convicted person in the eye and could read what their crimes were. The whole focus of a crucifixion was to humiliate the convicted person as well as create a very painful death. People could walk up to them and spit in their faces. They were nailed on the cross naked and exposed to all who walked past and so crucifixion sites were normally placed on the side of busy roads to maximize the exposure to the local population. Again this flies in the face of popular Christian culture which has the cross on a hill, with Jesus lifted up high off the ground. The very famous and moving hymn, the old Rugged Cross as an example has the words "on a hill far away."*

In this quote, the researcher/participant is questioning their prior understanding and value-adding to this with facts and evidence from what is being seen and explained. Throughout the Holy Land tour this type of experience was evident and a number of pre-conceived ideas were addressed and understanding and meaning were enhanced.

Further evidence of deeper understanding and meaning is shown when Researcher 2 stated, *I broke away from the group and sat by myself for a*

*while trying to imagine how David would have felt so many years ago as he was on the run from Saul. He would have lived in the caves I could see up against the hills. This theme also appears in regards to Hezekiah's tunnel where Researcher 2 states, This is a remarkable feat given they had no GPS guided equipment. One can only conclude that they had Divine guidance as they worked. Again, this comment shows deeper understanding with meaning. This theme was also evident in the narrative when Researcher 2 stated, A part of the trip that has become a highlight for me after the fact is the Mount of Olives. This geographical location played a very important role at the time of Jesus' departure. This was the place he left earth and this is the place he will return after the 1000 years. I have been reading the last chapters of The Great Controversy and in chapter 42, page 663, E. G. White states that Jesus will stand on the Mount of Olives before He and the saved enter the New Jerusalem. When I read that passage again it had so much more meaning to me because I had physically stood at the exact place and I want to be part of that group that enter the New Jerusalem with Him.*

Previous research (Collins-Kreiner 2010:443; Kindsley 1998:235; Rose 2015:1) confirms that the experience transforms a person's perspective permanently resulting in a lasting effect. The fact that the deeper understanding with meaning is still happening for the researcher/participant links directly with the next theme of personal journey.

### Personal Journey

There are eighteen references across the researcher stories that portray the theme of "personal journey." Researcher 1 stated that *as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian I have a number of beliefs and ways of thinking that are part of who I am and my faith-background. And as such is already on a personal journey of faith. Both researchers embarked on the tour as Christians intending to see the Holy Land and visit the sites that Jesus visited. Researcher 1 states, visiting the sites has assisted in changing how I visualize and connect with my faith experience. It is like the places I have visited are real and have meaning. I now understand the concept of personal experience so much more and the concept of being a witness, one who has seen, even though so many centuries later than the Bible times, it all counts into my spirituality and personal connection with my Savior.*

The concept of a personal journey shows the individual nature of the experience and how each person connects and makes meaning of the experience. This personal journey has continued since returning from the Holy Land tour as stated by Researcher 1. *Often while on the trip I did grumble about not having enough time to reflect but since returning home I have been able to use the tour experience and my continuing reflections for my own*

*personal Bible study, sharing with my friends and family, in our small group Bible study, in this research project, and in preparation for sermons.*

A personal journey is an on-going phenomenon as Researcher 1 shared some of her individual choices that also impacted on her personal experience during the tour: *During the tour I was following a read through the Bible in a year program as part of my personal Bible study time. And it was amazing how many of the tour days we actually visited sites that connected with my morning reading, for example, we visited Megiddo as I was reading about Elijah and King Ahab and how Elijah ran along the plain of Jezreel with King Ahab who was returning to his palace at Megiddo (Researcher 1).*

Interestingly, Researcher 2, who is also on a personal journey, shared some negative aspects he was experiencing and contemplating. *Something that I found particularly disturbing was how various religious groups have laid claim to parts of Israel and in particular parts of Jerusalem and how, still today, they use these sites for religious tourism, taking advantage of pilgrims who know no better.*

Following on from the above, not everything in a personal journey goes well initially as demonstrated by this comment. *There were a few sites on the itinerary I did wonder why we were going to visit them and even when we did visit them I still did not make any connections; however, on our return home and months later I have encountered these places in my Bible reading and am so glad that we did visit them (Researcher 1).* The Holy Land tour has continued to impact on the personal journey of the participants where Researcher 1 says, *I think for me since returning from this trip the experience has continued to impact my life through what I read and contextualize.* This shows that the Holy Land tour has continued to have an impact on the participants, which is still ongoing and contributing to transformative learning. Another theme, which emerged from the data, is that of “prior to trip planning.”

### Prior to Trip Planning

Although not as prolific as the other themes, this theme was referred to by both researchers nine times. Both participants have travelled overseas multiple times as Researcher 2 states. *I have travelled overseas before with our family and my wife who is a highly organized person, is generally our trip planner. With self-organized travel, you have to arrange all your own transport, venue tickets etc. On a tour, I discovered that this is all done for you and so all you do is get on the bus and soak in the experience.*

Researcher 1 supported the statement above by saying, *I was less stressed and could look at the itinerary prior to leaving and contemplate the places that we were to visit.* Having everything planned certainly made the preparation for the tour departure easier for the travelers. In addition the itinerary

was set and Researcher 1 added, *Prior to embarking on the trip I found myself thinking about the places we would visit and what I knew about them and there were a number of sites that already held significant appeal for me. As well as knowing about some of the sites, she says, there were some sites I had never heard of before like Mareesha and En Gedi, and so I did look these up on Google maps to orientate myself. Some of the listed sites were ones I had read about in the Bible.*

Another aspect of the prior to trip planning for the Holy Land tour was the fact that the travelers were asked to do some before travel reading. *Because this was a fully planned tour I had time before leaving on the trip to read books I had read before but this time with a specific focus in preparation for the itinerary . . . in preparation for the tour I spent time reading the “Desire of Ages,” the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and the “Following Jesus” book (Researcher 1).*

This was not a pre-requisite but a recommendation as Researcher 2 states, *we were all given a book called “Following Jesus” and we were asked to read the “Desire of Ages” in preparation for the trip. I started reading these books but with my current work load I struggled to keep up and so I had not read the required readings prior to arriving in Israel.*

The whole prior to trip planning was a very relaxed and enjoyable aspect for the participants on this Holy Land tour. This theme is one not addressed in other research except in the aspect of prior knowledge or experience. For this trip it was intentional and planned. In addition to the “prior to trip planning,” the theme of “tour group membership” was an aspect not organized by the participants; however, this theme did affect their tour experience.

### Tour Group Membership

Interestingly, this theme was included eleven times in the researcher/participant stories. Clearly tour group membership was an important theme, which also included the tour guides. Both researcher/participants agreed and stated that, *we had two very capable guides, one secular guide and one Adventist guide (Researcher 1). The two guides complemented each other as one gave all the historical data and evidence and the other provided the biblical links often reading sections from the Bible prior to looking at a site or sharing from the Bible while at the site or when leaving a site (Researcher 1). Our local guide and bus driver sorted everything ably supported by our Australian Guide (Researcher 2).*

In addition to the tour guides, *there were 22 members in our tour group and it was a great group consisting of all Adventists from around Australia and the South Pacific representing various cultural backgrounds. There was also a mix of working backgrounds including technicians, educators, finance people, and theologians* (Researcher 1).

Researcher 2 adds to this saying, *our group consisted of 20 people [excluding the researcher/participants] some of whom I knew and others who were new acquaintances. Traditionally the Seventh-day Adventist Church send groups of ministers and teachers on Bible Lands Study Tours but this was the first time they sent a group of "non-front line" employees and so the group was made up of mainly people who held roles in administration, finance, information technology, academia, education administration, etc. While most of the group were located in Australia there were four members from the Island Field. I was one of two spouses on the tour both of whom were also employees of the Adventist Church but not sponsored by our respective employers.*

This establishes the dynamics of the tour group all having the same faith-base and worldview with some existing social and cultural connections. This was clearly articulated by Researcher 1. *There were no major personality clashes and everyone seemed to get along. And confirmed by Researcher 2. Add to this a very easygoing group who got on well with each other and you have the makings of an incredibly enjoyable trip. Effort was put into getting to know tour group members. For example, individuals on the trip spent time getting to know each other on the bus, while visiting sites or during meal times* (Researcher 1).

The fact that, *the group laughed together and shared by discussing and reflecting on what was being seen as we moved from site to site. There were many opportunities on the bus between sites to reflect on what had been seen and how it connected with our faith journey. People shared their personal reflections which encouraged more discussion and contemplation of our faith and understanding* (Researcher 1).

This enhanced the tour and added value. Researcher 1 summed it up well when she said, *The difference for me was travelling with a faith-based group who were interested in reflecting about the sites, for example, how obsessed Herod was in all his building endeavours and how this same obsession drove him to murder and protect himself by killing all the baby boys when Jesus was born. This theme links directly with the literature where support, constant reflection, and social emotional support from group members positively impacts the experience* (McKenzie and Fitzsimmons 2010:47). This clearly made the trip "unlike any other trip" which is the final theme identified in the data.

### Unlike Any Other Trip

This theme included the most number of references (20) by both researcher/participants and was clearly an important factor. Interestingly, both researcher/participants acknowledge that *Israel was not a high destination on my tourist travel list which was more about fun, relaxation, and seeing things to check off a list of places I had been to* (Researcher 1). *Normally I do not like travelling much but because I have an interest in the Bible Lands because of my Christian faith as well as my love for the tenacity of the Israeli nation, I told her that subject to my work schedule and approval from my employer I was definitely interested* (Researcher 2). These spouses had not considered a Holy Land tour as a high priority as, *I always saw visiting Israel as a negative pilgrimage, for example more focused on “touching things” and because my faith is about a personal relationship with Jesus I did not see the need for a so called pilgrimage to places* (Researcher 1).

There were some very specific differences for the researcher/participants that made this “unlike any other trip”:

- a spiritual journey—for example, *Interestingly, this whole pilgrimage experience has been quite a spiritual journey and definitely more of an internal journey rather than the external journey which is still continuing to take place* (Researcher 1).
- kept a reflective journal—for example, *I feel like my personal journey has been enriched because I have had to reflect and this reflexivity has forced me to consider each aspect of my journey and personal growth connection to my faith and spirituality through the sites and readings that I did and continue to do* (Researcher 1).
- traveled with a faith-based group *who were interested in reflection about the sites* (Researcher 1).
- read from the Bible while visiting the sites.
- since returning home the impact continues—for example, *I think for me since returning from this trip the experience has continued to impact my life through what I read and contextualize* (Researcher 1).

This theme was linked to all the other themes discussed above. The fact that a specific faith-base was shared by all the tourists in the group and that all were on a personal journey of faith and spirituality with the sites linked with Bible references created a positive environment for contextualization.

## Conclusion

There has been a significant impact on the two participants who took part in this research project. There is no doubt that this short-term travel to the Holy Land has resulted in transformative learning where both individuals experienced contextualizing through a visual perspective, which has enhanced and contributed to a deeper meaningful understanding of their personal and spiritual journey. The results show that the impact has been positive and that planning, group membership, and active engagement through reading and journaling have made this trip unlike any other. This study although limited to two related individuals from the same faith does present short-term travel to the Holy Land as a positive transformative learning experience with lasting impacts.



## APPENDIX A

### Researcher/Participant 1: Sherene's Story

This tour to Israel was unlike any trip I have done before because I did not have to plan the tour or book anything. For previous trips I have had to research accommodation and locations in order to ensure that public transport was available and within walking distance. I also had to previously research sites we wished to visit and plan the activities for the day as well as the length of time spent in each location. For this specific trip the itinerary and accommodation were all planned and my only role was to join the tour and pack my suitcase. As such I was less stressed and could look at the itinerary prior to leaving and contemplate the places that we were to visit. There were some sites I had never heard of before like Mareesha and En Gedi, and so I did look these up on Google maps to orientate myself. Some of the listed sites were ones I had read about in the Bible and I was excited about finally seeing them and experiencing the environment. I have grown up as an Adventist and have read *Uncle Arthur's Bible Stories* with all the beautiful illustrations of the Bible Lands multiple times. Because this was a fully planned tour I had time before leaving on the trip to read books I also read but this time with a specific focus in preparation for the itinerary. Israel was not a high destination on my tourist travel list which was more about fun, relaxation, and seeing things to check off a list of places I had been to. I always saw visiting Israel as a negative pilgrimage. For example, more focused on "touching things" and because my faith is about a personal relationship with Jesus I did not see the need for a so called pilgrimage to places, but the tour opportunity presented as a work trip and so I was excited to be able to go. Interestingly, this whole pilgrimage experience has been quite a spiritual journey and definitely more of an internal journey rather than the external journey which is still continuing to take place. As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian I have a number of beliefs and ways of thinking that are part of who I am and my faith-background. Together with this and in preparation for the tour I spent time reading the *Desire of Ages*, the four gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the *Following Jesus* book. The tour centred on "Following Jesus" and visiting the places where He travelled. During the tour I was following a read through the Bible in a year program as part of my personal Bible study time. And it was amazing how many of the tour days we actually visited sites that connected with my morning reading, for example, we visited Megiddo as I was reading about Elijah and King Ahab and how Elijah ran along the plain of Jezreel with King Ahab who was returning to his palace at Megiddo. Another example was when we

visited En Gedi and I was reading one of David's Psalms that was written while he hid at En Gedi. These reading connections happened each day and I was so inspired and learned so much more and was able to process the stories I had read in the morning throughout the day by being able to contextualize the surroundings as well as "experience" the feel and atmosphere. I really felt like I was experiencing the Bible in a 3-dimensional perspective. This was the first trip I did not have to organise anything but could relax and enjoy the experience while also being forced to reflect by keeping a journal of my experience for this research. Interestingly, I feel like my personal journey has been enriched because I have had to reflect and this reflexivity has forced me to consider each aspect of my journey and personal growth connection to my faith and spirituality through the sites and readings that I did and continue to do.

On the tour we did 56 sites in 10 days and it was very intense. We had two very capable guides, one secular guide and one Adventist guide. There were 22 members in our tour group and it was a great group consisting of all Adventists from around Australia and the South Pacific representing various cultural backgrounds. There was also a mix of working backgrounds including technicians, educators, finance people, and theologians. There were no major personality clashes and everyone seemed to get along. Individuals on the trip spent time getting to know each other on the bus, while visiting sites or during meal times. The group laughed together and shared by discussing and reflecting on what was being seen as we moved from site to site. There were many opportunities on the bus between sites to reflect on what had been seen and how it connected with our faith journey. People shared their personal reflections which encouraged more discussion and contemplation of our faith and understanding. The difference for me was travelling with a faith-based group who were interested in reflecting about the sites, for example, how obsessed Herod was in all his building endeavours and how this same obsession drove him to murder and protect himself by killing all the baby boys when Jesus was born.

The two guides complemented each other as one gave all the historical data and evidence and the other provided the biblical links often reading sections from the Bible prior to looking at a site or sharing from the Bible while at the site or when leaving a site. I have never done a trip where I have read from the Bible while visiting sites. In addition, this was the first trip where I have specifically kept a journal for the trip and not just a diary of what happened during the day. This process of journaling has been quite a different experience for me and I have found the process enriching as I have really been pushed to reflect on what I have seen and what it actually means to me and my journey. Often while on the trip I did grumble

about not having enough time to reflect but since returning home I have been able to use the tour experience and my continuing reflections for my own personal Bible study, sharing with my friends and family, in our small group Bible study, in this research project and in preparation for sermons. I think the process of reflective journaling has been one that I am continuing to implement and utilize through my personal journey and when revisiting the photos from the trip. In addition to this the reflective process has continued with this research projects as well as when connecting with people from the trip or others who have been on a trip to Israel.

There were places on the itinerary I was excited to be able to visit, for example, the Dead Sea and to swim in it, Masada, the Mount of Olives, Jerusalem, Jacob's Well and the Sea of Galilee. The other sites listed on the itinerary seemed reasonable and because I had never been to Israel before I thought the organizers must have included them for a reason. Prior to embarking on the trip I found myself thinking about the places we would visit and what I knew about them and there were a number of sites that already held significant appeal for me. The Dead Sea swim was a highlight for me and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience. I can still visualize the magazine pictures I cut out and glued into my scrapbook as a child of other tourists relaxing and reading while floating in the Dead Sea. I remember thinking that it was so "cool" to be able to do that. The experience was phenomenal and I expected the water to be salty. The two aspects I did not expect at my Dead Sea swim experience were the salt crystals around the edge and how hard and rough they are, hence the footwear we had to use, as well as the oil residue on your skin when you exit the water as every other swimming experience for me has not included oil. There are so many references to oil in the Bible that this "oil" experience now seems a plausible and logical personal experience; however, at the time I was not aware or prepared for it. This seemed to be a part of my personal journey each day on this Following Jesus tour. These types of unforeseen aspects continued to happen on a daily basis across the whole trip. Some of these aspects were positive and some were negative. One of the negative aspects on my personal journey was that I was so looking forward to seeing Jacob's Well but now don't remember the experience at all. I do have a photo of me sitting at the well looking very "dozy." A church has been constructed over the original well and you have to go into the basement to see the well. I am an allergy sufferer and unfortunately there is a lot of mold in that area and I react to mold and so I have no recollection of the much anticipated site which was extremely disappointing. So, although I physically was at the site, I really did not mentally participate in the experience. This site feels like a surreal aspect as I can remember how it smells but not how it looks. My reflections on this site revolve around why an outside well is now underground.

There were a few sites on the itinerary I did wonder why we were going to visit them and even when we did visit them I still did not make any connections; however, on our return home and months later I have encountered these places in my Bible reading and am so glad that we did visit them. For example, Mareesha was one of these sites and reading about how the people lived in Bible times and how they kept their water, etc. I have been able to build a better understanding and have a mental picture of what I saw. The whole process in the Bible of sacrifice and needing doves as part of this now makes so much more sense as to why they would need to farm and keep doves in caves and essentially underground where it is cooler and easier to manage.

Living in Australia where there is much land and space often our perception and expectation is that other countries also have large spaces. I also think that my vision was clouded in this aspect because of the fact that in Bible times people travelled on foot and the journeys took a long time. Travelling around Israel was fast and easy and places were nearby. I did not realise how close Bethlehem and Bethany were to Jerusalem. The fact that we could travel from Jerusalem to Masada, En Gedi, Quamram, the Dead Sea, Jericho and back to Jerusalem in a day while experiencing all those sites and fitting in a wilderness walk I felt was quite amazing. I always suspected that the distance between these places would be so vast and it would take days to cover; whereas in reality they are far away when on foot but not so far when travelling via modern transport. When reading the Bible journeys took weeks to complete whereas today in a bus these places are no longer a week's journey or more.

I think for me since returning from this trip the experience has continued to impact my life through what I read and contextualize. Visiting the sites has assisted in changing how I visualize and connect with my faith experience. It is like the places I have visited are real and have meaning. I now understand the concept of personal experience so much more and the concept of being a witness, one who has seen, even though so many centuries later than the Bible times, it all counts into my spirituality and personal connection with my Saviour. As I read in the Bible about Jesus being beside the Sea of Galilee, I can picture the sea and the countryside in that area. I have experienced the distances between the various towns and where they are located. There is so much physical evidence to support the reality of Jesus and the biblical stories recorded in my Bible. The archaeological findings and continuing discoveries in the Bible Lands continue to contribute to this. Besides the reality of the places factor and the physical evidence I also think that seeing what had been constructed as well as being able to contextualise and see the current culture of Israel has assisted me in understanding important cultural understandings that

seem so different from my world. The biggest aspect for me throughout this trip was the amount of “me” that was invested in this trip. I grew up a Christian and have read about the Holy Land my whole life but this was the first time I had been there. I did not realize the significance of seeing some of these sites and how they would impact on my spirituality.

## APPENDIX B

### Researcher/Participant 2: Paul’s Story

My wife called me at work one day in May 2017 to say that a place had come available on a Bible Lands Study Tour and that Avondale College, her employer, had offered her a place on the Study Tour. She was called to find out if that was something that we could fit into our schedule and budget. I had heard about the Bible Lands Study Tours from people who had previously attended and so I was very supportive of her going. She wanted to know if I wanted to join her. Normally I do not like travelling much but because I have an interest in the Bible Lands because of my Christian faith as well as my love for the tenacity of the Israeli nation, I told her that subject to my work schedule and approval from my employer I was definitely interested.

A few days later I was told that they had a place for me as well and so we were off to Israel to visit places that Jesus had frequented during His time on earth. We were all given a book called *Following Jesus* and we were asked to read the *Desire of Ages* preparation for the trip. I started reading these books but with my current work load I struggled to keep up and so I had not read the required readings prior to arriving in Israel.

Our part of the group, which included the Australian Tour Leader arrived in Israel on the morning of the June 11, 2017 instead of the night before due to delayed flights. This meant we got to the hotel mid-morning and after a quick shower we are in the bus and on the road. Our group consisted of 20 people some of whom I knew and others who were new acquaintances. Traditionally the Seventh-day Adventist Church send groups of ministers and teachers on Bible Lands Study Tours but this was the first time they sent a group of “non-front line” employees and so the group was made up of mainly people who held roles in administration, finance, information technology, academia, education administration, etc. While most of the group were located in Australia there were four members from the Island Field. I was one of two spouses on the tour both of whom were also employees of the Adventist Church but not sponsored by our respective employers.

This was my first group tour. I have travelled overseas before with our family and my wife who is a highly organized person, is generally our trip planner. With self-organized travel you have to arrange all you own transport, venue tickets, etc. On a tour I discovered that this is all done for you and so all you do is get on the bus and soak in the experience. Our local guide and bus driver sorted everything ably supported by our Australian Guide. Add to this a very easy going group who got on well with each other and you have the makings of an incredibly enjoyable trip. It was fast paced, we visited 56 sites in 10 days and on reflection it would have been nice to have a little time to ponder what we had seen, it was no overbearing and we got to see a real snapshot of where Jesus travelled.

I am of European descent and my exposure to the Bible and Bible stories is from a European and American perspective because most of the English Bible story books were written by American authors for an American audience. For example, growing up all the pictures of Jesus that I saw depicted him as European, when in reality he was Middle Eastern. The pictures in the Arthur Maxwell, an American author, published a series of *Bible Stories* which depict biblical Israel through that same European lens of rolling green hills, lovely clean white sheep, people dressed in well-fitting garments with European features. The real Israel is quite different and is a country of contrasts. We were told that if you wanted to be wealthy you went north and west of Jerusalem and if you wanted to get close to God you went south and east of Jerusalem. This is because the north is green and fertile while the south is arid and dry.

Size and topography was another shock to the system. I have lived in Africa and Australia with many wide-open spaces and great distances between towns. Israel is a very compact country, which makes a lot of sense given that Jesus walked everywhere and when he was not walking, he was on a boat in the Sea of Galilee. The country is very hilly, for example Jerusalem is 779 m above sea level and the Dead Sea is 417 m below sea level however the distance between the two is a mere 33.8 kilometers. Great if you are walking from Jerusalem to Jericho, not so great if you are going the other way. The country is very dry and has a very fine dust, which covers everything. You gain an appreciation for why there was the custom of foot washing because walking in the dust with sandals on your feet they get very dirty very quickly.

We walked through the old city in Jerusalem. While the current city is not exactly the same as Jesus' time, He was in the same location. The contrast between the different quarters of the city is stark. We normally entered the Damascus gate as our accommodation was near there and then walked through the Muslim quarter, which is noisy and dirty. By contrast the Jewish quarter is far more sedate and clean. Access to the Jewish

quarter is tightly controlled for security reasons. Israel is very cramped and people have built where ever there is space, and almost always their dwellings are multi story. There are cars and people everywhere. You can understand why there were great crowds following Jesus. People would have talked about him and due to the closeness of the communities word would have travelled very fast.

Something that I found particularly disturbing was how various religious groups have laid claim to parts of Israel and in particular parts of Jerusalem and how, still today, they use these sites for religious tourism taking advantage of pilgrims who know no better. Our Guide would explain for example how the different church groups would battle with each other over access to the Church of the Nativity. There are churches built over a number of alleged religious sites often without any historical or archaeological evidence to support the claims. I recently read a book on the history of Jerusalem and Christian Kings and Queens would have envoys and other religious figures bring back artefacts from Christ such as a sliver of wood from the Cross on which Jesus was crucified.

We travelled south to En Gedi, Masada, and the Dead Sea. It is a very hard place. Dry, hot, and dusty. The vegetation is very sparse except where there are springs and En Gedi is just such a place. There is a brook that runs down out of the hills and surrounding the water there is this green oasis surrounded by the desert. I broke away from the group and sat by myself for a while trying to imagine how David would have felt so many years ago as he was on the run from Saul. He would have lived in the caves I could see up against the hills.

Another fascinating discover for me was Hezekiah's tunnel dug during his reign (2 Kings 20:20) that is 533 meters long. The tunnel was required to protect the water source for Jerusalem. They started digging the tunnel through rock from two sides and they met exactly in the middle as they had planned. This is a remarkable feat given they had no GPS guided equipment. One can only conclude that they had Divine guidance as they worked.

A part of the trip that has become a highlight for me after the fact is the Mount of Olives. This geographical location played a very important role at the time of Jesus departure. This was the place he left earth and this is the place he will return after the 1000 years. I have been reading the last chapters of *The Great Controversy* and in chapter 42, page 663, E. G. White states that Jesus will stand on the Mount of Olives before He and the saved enter the New Jerusalem. When I read that passage again it had so much more meaning to me because I had physically stood at the exact place and I want to be part of that group that enter the New Jerusalem with Him.

One of the last places we visited was the Tomb Garden. The Guide explained to us how a Jewish stoning worked as well as Roman Crucifixion. According to the guide, people were crucified at ground level so that people to look the convicted person in the eye and could read what their crimes were. The whole focus of a crucifixion was to humiliate the convicted person as well as create a very painful death. People could walk up to them and spit in their faces. They were nailed on the cross naked and exposed to all who walked past and so crucifixion sites where normally placed on the side of busy roads to maximize the exposure to the local population. Again this flies in the face of popular Christian culture which has the cross on a hill, with Jesus lifted up high off the ground. The very famous and moving hymn, the old Rugged Cross as an example has the words “on a hill far away.”

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Dr Sherene Hattingh is the Primary Course Convenor - Education in the Faculty of Business, Education and Science at Avondale College of Higher Education. She has worked, researched and presented in the Primary, Secondary and Tertiary education sectors as a teacher, administrator and researcher. Her publications in peer reviewed and church journals and books cover the areas of internationalisation, ESL students and pedagogy, assessment and Christian discipleship.



Dr Phil Fitzsimmons is currently an educational consultant, independent researcher and adjunct at Avondale College of Higher Education. He is currently working with a team of educators in Canada in the area of visual futures, and in Australia, Israel and the United States in the field of adolescent and tertiary spirituality.



Mr Paul Hattingh is the General Manager for the North New South Wales Seventh-day Adventist Schools Limited. As a Chartered Accountant he has worked in the areas of management and finance in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. His specialisation area within the not-for-profit sector is primary, secondary and tertiary education.

Abner P. Dizon

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# Towards A Theology of Bi-vocational Mission with Missiological Applications to Creative Access Cities<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

In 1990, the Seventh-day Adventist Church launched a global strategy that called for the planting of an Adventist congregation in “1,800 population segments of 1 million people or more that have no Adventist” before the year 2000 (Widmer 1990:5). Nearly three decades later, many of these population segments are still unentered. One major reason for the difficulty in entering these unentered population segments is that they are located in countries that do not issue missionary visas. Consequently, denominational work is difficult to start. In fact, 80% of the least evangelized people groups in the world live in countries where the government prohibits proselytizing (Adams and Lewis 1991:127). Such countries are often called *restricted access nations*, *limited access nations*, *closed access nations*, or *creative access countries* (127). Many of these creative access countries are in the 10/40 Window.

## The 10/40 Window

The 10/40 Window is an imaginary belt between 10 and 40 degrees north of the equator, and extending from West Africa across the Middle East to Japan in the east. This window is also called the *Resistant Belt* and includes the majority of the world’s Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists (Johnstone 1999:543).

A majority of the world’s least evangelized countries (53 out of 55) are in this region (Culbertson, 2012a). Half of the least evangelized cities in the world are also in the 10/40 window (Culbertson, 2012b). Yet, only 10% of all missionaries live or work there (2012a).

The 10/40 Window has tremendous significance for Adventist mission. David Trim, in the introduction to the 2011 Annual Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists observes that “while net membership has increased significantly . . . the number of SDAs in proportion to the wider population has only marginally increased in the 10/40 Window, while significantly increasing in the rest of the world. Arguably more resources need to be put into this area” (General Conference Annual Statistics 2013:2).

### Bi-vocational Mission—An Innovative Approach

Today many denominations are interested in finishing the gospel commission by reaching every unreached people groups—both in the rural and urban areas of the globe. In their zeal to accomplish the evangelization of the world in this generation, many mission agencies have launched innovative and creative models of mission. One of the new developments in mission outreach, particularly for creative access cities, is the bi-vocational mission approach. Among Protestant mission literature, this approach is seen as one possible way to reach the unreached. A couple of Adventist scholars also consider this approach as the way forward in the future. (Gungadoo 1993; Onongha 2015).

### Defining Bi-vocational Mission

Bi-vocation comes from two words, “bi” and “vocation.” The first word “bi” means “two.” The second part, *vocation*, comes from the Old French *vocation*, meaning, “call, consecration; calling, profession” — which in turn, came from the Latin *vocationem*, literally “a call” or “a being called” (from *vocare* “to call”) (Harper 2018). The English word first appeared in writing in the 1550s with the sense of a person’s “occupation or profession” (Harper 2018). In *Collins English Dictionary* (2012) vocation connotes “a special urge, inclination, or predisposition to a particular calling or career, especially a religious one,” whereas today, vocation simply means, “the work” or job “in which a person is employed. Putting together these two words means the state of having two callings, *professions* or *careers*.”

In this paper, bi-vocational mission refers to the approach or model of mission in which a missions-driven, committed Christian supports himself or herself in a mission field through a secular profession with the intention of making “Christ known on the job and in their free time” (Siemens 1997:121). Bi-vocational mission uses “paid employment to gain and maintain entry in cross-cultural setting” (Pocock, Van Rheenen, and McConnell 2005:17).

Bi-vocational missionaries have also been called non-professional missionaries, lay apostolate, self-supporting witnesses, self-supporting missionaries, ambassadors for Christ without a portfolio, and unofficial missionaries. They “work as professionals and engage in ministry activities in addition to their wage-earning work” (Pocock et al. 2005:17). Such non-traditional missionaries are also called tentmakers in the tradition of Paul’s mission work in an “overseas, cross-cultural ministry environment” (Clarke 1997:103).

### Strengths of Bi-vocational Mission

What are the strengths of bi-vocational mission? Below are some observations:

1. *It enlarges the Church’s workforce.* Bi-vocational workers fills the ministry vacuum in creative access cities. In fact, some bi-vocational workers eventually become fulltime, fully-sponsored pastors and mission personnel.
2. *It mobilizes the laity.* It does away with the misconception that “missions are . . . exclusively the job of special agents sent out by mission boards” (Wilson 1985:67). It encourages unpaid lay ministry and total member involvement.
3. *It gives entry into restricted access countries.* Many of the unreached people groups live in countries that are closed to regular, church supported missionaries but bi-vocational workers can enter these countries.
4. *It augments the finances of the field.* Not only are bi-vocational workers a source of unpaid outreach personnel, but they also provide income for the church (both in the field and back home) through their tithes and offerings.
5. *It allows poor countries to send foreign missionaries.* Churches in countries that are relatively poor but with a large, educated membership (like the Philippines) are able to “send out” missionaries to creative access countries through the international job market.
6. *It gives flexibility and mobility.* Bi-vocational workers have the potential to reach people that are not reached by traditional missionaries or church workers. They are also more flexible and able to freely “respond to needs which may not be in the program of a mission” (Wilson 1985:71).
7. *It gives credibility to Christian witness.* Bi-vocational workers usually do not have “the stigma of proselytizing” because they are seen as “secular persons with [a] secular calling” (Kane, cited in Wilson 1985:70). Nationals in the host country see them as sharing their faith

“out of the abundance of the heart” (Luke 6:45)—not “as paid propagandists for their religion” (Wilson 1985:70).

8. *It provides natural and sustained opportunities for witnessing.* Bi-vocational mission provides a natural, sustained contact with non-believers (Siemens 1997:121). They often meet people whom missionaries usually do not reach such as “professional men and women, educated persons, factory workers, university professors” (Wilson 1985:70). Their relationship with them “can provide a very natural setting for sharing the Gospel” (71).
9. *It supplements media ministries.* In many parts of the world, people seldom know any Christian even though they have listened to Christian radio or TV programs. A Christian professional living or working among such people will make the media messages more tangible and practical since they can answer questions and model Christianity in action.

### Towards a Theology of Bi-vocational Mission

The previous section showed the practical strengths of bi-vocational mission and mentioned several strategic and financial advantages; however, is bi-vocational mission a biblical mission model?

#### Bi-Vocational Mission in the Bible

There are two kinds of bi-vocational mission in the Bible: *involuntary* and *voluntary*. In *involuntary bi-vocational mission*, a person is forced by circumstances to leave his or her home country to live and work in a foreign land. In such situations there was no intention of becoming a foreign missionary but faithfulness to God resulted in the host country’s residents acknowledging God’s sovereignty and power.

Naomi followed her husband to Moab in search of a more prosperous land (Ruth 1). Joseph was promoted from a domestic helper to become governor of Egypt (Gen 41). Esther became queen of Persia (Esth 2). Mordecai and Daniel became high government officials in Persia (Esth 10; Dan 2). And an Israelite maid was instrumental in helping Naaman come to know the true God (2 Kgs 5). All these people held secular jobs in a foreign country and “were used by God . . . in the course of normal duty” to reveal his glory to the heathens (Nunn 1990:7).

In *voluntary bi-vocational mission*, someone receives a call from God to go to a foreign land to be a witness for him. The best example of this kind of mission in the Old Testament is Abraham. He had a clear call from

God to leave his home country and become God's witness (Gen 12:1-4). In obedience, Abraham left his home country of Chaldea to live and work in Canaan as a shepherd (v. 8). He also intentionally spread his faith by setting up altars in key places.

There are also several New Testament examples of individual followers of God who had a secular job but were used by God to glorify his name. Joseph was a carpenter, Zaccheus a tax collector, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea were members of the Sanhedin, Cornelius was an army officer, Luke was a physician, Lydia was a seller of purple-dye, Zenas was a lawyer, and Erastus was a city treasurer (Wilson 1985:21). This was a common pattern in the New Testament because "most of the disciples had ordinary jobs" (Bloecher 1993:17). Jesus himself worked as a carpenter. But the best biblical model of voluntary bi-vocational mission can be found in the ministry of Paul. Like Abraham, Paul had a clear call from God to leave his home country and become God's missionary (Acts 9:15-16, 13:2, 22:14-15, 21, 24:16-18).

### A Model of Self-Supporting Mission Work

How should workers be supported in mission work in creative access cities? Should they support themselves like Paul and his companions, or should they be fully sponsored by churches like Peter and the other apostles? On the one hand, Paul believes in the idea of church or donor-supported mission work. On the other hand, he also subscribed to the concept of self-supporting or bi-vocational mission.

### Church-Supported Mission

In 1 Corinthians 9:1-15, Paul refers to the right of an apostle or missionary (like Peter and the other apostles) to be financially supported by those they minister to. He refers to the apostles' "right to refrain from working for a living" (1 Cor 9:6, ESV), pointing out that a soldier does not serve at his own expense. He quotes the Law of Moses regarding not muzzling the ox as "it treads out the grain" (v. 9). By so doing, he emphasized "a principle that has a universal application: that those who work have the right to be supported by the fruits of their toil" (Nichol 1957:6:728.5; 1 Cor 9:7; 2 Thess 3:10). He further applies this concept to the gospel ministry. Those who "have sown spiritual things" have a right to "reap material things" from their converts (v. 11). Even the priests and the Levites who



ministered in the temple were supported by the temple (v. 13). Finally, he concludes with strong biblical support for church-sponsored mission work: “the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (v. 14).

In 2 Corinthians 11:7-12 Paul reports that other churches supported him while he was serving in Corinth (v. 8). When he was financially in need in Corinth, “the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied [my] need” (v. 9). This was in reference to Silas and Timothy who arrived from Macedonia (Acts 18:5). The financial support from Macedonia that Silas and Timothy brought “freed him for full-time ministry,” at least for the time being (Karris 1992:1060).

The point is that Paul was supported, at least occasionally, by church donated money. In Philippians 4:9-20 Paul praises the Philippians for their concern for him. While he tells them that he has learned to make do with what he has or does not have, he nevertheless thanks them for their financial gifts that they sent through Epaphroditus (Phil 4:12, 18). He praises the Philippian church for being the only church in Macedonia to enter “into partnership with [him] in giving and receiving” (v. 15). He gives a theological meaning to the financial assistance the Philippian believers sent him. The act of giving is symptomatic of the gospel bearing fruit in a convert’s life (v. 17). In Romans 12:1-2, Paul writes that the giving for the support of missionaries is “a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (Phil 4:18). Then comes another famous verse, “My God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (v. 19). It is interesting to note that the context of this promise is a church that is sending occasional support to self-supporting ministers of the gospel in regions beyond.

### Self-Supporting or Bi-vocational Mission

Acts 20:34 tells us that Paul worked with his hands “to provide everything” that he and his companions needed. In fact, Paul was not the only one doing manual labor to support their mission. His entire team also labored and worked with their hands (1 Cor 4:11).

The whole chapter of 1 Corinthians 9 is a defense of the apostleship of Paul. Paul explains that even though he and Barnabas have the right to be fully supported by the churches, they did not make use of their rights (vv. 6, 15). Instead, to avoid any hindrance to the preaching of the gospel, they worked with their hands (vv. 12, 15, 18).

In 2 Corinthians 11:7-12 Paul reiterates his reason for not asking the churches to support him. He wanted to preach “God’s gospel . . . free of charge” (v. 7). Paul points out that while in the regions of Achaia, he was

not supported by the churches there. Hence, he can boast that he “robbed other churches by accepting support from [those other churches] in order to serve” the people of Corinth and Achaia (v. 10).

In 2 Corinthians 12:12-16 Paul points out that his apostleship was confirmed or attested to “with signs and wonders and mighty works” (v. 12). Then he goes on to say that the only difference between the church of Corinth and other churches is that Paul, their apostle, did not burden them with financial support (v. 13). He explains that he is not after the money of the believers, but their souls (v. 14). As a spiritual father, he would not require them to support him. Instead, he “will most gladly spend and be spent for” their souls (vv. 14, 15).

In 1 Thessalonians 2:7-12 Paul continues the parent-children analogy in describing his tentmaking ministry among the Thessalonians. He and his fellow tentmakers “worked night and day” (v. 9) to avoid becoming a burden to any of the Thessalonian brethren.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 Paul not only explains why he supported himself, but also outlines the principle of “no work—no eat” (v. 10). Paul and his team’s practice of manual labor and self-support was an example to the Thessalonians. He wanted them to see and imitate their industriousness (v. 9). Again, he reminds them that his team did not become a burden to anyone because they “worked night and day . . . with toil and labor” (v. 8).

### Pauline Reasons for Engaging in Bi-vocational Mission

Paul was not against the concept of church sponsored mission work. In fact, he encouraged churches to send support for the church in Jerusalem. Yet, he stands as the ideal example of a *bi-vocational* missionary, pastor, and evangelist. Notice that Paul dealt with finances in three ways: (1) he did not ask for financial assistance for himself, (2) he did not take financial support from those he was ministering to, and (3) he did not manage or control the local church funds (Allen 1962:49-61).

So why did Paul prefer to earn a living to support himself and his ministry team?

1. **Consideration.** He did not want to be a burden to anyone. Several times he repeats this as his foremost reason for supporting himself (1 Cor 9:12, 15-16; 2 Thess 3:8). In Acts 20:33-35 Paul emphasized “how he supported himself and did not drain the church to which he ministered” (Karris 1992:1060).
2. **Identification.** He wanted to identify with the people he was trying to reach. He has indeed become a servant to all by doing manual labor for his support. He also wanted to identify with Jesus who also labored manually as a carpenter (1 Cor 9:19-21; Rom 1:14-16; 2 Cor 8:9; cf. Matt 13:55; Mark 6:3).

3. **Credibility.** He wanted to show that he was not preaching the gospel for financial reasons. Paul set himself apart from those who preached God’s Word for financial gain “by relying on his tentmaking work and receiving only voluntary gifts from other churches” (Ott and Wilson 2011:182; 2 Cor 2:17; 1 Cor 9:12, 17-18; 2 Thess 3:8).
4. **Modeling.** Self-supporting work offers a model of integrity, work ethics, and a pattern for lay evangelism (1 Cor 3:10-15, 6:10,11, 7:7-28, 11:1; 1 Thess 1:5-8, 3:8, 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6-18; 1 Cor 6:10, 11; Eph 4:28; 1 Tim 5:8).

### Theological Foundation for Bi-vocational Mission

As I observed the ministry of a number of expatriate workers in six Middle Eastern countries, I realized that there are several key theological beliefs that serve as a foundation for an effective—even spontaneous—bi-vocational mission in creative access cities.

#### The *Missio Dei*

Bi-vocational mission works best when based on an understanding of God’s purposes and activities in and for the entire universe (Kirk 2000:25). Missiologists call this the *missio dei*. The central idea of *missio Dei* is that “God is the One who initiates and sustains mission. At most, then, the church is God’s partner in what is God’s agenda. . . . Mission is God-centered rather than human-centered, but without neglecting the important role that God has assigned to the church in that process (Moreau, Corwin, and McGee 2013:17).

The beauty of bi-vocational mission in countries with no existing denominational administrative offices has to do with the relative absence (or minimal presence) of pressure to produce baptisms in a very short time! That is how it should be. Bi-vocational mission is not about statistics or mission-metrics. Bi-vocational mission is about God working through his faithful, normal, ordinary, children in business places, in universities, and even in private homes, where they serve as “God-supported” missionaries.

The success of bi-vocational mission ultimately belongs to God. God does not require anyone to succeed—he requires them to be faithful witnesses. Yes, the “field is the world” and we are “God’s fellow workers,” but God is “the Lord of the Harvest”—not us (Matt 13:38; 1 Cor 3:9; Matt 9:38, ESV). It is God who “will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth” (Rom 9:28, KJV). Success is up to him—he will bring it about in his own time.

## The Great Controversy

When talking of mission, one needs to remember that behind it are two problems that God is seeking to solve. One is the rebellion of Lucifer who started a *counter kingdom* and stole the allegiance of a large number of angels. The second is human defection and fall into a state of sin and personal degeneration, which left God's kingdom partially dissected and usurped (Ellisen 2009:18).

God devised a plan through which he will be victorious over the counterfeit kingdom and at the same time be able to provide salvation for fallen humanity. The final destruction of Satan and those who side with him is postponed until Jesus has redeemed humankind and reclaimed his partially lost kingdom.

The Bible shows the progressive development of God's plan to overcome this double rebellion. First, he sent patriarchs and prophets to teach people about his plan to redeem the earth. Later, when the people of the earth had multiplied to include 70 nations (Gen 10), God formed a people, Israel, to be his witness in the midst of the nations. Then at the right time, he sent his Son "to die for the ungodly" so that they may receive reconciliation through his death (Rom 5:6, 11, ESV). The story continues as God sends a new people—the church—to become his agents in inviting people to join his kingdom. Finally, the story will end triumphantly with the return of Jesus. He will ultimately establish his kingdom and once and for all defeat evil, with everyone confessing that he is indeed Lord (Phil 2:9-11).

## The Great Commission

The Great Commission is the so-called "Magna Carta of the Christian church" (Burrill 1996:11). It gives an all-encompassing direction to all Christians, both individually and corporately. So, what are the key elements of the Great Commission that needs to be clear to would-be bi-vocational workers?

First of all, the authority behind this commission is Jesus. Jesus, as "the universal Lord, gives a universal commission" (Ott, Strauss, and Tennent 2010:36).

This is not *just* Jesus giving the command, this is "the *authoritative* Jesus," "the chief executive officer of the universe" who issues the Great Commission. God's people dare not take the command lightly (Burrill 1996:14, emphasis added).

Second, the heart of this commission is the command to disciple all nations. The *task* includes an intentional going, baptizing, teaching but the

*goal* is to call people to life transformation and full obedience to Christ—every aspect of their lives submitted to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Third, *the scope* or focus is all the nations. We are to “go” and launch the expanding force of mission to *all the nations*. The preaching of the gospel is not to be done “without actually going to the places where people lived” (Hawthorne 2009:129). The Lord wants us to be prepared to change locality to accomplish this task.

Fourth, underlying this Christian mission to the nations is *the promise* that Jesus will make available all his power and authority in the accomplishment of the mission. This is an assurance Jesus gives disciples of all generations as they execute the Great Commission.

Finally, there is *the duration* of the commission. Neither the promise nor the command ended with the death of the original disciples. Both promise and command continue “to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:20, ESV). In the same way that Jesus was with his “discipling disciples” until the end of the world, all of his disciples (down through the end of time) are to continue discipling the nations until Jesus comes.

Understanding the Great Commission along with the idea of the Priesthood of all Believers is foundational to an effective bi-vocational mission.

The Saviour’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*. (White 2005:822, emphasis added)

### Priesthood of All Believers

The distinction between clergy and laity has kept the majority of the church from becoming fully involved in mission. The clergy (pastors or church-supported workers) are often the only ones expected to do ministry. Ordinary church members are expected to merely “pay, pray and stay out of the way” (Rundle 2009:763).

One of the basic principles of the Protestant Reformation is the idea of the priesthood of all believers based on 1 Peter 2:9, which identifies the entire church (clergy and the laity together) as “a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God” (NIV).

Belief in the priesthood of all believers—in contrast to the Roman Catholic “concept of priesthood,” which “draws a sharp line of demarcation

between the laity and the clergy”—is a logical consequence of “belief in salvation by faith alone” (Edwards 1995:13; Dolson and Dolson 1995). It is the belief that “every person can approach God directly, without the services of an intermediary human priesthood” (1995).

For bi-vocational mission to flourish, a redefining of the role of the laity is crucial. The laity needs to see themselves as God’s ministers to a dying world. As Edwards observes, “The New Testament clearly teaches that all Christians are to be ministers. Anything else clearly violates the demands of discipleship which our Lord presented” (1995:13). Ellen White clearly points out that “the responsibility of going forth to fulfill” the Great Commission does not rest only “upon the ordained minister. . . . Everyone who has received Christ is called to work for the salvation of his fellowmen” (White 2005:110).

Bi-vocational mission thrusts business people unto the playing field, just like during the Early Church. They are to serve as *lay* pastors, *lay* evangelists, and *lay* church leaders in countries where professional ministers are not allowed to function. In order to reach creative access cities, “pastors” may now have to become “laymen”—earning their keep and doing ministry on the job and during their spare time. This reality redefines the word “layman.”

### Theology of Work

Closely related to the concept of the priesthood of all believers is the theology of work. Similar to the dichotomy between lay people and clergy, there is a misperception concerning “sacred and worldly professions that has long sidelined so many Christians” (Rundle 2009:763). One of the negative effects of the Enlightenment era is the artificial distinction between what is sacred and what is secular. This concept when “carried over into the realm of work implied that there were certain kinds of work that were sacred, such as the functions of the clergy, while other types of work were labeled secular” (Onongha 2015:190). This dichotomy needs to disappear if the laity are to be encouraged to integrate work and ministry.

The starting point for a theology of work comes to us “through the example of God Himself” who is “depicted as a craftsman” who used his hands (not just his word) “to bring all things into existence” (Gungadoo 1993:134; Gen 1:1; Ps 19:1, 8:3). Genesis offers the idea that God took pleasure in his work (Gen 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21). God works and never stops working because “that which he created, he is still busy sustaining” (Gungadoo 1993:135; Col 1:17). Contrary to what many people think, work is not a curse. Genesis says that God gave humans work even before the fall (Gen 1:28, 2:15). Ellen White wrote, “God appointed labor as a blessing to man,

to occupy his mind, to strengthen his body, and to develop his faculties. . . . And when, as a result of his disobedience, he was . . . forced to struggle with a stubborn soil to gain his daily bread, that very labor . . . was a safeguard against temptation and a source of happiness. (1890:50.1)

Bi-vocational mission entails a change in perception about the so-called “spiritual-vocational hierarchy” which treats some professions as “more God-pleasing and honorable than others” (Rundle 2009:757). Such a hierarchy of vocation needs to be revised. Ellen White notes that

those who regard work as a curse, attended though it be with weariness and pain, are cherishing an error. The rich often look down with contempt upon the working classes, but this is wholly at variance with God’s purpose in creating man. . . . Our Creator, who understands what is for man’s happiness, appointed Adam his work. The true joy of life is found only by the working men and women. . . . The Creator has prepared no place for the stagnating practice of indolence. (1890:50.1)

Those who call themselves Christians should perform work faithfully. Faithful work is in reality bi-vocational work. “Let the businessman do his business in a way that will glorify his Master because of his fidelity. Let him carry his religion into everything that is done. . . . Let the mechanic be a diligent and faithful representative of [Christ] . . . Let everyone who names the name of Christ so work that man by seeing his good works may be led to glorify his Creator and Redeemer (White 1925:27).

### **Lessons for Bi-vocational Mission in Creative Access Cities**

When it comes to effective bi-vocational mission strategy, the views and example of Paul is instructive. Notice some Pauline lessons for bi-vocational mission work in creative access cities today.

#### **Targeting Big Cities**

Most of Paul’s bi-vocational mission targeted big cities. This is not to say that he did not minister in smaller centers. He did. For instance, Athens only had 10,000 people as opposed to Corinth that had as many as 250,000 free people and about 400,000 slaves (Wood and McGhee 2002:236). However, “big cities were Paul’s favorite targets for the gospel” (236). Corinth was also a center for travelers, traders, and pleasure-seekers. It was the most important trade city in ancient Greece (Youngblood, Bruce, and Harrison 2005:46). It was “the connecting link between Rome, the capital of the world, and the East” (467). Since it was “a great commercial

center, situated within easy access of all parts of the Roman Empire, it was an important place in which to establish memorials for God and His truth" (White 2005:243). In fact, "all the cities, or towns, in which he [Paul] planted churches, were centres of Roman administration, of Greek civilization, or of some commercial importance" (Allen 1962:13). The places Paul focused his ministry in "were located on major trade routes oriented towards Rome" (Hesselgrave 1980:97). Focusing on large central cities is a strategy that is also relevant today, considering that more than half of the world's population lives in big cities (Wood and McGhee 2002:235).

### Finding Financial Support

When Paul arrived in a new location, he looked for a source of support and a place of residence (Acts 18:2-3). Paul's practice of manual labor and self-support is instructive. Too often, the failure of church planting efforts is attributed to a lack of funds (either for the support of workers or for facilities). Paul's ministry was not dependent on outside financial help because he had a vocational skill that was in demand in those days. Thus, he was able to provide for his financial need as well as for the needs of his ministry. This is not to say that Paul never lacked anything. To the contrary, he wrote about his financial needs and the needs of churches that were in distress (1 Cor 16; 2 Cor 8-9; Phil 4). "Tentmaking did not bring returns so quickly as some other occupations, and at times it was only by the strictest economy that Paul could supply his necessities" (Nichol 1956:6:1063.3). There were times when he had enough and there were times when he did not have enough (Phil 4:12). Yet, for the most part, he was able to provide for his and his team's needs (Acts 20:34-35; Phil 4:16; 1 Thess 2:9). This is where learning a vocational skill comes in very handy.

Paul was highly educated, and was admired for his genius and eloquence. He was chosen by his countrymen as a member of the Sanhedrin, and was a rabbi of distinguished ability; yet his education had not been considered complete until he had served an apprenticeship at some useful trade. He rejoiced that he was able to support himself by manual labor, and frequently declared that his own hands had ministered to his necessities. While in a city of strangers, he would not be chargeable to anyone. When his means had been expended to advance the cause of Christ, he resorted to his trade in order to gain a livelihood. (Nichol 1956:6:957:1063.1)



## Looking for Witnessing Opportunities

Once Paul settled in a city, he intentionally looked for opportunities to witness to people. Even though Paul's commission was to preach to the Gentiles (Gal 2:7), he usually visited the synagogues. There are six verses in Acts that show Paul going to where the Jews and God-fearing Gentiles met every Sabbath (Acts 13:14, 42, 44, 16:13, 17:2, 18:4). This "practice of visiting synagogues" (Hesselgrave 1980:166) is not just about his Sabbath-keeping custom. In other words, he was not just concerned about going to church. It was a strategic decision to go where he could find opportunities to witness.

### Finding Seekers

Acts 18:6-7 gives insight into Paul's evangelistic approach. When the Jews in the synagogue "opposed him and said evil things about him, he protested by shaking the dust from his clothes" (v. 6, GNB). Paul declared: "If you are lost, you yourselves must take the blame for it! I am not responsible; from now on I will go to the Gentiles" (v. 6). This is reminiscent of Jesus' command to the disciples to "shake the dust off" one's feet and leave a home or town that will not welcome them or listen to them (Matt 10:14). Siemens calls this the "selective approach" (1998:6). Paul was looking for seekers or "people on whom the Holy Spirit was already working" (6). When people showed that they were not receptive to the message, Paul moved to those who were more open. Thus, when the Jews rejected the gospel, Paul "moved from the synagogue to the neighboring house of Titus Justus, a God-fearing Gentile" (Karris 1992:1060). Paul's evangelistic approach was not an "indiscriminate personal evangelism" type that forced people to listen whether they wanted to or not. He had "a strategy of contact that involved a degree of selectivity" (Hesselgrave 1980:158).

### Establishing House Churches

In the Old Testament, people largely worshipped at the tabernacle and later the temple. In the New Testament when Christians met opposition in local synagogues, they started meeting in homes (Ott and Wilson 2011:109). This approach was not only necessitated by "persecution or lack of alternative meeting places" but also by a new understanding regarding the locus of worship (109). Jesus taught that the place was not the important factor in worship, but one's attitude (John 4:23, 24). He also promised that "where two or three are gathered in [his] name," he would be there among them (Matt 18:20, ESV). The new locus of worship was

Jesus and no longer the temple. Thus, from the very start and throughout the history of the Early Church, “house gatherings were [the] common feature of Christian corporate life” (Hesselgrave 1980:290). Indeed, “there were no church buildings as we know them for the first 150 years of the Church’s existence” (290).

### Multiplying Bi-vocational Workers

A final observation concerning Paul’s bi-vocational mission strategy is his practice of multiplying bi-vocational missionaries. In Acts 18:11 it says that Paul stayed in Corinth for a year and a half “teaching the word of God among *them*” (v. 11). A lexical study of the verb used in verse 11 (comparing it with v. 4) suggests that this verse refers to Crispus, his household, and the other converts in Corinth. In other words, Paul disciplined his converts in obedience to the Great Commission to “teach them to obey everything” (Matt 28:20, GNB). *Disciple-maker multipliers* are needed in today’s churches. Paul not only taught his converts the message, he also showed them how to work for others. His one and a half year stay in Corinth did not just focus on evangelism and winning new converts, but also involved on-the-job training for bi-vocational mission work by his companions. The principle of multiplication can be seen in Paul’s advice to his younger co-worker: “What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2, ESV).

### Conclusion

Bi-vocational mission is not only an innovative and useful model to use in creative access cities. Even though this approach may not be for everyone, and even though Paul himself saw the need for church-supported mission, this chapter has shown that the model itself is biblical. In order for this approach to be effective, however, it needs to be grounded on a strong belief in the mission of God, an understanding of the Great Controversy, willingness to obey the Great Commission, an implementation of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, and a sound theology of work.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup>Much of the material in this paper first appeared in *Beyond Barriers: Adventist Professionals with a Mission* by Abner P. Dizon Copyright 2014 by the Middle East & North Africa Union. Used by permission.

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Abner Perez Dizon, DMiss, served with Philippine Frontier Missions as founding Executive Director and later as Research & Training Director for a total of 22 years. He has a Doctor of Missiology degree from Philippine Christian University and currently serves as Assistant Professor of Mission and Islamic Studies and Master of Ministry/Master of Arts in Ministry-Intercultural Studies Program Director at the Theological Seminary in the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies.