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Anti-Urbanism in Culture and Seventh-day Adventism: Advocacy and Action for Urban Ministry

Introduction

During its first 150 years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has had at best an ambivalent relationship with the missional needs of the city. Because of internal and external societal factors, the church largely failed to embrace the enormous challenge of the growing cities. Instead, in practice if not by overt teaching, Adventist retreated from the cities while the growth of the population in cities accelerated with currently over half of the world population residing in urban centers.

In an effort to reclaim what had become numerically the largest segment of the mission field the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist in late 2013 hosted a conference of church leaders entitled, *It's Time: Refocusing Adventist Urban Mission for the 21st Century* (McEdward and Trim 2014:1). The focus of that conference was on the 500 plus *urban agglomerations* of a million or more at that time according to Thomas Brinkoff. Data on the Adventist presence in these urban centers was collected and presented through a series of maps. Although this conference brought needed attention to the missional challenge of urbanization, the Adventist Church has yet to address the systemic attitudinal factors within and without, which led to the current neglect of large cities around the world.

Over the last century, while much of the Adventist population has been preoccupied with fleeing the cities to live in the country, the weight of world population has been steadily shifting from the country to the cities. In 1900 a mere 13% of the world's population lived in urban areas (United Nations 2006); however, by 2008 the world population was divided equally between those who lived in the country and those who lived in urban centers (United Nations 2015). In 2018, 55% of the world population is urban and the share of city dwellers is anticipated to climb to 68% by 2050 (United Nations 2018).

The urban and rural makeup of the world is remarkably different today from when the early Adventist pioneers were growing up and so has what constitutes the mission frontiers for Christianity. Because the Adventist Church was established in North America, it is important to examine the shift in urbanization in the United States.

The percentage of US urban population had a precipitous climb during the early developmental period of the Adventist Church and its first hundred years of existence. The US started the 1800s with a 6.1% urban population, which by midcentury had reached 15.4%. By the beginning of the 1900s the urban population share stood at 39.6%. The rate of decadal urban population growth was over 50% for all but two of the decades in the 1800s, topping out at 93.7% for the period between 1840 to 1850 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2012). By 1920, US urban population reached 51.2% and has steadily grown, albeit at a lower rate than the previous century, to 82.5% in 2018 with a projected 89.2% urban population by 2050.

Description of the Issue

Anti-urbanism is not something unique to the Seventh-day Adventist Church. A precise definition of anti-urbanism is elusive, but its presence is pervasive. Steven Conn writes in *Americans Against the City*, "To define what I mean by anti-urbanism demands that I define what 'urbanism' itself means, and that is no small task" (2014:3). Michael J. Thompson points out that "Hatred of—or even ambivalence toward—the city or urban life seems a constant companion to the history of cities themselves" (2009:9). And although the focus and expressions of anti-urbanism have changed over time, according to Thompson what unites the expressions of anti-urbanism throughout history "is an emphatic rejection of urban life, of a linking of the urban with all that is in opposition to virtue, nature, truth" (9).

What is critical to take away from this is that negative views towards large urban centers has existed across history, both from within and without the Christian community. Christian negativity, and in cases outright hostility, toward the cities has hampered evangelization of a new demographic,

which is now a clear world majority and trending larger every day. This is borne out by the fact that the Christian urban population is not keeping pace with the global urban population. Although the number of urban Christian adherents is increasing year by year, it is at a slower rate than the population at large. The statistic is stark: the global urban population has been growing at an average annual rate of 2.2% between 2000 and 2016 but Christian urban population has only experienced a 1.6% growth rate during this same period (Johnson 2017). In simple words, *under the current trends Christianity is losing ground among the urban population of the world.*

The Challenge for Christianity

Assessing and categorizing the state of Christian evangelization of the cities is not an easy task. Harvie M. Conn and Manuel Ortiz in *Urban Ministry: The Kingdom, the City and the People of God* initiate the conversation this way: “Is the church losing the cities? That language can be misleading to some degree” (2001:74). They proceed to identify some of the challenges.

First, in countries traditionally hostile to Christianity there is massive population growth with accompanying rapid expansion of cities. These areas of the world have represented a historical challenge to the church and will require exceptional Spirit-led efforts to turn the situation around. No, the church is not losing these cities, it never “had” them to begin with.

Second, although there are exceptions in some parts of the world, often, most of evangelical church growth has taken place in rural areas, towns, and smaller cities, exemplifying the church’s identification with its rural heritage. The answer in this case is that in some places, the church is winning the cities, but in many other places the church is losing the cities.

Third, there is an unevenness in the churches’ geographical spread throughout the city. So, whether it is social or economic segmentation of the cities, the church is not uniformly distributed in the city. So finally, my summary to the question of how the church is doing in the cities is this. *It depends on what cities, and where in those cities you are looking; however, in the end the numbers do not lie. Over all the church is losing ground in the cities.*

Urbanism Issues within Christianity

It is important to ask, Why have Christians abandoned the city? What factors may have influenced the church to cede the cities to the enemy? These questions are certainly too strong and overstated, for it is not true of every Christian, but one must still ask in order to seek answers. I have found the discussion in Conn and Ortiz on the development of cities and

the ways Christians have related to the city very helpful in understanding our current state of missional engagement with urban areas. What follows is a brief overview of some of their points.

The story of the precursor of our current cities is the industrial city, which came into its own in the 1800s. Fortunately, there are snapshots of the state of church attendance and church adherence in England and the United States from this period. Conn and Ortiz provide some provocative statistics. "In 1851 the only official census of religion ever taken in England was conducted. It indicated that somewhere between 47 and 54 percent of the total population over the age of ten were in church on census Sunday" (2001:53). Noteworthy is the ratio of attendance in rural areas and small towns: 71.4% contrasted with 49.7% for large towns with a population of more than 10,000. By 1979, the adult church attendance had dropped to 11%.

In 1890 and 1906 the United States conducted the only two religious censuses in its history. Interestingly, during that time, church membership grew 60% nationally but more astoundingly, the growth rate in cities was more than 87%. Therefore, in the United States at this time the trend was the opposite of what was seen in England and what we are seeing today. Whereas 39% of all Americans belonged to some church, over 46% of city residents were affiliated with a local congregation (2001:53).

How was it that church affiliation in the United States during this time period grew at a greater rate in the cities than in the country at large? Conn and Ortiz suggest that massive immigration from largely Catholic areas of Southern and Eastern Europe could account for this. The largest increases to the Catholic membership came between 1890 and 1906 as a result of this immigration. Because the highest percentage of these immigrants settled in the major cities of the north, the share of church adherents in the cities shot up. Undoubtedly, this massive influx of Catholic immigrants during that period fostered a growing blend of anti-Catholicism and a disdain of the urban neighborhoods that they populated.

Another important consideration is the view of the working class toward the church. "In England the urban working class viewed the church as aligned with the powerful and the privileged. Its clergy were suspect because of their middle-class character and comfortable lifestyle" (2001:54). In the United States, the laboring classes shared a similar view. The Protestant church leaders pursued the middle class and, when possible, the upper classes. Even urban revivalists such as Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) and Charles Finney (1792-1875) reached primarily the middle-class, rural-born native Americans rather than the laboring classes.

With the industrialization of the city came mounting pain and squalor. How would Christians respond? Would they address these ills by

transformative intervention in the struggling communities of the city, or would they mostly offer assistance from without?

In England, Christian leaders in Parliament sought to address many of the social ills like child labor in factories, and female labor in mines through legislation. In the United States and England, moral crusades were mounted to combat the slave trade and alcoholism.

At the same time, a trend in individualism among the middle-class church led to the rise of charities and voluntarism to respond to the social needs in the city. The outcome was a host of large-scale religious philanthropy such as rescue missions and the Salvation Army. In the end, most of Christianity became more comfortable with charity than with justice.

Conn and Ortiz finger a “growing Christian dualism that looked for individual converts in the city but turned against the city as a perversion of nature” as an important step in the Protestant Church isolating itself from the industrial worker. “A growing transatlantic anti-urbanism divided the poor of the cities into worthy and unworthy and would eventually isolate evangelism from social transformation. Class sensitivities in England and Anglo-Saxon racist attitudes in America toward blacks and new immigrants molded negative opinions about the city” (2001:57).

The anti-urban dualism of individual and society began to be reflected in the theological formulations. In the early twentieth century, sides were being taken. Evangelicals and the fundamentalists were focused on evangelism. Their mantra could be summed up with “Change the person and you change the setting.” On the other hand, the more liberal, mainline denominations supported a wider program, referred to as Social Gospel. They claimed, “Change the setting and you change the person.”

Because in the nineteenth century most of the world was rural, mission leaders rightly focused mainly on rural areas. Anti-urbanism reinforced the focus of the mission enterprise on a rural strategy. So, in Brittan, missionaries came from churches that ignored the massive urban problems back home and in the United States there were missionaries “motivated to some degree by a desire to flee the decaying American cities” (Conn and Ortiz 2001:60).

At the end of the colonial period, the theological divisions eroded the holistic certainty of the gospel. “Liberalism . . . would move toward the Christianizing pole in a comprehensive approach that gave equal space to preaching, education, medical assistance, and technical and socioeconomic aid.” Some evangelicals, on the other hand, “would reduce their calling to personal evangelism. Christianity’s mandate for social transformation became charitable service” (2001:62).

What had started out as unreached peoples primarily living in a rural mission field was at an ever-increasing rate becoming an urban mission

field. By the 1950s, the urban wave was reaching Latin America, Asia, and Africa. In 1961, Latin America crossed the 50% urban population threshold. The United Nations projects that Asia's urban population will exceed 50% in 2019 (2018). The new reality was that the overseas mission field was both rural and urban and rapidly becoming increasingly more urban. In recognition of this, the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization (LCWE) held the Mini-Consultation on Reaching Large Cities in June of 1980. The overall purpose was stated as: "The covenant vision is a redeemed city, and the specific task is to encourage, equip, and empower 'the whole church to take the whole gospel to the whole city'" (Bakke 1984).

The LCWE brought in its wake more attention to mission to the cities, but that did not mean that today Christianity at large has embraced holistic ministry to the cities of the world. Eduardo Mendieta in his chapter "Fundamentalism and Antiurbanism: The Frontier Myth, the Christian Nation, and the Heartland," in the book *Fleeing the City: Studies in the Culture and Politics of Antiurbanism*, writes this:

These born-again Christians, evangelicals, and fundamentalists have become exurban, that is exiles from the cities of Babel, Sodom, and Gomorrah. In an irony that should not escape this new soldier of god, they seek refuge in the suburbs of urbanized rural America, in the mega-churches of the heartland, where they gather under steel and glass structures to be connected via satellite with like-minded believers. (2009)

Politically, the plight of decaying inner cities is increasingly controlled by the suburbs where most statewide and national elections are now won. As the more affluent Christians have fled to the pastoral suburbs, they have taken their money, taxes, and jobs with them. In so doing they have left the inner-city core with less resources to serve its population. In the words of Warren R. Copeland, a Christian professor and the Mayor of Springfield, Ohio,

Once upon a time, the cities were seen as the birthplaces of civilization and democracy; now they are seen as centers of crime and deterioration. I believe that the tendency to withdraw from cities and let them decline is a profoundly destructive force in our society. I also consider it a fundamental ethical issue for our citizens and a critical religious issue for people of faith. (2009)

Foreign and City Mission in Adventism

I have purposefully held off discussing the Adventist relationship to urbanism. As a denomination, Adventists often perceive themselves as

being set apart, unique, more focused on truth than others, the bearers of a last day message—the *three angels' messages*. It may be so in God's idealized plan, but in everyday operations how true are Adventists to God's plan and how often do they reflect the culture around them? I begin with a brief survey of the development of Adventist mission and a review of initial reporting on mission to the cities.

At first, the group who developed into what is now the Seventh-day Adventist Church did not believe in mission. The Adventist vision for missions grew progressively. Following the 1844 disappointment, the Millerites, who eventually accepted the Sabbath were known derogatorily for a time as the "Sabbath and the shut-door people" as a way of calling attention to their distinctive beliefs. "During the shut-door period of Adventist mission development Sabbatarian Adventist believed that evangelistic outreach of their movement was restricted to those who had accepted the Millerite message of the 1830s and early 1840s. The door of mercy had shut for all others" (Knight 1999:49).

However, by 1850 James White reported the "accession of a man who 'had made no public profession of religion' before 1845" (in Knight 1999:65). Conversions like this one increased over the following two years. Here were examples of the work of the Holy Spirit correcting theology. By 1852, White had switched to an open-door evangelistic policy. Nevertheless, Sabbatarian Adventist had not opened the door to mission very far. "For one thing, some of the Sabbatarians believed that the Millerites had accomplished the preaching of the first angel's message to all the earth through the sending of their publications around the world" (66). Others like Uriah Smith thought that it might not be necessary to give the third angel's message outside of the United States because "our own land is composed of people from almost every nation" (67).

So, when Michael Belina Czechowski, an former Roman Catholic Polish priest who had converted to Adventism in America in 1857, expressed an interest in going as a missionary to his native people in Europe, the Adventist leadership said no. The leadership had its reasons including questions of Czechowski's readiness and suitability for the task. However, he would not be deterred. He "requested and received missionary sponsorship from the Advent Christian denomination (the main body of Sunday keeping Adventists)" (1999:82).

While in Europe, he planted Adventist doctrinal seeds which eventually bore fruit in Switzerland, Italy, Hungary, and elsewhere, even though he hid his Seventh-day Adventist roots. Eventually one of his Swiss followers discovered the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and contacted the leadership in the United States. The American Seventh-day Adventist leadership invited this Swiss believer to the United States,

where he received training in Adventist beliefs. In 1870, he returned to Europe as an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister. Again, the Holy Spirit was propelling the Church to new frontiers.

One result of the contact with European Adventists was the development in 1869 of a missionary society to send printed material to foreign lands. In 1874, the Adventist Church sent its first “official” foreign missionary, John Nevins Andrews; however, for the next fifteen years Adventist mission was primarily to the Protestant nations (1999:99).

That would change in 1889 when S. N. Haskell and Percy T. Magan were sent on a two-year “itinerary around the world to survey opportunities, problems, and possible sites for Adventist missions in various parts of Africa, India, and the Orient” (1999:100).

Haskell and Magan reported on their tour in the *Youth Instructor*, capturing the interest of Adventist youth. This awakening of the hearts and minds of Adventist youth to mission was taking place at the same time as the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (founded in 1886) was growing.

During this same period, a recognition developed for the need of mission to Black America. In 1891, Ellen White presented a “testimony” on the matter to the delegates of the General Conference session in which she “especially called for more work among the Southern Blacks. Her appeal soon went into print as a 16-page tract entitled *Our Duty to the Colored People*” (1999:103). However, her appeal for work among the Southern Blacks went unheeded until her son Edson White “discovered” the document in 1893 and teamed up with Will Palmer to build a traveling mission station boat, the *Morning Star*. Lacking the confidence and support of Adventist Church leadership, White’s and Palmer’s endeavors were mostly self-supporting. By 1896, the General Conference recognized the need for the education of Black workers and opened Oakwood Industrial School. When in 1901 Edson’s mission, known as the Southern Missionary Society, was merged with the newly established Southern Union Conference it had nearly 50 schools in operation. As the Adventist Church was awakening to its worldwide mission there was also a parallel awakening to the need of mission in the homeland encompassing racial, ethnic, and urban diversity in North America.

It would be helpful at this point to consider the background of the early Adventist leaders in relationship to urbanity. Just as most of the population in the early stages of the Adventist Church was from a rural background, so were its leaders. It is not surprising that the church grew most naturally in the more rural environments. Contributing to this tilt toward the rural was that for most of the leaders, cities were “foreign.” Of the three key founding leaders, only one, Ellen White, grew up in what then would have been called a city.

Joseph Bates, whom George Knight considers the “real founder of the Seventh-day Adventist,” was born in Rochester in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, on July 8, 1792. “The next year the family moved the seven miles to New Bedford, just across the Acushnet River from the town that became Fairhaven in 1812” (2004:2). In 1790, New Bedford was a small town with a total population of 3,313. It got its first post office in 1792 but experienced little growth over the next few decades with a population of just 3,947 in 1820. New Bedford did not become a city until 1847 with a population of around 15,000 (*Wikipedia* 2018; *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. New Bedford).

James White’s hometown of Palmyra, Somerset County, Maine, was even smaller and more rural than Joseph Bates’ hometown. It was incorporated in 1807 and when White was born there in 1821 Palmyra had a population of little over 360. Unlike New Bedford, Palmyra has remained a small town with a 2019 estimated population below 2,000 (U.S. Census Bureau 2019)

Ellen White was born in 1827 in Gorham, Maine, but shortly after her birth, the family moved to Portland, Maine. Except for a brief time between 1829 and 1833 when the family relocated to Poland, Maine, Ellen White grew up in Portland, the largest city in Maine (Moon and Fortin 2013:19). By 1840 Portland boasted of a population of over 15,000, and although not a large city by modern standards it was an important regional urban center of its day (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. Portland Maine). None-the-less, even her experience in Portland, Maine, would not prepare her for the challenges of the super cities, which were rapidly growing in the United States and elsewhere.

City mission was definitely not in the Adventist DNA from the beginning, as will be seen from Monte Sahlin’s introduction to the development of urban mission in the Adventist Church; however, his book *Mission in Metropolis: The Adventist Movement in an Urban World*, mentioned that it did take off when the circumstances were right.

From 1893 through 1893, the original city missions were established. These usually included housing for a team of Bible workers and literature evangelists, a reading room and bookstore, and a lecture room. During 1884, eight major articles appeared in the *Review* concerning city mission work. In *Testimony Number 32*, published in 1885, Ellen White released a 17-page letter written a year earlier to a conference president urging “The Support of City Mission.”

From 1885 through 1904, the General Conference published a yearly report on city missions. The first one indicates that the New York City mission had been operating since June 1883. The 1886 report included reports from 36 city missions. These employed 102 denominational workers with an additional 224 laity serving as staff interns and trainees.

The city missions during this era had the goal of planting Adventist congregations in unentered metropolitan areas. They “often faded away when [the] immediate objective in the establishment of a thriving church was completed.” (Sahlin 2007:8)

Some key points in Sahlin’s narrative are worth highlighting. First, city mission began with Ellen White’s strong endorsement. She would continue to press leadership to do more on behalf of city mission for the rest of her life. Second, when the church embarked on city mission there were sizable resources, compared to the size of the church at the time, devoted to reaching the cities. Sampling the *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book* during this time yields some amazingly ambitious plans. This relatively young and vibrant movement was still accustomed to putting their whole heart into any endeavor deemed critical.

The first two points Sahlin makes bode well for the development of city mission. However, the last two points give us some indication why city mission flourished for a time but did not ultimately have the same traction in SDA circles as foreign mission. In 1904, the GC published the last of the city mission reports which it had begun in 1885. Dropping the city mission report coincides with the 1901 and the 1903 reorganization of the administrative structure of the Adventist Church. The church during the next thirty years, under the combined leadership of A. G. Daniells and William A. Spicer, saw unparalleled growth in Adventist missions. Sadly, during this time that the GC leadership focused on foreign mission, home mission to cities declined in importance. Finally, Arthur White’s observation that city missions “often faded away when [the] immediate objective in the establishment of a thriving church was completed” (1970:3) is but one factor that could be cited for the demise of city mission in the North American Adventist Church.

It is fascinating to observe the rapid development of city mission from 1883 through the end of the century. Mention of “city missions” can be found in each of the *Seventh-day Adventist Year Books* from 1884 through 1891. A “Directory of City Missions” appeared in the 1904 *Year Book*. An even more fruitful read is found in the minutes to the GC Sessions during this period. On November 19, 1885, a “committee of nine was appointed to consider the matter of city missions, and report to this Conference in regard to the best methods of conducting them” (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1863-1888:272). Seven days later the newly appointed committee on city missions presented their recommendations with the following introduction.

Considering the character of our work, the extent to which the message must go, the limited time in which we have to perform the work assigned us, together with the fact that the Spirit of God has said that the time has come when we should enter our cities, villages, and towns, and that the standard of truth should be planted in the great thoroughfares of travel, the conviction urges itself upon us that vigorous steps should be taken, and wise plans laid, whereby the truth can be successfully carried forward in these localities. (1863-1888:285)

What follows are fourteen recommendations, some dealing with strategy and broad plans, and others pertaining to logistics and staffing needs in specific locations. The first recommendation is representative of the boldness in their thinking. "1. We therefore recommend that each conference having cities of sufficient size to [make] such a move desirable, have in its bounds at least one mission where there shall be special training and special instruction given to the workers in connection with their actual work in these missions, and thus prepare persons to enter other missions that must in the near future be opened" (1863-1888:285).

A lengthy tenth recommendation pertained to financial support. It recognized among other things, the need for differentiation in remuneration between settled workers employed by a conference and "persons who may be considered as experimental workers" who might receive as their remuneration "their board and lodging" until "they have become acceptable workers," and that "persons sent from one state to another to be instructed in a city mission" have their board and room-rent "paid by the conference which sends them" (1863-1888:285). Funding the expanding city mission was certainly a challenge. Later in the same GC Session, the Committee on Finances reported that there was "great need of a fund to support city missions outside of organized conferences" (1863-1888:300). They recommended that \$10,000 be raised for the support of city missions, which ostensibly was to come from Christmas donations solicited from "our people everywhere."

In the 1886 GC Session, a few items concerning city missions surfaced involving logistics of the work and screening potential workers, which were addressed. In the following year, on November 16, 1887 the Committee on City Missions reported on the need for "broader and more careful plans" (1863-1888:356). This nine-point "plan" was adopted the following year at the 1888 GC session focused primarily on education for city missions and canvassing work. Items one through three pertained to training to be offered at the main Adventist educational institutions. Items four through eight pertained to conference conducted city mission training schools. Four conferences were identified to conduct quarterly trainings "so as to accommodate workers from other conferences that may be

selected to receive a thorough preparation in all branches of this work" (1863-1888:357). Further details were provided on how persons sent to these schools should be screened. Item nine was a reminder of the ever-present financial concern, that if city missions were not run well that they would become a financial liability, which might "result in injury to the cause" (357).

The *Seventh-day Adventist Year Book for 1890* with the report of the 1889 GC Session has features related to city mission, which are worth noting. First, along with the one-page table of "Statistics of Home and Foreign Conferences and Missions" (1890:59) there are tables on two pages related to city missions, twelve in the United States, and in London, England (1890:60, 61), and "Population of Cities in the United States" lists 115 cities with population estimates for 1888, 1880, and 1870. Additionally, at the bottom of the page is a breakdown of the nationality or nativity of the foreign-born inhabitants of the United States, according to the census of 1880 (1890:140). The Great Britain report (65-67) highlighted cities with an enumeration of 192 towns having a population of over 10,000 inhabitants, and over twenty towns with a population of over 100,000. The report points out that while the area of the United Kingdom is smaller than that of California, the four cities of Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester, and Leeds, have a population equal to that of California, North Pacific, and Montana. "The United Kingdom, with an area . . . much less than California, has a population exceeding one half that of the United States" (66). The report further stated that "the London mission is paying quite a heavy rent, and has room for nearly a score of workers, but does not have one half that number at work in a city of 5,000,000 inhabitants" (67).

The original city missions, from 1883 through 1897, were characterized mainly by an emphasis on Bible workers and literature evangelists. During the second period of major city mission, from 1897 through 1904, the emphasis was on "health and social work alongside the continued efforts of Bible workers and evangelists. Dr. John H. Kellogg sponsored the most sophisticated of these 'medical missionary' projects in Chicago" (Sahlin 2007:8).

Kellogg's prominent involvement in city missions was soon to become a liability. At the turn-of-the-century when there was a crisis between the church administration and Kellogg, one of the casualties was the city mission work. Kellogg's drive for power and his ambitious plans, which tied up a large portion of the church's resources, elicited a number of Ellen White's counsels on this matter. "Much has been made of isolated quotes from Ellen White, often taken out of context that seem to discourage aggressive ministry in the large cities. . . . Prejudice against city life is mingled with misunderstood fragments to create a distorted picture of Ellen White's real views on urban mission" (Sahlin 2007:9).

A brief flurry of “large city evangelism” occurred in 1909 and 1910 as a result of Ellen White’s insistence that city mission should not be ignored. Unlike the 1909 session where Ellen White spoke in person many times throughout the session, in 1913 she sent greetings through her son W. C. White and two written messages to be read before the delegates. W. C. White, in delivering greetings from his mother, quotes her saying, “Tell our brethren I feel perfectly clear that it is God’s will that I shall remain at home and reserve what strength I have to help in the work of bringing my writings into book form” (White 1913:5-6).

In the first written message read on Ellen White’s behalf, she recalled her dissatisfaction with the leaders’ response in 1909. She then went on to say that when “those in positions of trust” gave prayerful and careful study of the “various messages given” and began to venture out to implement what they learned, “It has brought great rejoicing to my heart to see the marvelous transformations that have been wrought in the lives of some who thus chose to advance by faith in the way of the Lord, rather than to follow a way of their own choosing” (White 1913:34). It appears that the two individuals that White had singled out to take a more decided leadership in city mission, Prescott and Daniells, had begun to do so, at least in her view. I have not found any further references in her writing on this matter.

Examining the 1918 General Conference Bulletins, there is evidence of renewed interest in city mission, but it is important to notice a shift in focus. At that time, the emphasis was primarily on reaching major immigrant groups under the auspices of the newly created Home Missionary Department. The North American Division Conference organized this department at its Executive Committee in the autumn of 1914, shortly after the division itself was organized in 1913 (Evans 1918:25).

In the 1918 General Conference Daniells, as expected, addresses a number of topics in his presidential address. He began his remarks on city work by reminding the listeners of the “stirring messages that came to us through the Spirit of Prophecy a few years ago in behalf of the masses gathered in our large cities” (Daniells 1918:4). He then related how at that time they “had done little real successful work in these great congested centers. . . . But aroused by oft repeated and most urgent messages, we applied ourselves to the great understating. Our efforts have been blessed of God. We have made good headway” (4).

Daniells closed his address by reading extensively from Ellen White’s first message shared at the 1913 General Conference Session, which he introduces as follows. “At the opening of our conference five years ago there came to us through the Spirit of prophecy a most cheering, encouraging, uplifting message” (1918:5). It almost seemed that he was taking a victory lap over the effort put forth in working for the cities.

Despite Daniells' and Spicer's exceptional emphasis on world missions during their shared time as General Conference President and Secretary from 1901 through 1926, the North American Church would begin to lose ground in the cities during their tenure. Even though some in the church would periodically attempt to revive church planting in the cities over the subsequent years, inner city church planting focused on those born in the United States has languished. The possible exception to this is ethnic congregations focused on recent immigrants. Membership trends for the population born in the United States for multiple generations is stark. Were it not for the influx of recent immigrants into the Adventist Church, membership trends would be similar to the downward trend of many mainline churches. Make no mistake; the North American Adventist Church has crossed a threshold into stagnation and decline. The root causes of the ineffectiveness in reaching the vast populations in urban areas must be discovered and responded to before the church loses its capacity to function.

In a subsequent paper, I will explore the years following the 1918 General Conference and a new movement within Adventism that focused on the families and the evils of the city. W. A. Spalding and others through the Home Commission, created in 1919, would be instrumental in fanning an anti-city movement among North American Adventists. The subsequent study will examine the various factors that contributed to blunting the church's dedication to and effectiveness in urban mission.

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