

et al.: Spiritual Warfare

# SPIRITUAL WARFARE

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## Editorial

One of the neglected topics among Adventists seems to be how to deal with demonic influence and harassment. Most Adventist pastors in Western societies have received very little if any formal training on how to help people who are demonized. This is happening at a time when the West, in its trend towards greater secularization, sees more and more evidence of people turning to Eastern religious practices that are often infected with occult activities. Movies, and Media are also pushing an agenda that emphasizes supernatural powers. The Catholic Church has reacted by training hundred of exorcists to handle the needs of their members and in response to what is happening in their communities.

This issue of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* focuses on spiritual warfare with several articles answering questions that many have regarding this growing phenomenon. Several of the authors are from the African continent, perhaps because they are more experienced in this area and have a lot to share with us in the West.

Jerry Chase offers part two of his article on the anti-urban attitude so prevalent among Seventh-day Adventists and digs deep to discover some of the underlying reasons for this. At a time when more than fifty percent of the world's population lives in urban centers, his presentation is timely to help nudge us to a more balanced approach to the world's cities.

Andrew Tompkins takes an in-depth look at the context of Ellen White's statements concerning how God views the "heathen" and those "knowing little of the law" to help us better understand that God judges people based on the light they have, which perhaps does not bode well for so many who have great knowledge, but with a gap between what they know and how they live.

Bruce L. Bauer, editor



MICHÉE BADÉ

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# Demonization of Christians: Missiological Perspectives and Implications

## Introduction

This article is a missiological reflection on the phenomenon of Christian demonization from a Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) perspective. The article argues from the four voices approach in theology (see Cameron et al. 2010; Cameron and Duce 2013), and contends that Christians can *be demonized*, have been demonized throughout the Christian church history, and are still demonized today across all Christian denomination lines. This is the position that appears in a few SDA publications, and is not in contradiction with the Scriptures. I suggest that demonization and demon possession are etymologically and phenomenologically the same. Thus, this paper builds on the assumption that Christian demonization is not just a claim from deliverance ministry practitioners with an operant theology but a missiological phenomenon with inreach and outreach dimensions. The phenomenon is encountered in formal and normative theologies as well, as it is an exposed theology from an operant theology.

As such, this article points out that many mainline Christian denominations (Roman Catholics, Protestants like non-charismatic evangelicals, Seventh-day Adventists, etc.) have recently emphasized practical ministries in their denominations to face the needs of their members struggling with demonization. These denominations have moved from an attitude closed to the possibility of ministry to demonized members to a more open attitude with a willingness to consider the issue and explore potential solutions.



The article first addresses briefly the seeming controversy on the translation of the Greek terms *daimonizomenos* (participle), and *daimonizomai* (verb). These terms, together with *echo/echei daimonion*, are translated in some Bible texts “possessed with the devil” (Mark 5:15, 16, 18, KJV), “demon- possessed” (Matt 8:28–32; Mark 5:15, 16, 18, Luke 8:27, NKJV or NIV etc.). Second, this article asserts that Christians are best categorized by the centered set theory and not otherwise (see Hiebert 1978, 1994, 2008). Consequently, this missiological reflection emphasizes that Christian demonization has missiological implications for Christian mission in general and SDA mission in particular. Finally, the article argues that theological research is enriched when the four voices of theology—the formal or academic theology, the espoused theology, the normative theology, and the operant theology are brought “into conscious conversation so that all voices can be enriched” (Cameron and Duce 2013:xxx). This means that each theological voice must interpenetrate the others and influence them (xxx).

### Translation Issues with the Koine Greek Verb *daimonizomai*

The New Testament Greek uses the common verb *daimonizomai* in the synoptic gospels. Some contend that its general translation—*demon possession* or *to be possessed by a demon* (see Anrdt and Gingrich 1952:168; Brown 1975:453)—is improper and misleading (Dickason 1978, 1987:37-39; Kraft 1992, 1994:79-81, 2011:38-39; Unger 1991:97). The confusion in translation, according to many, lies in the fact that the English word *possession* suggests ownership (Dickason 1987:38; Kraft 2011:38). Charles Kraft, for instance, asserts that the translations *demon possession* or *demon possessed* give too much credit to Satan and too much control to demons (2011:38).

As such, advocates of the term demonization argue that a better translation for the Greek verb *daimonizomai* should emphasize the passivity of the victims of demonization and not an implication of ownership. To make his point Dickason gives special attention to the root and structure of the Greek verb and demonstrates that *daimonizomenos*, the participle form of *daimonizomai* with the same root is used only “in the present tense, indicating the continued state of one inhabited by a demon, or demonized” (1987:37).

This participle has components to its structure. First there is the root, *daimon*, which indicates the involvement of demons. Second is the causative stem, *iz*, which shows that there is an active cause in this verb. Third is the passive ending *omenos*. This conveys the passivity of the person described as demonized. Putting it all together, the participle in its root form means “a demon caused passivity.” This indicates

control other than that of the person who is demonized; he is regarded as the recipient of the demon's action. In other words, demonization pictures a demon controlling a somewhat passive human. (Dickason 1987:37)

Owusu-Antwi (2011:60) concurs and asserts that this passivity in the participle form *daimonizomenos* "depicts the active involvement of a demon or demons and indicates that the victim is passive *when* the demon acts." Owusu-Antwi further comments:

The expressions that usually are used to describe the condition of demon possession are *echo daimonion*, to be "held or possessed by a demon" (e.g., Luke 8:27) or *daimonizomai*, to "be demonized" (e.g., Matt 4:24; 8:28). It has been observed that the English expression "demon possession" may have originated with Flavius Josephus in the first century A.D. and then passed into ecclesiastical language (Owusu-Antwi 2011:59 referring to Unger 1971:101 and Edersheim 1969:1).

While I agree that the seeming confusion around ownership and passivity in the etymology of *daimonizomai*/*daimonizomenos* should be addressed, I do not share the view that demonization, the new terminology suggested and being adopted, describes a different phenomenon. If "the term for the condition of a demonized person may be derived from *daimonizomenos*" (Owusu-Antwi 2011:60), and *daimonizomai* as indicated earlier means to "be possessed by a demon (Anrdt and Gingrich 1952:168; Bietenhard 1975:453) demonization or to be demonized are etymologically and phenomenologically the same as the translations "demon possession" or "possessed by demon." This has been my understanding in my previous publications where I used the terms "demonized" or "demonization" (see Badé 2017:120, 2020:18). Carter points out:

While the addition of the word "demonization" to the English language has caused confusion, as long as it is used simply as a substitute translation for the Greek verb *daimonizomai* and the meaning of the original Greek word is retained, there is no problem in adopting this term. However, if, in the process of adopting this new word, the implied English meaning of the Greek word is changed, then the use of this new word is unacceptable (Carter 2000:22).

I believe Carter makes a fair point in this case (although I disagree with him in his later conclusions). Demonization or being demonized is the same phenomenon assumed by the New Testament Greek terms *daimonizomai*, which occurs 13 times in the gospels (Matt 4:24; 8:16, 28, 33; 9:32; 12:22; 15:22; Mark 1:32; 5:15, 16, 18; Luke 8:36; John 10:21), and

*daimonizomenos*, which occurs 12 times (see Bietenhard 1975:453; Carter 2000:26; Dickason 1987:37; Owusu-Antwi 2011:60). Consequently, when using demonization or demonized it is important that authors do not infer any less phenomenology.

### Control Issues in the Implications of Demon Possession or Demonization

Merrill Frederick Unger (1909-1980) is one of the 20th century's well-known authors on the subject of biblical demonology. His understanding of a demon's control over the person they inhabit grew over the years from "complete control" while defining "demon possession" in 1971 (see Unger 1971:102-108), to an understanding six years later that demons do not have "complete control" when in the body of their victims (see Unger 1977:87). Below are Unger's two different definitions of demon possession mentioned above.

"Demon possession is a condition in which one or more evil spirits or demons inhabit the body of a human being and can take complete control of their victim at will. By temporarily blotting out his consciousness, they can speak and act through him as their complete slave and tool" (Unger 1971:102). "Both demon invasion and so-called 'demon possession' are, as already noted, more accurately defined biblically as "demonization" (Gk. *daimonizomai*, meaning "being demonized," i.e., 'under the control of one or more demons'; see Matthew 4:24; Mark 1:32; Luke 8:316). Another Greek expression means 'to have a demon' (*echei dairnonion*, see Luke 7:33; John 7:20)" (Unger 1977:86).

Dickason (1987:38) points out that like Unger, his understanding of the control that demons have over a demonized person developed over the years as well. According to Dickason, the use of *daimonizomenos* in the gospels (Matt 8:28; 9:32; 12:22) "means 'demon-caused passivity,' or control by one or more demons with various results in the life of the person including the physical and the psychological." It is true that the various Bible texts above used by Dickason describe cases of demonization with the demons' control leading to abnormal behavior, supernatural strength, and/or knowledge, etc. But one cannot conclude that these demonic manifestations imply the "control of human neurology and physiology—the control of an individual's higher centers, central nervous system, individual organs of the body, et cetera" (Donkor 2011:205).

Thus, referring to Unger, Dickason asserts that the term *demon possession*, unfortunately, "has been commonly used, not to refer correctly to all cases of demon invasion, but incorrectly to refer only to the basest and most enslaving forms, such as those represented by the demoniac of Gadara (Mark 5:1-20)" (Unger 1977:87 quoted in Dickason 1987:38).

So, although many sources present the Gadarene or Gerasene demoniac (s) of Mathew 8 or Mark 5 and Luke 8 as “typical” cases of demon possession or demonization in the Scriptures (see Carter 2000:22; Lane 1974:170; Wiyono 2017:47), it is accurate to say, based on a brief look at the different incidents of demonization in the Bible, that the type of demonization described here cannot be described as “typical” but as atypical, unusual, or exceptional. First, when something is “typical” it means that such a thing is common, regular, expected, representative, predictable, etc. It is something that represents the average distinctive characteristics of that type of thing (see *Merriam-Webster* 1984:839; Thompson 1993:989). For instance, it is right to say that *koinonia* (communion, fellowship, gathering) “is a typical Pauline term” because Paul used it 13 times in his epistles (Schattenmann 1975:641).

The narrative of Mark 5 with the demoniac (s) of Gadara is often used as a classic case of demon possession. One can count roughly ten characteristics in that type of demonization: dwelling among the tombs (v. 3), resisting binding by chains (v. 3), resisting discipline (v. 4), self-mutilation with stones while crying night and day (v. 5), instantaneous worship of Jesus (v. 6), imploration of Jesus with a loud voice (v. 7), the presence of up to 6,000 demons (v. 9), begging Jesus to stay in a territory (v. 10), begging Jesus to be allowed to enter animals (v. 12), and destroying animals life (v. 13). Unfortunately, less than half of the above characteristics are found in other cases of demonization in the New Testament. What one can call *typical* or *regular* of demon possession in the New Testament from the actual encounters and a few others cases could be: (1) physical violence like sudden outbursts or stiffness, convulsions, crying out, foaming, etc. (Matt 15:22-28; 17:14-20; Mark 1:23-27; 9:17-29; Acts 8:7), (2) sicknesses like being mute, blind, or having restricted mobility (Matt 9:32, 33; 12:22, 23; Luke 13:11, 16).

This so-called typical case of demon possession of the Gadarene demoniac(s) is often associated with the overemphasized and unrealistic notion of total, full, or complete control. If the demons’ goal against human beings is the ultimate destruction of people it is hard to believe that a legion of demons (5,000-6,000) could control 2,000 pigs and cause the herd to run “violently down the steep place into the sea, and drown” (Mark 5:14) while but at the same time these same demons were unable to destroy a single man while “controlling” him for such a long period of time. They were even unable to control the man and prevent him from going toward Jesus who obviously was going to cast them out of the man. Mark says “when he saw Jesus from afar, he ran and worshiped Him” (5:6). Luke asserts that “when he saw Jesus, he cried out, fell down before Him” (8:28).

It is true that “in causing the destruction of the swine, it was Satan’s purpose to turn the people away from the Saviour and prevent the preaching of the gospel in that region” (White 1898:340). Satan, through his legions of demons, could not control the will of the demoniac(s). “They realized dimly that One was near who could save them from the tormenting demons. They fell at the Saviour’s feet to worship Him; but when their lips were opened to entreat His mercy, the demons spoke through them” (White 1898:337, 338). The demons had control over their tongues, and maybe voices but not over their understanding and will. They ran to Jesus not necessarily to hurt him. Other similar instances of confrontations with Jesus show that demons felt tormented by Jesus’ presence because they knew his power and authority over them. The demoniacs ran to Jesus because they wanted to be set free and the demons could not prevent them from such action. While it is true that the demons had some level of control over them, it is also true that it was not total or complete over every aspect of human anatomy or physiology.

Then there is the case of the boy with the demon who caused epilepsy, tried to kill him through water or fire, or who threw him down with foaming of the mouth, gnashing of teeth, and rigidity (Matt 17:14-20; Mark 9:17-29). Could it be that the authors of Matthew and Mark deliberately or unwittingly overlooking other cases of demonization recorded in the Bible and used one type of demonization to describe all the cases they had seen? Look for instance at the narrative in Acts 16:16-18 where a young female slave had a python spirit or a spirit of divination or fortune-telling.

This type of demonization was common in the first century with the influence of the astrological worldview of that time (Dybdahl 2010:1445–1466; see also my article on adoricism in this issue). Today too, mediums, soothsayers, diviners of all kinds predict the future for profit. Among them are counterfeits with no supernatural power while others have connection with fallen angels of high ranks and have real demonic powers. The slave python-spirit-possessed girl seems to have belonged to the latter group (see Fernando 1998:444). As the serpent or dragon in charge of protecting the oracle at Delphi in Greek mythology, the Python “was worshipped at Delphi as the symbol of wisdom” (Nichol 1980:6:330). General Greek belief attributed the power to foretell the future to the Pythiai—the priestesses at the Delphi to the python spirit (Rodríguez 2020:1514).

From a superficial point of view there was nothing wrong with what the python-spirit- possessed slave girl was saying about Paul and Silas. She was not doing them any harm, but rather she was speaking approvingly of them. “These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17, NKJV). However, a careful look at the narrative in its cultural context could show perhaps a totally

different picture. It would have been too good to believe that the evil spirit in the slave girl was supporting Christ's mission. White (1911:212) argues that the girl's "influence had helped to strengthen idolatry" and that Satan used the means of divination to oppose God's work, "hoping to mingle his sophistry with the truths taught by those who were proclaiming the gospel message." She further points out:

The words of recommendation uttered by this woman were an injury to the cause of truth, distracting the minds of the people from the teachings of the apostles and bringing disrepute upon the gospel, and by them many were led to believe that the men who spoke with the Spirit and power of God were actuated by the same spirit as this emissary of Satan. (1911:212)

Although she spoke positively of Paul and Silas, just like the publicity given to Jesus by demons in Luke 4:33-37; 8:26-36, she herself was sowing tares. Diviners and soothsayers are exposed and condemned in the Scriptures (Lev 19:31; Deut 18:10-12). As such her exact revelation concerning Paul and Silas was not going to help the cause of Christ and produce good fruit—rather she was hurting Christ's mission. And Paul, empowered by the Holy Spirit, discerned this. Why Paul did not rebuke the python spirit the very first day or why he waited many days before doing so is not known. Some have suggested that "Paul patiently waited for several days, probably hoping to avoid the consequences of conflict" (Rodríguez 2020:1514).

But, when Paul decided to act, it was to avoid any confusion over the source of their teachings and the divinations of the spirit possessed girl. "Paul and his companions would have been perceived as mere clairvoyants, like her" (Rodríguez 2020:1514).

Since she is said to have been possessed of a "Python spirit" (see on Acts 16:16), her words need to be considered against their pagan background. When, therefore, she spoke of "the most high God" she was probably referring to the common heathen conception of a vague divine being who was supposed to preside over the well-known Greek pantheon. Nevertheless, her words expressed great truth. The Christians whom she was following were truly the servants of the one and only most high God. (Nichol 1980:6:330)

It is good to know that the Greek word *manteuomai* (soothsaying) used in Acts 16:17 is always used in the LXX to designate lying prophets (Deut 18:10; 1 Sam 28:8; Ezek 13:6; etc.), and its usage only in Acts 16 in the New Testament "may be taken in the same sense: 'to pretend to foretell the

future” (Nichol 1980:330). Nichol further asserts that “the girl’s darkened mind was longing for a share in ‘the way of salvation,’ but the demon within her was challenging that ‘way,’ and her words impeded the missionaries’ work” (1980:6:330).

Hence, like Christ (see Mark 5:7; Luke 8:29), Paul commanded, in the name of Jesus, for the python spirit to come out of the slave girl, and the spirit obeyed promptly, just as the spirits had obeyed Jesus in many instances (see Matt 15:28; Mark 1:31; 9:26; John 4:53). Nevertheless, it is important to note, not all commands made by Jesus or the disciples were always promptly obeyed or obeyed at all. For example, see Matt 17:16, 19 where the disciples commanded the demon to come out but with no response, or in Mark 5:8 where Jesus continued to command the spirits to come out. Nichol argues that Jesus was commanding the demon (s) to come out of the man but “the spirit startlingly interrupted and challenged Him” (1980:5604). White concurs in her comments on the same Bible text and asserts that “the demon resisted the power of Christ” (1996:184, 185).

Although nothing else is said in the narrative about the spirit-possessed slave girl after her deliverance, “it is surely permissible to think that she became a Christian [White 1911:213] and found shelter with the women who ‘labored’ with the apostle (Phil 4:3)” (Nichol 1980:6:331). That the slave girl expressed indirectly her need of physical and spiritual deliverance cannot be concluded from the literal text. But some have suggested, that while it is “not dogmatically stated” that the girl expressed in her repeated predictions about Paul and Silas a desire for a better knowledge of God (see Murphy 1992:325, cited in Fernando 1998:444).

Acts 16:16-18 presents a different type of demon possession or demonization often overlooked by some theologians but well known to anthropologists and familiar to some missiologists. Some astrologers, fortunetellers, palm readers, psychics, tarot card readers, occultists, etc. have real satanic power and work with demonic entities in perfect symbiosis. These spirit-ists often advertise openly without sensing they are involved in any social abnormal behavior. Otherwise, they would be reported to law enforcement agents and not be able to make a living in many countries where their offices or centers are visible on main streets and well-known in the communities like any other legitimate practice. This type of spirit possession or demonization is called *adorcism* because the possessed person invites and welcomes the demons whose presence is deemed valuable to them and their communities (see Openshaw 2020:6).

Acts 16:16-18 reports a case of *adorcism*. Therefore, not all cases of demonization in the Scriptures are characterized by abnormal behavior, supernatural strength, illness, or social isolation. Like the case of Acts 16:16-19, the demoniac in Mark 1:23-26 was in the synagogue unnoticed until he

came face to face with Jesus. This man had an apparently normal social life like many demonized people today. He might have been aware of his spiritual condition as are many today or he might not have been conscious about his demonization—also is the case today. The demoniac in Mark 1 was not a social outcast or quarantined like the demoniacs of Mathew 8 or the one in Mark 5 and Luke 8. These cases illustrate that there are various types of demonization.

### Classification Issues—Category of Christians

It is important to briefly look at the question, What is a Christian? Simply put, a Christian, from the Greek *Christianos*, is a follower of Christ. The name was used first in Antioch of Syria about ten years or so after Jesus's resurrection to describe Christ's early followers, as groups or as individuals because their behavior, activity, and speech were like Christ (Acts 11:26) and in another two instances in the New Testament by Agrippa who confessed to Paul of almost being persuaded by his speech to become a Christian (Acts 26:28) and in 1 Peter 4:16 referring to suffering "as a Christian" as an honor. Among themselves, Christians used terms like brethren, (Acts 1:16; Rom 1:13; 1 Cor 1:26; etc.), elect, (Rom 8:39; Col 3:12; etc.), saints, (1 Thess 3:13; 1 Tim 5:10; etc.), believers (Acts 5:14; 1 Tim 4:12).

There were also many restorative titles used to describe Christians, such as body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), born again (1 Pet 1:23), branches (John 15:5), children of light (1 Thess 5:5), new creature (2 Cor 5:17), habitation of God (Eph 2:22), sanctified (1 Cor 1:2), saints (Heb 6:10), temple of God, of the Living God (1 Cor 3:16; 2 Cor 6:16), and washed (1 Cor 6:11) (Smith 1998:50-53).

Based on such titles for Christians and other biblical designations for God's people some have come to distinguish two uses of the terms *Christian*. First, the broad sense of the term Christian with no evaluation or approval either spiritual, moral, or doctrinal is "any individual or group that identifies Jesus Christ as its primary religious figure is 'Christian' and is part of the world religion known as Christianity. In this sense, really any group that identifies itself as Christian is defined as such for the purposes of religious classification" (Bowman 2018:127). The second use, which is narrower, classifies as Christian an individual or group with a doctrine and behavior "considered adequately representative of what Christ's followers should believe and do" (127).

From a missiological perspective, there are some limits with such classifications of the category Christian. Yes, a Christian is someone who repents from his/her sinful ways (Acts 17:30) and embraces by faith Christ's



death and resurrection for the forgiveness of his/her sin, while living in justification before God (John 3:16; Eph 2:1-10), and through an ongoing display of his/her sincere and genuine life of faith (2 Cor 6:15; 1 Tim 4:10, 12; Jas 2:14-26) while realizing that his/her works do not contribute to his/her salvation (Eph 2:8). Such a Christian is a part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), is call a “saint” (Eph 1:1, 5:3; 1 John 3:2) and will be resurrected at the glorious second coming of Christ and be given an imperishable body to reign with Christ forever in a recreated universe (Phil 3:20, 21; Rev 21, 22). However, such is not the reality of conversion in mission.

The narrow classification of Christian above generally accepted across many Christian denominations presents conversion as a bonded set. The origin of the theory of sets is attributed to the Russian-born German mathematician Georg Cantor (1845-1918) whose discovery stimulated 20th century exploration of number theory (Cunningham 2016:x, 20, 111).

Hiebert argues that most Westerners with their two-tiered view of life have a bounded set mentality, because many of their daily words (apples, oranges, pencils, and pens) refer to bounded set concepts, which he believes stem from Greek civilization (1978:26). Hiebert points out that in a bounded set mentality or worldview, objects that share some common characteristics are put together. For instance, fruits with characteristics such as from a rosaceous tree, eaten raw or cooked, usually red, yellow, or green, firm, fleshy, somewhat round, will be called apples (1978:26). Thus, with characteristics, such as uniformity and stationery, the category apple is created and identified. Every apple in that category belongs to a set with clear boundaries—creating a bounded set (1978:26-27).

Applied to the category Christian, a bounded set mentally among classical expectations from evangelicals and other mainline Protestant denominations in the case of proof of conversion to Christianity includes (1) a minimum Bible knowledge, and (2) the necessity to live a good life (Hiebert 1994:108; 2008:314). That is, a Christian is someone with specific characteristics within a defined group. However, Hiebert argues that such expectations are not realistic sometimes because the converts in a mission field are illiterate or for other reasons (1994:108; 2008:314). Therefore, Hiebert advocates for a centered set approach to conversion because the set does not have clear boundaries. Rather, the set makes a clear separation between objects moving into and those moving out of the set (1978:28). Thus, the set is formed by defining a center and the relationship of objects to that center. When the set is made up of all objects moving towards the center it is a centered set (1978:27-28; 1983:423). However, “objects within the set are not categorically uniform, some may be near the center and others far from it, even though all are moving towards the center” (1978:28; 1983:423-424). This makes the set a centered set that has variation within

a category (1978:28). To belong to the set, elements, although far from the center, will have to be moving towards the center. Hence, elements close to the center, but not moving towards the center, will be excluded from the set (1978:28).

Hiebert also recognized some limits in defining the category Christian from only two perspectives (bounded set and centered set). Pushing his thinking further, Hiebert arrived at four ways to view conversion.

### **Hiebert's Four Ways to View Conversion or the Category Christian**

#### Intrinsic Well-Formed Bounded Sets

Hiebert describes intrinsic well-formed bounded sets in two presentations (1994:112-116; 2008:33, 34, 186-189, 311, 312).

*Characteristics of Conversion:* 1. To be an adherent of the set elements are expected to have an "existential" change. 2. Elements of the set are to be "ontologically homogeneous" and physically static. 3. Adherents of the set are expected to have a visible and similar inherent required essential character in a group with a "clear boundary."

*Implications for Converts:* 1. A person is only considered a convert when the required elements have passed the test of "orthodoxy and orthopraxy (right and same theology and behavior) with the expectation that entry into the set be similar to previous conversion." This means a verbal affirmation of belief in a specific set of doctrines. As such, conversion is "a single dramatic" and "essential change all Christians must experience to be saved" (1994:115). 2. Each convert must exhibit a Christian-like character. "Once a person is a Christian, he or she is 100 percent Christian" (1994:116; cf. 2008:311-112).

#### Well Formed Centered Sets

Hiebert describes well-formed centered sets in the 1983 July issue of the *International Review of Mission* (421-427) and in *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (1994:122-127)

*Characteristics of Conversion:* 1. To be an adherent of the set, elements must relate to the "defined center" of the set which is the "reference point." 2. The sharp boundary of the set between members and non-members of the set is created by the elements' relationship and allegiance to the central point of the set. 3. "Membership or entry into or exit from the set is not about distance but direction."

*Implications for Converts:* 1. Each convert accepts and makes “Jesus Christ the center and Lord of his/her life” [and] . . . acquires knowledge about Jesus through the relationship he/she has with Him (Deut. 34:10; Judg. 2:10; John 17:3) and not through “a mental assent on biblical and historical facts about Jesus” (1994:125). 2. “There is no cheap nor costly grace” since conversion is both a “definite event” and “an ongoing process” and as such, “a Christian is not a finished product the moment he or she is converted” (1994:127). Thus, each Christian is “expected to grow because each decision taken by a Christian . . . (Deut. 4:10; 1 Sam. 7:3; Isa. 55:7 Josh. 20:6; Judg. 21:1) leads him/her towards or away from Christ” (1994:127).

### Intrinsic Fuzzy Sets

Hiebert refers to intrinsic fuzzy sets in his 1983:425-427, 1994:118-121, and 2008:311 presentations dealing with sets.

*Characteristics of Conversion:* 1. There are no fixed conditions expected of adherents who wish to be elements of the set since the “intrinsic nature defines membership in the set.” 2. The set has “no sharp edges,” “no either-or” reality for adherents of the set, “rather degrees of inclusion or a continuum of variability like most of life’s matters” (1994:119). 3. Adherent of this set “may belong to two or more sets at the same time” (1994:119).

*Implications for Converts:* 1. Conversion takes place after a cumulation of many decisions to follow Christ. Hence, conversion is “a gradual movement from outside to inside the set based on the gradual acquisition of the necessary beliefs and practices or on a series of small decisions and not a decisive event like in a well-formed set. Conversion to Christianity will have “no point in the process where the person suddenly becomes a Christian” (1983:425; 1994:121; 2008:311). 2. Converts could be “half Christians, three-quarter Christians, etc., according to the number of beliefs they affirm. Christians will be qualified in terms of degree, which unfortunately could shift in the area of moral judgments of “bad or good” or “false or true” (1994:121).

### Extrinsic Fuzzy Sets

Extrinsic fuzzy sets are described by Hiebert in his 1994 article (131, 132) and in his 2008 book, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (311).

*Characteristics of Conversion:* 1. “Membership in the set is based on elements’ relationship among one another and/or a defined center with fuzzy boundaries.” This means that “relationship within the set can move from one extreme to the other, from near to nonexistent, from being in to

being outside the set" (1994:131). 2. There is "no sharp point transition" between adherents' entrance or exit of the set. "Degrees of membership and distance of members from the center qualify the differences in the strength of members' relationships" with the center (1994:131).

*Implications for Converts:* 1. The process of conversion has no beginning point and needs no "turning around and going in a new direction." As such, converts are people who relate to Christ and see him "as Lord, guru, philosopher or any other good man" who can show them the way and teach them the truth (1994:132). 2. Christians in this set are not different from non-Christians. "There are only degrees of being Christian because a person might make Christ the Lord of some areas of his/her life but not others. Thus, a faithful disciple of Christ is of the same value in the set as a casual follower, a person only interested in his teachings, or even a person indifferent or opposed to Christ" (1994:132).

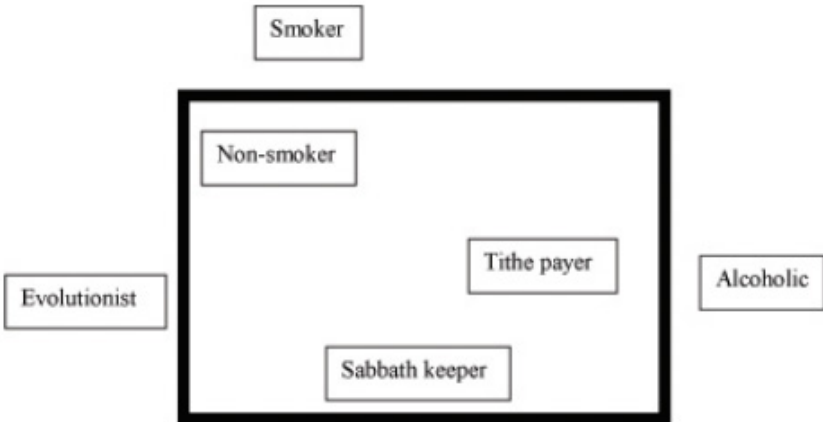
Hiebert argues that out of the four ways to view conversion above, the "well-formed centered set" approach to conversion seems the most theologically balanced and culturally acceptable (1983:123-125; 1994:125-127). First, because "a mental assent" to "biblical and historical facts about Jesus" is not a prerequisite before conversion. What is needed is an individual allegiance of each convert to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior with the expectation of growth in knowledge about Jesus through the relationship he/she has with Him" (Hiebert 1994:125). Second, the centered set approach to conversion or mission solves the problem of cheap or costly grace, because conversion is both a definite event and an ongoing process. As such, "a Christian is not a finished product the moment he or she is converted" but, each Christian is expected to grow because each decision taken by a Christian leads him/her towards or away from Christ (1994:124, 127).

Hiebert rejects a bounded set approach to mission because it is too legalistic with its focus on boundaries and maintaining the purity of the set (1994:115). For instance, a convert in a bounded set church will be one who has passed the test of orthodoxy and orthopraxy (right and same theology and behavior) with the expectation that entry into the set will be similar to all those who have joined the set through previous conversions (Hiebert 1994:115). According to Hiebert, conversion in such Christian communities means a verbal affirmation of belief in a specific set of doctrines and a single dramatic and "essential change all Christians must experience to be saved" (1994:115). Hence, Hiebert contends that a bounded set approach to conversion, mission, and church overlooks the work of the Holy Spirit and underestimates the dynamic relationship each member progressively has with the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (1983:427). However, Hiebert's biggest contention is against "a fuzzy set approach to conversion" because that approach "raises difficult theological questions" (2008:309-310).

Hiebert’s writings on set theory and its related concepts have been generally welcomed and appreciated among missionaries and missiologists where conversion in a Christian life is a determining factor in mission (Yoder et al. 2009:182). But, contrary to missiologists, some theologians engaged, warned, and disagreed with one another on Hiebert’s concept (184). However, one can point out that Hiebert’s overall conclusion on set theory, as indicated above, was balanced with sufficient safeguards against its misuse.

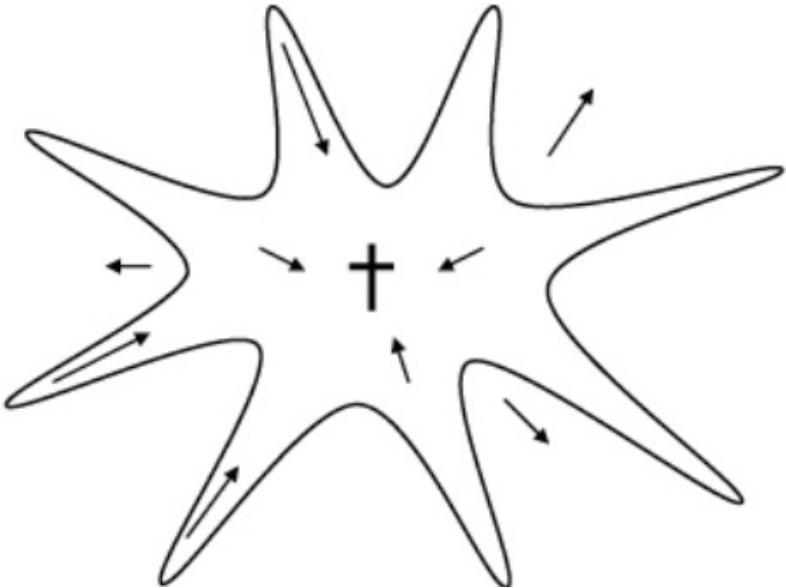
Bruce Bauer (2007:73,74), for instance, suggests a new model that combines the strengths of both bounded and centered set approaches. Bauer (71) describes such an approach as a funnel—a pipe or tube often used to guide liquid or anything into a container with a small opening because it is wide at the upper part and narrow at the bottom. According to Bauer, such an approach makes mission biblical and practical in the sense that the initial approaches to converts in the mission field are those of a centered set approach and the final perspectives of the approach are those of a bounded set approach (74, 75). Arguing from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective, Bauer contends that such an approach preserves specific denominational traditions and identity (75). Bauer asserts that in his suggested model, “as people move toward the spout there is a narrowing and movement towards the center or even movement towards a bounded set in the center of the centered set” (71). See Bauer’s different presentations of bounded, centered, and combined centered-bounded sets below.

**Bounded Set**



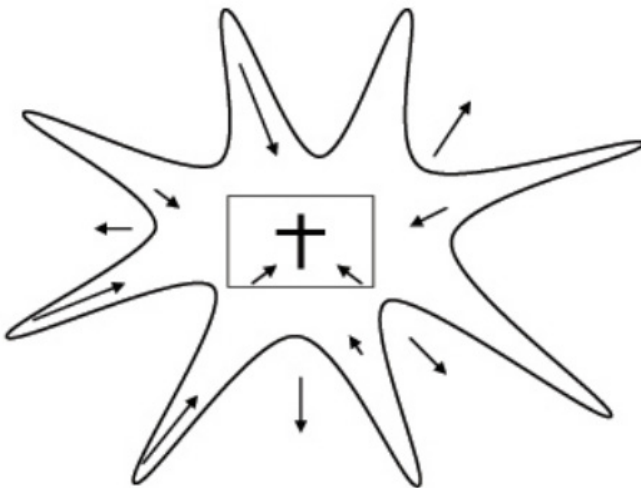
Bauer 2007:61

### Centered Set



Bauer 2007:67

### Bounded Set with a Centered Set



see Bauer 2007:75

## Christian Demon Possession or Demonization Issues among Christians

### Implication for Christian Missions

As seen above some of the restorative titles of Christians such as body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:27), new creature (2 Corinthians 5:17), temple of the Living God (1 Corinthians 3:16; 2 Corinthians 6:16), etc. imply for many Christians that a born-again believer, Christian cannot be demon possessed or have a demon (Carter 2000; Hart 2001; Stanford 1988; Wan 2003; Wiyono 2017 etc...). These opponents to the thesis of Christians' demonization further point to many other Bible verses to support their view (see Dickason 1987:80-100).

### Suggested Biblical Evidence against Demon Possession among Christians

<b>Bible Passage</b>	<b>Texts (ESV)</b>
Psalm 5:4	"For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you."
Matthew 6:13	"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."
John 10:22-29	"My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand. I and the Father are one."
John 12:31	"Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out.
John 16:11	"...Concerning judgment, because the ruler of this world is judged."
John 17:15	"I do not ask that you take them out of the world, but that you keep them from the evil one."
Acts 26:18	"open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me."
1 Cor 10:21	"You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons."

2 Cor 6:14-16	"Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness?"
Col 1:13;	"He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."
Col 2:14-15;	"by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him."
2 Thess 3:3	"But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one."
Heb 2:14-15	"Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery."
1 John 4:4	"Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world."
1 John 5:18;	"We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him."
Rev. 20:1-3	"Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while."

The Bible verses above touch on issue of spatial delimitation, ownership, identity, security, moral presence, modified presence, and salvation (in Dickason 1987:129-140). For instance, some argue that the Holy Spirit and demons cannot inhabit the same body (1987:129). However, there are many Christians who support a contrary view (Bubeck 1975, 1984; Dickason 1987; Kraft 1994, 2011, 2015; Moreau 1996; Unger 1977, 1991).



Bubeck, Unger, and Kraft have used a partitive anthropology to explain their point, although Kraft's approach is more from a dualistic anthropology (1992:67). Kraft represents humans as beings with innermost part (spirit) and outer parts (mind, emotions, body, and will), and demons can only occupy the outer parts (1992:67).

Bubeck and Unger particularly, based on 1 Thessalonians 5:23, argue from a tripartite concept of man: body, soul, and spirit and claim that demons can occupy a believer's body or soul, but they cannot invade his spirit where the Holy Spirit resides (Bubeck 1975:87-88; Unger 1977:86-87). Like Dickason, I believe that this attempt to theologically demonstrate the demonization of Christians is faulty. Dickason for instance points out that most standard theologians will say that the above view has very little support in the Bible because only 1 Thessalonians 5:23 puts body, soul, and spirit together in the Scriptures (1987:136). The human being is a holistic being that cannot be divided or compartmentalized. "The Bible teaches neither a trichotomist (spirit, soul, body) nor a dichotomist (soul, body) view of humans. Humans are unified beings" (Donkor 2011:101).

Dickason rather asserts that Psalms 5:4 states a clear principle: "That is, God does not take pleasure in wickedness is the same concept as God does not dwell with evil" (1987:95). Dickason contends that the "mutual exclusion of the presence of God and evil" cannot be supported from this passage "but the lack of pleasure or fellowship of God with evil" (1987:95). Consequently, Dickason concludes that God tolerating evil in his presence and having fellowship with evil "are certainly different" (1987:95). In other words, it is not impossible for God and evil to co-exist, rather, it is impossible to think of evil without thinking of God. From a Christian perspective, physical or natural evil such as natural disasters—earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, wildfires, or diseases like cancer resulting in great loss of human life, leads to the question of evil in the world despite God's holiness, goodness, and justice in governing the world.

Theodicy, from the Greek words *theos* (God) and *dikē* (justice), is "the theological or philosophical vindication of the justice of God, in view of His toleration of the existence of evil, both in the sense of wickedness and of calamity, in the world" (Cains 2002:481). However, while God has a sovereign reign over the world, Satan and his host still have an evil influence over earth and sea (Rev 12:12) and will continue to do so until the end of time (John 12:31). Thus, though Christians are citizens of the heavenly kingdom, they are still living on earth and are still under the influence of evil (1 John 2:13). Evil is present and is an affront to God and causes a dilemma; yet the Scriptures were not written specifically to give a rational argument of how God is holy, just, loving, and sovereign in the face of evil.

Unfortunately, those who defend the spatial delimitation of God and Satan or the Holy Spirit and demons often overlook the logic of one of God's three key divine attributes: His Omnipresence.

The biblical God is able to relate to space in a way that is impossible for limited human beings. God's historical, personal, direct presence is real and simultaneous in all places of His vast universe. This capability of God's being is known in theological language as God's omnipresence. (Dederen 2001:118)

Consequently, it is a fallacy to omit God's omnipotence in the idea of special delimitation. The Psalmist declares:

Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. (Psalm 139:7-12, ESV; cf. Job 26:6)

There is no place in this universe where God's presence is not manifested. That is what it means to be God. So, wherever Satan or demons are, or are planning to be, God is already there. God was present during Eve's temptation in Eden (Gen 3:1-7), He was present when the Israelites melted the gold earrings to make the golden calf (Exod 32:1-5); God was present when Saul went to the witch at Endor (1 Sam 28:1-25); God the father, God the Holy Spirit and God the Son were all present during Christ's temptation in the desert (Matt 4:1-11). It was in their holy presence that Lucifer became Satan (Ezek 28:11-19). The Bible declares that Lucifer dwelt in the very presence of God (Ezek 28:14).

The moral descent of this heavenly being to wickedness is incomprehensible. One thing is clear, namely, that he was a creature (vv. 13,15). Evil originated not in God but in a creature. Moses states that the serpent, whom NT writers later identified as Satan (Gen. 3:1; Rom. 16:20; 2 Cor. 11:14; Rev. 12:9; 20:2), was created, yet by sophistry and subtlety it deceived Eve. Like Tyre, this powerful angel was successful in trafficking (Ezek. 27:3; 28:5, 16, 18), albeit in iniquitous acts that generated violence (28:16; Heb. *khamas*, "malicious intent"; cf. Ex. 23:1) and sin. The notion of trafficking pictures a trader in wares going back and forth, plying his trade with skillful artistry to enrich himself in some way. . . . Just as Israel's iniquity profaned (24:21) God's sanctuary, so

the cherub corrupted his sanctuaries (v. 18; some manuscripts have the singular "sanctuary"). which presumably could refer to himself as the object of God's holiness or perhaps to his profanation of God's dwelling (v. 18). This was redressed by his expulsion from it. Like Tyre, all would be appalled that one so blessed of God could rebel and come to such an inglorious end (v. 19; see also 27:36). (Rodríguez 2020:1008)

Did God the father, God the Holy Spirit and God the Son share the same space with Satan? Yes. For how long, we do not know. Is the body of a born again Christian holier than God's heavenly abode? You will agree with me that this is an ironical question. From deductive reasoning it is logical that the answer to the above question is no. Although not always, deductive reasoning in theology leads to a logically confident conclusion. This is where I disagree with Charles Kraft and others (Dickason on a lesser grade) when they argue for a Christian's demonization from clinical evidence (see Dickason 1987:149; Kraft 1992:34, 64-70; Unger 1991:150). An inductive approach with clinical experience may be logically probable but may cloud people's understanding of God's attributes such as his omnipotence, his holiness and righteousness. Moreover, I believe that clinical experiences fit better in the practice of a deliverance ministry. Christ's disciples learned from practical experience that some spirits are more resistant than others. They also learned that faith and fervent prayers must accompany the "command" in the name of Jesus (Matt 17:14-21; Mark 9:14-29).

The reality of Christians being demonized throughout Christian church history is a phenomenon recognized by advocates and non-advocates (see Arnold 1997:108-112 cited in Ott et al. 2010:257). Toner (1913:710-712) points out that "the present rite of exorcism as given in the Roman Ritual fully agrees with patristic teaching and is a proof of the continuity of Catholic tradition in this matter." This has not been the case for Protestant churches. Catholics, for instance, during the fourth Council of Carthage (398), prescribed the rite of ordination for exorcists in its seventh canon (Toner 1913:711). According to Toner, the priest exorcist being ordained was given power to exorcise both baptized and non-baptized members (1913:711). Catholics follow that same dynamic today. To face the increasing demands of exorcism among its members since the late 1980s (see MacNutt 2009), the Vatican opened its doors for its annual exorcism course to 250 priests from 50 countries (See BBC News 2018).

Neither non-Charismatic nor Pentecostal Protestant authors and churches are doing as well when facing present reality. Some have developed official church documents on the Ministry of Healing and Deliverance (see Währisch-Oblau and Wrogemann 2015). Scott Moreau for instance makes these interesting comments.

While experience is not the final arbiter of doctrinal formulation, our experience should be in accord with our doctrine. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that Christians may be demonized and that the warnings to stand against Satan are not just to stop his attacks against the church or his control over those who do not believe. Whatever our conclusion on demonization of believers, Christians clearly have the identity (being in Christ), the authority (being seated with Christ), and the mandate to resist Satan and his demons. We do so not on the basis of our own goodness, but on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross. Because the One who is in us is greater than the one who is in the world (1 John 4:4), we can successfully stand against demonic schemes. Our weapons in this ongoing struggle include our authority as seated with Christ at the right hand of God, far above every power (Eph. 1:15-2:6), the name of Jesus (Phil. 2:10), our spiritual armor (Eph. 6:18), prayer (a must in some cases, Mark 9:29), simple resistance (James 4:7), forgiveness (Eph. 4:26-27), and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23; Eph. 4:22-29; 6:10-18). (Moreau 1996:165)

Among Seventh-day Adventists, there are advocates (Allen 1993; Ewoo 2011; Mensah 2011; Badé 2017, 2020; etc.) and non-advocates (Donkor 2011; Ewoo 2011; Onongha 2019; etc.) as well. The Biblical Research Institute (BRI) publication of 1983 was written in the context of a crisis that surrounded the often-questionable teachings and practices from extreme positions of certain deliverance ministries of that time. Although (my critical assessment) the tone of the official document was more from a systematic and biblical theology perspective, considering the context of the time, the document is balanced. One of the concluding points of the document (no. 4 in 1983 and no. 3 in the revised version of 2011) unequivocally states this: "The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that there is a place for ministry to those who are tempted and controlled by Satanic agencies; and, furthermore, it is not a ministry to be limited to professional clergy, psychologists, and psychiatrists" (BRI 1983; Donkor 2011:224). Thus, before the adoption of the church's 28th fundamental believe in 2005, there was already provision for ministry to the demonized in the Adventist Church both as an in-reach and outreach ministry. This is later confirmed in the 2015 *Seventh-day Adventist Ministers' Handbook*. The *Safeliz Ministers' Bible* co-produced with the Ministerial Association of the Seventh-day Adventist Church reads:

The anointing service in James addresses primarily physical illness and forgiveness. However, there is also a ministry in Scripture that addresses possession by demonic powers. "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the

rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph. 6:12, 13). While this struggle is not manifested equally in all places, there are occasions during which demonic power becomes evident (Safeliz 2015:1528).

As this missiological and ecclesiastical dynamic seeks to meet church members’ needs, the World Mission Department of Andrews University and Adventist Frontier Missions produced *Finding Freedom in Jesus: A Deliverance Ministry Manual* (see Bauer 2018). The warning of White seems to be taken more seriously by Seventh-day Adventists in the past decade. She wrote: “Have Seventh-day Adventists forgotten the warning given in the sixth chapter of Ephesians? We are engaged in a warfare against the hosts of darkness. Unless we follow our Leader closely, Satan will obtain the victory over us” (White 1903:8, 9).

### Implications for Christian Missions

There are several missiological implications in this area of demonization of Christians from the perspective presented above.

#### Evangelism Is First Offensive, Not Defensive as Some Think

When we accept Jesus as Lord and Savior we are at enmity with Satan. There is no neutral or middle ground. Either we are with Christ, or we are against him. Either we gather with Christ, or we scatter (Matt 12:30). Christ said: “Or how can someone enter a strong man’s house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man? Then indeed he may plunder his house” (Matt 12:29, ESV). Satan is the prince of this world (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2).

Mission cannot take place unless Satan is bound. The unbelievers are satan’s goods. This is one of the reasons why when sending the 12 or the 70 Christ first gave them power over demons (Matt 10:1, 8; Luke 10:17). “By this greater power Jesus is binding ‘the strong man’ and plundering his ‘house.’ So, the kingdom of heaven is forcefully advancing” (Carson 1984:290). This explains why the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God (Eph 6:12). As an offense weapon, Christians attach Satan’s kingdom with the Word of God as the foundation of their prayers for mission, when claiming God promises, and when praying for the lost (Matt 24:14, 28:19)—even before beginning mission.

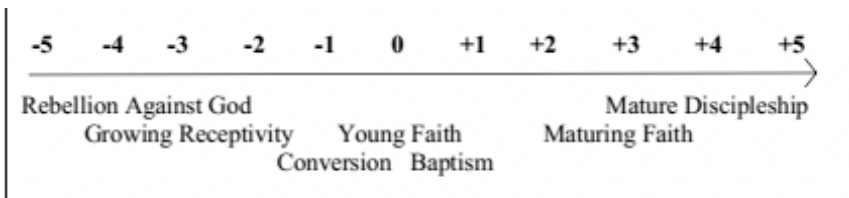
## Mission Is First Inreach before It Is Outreach

“But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And proclaim as you go, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying; give without pay” (Matt 10:6-8, ESV). “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, ESV).

## Conversion and Maturity Are a Process

The 10/40 window where Christian mission is concentrated in these last years has Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus in the majority. They practice different folk versions of their religions with strong animistic backgrounds. Their journey to become matures Christians cannot be evaluated from a bounded set perspective. This means they often carry over from their previous religions attitudes, assumptions, and even inhabiting demons that often are not addressed during their conversion and baptism.

### Journey Toward Discipleship



Doss 2018:271

## The “Already—Not Yet” Concept in Missiology

Even though “Christian theology should never ignore or overlook the fact that on the cross Christ defeated once and for all the cosmic evil powers” (Rodriguez 2008:17), these powers have not been “totally divested of their power” (19). As such, these evil forces still seek to control humanity redeemed by Christ and they still tempt, harass, oppress, and torment even believers (19). This tension between the present age and the age to come (the “already” and “not yet”) should not be absent in our mission theology, rather, it should be used adequately so that we do not communicate any wrong message when we emphasize one over the other.

## Conclusion

This article has argued that *demon possession* and *demonization* are etymologically and phenomenologically the same. Although the idea of ownership is avoided in the term demonization, it does not mean any less of a phenomenon. The article argued from a deductive perspective and not from an inductive approach with clinical cases from the Bible such as Saul, Judas Iscariot, the daughter of Abraham paralyzed for 18 years by an evil spirit.

The formal theology presented to defend the reality of the demonization of Christians was missiological and in agreement with the normative (Toner 1913; Ott et al. 2010) and operant theologies (Dickason 1987; Kraft 1992, 2011). Unfortunately, many non-advocates who deny that Christians can be demonized fail to enrich their theology with other points of view.

Yet, the logic of the demonization of Christians does not negate God's sovereignty in people's lives nor his holiness and righteousness. It just means that as there was a time for Satan to be cast out of heaven, demonized Christians also need such a time when they can be set free for the demonic influences in their lives.

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KELVIN ONONGHA

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# Can Christians be Possessed by Evil Spirits?

## Introduction

In the African ministry context, accusations of demon possession are commonplace. It would appear that every strange, bizarre, or abnormal form of behavior is attributed to demon possession. Unfortunately, in many cases there is a very thin line between occurrences of mental disorder and demonization. This is because the symptoms in several instances are quite similar, and the precursors may be quite complex. For these reasons, another article in this issue sought to address the issue of discerning whether certain conditions were caused by mental disorders or demonization.

In addition, the predisposition to regard every unexplained behavior as having a demonic origin was also addressed in this issue and described “the expanded middle.” However, one debate that has continued for decades and which is the concern of this chapter is, Can Christians be possessed by evil spirits?

## Demon Possession in the African Context

The African worldview is quite tolerant to accusations of demon possession. This is because of the belief that spirits—good and evil—permeate the cosmos; many belonging to the malicious category. Also, because ritual specialists such as diviners, healers, and sorcerers are dependent upon communication with the spirit world and are sometimes overwhelmed by the spirits with whom they have contact, demon possession is not an unfamiliar occurrence. Indeed, in African Traditional Religion (ATR) it is believed that certain persons possess the ability to induce spirit possession

upon others, especially during cases of disputes. In addition, it is believed that mental disorders or possession by an evil spirit can occur when a person is under the sentence of the divinities or ancestors. Although such episodes may not be considered strange within the continent, the real issue is whether these occurrences of demon possession can also include Christians, whose lives are committed to Christ.

### **ATR Beliefs Concerning Possession and the Bible**

In many respects the African worldview find parallels with that of the Bible. Among the areas one finds similarities is the acceptance of a realm in which spirits operate. This is significant because in some respects modern Western education attributes every unexplainable human condition to either psychological or neurotic causes; however, the Scriptures acknowledge the existence, working, and interference of demons in human affairs.

The Old Testament demonstrates the operation and powers of evil spirits especially in opposition to the people of God, and especially through the gods in the nations surrounding Israel. However, it is not until the New Testament period, during Christ's earthly ministry, that open confrontations and manifestations of the demonic are encountered. From the beginning of Christ's public ministry when a demoniac identified the Messiah in the synagogue, until the end of his ministry when he hung on the cross, demons dogged Christ's pathway. Yet with each and every encounter with the demonic Jesus displayed the supremacy of his kingdom and the sovereignty of his power.

### **Demon Possession in the NT**

The most common expression denoting demon possession in the NT is the word *daimonizomai*—often translated as demon possession. However, most scholars consider that a better translation would be demonized (Boyd 2007; Love 2000; Wilson 2000), or acting under the influence of a demon. In other words, demons may attempt to attack, influence, harass and oppress Christians but may not gain full control of them.

It is important to make a clear distinction between demonization and demon possession. Demon possession is a state in which demons have total control over the will and life of a person, so that they determine what the person does, says, and how they behave. The Gospels reveal several accounts of demon-possessed persons. A classic example is the demoniac who lived in the region of Gadarenes (Mark 5:1-20; Luke 8:26-39). Distinctive features of demon possession are evident from this Bible narrative: The victim made his home in the tombs (Mark 5:3); chains could

not contain him—he always broke loose (vv. 3, 4), he cut his body with stones (v. 5); he was often heard crying out night and day in the mountains (v. 5); he was naked (Luke 8:27); and his thoughts had been taken over by the demons so that when he spoke it was the words of the demons that emerged (Mark 5:7-9).

Another gospel account that describes the effects of demon possession is found in Mark 9:14-29. From this passage the evident effects of demon possession include deafness and dumbness (vv. 17, 25), epileptic-like features—foaming at the mouth, gnashing of teeth (vv. 18, 20), and suicidal behavior—thrown into the water, or fire (v. 22).

It is interesting to note that besides psychological characteristics such as self-mutilation, and suicidal behavior, other features, which accompany the presence and possession of demons are physiological conditions such as muteness or dumbness, and other epileptic-like symptoms.

Other narratives in Scripture also indicate the devil's ability to inflict physical harm or affliction upon the children of God. These include the diseases that broke out all over the body of Job (Job 2:1-10). Paul also spoke about an affliction from the devil (2 Cor 12:7-10), a messenger from Satan, a thorn in his flesh, which some consider to have been near sightedness.

To sum it all up, demonization can be manifest in a wide variety of physical ailments, psychological conditions, or relational issues. Symptoms of the demonic activity can also have close parallels with mental conditions (Appleby 2012).

## Degrees of Demonization

Demons are constantly working in order to tempt and influence people away from the will of God. However, whenever they are resisted through the Word of God or prayer, their hold over any victim is weakened. A survey of the Scriptures indicates clear efforts by demons to lead God's people away from the pathway of life, and from obedience to his commands. They also reveal that no one is immune from such attacks or influences; what is critical is the response of each individual to these demonic promptings.

An example of demonic attempts to influence believers is the experience of Peter, who in response to Jesus' question, had under inspiration, proclaimed that Christ was the Messiah. Barely moments later under the influence of Satan he sought to dissuade Jesus from his appointment with death on the cross (Matt 16:13-23). In this incident, Christ made it obvious that the identity of the spirit and the motivation underlying Peter's remonstrance was satanic. It was for this reason that Jesus' rebuke of Peter was swift, public, and stern. What is noteworthy about this account is that

no sooner had Christ commended Peter for being used by the Holy Spirit to reveal his true identity as the Messiah and Savior, he also condemned him for the role the devil sought to use Peter to play in hindering the plan of salvation. This is an object lesson on how one so recently inspired can fall prey to satanic influences once the believer's guard is lowered.

Apparently, that episode was not the sole occasion that the devil had sought to gain control of or destroy Peter. At Christ's last supper with his disciples Jesus lamented to Peter, seeking to alert him of the demonic influences around him and of the danger ahead: "And the Lord said, 'Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift *you* as wheat. But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to *Me*, strengthen your brethren'" (Luke 22:31-34). Jesus' warning to Peter actually is a lesson for all believers to learn—the devil and his demonic lieutenants are relentlessly seeking to control Christians, to "sift them as wheat!"

Ralph Wilson outlines what may be described as several levels, or degrees, of demonization he finds in the New Testament. These are temptation, influence, oppression, obsession, and finally possession (2000). In this spectrum of demonic activity, Wilson seeks to demonstrate how the activities commence with seemingly innocuous temptations and then quickly graduate to the desired stranglehold of total possession. Similarly, Enoch Wan agrees that demonization may vary in degree and duration, and outlines the following stages: Oppression is the "state/process of being tempted spiritually with a sense of being weighed down physically and psychologically," as in the case of a Christian being disturbed or harassed by the devil. Possible symptoms are heaviness or obstruction in body and/or mind, depression, discouragement, dullness, etc. (2003).

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* suggests that obsession is "a persistent disturbing preoccupation with an often unreasonable and unnatural idea or feeling," as a result of the devil's (or evil spirits') intrusion into the life of a Christian, impelling the person to (or preoccupying the person with) certain ideas, emotions or actions from without. After his repeated oppression by an evil spirit, King Saul was obsessed by the thought of killing David because he was filled with jealousy and consumed by his hatred of David; though he had previously been anointed by the Spirit and prophesied (1 Sam 10:1, 9-13). Inhabitation is the process of being temporarily occupied, leading to being inhabited or indwelt by the devil or evil spirits (Luke 13:11-16; 1 Cor 5:5).

Possession is "the act or state of being dominated or possessed by an extra-ordinary force (e.g., passion, impulse, idea) or extraneous personality (the devil or evil spirits)." Demonic possession by evil spirits occurs among non-Christians who have not been born again and are subject to the complete control of Satan in the kingdom of darkness (Wan 2003).

While there are those who believe that Christians can be demonized, others like Hart take a contrary view. John Hart insists that the primary issue as pertaining to demons is the question of space—demons seek to inhabit their victims, and that is why in every instance in which the Scriptures deal with the subject of deliverance it entails casting out the demons (Gk: *ekballien*) (2001:207-240). In Hart's opinion the primary objective of demons is spatial inhabitation of humans to gain full control of their faculties. Although a number of the advocates of spiritual warfare such as Boyd, Wan, and Appleby cited above support the position that Christians can be demonized, I tend to agree with Hart that this may not be biblical. Among the reasons for this is:

1. Living in a covenant relationship with Christ indicates that the believer belongs to Christ, therefore Satan's ownership over their life is null and void.
2. The Spirit of the Lord dwelling in the Christian is at enmity with and wars against the flesh, the world, and Satan; these struggle to turn the believer away from the paths of the Lord, while the Spirit helps the Christian remain on track.
3. Although a Christian can be harassed, tempted, influenced, or oppressed by demons and Satan so long as they continue to resist demonic innuendos and refuse to yield their will to these evil forces they cannot be inhabited by these powers.

What the foregoing suggests is that there is a constant ongoing attempt by demons to gain control over humans—Christians and non-believers. Therefore, each Christian has a duty to be watchful and sober to hinder access into their heart via footholds of the devil. The counsel of the Wise man in this context is therefore far more significant: "Keep your heart with all diligence, For out of it spring the issues of life" (Prov 4:23). In another article the important subject of footholds and strongholds is discussed.

Regarding the significance of constant vigilance on the part of Christians against the wiles and snares of Satan and his demonic hosts, Ellen White states:

And it is because Satan can most readily control the minds of those who are unconscious of his influence that the word of God gives us so many examples of his malignant work, unveiling before us his secret forces, and thus placing us on our guard against his assaults. The power and malice of Satan and his host might justly alarm us, were it not that we may find shelter and deliverance in the superior power of our Redeemer. We carefully secure our houses with bolts and locks to protect our property and our lives from evil men; but we seldom think of the evil angels who are constantly seeking access to us, and against whose attacks we have no method of defense. If permitted, they can

distract our minds, disorder, torment our bodies, destroy our possessions, and our lives. Their only delight is in misery and destruction. Fearful is the condition of those who resist the divine claims and yield to Satan's temptations until God gives them up to the control of evil spirits; but those who follow Christ are ever safe under his watchcare. Angels that excel in strength are sent from Heaven to protect them. The wicked one cannot break through the guard which God has stationed about his people. (1969:335, 336)

## Implications

Although the characterization of demon possession has been loosely ascribed to many persons and to various behaviors and conducts it is important that this concept be properly understood for a number of reasons:

1. If a person's condition is wrongly categorized or classified then the method of therapy will be faulty, too. I happened to have been invited to participate in a deliverance session involving a pretty, young lady who had been brought by her friends to be set free from her condition. However, before the main deliverance session, after much singing had preceded the period, I requested to hear the lady tell her story herself rather than through her friends. It emerged that she was actually plagued by the trauma of having accidentally killed a local shaman who had attempted to rape her in their home during the absence of her mother. After struggling and resisting him she found a metal object with which she struck the man, resulting in his death. Upon her mother's return that very day she made the decision to send the young teenage girl out of their country immediately, never to return. Thus, she became a refuge far away from home and family. Now married, she often felt put off at night whenever her husband approached her in bed. After listening to her account, it became apparent that we were dealing with the effects of trauma, rather than with demon possession. After conducting a brief counseling session and leading her through a prayer of confession, we opened our eyes to behold a new creature altogether, free from the guilt and shame of the accusation of being demon possessed, smiling and joyful in her new-found freedom in Christ.

2. Another reason the question whether Christians can be demon possessed is vital is that rather than encouraging careless living it urges careful living. Christians may live cautiously in this world. The awareness that demons are a reality and that they are relentlessly on the prowl seeking to influence, harass, oppress, inhabit, and possess the children of God should have a sobering effect on all. As many have noted, the language of Scripture speaks incontrovertibly of warfare, or what Adventists refer to as the Great Controversy. This is a major theme reflected throughout the Scriptures. Christians are living on a battleground, and in wartimes this



consciousness needs to seep in and remain with all. There is an enemy on our trail; we cannot be asleep or careless.

3. Accordingly, all Christians need the comprehensive coverage, which Christ alone can provide against demonic devices. Paul's call to put on the whole armor of Christ makes total sense in the light of the nature, intensity, and resolute character of the conflict Christians are caught in (Eph 6:10-18). The weapons of defense are critical to shield from the devil's attacks, just as the weapons of offense are needed to call for re-enforcement and to keep at bay the demonic forces.

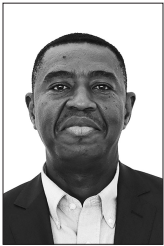
4. Another critical feature this subject brings to light is the fact that the antidote for demon possession is complete possession by the Holy Spirit. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the Christian secures the heart and life for the Lord and hampers the ability of demons to dwell in the Christian. Ultimately, God through the Holy Spirit, wants to dwell in believers, but demons also want to inhabit and control God's people. The only safeguard is being filled with the Spirit. No wonder Paul advocated being drunk with the Holy Spirit, rather than with wine or any other spirits (Eph 5:18).

5. Finally, there is the issue of command and control. Christians need to learn the authority given to them in Christ to expel and reject the power and attacks of demons. The weakest Christians, allied to Christ through the power of his name and by the blood of the Lamb, can obtain victory over the hosts of demonic forces they confront. Spiritual authority has been given by Christ through a chain of command over all demonic forces (Matt 28:18; Luke 10:17-19) so that in every confrontation with demons, at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord (Phil 2:10). No longer are Christians to cower in fear or walk in timidity for the Gospel they preach is a message of power in the name of Jesus (1 Thess 1:5; 2 Tim 1:7).

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KELVIN ONONGHA

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# The African Worldview and Belief in the Demonic

## **African Traditional Religion's Worldview**

The African continent displays rich diversity in geography, culture, history, and language. In spite of this heterogeneity in several respects it still has many similarities. These similarities are to a great extent evident in its rich cultures, but especially in its religious worldview. For that reason, the debate still rages whether the religion appertaining to the region should be referred to as African Traditional Religion (ATR), or African Traditional Religions. The arguments on both sides are compelling. A close examination of the worldviews held by a large portion of Africans however reveals amazing similarities. The African worldview associated with the religious beliefs of the people is one that contributes greatly to belief in the reality, power, and working of demons in the daily lives of its people. To better understand how a worldview contributes to belief in the demonic the religion and corresponding aspects of the African worldview will be examined.

## **ATR and the Spirit World**

The principal elements of ATR comprise belief in God, divinities, ancestors, spirits, magic, and medicine (Idowu 1973:139). It has also been observed that Africans are notoriously religious; in other words, religion permeates every facet of their existence; therefore, there is hardly any function without religious significance (Mbiti 1969:1). The belief that all of life is affected by powers or beings greater than humans is prevalent in the psyche of the people. It is noteworthy that the major components of the

African cosmos are essentially spiritual in nature. In other words, God, the divinities, and ancestors are in essence spirits. Also, magic and medicine belong to the realm of spirit forces.

Indeed, an African scholar described the cosmos as “peopled by myriads of intractable and capricious spirits locked in an internecine battle at the center of which is humankind” (Okorochoa 1992:173). It could be said that Africans regard the cosmos as a sacred egg in which humans weave covenants with the munificent and the malevolent gods who are often at loggerheads in this world (Ogbu 2006:91, 92).

These spirits, or non-bodied beings, are prevalent throughout the cosmos. They often make their abode in nature—trees, forests, water, rocks, caves, or mountains. They could also dwell in creatures like animals and in humans.

Spirits are generally regarded as neutral in form and nature—they could be both beneficent or malevolent. Some people seek their assistance to have children, prosper in their business, have protection of life and property, or acquire power to control all of life’s circumstances. At the same time these spirits can wreak a lot of havoc on human lives and property, inflicting damage in the form of illnesses, disability, incapacitation, death, and devastation, and creating natural disasters. These spirits are considered more powerful than humans, so it is almost impossible to resist their power or influence. Life, therefore, is a negotiation that entails wisdom and tact with these ubiquitous spirits.

Certain persons by virtue of their training, experience, or allegiances are deemed powerful enough to control or manipulate evil spirits. Such are the shamans, diviners, or traditional healers. Through specialized rituals and sacrifices these ritual specialists can also command evil spirits to either leave or afflict people.

Another category of persons that have affiliation with evil spirits are witches. These are humans who become engaged with the world of evil spirits by initiation or covenantal bonds and are persons who can wreak untold havoc, to the extent of killing and eating their victims. These malicious beings are considered innately evil and totally under the control of demons to cause devastation and/or death to persons they perceive as their enemies, or whoever crosses their paths.

### **Animism and ATR Worldview**

Although the expression animism has been regarded as derogatory, there are elements of this sociological notion that resonate with the African worldview. In their classic volume, *Understanding Folk Religions*, Paul Hiebert, Daniel Shaw, and Tite Tienou present several characteristics of

animism that provide insight to the reinforced belief in the demonic inherent in the African worldview. These elements include communalism, the role of the spirit world, existentialism, power and pragmatism, orality, transportation and transformation, and fear (1999:196).

### Communalism

It is a widely known fact that Africans are communal in nature, that is, individual desires and aspirations are subordinated to the group's determination. Their cosmology is also reflective of another dimension of communalism—the African cosmos comprises the living, the living dead (ancestors), and the yet unborn. Each of these groups live in close connection with the other in such a manner that whatever happens to one group affects the other. Ancestors have the power to bless or to hurt living members of their families and the decisions of the living can bring curses or good fortune to the yet unborn. While a popular modern dictum states, “seeing is believing,” for many Africans the unseen spirit world is more believed in and feared than the natural world. For many Africans the belief in evil spirits is real and strong, and their dread for the spirit world is stronger than for any other thing or person in life.

Furthermore, ancestors are believed to be living in community with their progeny. These ancestors can be consulted for assistance in times of need and trouble. Africans believe that death is merely a transition from this realm unto another, and that the ancestors continue living in a new state with increased powers. Consequently, communication or consultation with the ancestors is encouraged, a practice which gives room for demonic spirits to manifest themselves among the living in the guise of dead ancestors.

### Existentialism

The African religious worldview is extremely existential in nature. That is, there is more concern for this world than the world to come. Salvation to the African is not about cognitive assent to a set of beliefs but more about how to achieve more benefit in this world than in a future life. Therefore, salvation for the African must be evident in health, peace, blessings, security, and prosperity. Because of the desire for a good life here on earth it is not uncommon for some to seek such a life at any cost, even when that may entail seeking the assistance of the spirit world—even if that involves demonic spirits.

Stories abound of barren women who develop connections with mermaid spirits for assistance to have children so that the reproach of

childlessness may be removed. Some men in their quest for fame and fortune have also sought the assistance of demonic spirits to enable them to rise from lives of obscurity to prominence. In just about every African country tales are told of various means people can and have employed to obtain material blessings.

### Power

As with most traditional religions the African worldview is power oriented. The ultimate quest is for power, which the people are keenly aware that it does exist. With the aid of spiritual power, people can obtain security, prosperity, healing, promotion, and every other material desire. Also, power provides protection from spiritual and physical calamities. Some Christians even believe that there are afflictions with demonic origins for which modern medicine and pastoral intervention are ineffectual to remedy. To them, the only remedy is to seek the help of ritual experts who, in consultation with the demonic spirits, can bring the healing or deliverance sought.

Another predisposing factor which prompts some Africans that leads them to engage with demonic agencies is the desire for speedy resolution to their predicaments. While the Christian faith teaches the virtue of patience and for waiting upon the Lord, the worldview of the African (which does not discriminate between good and evil power) seeks expeditious responses to petitions whatever the source of that response. Some Christians who engage in the practice of dual allegiance admit that prayer works, but complain that prayer may take a while, but when they go to the shaman, they receive instant results. Some Africans believe that there is only one true source of blessing or healing, and that is God. Therefore, whenever they are helped in any way, the source can only be God.

### Pragmatism

Pragmatism is another key feature of the African religious worldview—it is what works that counts, nothing more or less. Because the African concept of sin is at variance with the Western or Christian one, when a child is sick all the parents are interested in is how to restore the health or life of the child, even if it entails going to the witchdoctor, shaman, or diviner. Their argument is, so long as the child is restored, however that may have occurred, it must have originated from God. This perspective follows from the notion that power is neutral; neither good nor evil, it is what one does with it that is important. Such an outlook opens the way for demons to find a way into the lives and experiences of such persons who

are oblivious of the wiles and devices of the evil one. A further danger is that the devil can bring about some form of healing in order to lead to allegiance and ultimately gain total control of a person.

### Orality

African Traditional Religion has no written creed or scripture. It is a religion that has been transmitted orally. A mistake of the early missionaries, and still repeated often today, is that because ATR has no written tradition it is ignored and regarded as being of no consequence. Nevertheless, despite over a century and a half of successful mission activities on the continent ATR still thrives and flourishes and is actually experiencing a resurgence in certain regions. A primary reason for this is that its tenets, rituals, and services have been orally transmitted from generation to generation. Another reason for this could be that what is heard from a credible source is usually considered authentic, whether it is indeed factually correct or not. Because authority figures cannot be questioned due to respect for their age or positions, what they say is accepted as right. For instance, across the continent in various forms, accounts have been retold of some persons who after their deaths were later sighted in other different locations by persons who knew them in the past. These persons, as the stories go, became resettled, remarried, and began new lives in new locations, with new identities, until they were recognized and identified by those who knew them in their former lives. The moment this happened, the identified individuals vanished, never to be seen again. Such stories reveal the workings of evil spirits described in the Scriptures as familiar spirits who impersonate dead people in order to deceive the living (1 Sam 28:3-16). The reason tales like these abound and continue to be repeated, along with other supposed supernatural phenomena, is because of the power of orality in the African worldview.

Words are believed to possess innate power to create or recreate a new reality. For this reason, curses, especially from elderly persons are not lightly dismissed but treated as grave. Also, verbal threats of reprisals are taken very seriously because of the belief that some wicked persons in conformance with demonic agencies can unleash terrible afflictions on their victims.

### Transportation and Transformation

Across the continent a strong belief persists that certain people possess the power to transform themselves into other creatures and thus move from one location to another with speed and agility to carry out whatever

evil purposes they seek. These creatures could be birds, so that they fly with speed, or animals such as wild cats, so they can maim or kill their victims. In most parts of the continent accounts are freely told of persons who have actually witnessed people mutating from human to animal forms. These phenomena can only occur through demonic assistance. There are also reports of witches who were found in the early hours of the morning in half-human, half-creature-like states as evidence of such occurrences.

There are a number of creatures which are commonly associated with witches or the demonic. The types of creatures differ from one region to another. They include cats, owls, crows, bats, snakes, buffaloes, geckos, and wild cats such as leopards and panthers. The sudden appearance or presence of such creatures is usually regarded as an indication that demonic agencies such as witches are present. The cries of certain creatures at night are often taken as an indication that death is imminent to someone in a nearby household.

### Fear

Fear pervades and permeates much of the belief and worldview of African religion. This fear derives from the consciousness of a cosmos pregnant with spiritual agencies in which humans are pawns, and in many cases the people are powerless to overcome the control of these powerful forces. Because of the pain, misery, misfortune, and death that divinities, ancestors, enemies, and demons can cause, life for the African must be lived carefully so as not to antagonize any of these agencies. Many of the tales, myths, and narratives shared in most African communities underscore the proximity of evil spiritual forces to the extent that there is generally greater fear of the demonic in the African worldview than there is for God.

### Causation

A fundamental element of worldviews is the concept of causation—Why do things happen? For most parts of Africa, it is strongly believed that nothing happens without a cause, and this cause usually has a spiritual origin. In other words, human existence is often plagued by the interference and interaction of powerful spiritual forces to the extent that most events are ascribed to supernatural or spiritual explanations. Occurrences from the mundane to the most complex are attributed to the all-powerful realm of the spirits. For example, among certain people groups if a person walking to the farm were to kick a stone with his left foot, it would be recognized as a portent of something ominous. The next advisable course of action in such a scenario would be to return home in order to avert possible evil.



In most parts of Africa when a death occurs it is believed that an enemy is behind it—even when the deceased may have died at a ripe old age. Obituaries have been written with statements such as, “The enemies have done their worst.” In other words, the family of the deceased is expressing their conviction that the death of their beloved was definitely the work of some enemies. These enemies could be envious relatives, neighbors, members of the community, or witches. Rarely, if ever, is death attributed to disease or old age.

In some places during a funeral if evil spirits or persons are suspected to be the cause of death of a loved one, the deceased is buried with an instrument of vengeance in their hands and are directed to carry out retribution for the death. The dead are usually addressed, as though they could still hear, during funerals and told not to rest until vengeance has been done.

Sickness and disease also have explanations attributed to the spirit world. Modern medicine through careful research and observation aduces that the origins of diseases is traceable to germs. The invention of the microscope made it possible to observe germs in laboratory settings, consequently, the germ theory has become accepted as the scientific explanation for the incidence of diseases. However, in opposition to the germ theory is the spirit theory which explains that sickness has a spirit origin. The spirit theory is the dominant explanation for the incidence of sickness among many Africans. While this is largely true for many uneducated Africans, even among the educated the belief that certain conditions have supernatural origins still exists. This is true even among academics, professionals, and medical personnel.

In one known instance, after extensive diagnostic tests had been conducted upon a senior citizen without the discovery of any clear cause for his ailment, the presiding physician, well-schooled in modern medicine and highly ranked as a consultant in his profession, advised that the old man be taken to the traditional healers, because the consultant believed the ailment did not have a scientific cause, therefore, only the traditional healers could help. This account demonstrates the resilience of the African worldview to the extent that education and experience appear unable to transform it.

Even when sometimes the germ theory for the cause of sickness is acknowledged, the next question some Africans then ask is, “Who sent the disease agent?” Underlying such a question is the belief that there is always a human agent working through supernatural means to bring about affliction. Some of the ways a person could be made ill include curses, the evil eye, and the use of charms or *juju* (witchcraft).

As previously explained, a curse can be directed at someone by another who has the spiritual power to do so. Curses may transcend generations and remain effective until something definite is done to remove the curse. The evil eye is the ability some persons acquire to cause pain, ailment, or death simply by focusing their gaze on the victim. This supernatural ability can be prompted by jealousy or envy and has demonic origins. In different parts of Africa, this belief encourages people to take various precautions to protect vulnerable persons such as pregnant women and especially children. Thus, amulets or other tokens are used to protect against the evil eye, which is believed to have demonic origins.

Through the practice of voodoo and the use of magical arts Africans universally believe that sickness and eventually death could be brought upon a victim. In such situations, the perpetrators employ supernatural spiritual powers to overpower the victim and induce a desired disease condition or sickness. These beliefs, studies reveal, persist among Africans despite their education, exposure, and experience as Christians (Onongha 2017).

### **Pentecostalism and Belief in the Demonic**

Curiously, another factor that has contributed to reinforcing belief in the demonic is the growth and spread of African Pentecostalism. This strand of Christianity can be traced to the African Indigenous churches, which broke upon the scene in Eastern, Southern, and Western Africa in the early 1900s. The roots of Pentecostalism can be found in these movements that sought to make Christianity indigenous to the African people. Unfortunately, many contemporary Pentecostal churches in Africa can be regarded as reflective of what may be described as African Traditional Christianity. This is an amalgam of African Traditional Religion practices and Christianity resulting in a product with similar worldview foundations to ATR.

It is therefore little wonder that there are several popular Pentecostal preachers who subscribe to the spirit theory of sickness. They believe that demons are behind many common illnesses. As a result, ministries have arisen which promise deliverance from debilitating diseases such as HIV / AIDS, cancer, high blood pressure, and diabetes.

In addition, some Pentecostal preachers during their healing services seek to bind and cast out spirits of diverse illnesses by naming particular spirits considered responsible for the conditions of their patients: spirit of diabetes, spirit of hypertension, spirit of arthritis, spirit of malaria, etc. Evidently, these Christians still believe that demons are responsible for much that goes wrong in their lives, from illness to death.

This is reflective of the vast swing from when early missionaries denied, and even rejected the reality of the existence of spiritual powers and forces—the phenomenon referred to by the Christian anthropologist, Paul Hiebert, as “the flaw of the excluded middle” (2009:412-414). Both the biblical worldview and the African worldview acknowledge the existence of three realms of existence: the highest rung is the supernatural world with God and his angels, in the natural realm below are found humans, animals, and other creatures. However, between the supernatural and the natural is the realm where spirits operate. Missionaries, who were affected by the Enlightenment theories of their day, often questioned whatever was not considered empirical.

However, recently in missiological circles scholars have warned about the danger of what they refer to as the “expanded middle” (Pocock, Van Rheenen, McConnel 2005:198). This is a situation where just about every malaise and condition is blamed on demons—a complete swing from one end of the pendulum to the other.

### Missiological Implications

Notice the missiological implications when Christians with unconverted worldviews continue to hold unto their previous views that spirits and angry ancestors are the primary cause of all sickness and misfortune.

First, the foregoing discussion demonstrates how factors in the African context and issues derived from its worldview can result in allegiance to demonic powers as people seek to allay their fears and meet their needs.

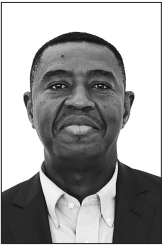
Second, the quest for power to gain control and attain security from the caprices of life often results in covenants and generational bonds with established demons, which will need to be broken for freedom in Christ to be attained.

Third, the scriptural narratives which demonstrate the supremacy and sovereignty of God need to be told and reemphasized in the African context so that believers may overcome their fears and the need for “fire insurance,” allowing them to live lives free from the practice of dual allegiance.

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CONRAD VINE

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# Deliverance Ministry Among Adventists in the North American Context

## Introduction

Deliverance Ministry (DM) among Adventists in North America is a rarely discussed topic. In North American Adventism, it is uncommon for those who do experience demonization to openly discuss their spiritual plight with fellow Adventists, or even with their pastors. Empirical feedback from those who seek deliverance, and from the participants at the International Fellowship of Adventist Mission Studies / Swallen Mission Conference organized by the Department of World Mission at the Adventist Seminary, Andrews University (September 2015) indicates that many Adventist pastors and seminarians in North America feel relatively unprepared to respond to requests for deliverance from members.

## The Adventist North American Context

The relative dearth of discussion among Adventist laity and ministerial workers parallels the paucity of materials within the academic Adventist community of North America. Vaughn Allen (1993) provides the basis for an Adventist approach to DM, with extensive analysis of the writings of Ellen G. White and exegesis of key New Testament (NT) passages. Winston Ferris (2003) analyzes spiritual warfare from different angles. In *The Armor of God*, he provides a detailed study of Ephesians 6.10-18, showing that the spiritual armor is as needed today as in NT times. In *The Embassy Prayer*, he argues that as Christians are ambassadors for Christ in and to a fallen world, Christians have the spiritual birthright to live in homes that

are protected by God from the attacks of Satan.

Louis Torres (2013) builds on the work of Allen and Ferris by analyzing the biblical evidence for demon possession and provides a helpful framework for discerning the authenticity of possession and how to minister to someone who is so possessed.

In 2018, after a conference was held in Berrien Springs, MI in an effort to bring front-line cross-cultural ministry practitioners together from around the world to share lessons learned and identify successful ministry strategies, *Finding Freedom in Jesus: A Deliverance Ministry Manual* was produced. The *Manual* represents a collaborative effort between the Department of World Mission, the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, and Adventist Frontier Missions, and is edited by Bruce Bauer, a long-time practitioner with a wealth of practical experience and biblical insight into DM. The *Manual* is not aimed at the North American experience specifically, but provides a generic Adventist approach to DM, particularly building on the insights provided by Allen and his analysis of the writings of Ellen G. White. The *Manual* is necessary to provide Adventist practitioners with an Adventist framework for DM in a way that reduces their dependency for strategies and material provided by evangelical and Catholic writers such as Anderson, MacNutt, Richards, Kraft, and Prince.

Addressing the long-standing need for Adventist pastors to develop a deeper understanding, *Ministry Magazine*, an international journal for pastors published by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists devoted an entire edition (April 2020) to practical questions relating to DM. That edition included articles from writers in both Africa and North America, but by virtue of being an international journal for pastors did not address specifically the challenges faced by Adventist DM practitioners in the North American context.

Given this wider academic context and limited pastoral reality in the North American Adventist context, this article outlines three case studies from the 2018-2021 period and identifies the lessons to be learned for DM practitioners in the North American Adventist context. Each case study is based on real events in the North American Adventist context, but the details and identities have been obscured sufficient to protect everyone involved. The two persons engaging in DM in each case are myself (CV) and a trusted colleague in ministry, Susan Payne (SP). Each case will be narrated.

### Case Study # 1

Pedro is a millennial, and qualified as an engineer. He approaches and

asks for a private meeting with CV after hearing a sermon on Christ's victory over Satan in the story of the Gadarene Demoniac (Mark 5:1-20). In response, CV agrees to meet with Pedro, but asks that SP be present, explaining her experience in such matters, and the fact that she and CV always work in team ministry whenever possible. Pedro agrees, and a discreet time and location for later that evening is then established that will provide confidentiality. Until then, CV and Pedro will fast and pray.

On arriving at the agreed time, it is clear to CV and SP that Pedro is very nervous. CV and SP warmly greet him, and a prayer of protection is offered by SP. CV then explains the ground-rules for what is about to happen. For there to be healing, there must be truth in the conversation. Every temptation of Satan is a lie, and falsehoods can only be overcome with truth. CV and SP are experienced practitioners, and there is nothing Pedro can say that will cause shock or cause CV and SP to withdraw from the process. Pedro is created in the image of God, that image has been defaced by the Fall, by Pedro's own sins, and by the attacks of Satan, but if Pedro will turn his eyes to the Savior in faith, he will find mercy and grace in his hour of need. As there are cultural differences, SP discusses Pedro's expectations for deliverance and how the process will work. How important is touch to Pedro, and how does he wish to be touched, that is by the laying on of hands during prayer? Pedro gives permission for the laying on of hands and for CV and SP to hold his hands when appropriate.

Pedro then explains his situation. His parents divorced when he was young. Shortly thereafter, he was sexually abused by his maternal uncle at a family holiday event. He became an Adventist after attending a prophecy seminar at his local Adventist church in his early 20s. He is single, and struggles to form meaningful relationships.

He is visited by spirit beings each night, which attempt to physically and sexually assault him. They are infinitely more powerful than he, so he is terrified of being in his bedroom alone at night. At times they strangle him, and at times they molest him. Who can he talk to without being made to feel like he is crazy? He is overwhelmed with shame and fear. As the tears flow, Pedro confesses that he is consumed with pornography. He recognizes that this is a cherished sin, it is not something he is proud of, but he watches compulsively whenever lonely or trying to bury the painful memories of his own childhood abuse. Pedro confesses the sin of pornography, and CV anoints his eyes and forehead, as being the entry-point and seat of this particular sin.

Pedro then confesses that the porn he watches is gay porn, eliciting more tears of shame and fear. CV and SP do not draw back in horror but assure him of the Savior's love. Pedro kneels and tearfully confesses this addiction, asking Jesus to take away the desire and to make him whole.

After a 10-minute break, the process continues. Pedro then speaks haltingly of an incestuous relationship in his mid-teens, and once again the three kneel while Pedro tearfully confesses this sin and the hurt caused. The relief is palpable as he confesses and does not find condemnation. Finally, Pedro starts discussing the sexual abuse he experienced as a small boy. The confusion. The shock. The degradation. The betrayal. The bitterness. The denial. The distortion. The silence.

There is silence. CV holds Pedro's hands. SP prays silently, asking for the Spirit to guide. God works in our silence. CV then leads Pedro through a prayer, asking God for forgiveness for the anger he has nurtured in his heart toward his abuser, and forgiving the abuser for what he did. Tears flow. The relief is palpable. The tension dissipates from the room. A huge burden appears to have been lifted from Pedro's shoulder. A smile breaks out on his face. He has forgiven. He is forgiven. He is free!

CV then leads Pedro through a prayer of consecration, asking for the infilling of the Holy Spirit. He and SP then systematically walk with Pedro through what a life in the Spirit will look like, including a life of prayer, worship, witness, Bible study, fellowship, and ministry to others. As argued by Allen (1993:23), "To be a nominal follower of Jesus Christ is not enough. We must be followers, not in name only, but "decided" followers."

Does Pedro have an accountability partner whom he trusts and who can hold him accountable? Yes, Pedro has a close friend who knows most of his struggles. Pedro agrees to establish an accountability relationship with his friend regarding daily devotional life and use of pornography. His room is then anointed, and the DM session is over for the day.

That night, Pedro slept peacefully, without interruption, and now years later, that blessed freedom in Christ continues. He has fallen on a number of occasions into porn use, but each time his accountability partner has helped him to repent, ask for and receive full forgiveness, and to continue walking in the Spirit. A number of years later, Pedro sends CV a card, expressing his gratitude for helping him to be free from the shackles of the past, of compulsive sin, and of demonic attacks.

Case Study # 1 illustrates a number of important DM principles. First, as recommended by Bade (2018:73, 74), whenever possible, work in a team, providing accountability and mutual support. DM sessions can expose all manner of cherished sins and fallen proclivities, and having a gender-balanced, experienced team can mitigate any potential fallout. Such teams allow for prayerful preparation, for confession of personal sins on the part of team members, the use of different spiritual gifts as needed, mutual accountability, scandal avoidance, and spiritual encouragement in the midst of a DM session.



Second, clearing out the spiritual garbage is necessary for the rats to have nothing left to feed upon! Kraft (2016:151, 152) emphasizes the critical importance of removing the spiritual garbage in DM. In fact, he goes so far as to argue that “We have found that the most important aspect of a DM is never the casting out of the demons; they are a secondary problem. The primary problem is dealing with what the demons are attached to” (151, 152). As specific sins are confessed and repented of, so the specific doorways to demonization are systematically closed. Within this process, it is imperative that the person being ministered to knows that they are loved. An atmosphere of love and compassion builds trust and allows someone to discuss sins and events in their lives they may be too ashamed to admit even to themselves. Reacting in shock, horror, or condemnation will not encourage the truth telling that is necessary for full confession, repentance, and forgiveness. Truthfulness is the prerequisite to healing and deliverance, particularly as every temptation from Satan is based on an essential lie, that is if you do or think or say such and such, it will be good for you in such and such a way.

Third, in ideal circumstances those engaged in DM have the opportunity to set the time and place (hopefully, the Sabbath hours, and in a consecrated place), thus allowing time for prayer, fasting and team preparation. In this Case Study, and others like it, there may not be the time to allow for such parameters. Calendars and schedules may be so full that practitioners simply have to respond at the next available possibility, even if inconvenient or if they do not feel personally ready. Thus, DM practitioners are wise to leave open space in their daily and weekly calendars, allowing temporal space and spiritual margin for the Holy Spirit to direct and to lead into DM sessions.

## Case Study # 2

Yvette is the daughter of Haitian immigrants, now living in the USA. Her parents are separated, and she lives with her mother. A confident girl, Yvette is excelling in her friendships and has an active social network of friends from school and her local Adventist church. She has good relationships with both her parents and appears to be coping well with their separation. One day, her mother calls and requests a meeting with SP. SP agrees to meet, providing CV is also present, and the three meet later that evening in CV's office, away from any prying eyes.

CV opens with prayer, and SP then lays out the parameters for the conversation. The mother will be believed. She will be treated with respect, compassion, and love, for Jesus never looked on a crowd with anything other than compassion. What she shares will be confidential. The mother

listens, nods, and then the story comes tumbling out. Yvette has recently become very distant and withdrawn. Her mother has rushed her to ER twice in the past month after Yvette engaged in self-harm behavior. Their relationship is crumbling. Yvette refuses to talk about anything with her mother and isn't giving any indication as to why the change in demeanor, attitude, and the onset of self-harm behavior. A psychiatrist has prescribed some medications, but the mother doesn't believe the problem is psychiatric. What do CV and SP think?

SP leads in a season of prayer, imploring the Spirit to lead the discussion, and for God's mighty angels, those excelling in strength, to protect all present, and all whom they love and care for. CV joins in with confession of sin, asking for God's forgiveness for all present, claiming the promises of Isa 59:1-2. What follows is a detailed conversation trying to elicit any information that might give a clue as to Yvette's sudden change in behavior. Recognizing that cultural norms of behavior differ; the focus is on the spiritual aspects of the family dynamics. A wide range of topics are explored. Occultic activities. Manifestations of witchcraft, voodoo practices, adoration of idols, ancestral spirits. Involvement in pagan religions in their family history. Abortion. Sexual sin. Pornography. Lust. Masturbation. Rape. Sexual or other abuse. Entertainment choices. Movies and music. Internet browsing habits. The discussion goes on. Nothing seems to relate to Yvette's sudden change.

Switching topics, SP focusses on recent family dynamics. Could any family event have triggered the problem? Apparently, the father's mother had recently died, and the father had visited Haiti for the funeral. On his return, he had given a small keepsake to Yvette from her paternal grandmother. SP explores more. Tell us about the grandma—was she an Adventist? No, she was involved in occultic activity. A medium. She practiced voodoo, casting spells and "blessing" amulets with curses or blessings, depending on the amount paid. Before her, her grandmother was also heavily involved in the occult. And when did the grandma die? The same day the self-harm began.

The discussion now turns to the question of an ancestral spirit, and SP explains. Ancestral spirits may enter a family through one of the family member's involvement with the occult, or unfortunately through either explicit demon worship or other engagement with voodoo or the occult, the ancestral spirit attaches itself to the family. As argued by MacNutt (2009:95), such spirits seek to "excite people's curiosity about departed relatives, and hence to entice them into communicating with the dead through seances and other forbidden activities." To be free from the spirit, a blood sacrifice may be demanded, and unless and until a suitable sacrifice is made, the spirit will continue to demonize the family. The mother describes the keepsake her husband had given to Yvette and realizes that

it may well have been an amulet. Perhaps most importantly, ancestral spirits often skip a generation and attach themselves to a family member within alternating generations.

After a season of prayer, the mother agrees to return home and try to discuss the situation more with her estranged husband and Yvette. The keepsake would need to be destroyed, and the situation explained to Yvette. CV and SP then pray with the mother, affirming her spiritual right to bring her child to Jesus for healing, just as the father brought his demonized child (Mark 9.14-29). Prayers are offered to Jesus to break any bondage that may have fallen upon Yvette through her grandma's death, and any ancestral spirit that has attached itself to Yvette is rebuked in the name of Jesus Christ. SP then closes with a prayer, and the meeting ends.

As a follow-up, SP connects with the mother a month later. The self-harm has ended, the relationship between mother daughter is much improved, the keepsake is gone, and the estranged father understands the overall situation. God be praised!

As with Case Study # 1, Case Study # 2 illustrates some important principles. First, cross-cultural DM requires tenderness, great care, and much listening. Assumptions of what constitutes "normal" behavior must be set aside to listen deeply to the life situations and experiences of the person seeking assistance. A questionnaire designed for a westerner seeking assistance can provide pointers for further investigation but listening carefully is critical for the whole situation to come out, and for the seeker after deliverance to be confident that his or her situation has been understood in all its complexity and beyond any barriers of fear or shame.

Second, North American Adventism is a diverse stew pot of peoples from around the world. There is no "standard" case for DM. Understanding of pagan religions is essential because those seeking assistance in North America often have deep personal and family ties in countries where ancestor worship, spirit worship, voodoo, animism, or folk-religions hold sway. This need for a broad understanding is emphasized by the implicit assumption on the part of some of those seeking assistance that their local pastor or elders in North America share similar experiences with fallen spirits or animistic religions and understand how to respond appropriately.

Third, through the ministry of Jesus Christ, parents could bring their children to him to seek for healing, whether it be from physical or spiritual ailment (see Mark 10:13-16). Parents have the spiritual authority to bring the children under their legal guardianship and spiritual oversight to the Savior for healing. Bade (2018:72, 73 goes further, arguing that permission is needed from a parent or legal guardian if the demonization is to be challenged. In this case study, the mother had the spiritual right to appeal for

assistance on behalf of her daughter, even if the daughter may not have wanted such deliverance at the time due to the rapid onset experience of demonization. Those engaged in DM can respond meaningfully to such parents, knowing that in so doing, they are following in the example of the Savior himself.

### Case Study # 3

Sarah is an undergraduate student enrolled in an Adventist college in the USA. She is very active in her home congregation in youth ministry and enjoys studying with and discipling teenage girls. Her dream is to become a full-time youth pastor, and she is now into her final year of studies before she can start serving as a licensed associate pastor with responsibility for youth ministry at a local congregation with her home conference. Sarah attends a DM talk given by a guest speaker, which raises many questions in her mind. Are all problems psychological, or are some caused by demonization? How can she differentiate between mental health challenge and demonization?

A few weeks later, as Sarah is starting to prepare for her graduation, a dark being starts to terrorize her at night, strangling her with strong hands, causing her to fight for her life each night. Each morning she awakes after a few hours of fitful sleep, and wonders whether she is going mad or not. Who will believe her? Rather than eagerly preparing for graduation, her life is now consumed by nightly terror and debilitating self-doubt. Is she really ready to minister to others when she is in such a terrible situation herself? And then she remembers the guest speaker at college and sends him an email.

CV responds to the email and copies SP, and tries to set up a meeting. However, Sarah is very busy with classes, and wants to communicate only via email. The correspondence goes on, and Sarah shares her situation. It is clear to SP and CV that Satan is trying his best to cripple Sarah's ministry before she even begins, but where is the open door in Sarah's life that would give him permission to harass her in such a personal way? From the correspondence, it becomes clear that Sarah has no obvious cherished, personal sins. There are no midnight campus hookups, no porn use (an increasingly common sin among young females in the experience of SP), and no history of sexual abuse. The emails go back and forth. Has there been any contact with the occult in Sarah's life? Sarah pauses, and then remembers. Yes, as a teen she bought a Ouija board and used it to ask questions at a sleepover with some friends while still living at home. Questions had been asked. Answers had been given. And where is the Ouija board now? It is in a box in the basement. Locked away, never to be used again.

SP shares the experience of the Ephesians, who burnt their books of magic when they heard the Gospel (Acts 19:19). Is it possible for Sarah to return home and destroy the Ouija board? For as long as it remains in her parents' basement, an object through which she has given permission for a demon to speak to her, Satan has permission to enter her life. Spring break is coming up, so Sarah agrees to return home, and to destroy the Ouija board. The trip is supposed to take one day by car, but it takes three days. The journey home is beset by burst tires, flat batteries, road diversions, and a lost credit card.

When Sarah finally makes it home, she calls CV. He advises her to explain the situation to her parents, and with their permission to ask the pastor and local elders to come by the next day. This she does, and all is set up. The pastor and elders come by. CV and SP spend time in intercessory prayer, imploring the Spirit to give Sarah wisdom, and for heavenly protection for Sarah and her parents as she destroys the Ouija board. Sarah also spends the morning in prayer, confessing the sin of communicating with a fallen spirit via the Ouija board, and asking for forgiveness, cleansing and divine protection. When the pastor and the elders arrive, they take the Ouija board outside, break it into small pieces, douse with gasoline, and burn it. The ashes are scraped away and dumped in a dumpster.

Sarah spends the rest of her spring break with her parents, and the nighttime terrors are now gone. She returns to her college dorm room, wondering whether her first night will be filled with peaceful sleep or a bitter battle against an unseen foe. By God's grace, her first night is filled with peaceful sleep, and so are all the subsequent nights. She calls CV just after her graduation to express her gratitude and is filled with praise to God for how he has set her free. CV responds by encouraging her to apply the principles of how to put on the armor of God, as laid out by Ferris (2003:7), who argues that in Eph 6:10-12, "we can live in the power of God's own might!" It is important to conclude with positive guidance at the end of a DM session to help the former victim have a clear roadmap to leading a life of victory in Jesus Christ.

Case Study # 3 illustrates further important principles of DM in the North American context. First, Adventists can have surprising "blind-spots" in their past, which they have either forgotten or simply assume to have no bearing on their current experience of demonization. Kraft argues (2015:76) that the Enlightenment led to a worldview shift in the West so that many in the West interpret the Scriptures in spiritual rather than literal terms. The Western Enlightenment worldview thus mitigates accepting the reality of evil in a personal, malevolent form, leaving many in the West at a loss for how to interpret demonization when it happens to them. Seemingly innocent episodes from earlier in life are often forgotten,

ignored, or assumed to have little spiritual significance. Yet, these same episodes may well have opened a door into their life for a demonic presence to demonize them at a time and place of the demon's own choosing.

The examples from biblical passages that describe how the apostolic church responded to demonization are not merely quaint stories from a superstitious past but provide a robust model for how modern-day Adventists can respond in a way that is faithful to Scripture. This requires the DM practitioner to adopt and minister within a biblical rather than a post-modern Western worldview.

Second, as with the previous case studies, the importance of listening deeply on the part of DM practitioners is once again demonstrated. There was no opportunity to use a guided questionnaire in a face-to-face interview that is often used with Adventists in North America. When the practitioner does not have much initial information to work with, it is critical that informed assessments can be made based on cultural competency and the available personal information. Such insights into the cultural context can provide significant guidance in understanding the probable causes of demonization when they are not readily apparent, particularly when the presenting data is sparse. Beyond questionnaires, sin lists, and family histories, what is needed is the gift of discernment of spirits (1 Cor 12:10) as urged by Prince (2020:47), who argued that DM practitioners need to distinguish between discernment and deliverance. "Before I could really help such people, I needed two essential items of spiritual equipment: the 'probe' of discernment and the 'forceps' of deliverance" (47).

North American society is becoming increasingly impacted by animistic or pagan ideas, which have a strong impact on popular culture via popular cable-TV shows, Hollywood movies, commercial music, and the burgeoning spirituality sections in popular bookstores. Lawrence Richards (2016:80) echoes this concern for western DM practitioners when discussing the primary causes of demonization in his ministry in the West, concluding that the primary doorways to demonization in the West are "trafficking with the occult, habitual personal sin, trauma and sins of the fathers." Thus, DM practitioners in the North American context are required to maintain an ongoing cultural competency, particularly understanding the impact of pagan and animistic influences on popular culture and responding appropriately in DM sessions.

Third, this case study was particularly interesting as neither CV nor SP ever met formally with Sarah in the context of DM, although subsequent informal contact was made. The entire ministry took place via email and a handful of telephone calls. There was no face-to-face communication, no kneeling together in prayer, no time for fasting, team preparation, or preparation of the supplicant. In fact, CV and SP would not know Sarah

even if they were to meet her in person. Particularly during the COVID pandemic, as people become used to transacting almost every aspect of their lives online, so there has been an increased demand for remote DM, connecting via electronic platforms rather than in person. Although this spreads DM opportunities around the globe for the practitioner, it also dramatically increases the possibility of cultural misunderstandings, for miscommunication to occur, and for the possibility of failure to discern the truth of a given situation. There is no discussion in the academic literature relating to virtual or online DM since all the referenced writers focus on face-to-face ministry.

Years of experience in DM on the part of CV and SP emphasizes the importance of meeting face-to-face with those seeking deliverance from demonization, for the non-verbal communication conveys important data that is often not conveyed in words. Some cultural backgrounds expect a much more tactile approach to ministry than others, just as Naaman had cultural expectations of how Elisha was supposed to heal him (2 Kgs 5:11). To lay hands on a victim of demonization, to observe their facial expressions, to hear the tone of their voice, to observe the rigidity of their body, to anoint them with oil, to hold their hands while they weep and confess their sins before their Heavenly Father are all important tactile aspects of the deliverance process. Although the power of God to deliver is not diminished by distance, the process of discernment, of understanding the situation in all its complexity, is greatly enhanced when the process is conducted face-to-face.

## Conclusion

There is a growing need for Adventist DM practitioners within the North American context. Growing cultural diversity within the Adventist community in North America, combined with the growing influence of pagan and occultic ideas and practices on popular culture, combine to make training in DM a growing priority for Adventist seminarians and pastors. Equipping in such ministry is increasingly essential to enable pastors and church leaders to respond effectively as members present widely varying manifestations of demonization.

The three case studies discussed above highlight the following important principles for DM in the North American Adventist context.

1. The importance of ministering in gender-balanced teams comprised of mature spiritual individuals with a variety of complimentary spiritual gifts.
2. Those requesting deliverance from demonization need to experience love and acceptance, without any hint of shock or condemnation if they are to feel comfortable to share the full truth of their situation.

3. DM practitioners ideally leave open space in their workday and monthly calendars, particularly on Sabbaths, to allow time and margin for ministry needs as and when they arise. This allows for more proactive team and victim preparation, and more appropriate choices of time and location.
4. Listening deeply, rather than using standardized questionnaires designed for the majority community in the North American context will allow a greater appreciation of differing understandings of “normal” behavior, and a deeper understanding of the extent of demonization in the victim’s life.
5. Parents and legal guardians can bring their children to Jesus Christ for deliverance, just as in the Gospels. DM practitioners can work with parents and legal guardians to bring deliverance for minors under their care.
6. Adventists often have blind spots concerning the presence of the occult in their lives, whereby they have unwittingly opened a door for demonization to occur. The biblical examples of spiritual house cleaning provide important templates (e.g., 2 Chron 17:6; Acts 19:19) for eliminating the causes of demonization today.
7. Maintaining intentional cultural competency in a fast-changing North American culture is imperative for DM practitioners to be able to intellectually understand and spiritually discern the causes and extent of demonization in a victim’s life.
8. The COVID pandemic has increased the wider community’s comfort with conducting complex interpersonal transactions on electronic platforms, including requests and expectations for DM being performed via electronic platforms. Yet, the biblical model illustrates the need for in-person ministry, which provides for deeper understanding and greater discernment of the extent of the demonization and subsequent strategies for deliverance.

### Recommendations for Adventist DM Practitioners in North American

1. Detailed study is recommended on the impact that online or virtual ministry delivery has on DM, with particular focus on mitigating the impact of cultural distance and poor communication.
2. Further research is needed into the area of *incubus* and *succubus* manifestations of demonization, particularly for individuals with a history of sexual immorality, promiscuity, or childhood abuse.
3. DM practitioners in the West may work with lists and questionnaires that focus on occultic activity that was dominant in the 1960s to the 2000 era. The advent of virtual reality, online gaming and



online occultic activity means new avenues for demonization are opening, over and above the “traditional” avenues such as Ouija boards, channeling, Tarot cards or certain forms of music. Ongoing research and awareness raising is needed for Western DM practitioners to stay abreast of the new and evolving avenues of connection with demonic beings in the internet era.

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Born into a pastoral family, Conrad Vine grew up with his twin brother and two sisters in homes across the UK. After graduating with a business management degree (1995), he served in the UK public healthcare system before God led him to ADRA (1996) where he initially served in Azerbaijan. Following seminary training at Newbold College (2002-2004), he and his wife, Luda, began their pastoral ministry in London, UK. After serving as Secretary-Treasurer in the Middle East Union, they transitioned to pastoral ministry for 4 years in Minnesota before being called to serve as President of Adventist Frontier Missions.

UGOCHUKWU ELEMS

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## Discerning the Condition: Disease or Demonic

### Introduction

In 2006, a woman who had earlier been diagnosed as psychotic and who was on medication suddenly quit taking them on the instruction of her pastor who told her that instead her case was one of demon possession. Unfortunately, shortly after quitting her medication, she killed her own daughter (Korosec 2006). In this case a pastor denied the existence of a mental illness.

Psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, anthropologists, some pastors, and other related professionals tend to go to the other extreme and dismiss the reality of demonic manifestations. They often explain that the Bible narratives of demonic encounters are myths, hence the need to demythologize the Scripture's claim. Yet it is not possible to deny the historicity of the biblical claims, nor can any objective reader of the Scriptures ignore the existence and influence of demons among people today. In fact, the Bible clearly asserts the reality and existence of demons.

The dividing line between disease and demonic possession is very thin, which poses problems for pastoral and clinical professionals on the where, how, or when they can properly function within their given boundaries without encroaching into one another's domain. This understanding is particularly relevant in the African context where the supernatural is intrinsically linked to almost every aspect of life and natural occurrences.

Until the mid-19th century, it was generally believed that any abnormal behavior was an indication of demon possession. However, by the late 19th century with the rise of the influence of science on human activities, many people began to doubt the existence of demons and labeled

everything as a mental illness instead. Surprisingly, in Africa the present generation is returning to a strong belief in the reality of demonic activities in everyday human existence, and even in Western nations this view is increasing as shown by related studies and statistics (O'Connor 2005:16, 17). M. W. Cuneo observed that there were over six hundred exorcism ministries in the United States of America alone (2001). In fact, Rodger Bufford believes we now exist in a world that is unprecedentedly drawn to the occult and demonism (1988:15) and Kathleen Sands postulates: "to ignore, or trivialize or apologize for earlier *belief in demon possession* is not merely arrogant; it is also bad history" (2004:3, emphasis mine).

Hence, this chapter is based on two assumptions: that disease is real and that demonic possession is real. However, it is vitally important for Christians to know the difference. Therefore, every section of this chapter will serve the purpose of helping the reader develop principles for discerning pathological cases from demonic possessions.

### Definition of Key Terms

*Disease*—a state of "disorder of structure or function in a human, animal, or plant, especially one that produces specific symptoms or that affects a specific location and is not simply a direct result of physical injury" (*Oxford Dictionary*).

*Demonic*—the state of being possessed or fully under the influence of demons. "Demons are satanic emissaries" (Unger 1971:102). According to Unger, to be possessed by a demon(s) is "a condition in which one or more evil spirits or demons inhabit the body of a human being and can take complete control of their victim at will" (102).

### Demons or Demonic Possession in the Old Testament

Demon activity is not as obvious in the Old Testament as in the New Testament. It is, in fact, possible to argue that demonic possessions or demons as understood today are not found in the Old Testament (Bufford 1988:21). Angel Rodriguez in his article "Old Testament Demonology" in the *Ministry Magazine* of June 1998, also concurs that the demons as understood in the present era are foreign to Old Testament believers. The Old Testament simply speaks of God, the Spirit of God (Exod 31:3; Isa 42:1; Num 24:2; 1 Sam 10:10), the devil, gods, and evil spirits (Judg 9:23; 1 Sam 16:14; Zech 3:1-2). The Old Testament recognizes only One God who is the Creator and supreme Controller of all things whether visible or invisible. Interestingly, evil spirits are sometimes portrayed as serving the will of God (1 Sam 6:14).

Although certain portions (Lev 17:7; Deut 32:17; 2 Chr 11:15; and Ps 106:37) of the Old Testament speak of devils, there is no singular Hebrew word that corresponds in meaning to demons as understood in contemporary times (Bratcher 2018). Nevertheless, the “Old Testament testifies to the existence of a demonic being in conflict with God and His people (Isa 14:12-14). This archenemy of God is found throughout Old Testament narratives, hymns, and prophetic speeches” (Rodriguez 1999:7).

### **Demons or Demonic Possession in the New Testament**

Demons or demonic activities are real in the New Testament. The New Testament presents many case studies about demonic powers and instances of demonic possession and manipulations. Mark’s Gospel supplies an account of one of Jesus’ encounters with a man possessed by an unclean or evil spirit while He taught in the synagogue in Capernaum. On seeing Jesus, the evil spirit or demons in this man spoke up saying, “Let us alone! What have we to do with You, Jesus of Nazareth? Did You come to destroy us? I know who You are—the Holy One of God! But Jesus rebuked him, saying, “Be quiet, and come out of him!” And when the unclean spirit had convulsed him and cried out with a loud voice, he came out of him” (Mark 1:24-26 NKJV). It is obvious that the demons are real in these stories and that they are personal beings possessing ability to reason and assert themselves. Moreover, they also recognized Jesus Christ as their Master and Creator. When Jesus commanded them to come out and depart from the man they obeyed.

Another instance of demonic activity is recorded in Matthew 8:28-34 where Jesus encountered two demon-possessed men in Gergesenes. Once again, the demons recognized him and begged him not to destroy them before the appointed time and to allow them to go into a herd of pigs feeding close by. Jesus granted them their request. In Acts 16:16-18, Paul casts out a demon from a slave girl who was used for money-making by her masters. The demonic influence enabled her to act as a fortune-teller.

In Matthew 9:32-33, a dumb and deaf man was brought to Jesus for healing, and Jesus immediately rebuked and commanded the demon to depart from the man and immediately the man was able to speak and hear.

Matthew 17:14-21 reports another case of a boy who suffered seizures and was suffering a lot. While Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, unfortunately his disciples could not deliver the boy. When Jesus came back down the father of the boy reported the situation to Christ, who immediately rebuked the demon and caused it to depart from the boy and he was instantly set free. The symptom as reported by the boy’s father was seizures, which is a sign of a common mental condition. Jesus

immediately rebuked the demon, and the boy was instantly whole again. Thus, it is evident that demons are real in the New Testament era and that Jesus possessed the gift of discernment that enabled him to determine whether the origin of the problem was disease or demonic.

### **Can Demons Afflict Humans with Sicknesses or Diseases?**

The Bible affirms the reality of Satan and his angelic loyalists (demons). Lucifer was created and endowed with beauty, power, and honor above every other creature in heaven and was indeed perfect in all his ways until iniquity was found in him (Ezek 28:11-15; Isa 14:12-14). When he was cast out of heaven, the Bible does not say his power and abilities diminished; rather, he lost his position as the covering cherub (Rev 12:7-10; Isa 14:12, 15-20).

Demons can cause afflictions (Luke 13:10-17) such as blindness (Matt 12:22), deafness (Mark 9:17-27), and dumbness (Matt 12:22). In Matthew 4:23-24 those who were demonized were ill from various diseases and suffered severe pain, seizures, and paralysis.

The experience of Job as recorded in Job 1-2, reveals that the devil has power to inflict sickness and disease on human beings. He inflicted Job with a terrible skin disease (Job 2:7).

Matthew 12:22 describes the case of a man who was possessed by demons who made him blind and dumb. When Jesus cast out those demons, the man was able to speak and see. Another instance is recorded in Matthew 17:14-18 in which a boy was said to be epileptic as a result of demonic possession. He was brought to Jesus and after he cast out the demons the boy's health was restored, and the epilepsy gone.

In 2000, a church member asked me to visit her son in the hospital who was in a critical situation. On arriving at the hospital, I learned that the doctors and nurses had tried all they could do medically to no avail and were in the process of discharging the young man. He could not be restrained, nor was he aware of what he did. We finally took him to the church, and I called a few church members who were available at that moment to join in prayers for the deliverance and healing of this young man. After praying for about an hour, the demons in him shouted and then he fell down like a dead person. I asked everyone present to leave him alone and we continued singing and praising God for about another hour. He woke up and acted like a new person and was surprised that he was in the church. When he heard what had happened, he joined us in praising God.

It is evident that the devil and his demonic agencies can and have indeed afflicted many people in biblical and contemporary times with sicknesses and diseases; hence, it is reasonable to assert that some sicknesses and/or diseases are inflicted by demons.

In the biblical account, Jesus recognized the distinction or dividing line between disease and demonic cases. In Matthew 10:1, 8, Jesus empowered his apostles to cast out demons (unclean spirits) and to heal every disease. Further, in Luke 13:32, Jesus said to the messengers from John the Baptist, “I will keep on driving out demons and healing people today and tomorrow.”

### **Contemporary Evidence of Supernatural Interventions in Medical Cases**

A national survey of 1,100 medical doctors, piloted by HCD Research and the Louis Finkelstein Institute for Religious and Social Studies of The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York City, revealed that 55% (605) of these doctors attest to miraculous healing of their patients (Bishop 2017). Thus, even many physicians recognize the supremacy of supernatural powers over medical conditions.

In 1996, a church member (in Rivers State, Nigeria) approached me with a desperate request for help because she was so confused. Her only son was in a critical health situation and needed an urgent blood transfusion. Unfortunately, she did not have the funds needed. I did not have money—like Peter and John; however, the Holy Spirit inspired me to give what I had, so I prayed with her for the healing of her son. A few hours later she came running back to the parsonage. She was excited and praising God. Why? On getting back to the hospital, God had already performed a miracle for her son, and to the surprise of the doctors there was no need for a blood transfusion. The doctors said the boy was healed and discharged him that same day.

In another instance (in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria), we had just finished an evening evangelistic meeting when a lady with an unusually swollen foot came asking for prayers to heal her swollen right foot, which had persisted for months. I simply prayed to God for her healing and believed that God had heard our prayers and that she would be healed; however, as she left my presence that night there was no physical change, her right foot was still swollen. To the glory of God, by the next day, this same lady attended the meeting with no more swelling in her right foot.

### **The Conundrum of Disease vs. Demonic Cases**

Cases of demonic possession share certain characteristic symptoms or features similar to certain mental illnesses such as sudden vomiting, dizziness, sensing a sudden change in room temperature, or experiencing a significant or complete alteration of the individual’s appearance. Rodger K. Bufford presented research findings on some of the similarities

between mental disease and demonic possession as shown in the chart below (1988:105, 107, 121).

<b>Comparison of Demonic Influence and Mental Disorders</b>	
<b>Demonic Influence</b>	<b>Parallels in Mental Disorders</b>
Supernatural knowledge	Hallucinations, delusions of psychotic disorders; God told me.
Supernatural Strength	Unusual strength displayed in bipolar disorder, other psychotic conditions such as catatonic.
Going about naked	Evident in most psychological disorders such as schizophrenia and schizotypal disorders.
Unable to hear, speak, or be blind	Associated with convulsion and other hysterical disorders.
Seizures	Common with epilepsy and other chronic brain disorders like intoxication, trauma, cerebral arteriosclerosis, syphilis, and intracranial neoplasms.
Use of a “different” voice; presence of distinct personality	Displayed in cases of dissociative disorders such as multiple personality disorder.
Bizarre behavior	Common in psychoses.
Force, violent behavior	Common in most psychotic cases such as paranoid, intermittent explosive disorder, anti-social personality, and crude aggressive behaviors.
Claims of demonic influence	Observed in multiple personality disorder.
Involvement in occult practices	This can be observed in many disorders (not to be used as a diagnostic standard).
Forceful, violent behavior	Observed in many psychotic conditions like bipolar disorders, paranoid, and intermittent explosive disorder.
Loss of personal control	Common to most psychotic conditions
Invasive	Associated with psychotic conditions

The chart clearly shows the challenges involved in distinguishing between demonic possession and disease (especially mental disease). This situation creates daunting challenges for scientists and Bible scholars in determining how to help the victims. Yet, every case needs to be properly diagnosed and treated.

Despite the doubts and arguments of some scientists against the phenomena of demonic possession, C. P. Bankart observed that “demonology continues to be a favored explanation for bizarre behavior even in modern, postindustrial, postfeminist, politically correct North America” (1997:34). On the one hand, while some scientists deny demonic possession, they are sometimes confronted with cases that defy all medical standards and interventions and thus are compelled to admit that there might be some influence beyond the realm of scientific investigations and diagnosis.

The New Testament does acknowledge both disease and demonic cases. When Jesus commissioned the Twelve, Matthew reports that he “gave them authority to *drive out impure spirits* and to *heal every disease and sickness*” (Matt 10:1, emphasis mine). Their ministry was twofold: casting out demons and healing all kinds of diseases. Furthermore, in Matthew 10:8, Jesus again makes a distinction between healing the sick and driving out demons. Thus, Jesus was cognizant of the difference between disease and demonic cases. Another instance where Jesus highlighted the difference between disease and demonic situations was in response to the Pharisees who tried to discourage him from preaching in Jerusalem by reminding him of Herod’s plan to kill him. Jesus told them to “go tell that fox, ‘I will keep on *driving out demons* and *healing people* today and tomorrow” (Luke 13:32, emphasis mine). Nevertheless, divine aid, wisdom, and spiritual gifting are needed to discern the difference.

### Some Helpful Principles in Discerning the Condition

1. Know the truth. Isaiah 8:20 declares: “To the law and to the testimony, if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no truth in them.” The Word of God is central in understanding and discerning the condition (disease or demonic). It is the inspired, infallible norm for evaluation of all knowledge and reality (2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:20, 21).

2. It is important to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Spiritual things are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14). Spiritual insight that is consequent on a close relationship with God is needed in discerning the condition. The Spirit of God discerns the presence and manifestations of the demonic influences and reveals the same to those who maintain an intimate relationship with God. In fact, time and again in Scripture, it has been shown that the demons recognize the Spirit of God and vice versa (Acts 19:15; Matt 8:28-29).



3. Demons manifest themselves when they encounter the power and presence of God. They recognize the Lordship of Jesus Christ (Matt 8:29); they may beg or cry out for mercy as in Matthew 8:28-32, or shout and torment their victim as in Mark 1:23-26.

4. People under demonic influences are resistant to prayer because the demons in them forbid them to call on the name and presence of God.

5. Sickesses may result from natural causes but can also be inflicted by the devil and his demonic agencies. This is where the spirit of discernment, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit, is critical (1 Cor 12:10). The Holy Spirit is able to guide us so that we will not mistake a demonic case for sickness.

6. Listen to the victim. Active listening is another critical factor in discerning the condition (whether disease or demonic). Often, by simply listening, one is able to understand some details about the case. Jesus was always an active listener, which is part of the reason he always ministered to the real needs in people's lives. In fact, even when a demon speaks through a possessed person, it takes a spiritually minded and good listener to discern if the demon is speaking or if the person could just be confused because of a mental disorder.

7. Demonic cases are usually resistant or unresponsive to medical diagnosis and therapy.

## Conclusion

It has been seen that the dividing line between diseases and demonic possession is thin. It is sometimes difficult to determine whether a case is pathological or demonic, but while the dividing line is thin, diseases and demonic cases are real, and each case (whether disease or demonic) can be discerned and appropriately dealt with. Nevertheless, the guidelines provided above are critical for appropriately discerning and addressing cases of disease or demonic possession.

There is overwhelming evidence in the New Testament that many of the diseases or illnesses that mental health professionals today classify as mental illness were believed to be and treated as demonic cases. In fact, one can hardly find any clear case of mental disease/illness in the New Testament that was not associated with demonic influences. Thus, pastors and Bible scholars have an important role to play in cases involving mental or demonic activity, while always using the spiritual gift of discernment.

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KELVIN ONONGHA

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## Footholds and Strongholds

At creation God made humans in His image and likeness, endowing them with powers and abilities akin to their Creator. One distinguishing quality which humans alone possessed, unique from all other creatures, was the power of choice—the will. This unique attribute made humans the only creatures with the ability to say yes or no to God. Since the devil’s fall from glory, it has been his mission to deceive and enlist others in his rebellion against the sovereignty of God. Continuing the work of deception and rebellion he began in heaven before he and his confederates were forcefully expelled, he seeks in his wrath against the Creator to totally deface the image of God from the lives of His children (Rev 12:17). To achieve these objectives Satan seeks inroads into people’s lives; means by which he can obtain a foothold, which could later become a stronghold, to gain total control or subordination of the human will to his whims and pleasures. Ultimately, as Jesus stated, his mission is to “kill, and steal, and destroy” (John 10:10). The beginning point for his objective is finding a foothold to obtain access into the lives of God’s creatures, for whom He sent His Son to die on the cross.

As a result of the great conflict which broke out in heaven (Rev 12:7-11), the devil and his evil angels were expelled from their former abode and became vagrants in need of new habitations. This problem was solved when the devil tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden to disobey God. By complying to the counsel of the deceiver, the earth’s dominion was ceded to the usurper (Gen 3). The fall of Adam and Eve occurred because the devil found a foothold, an entry point into the heart of Eve. This foothold was the sin of covetousness. Eve apparently coveted the adulation and

glory only God should have; she desired to be worshiped (v. 5). Eve was deceived by Satan who thereby gained control of her and subsequently used her as an agent to tempt Adam to join in the rebellion against God. Adam, on his part, apparently chose to join his wife in her disobedience rather than to obey God and live. In attempting to be godlike Adam and Eve lost their paradise home, their dominion over the entire creation, and their position as custodians of God's world entrusted to them. Intriguingly, the same unholy ambition which Satan had nursed—the desire to have the position, dominion, and glory belonging to the Creator—he transmitted to Adam and Eve.

### Battle for the Mind

Although the great conflict between God and Satan, light and darkness, truth and error began in heaven and culminated in a literal war (Rev 12:7-8), the Scriptures reveal a different phase of this age-old battle, which has morphed into a spiritual conflict. The new battleground is the human heart. The great controversy is now a battle for the will, with the people on this earth playing center stage for this drama of the universe. The war is all about control for dominion, and which kingdom humans choose to belong to. No one can claim neutrality; there is no middle ground.

In order to obtain total control of human subjects the devil first seeks footholds into their lives. A foothold can be explained as “a spot, place, location, room, home, position, tract, occasion, opportunity, locality, region, or condition” (Anderson n.d.). The Apostle Paul provides insight into the nature of the devil's footholds when he states: “And don't sin by letting anger control you. Don't let the sun go down while you are still angry, for anger gives a foothold to the devil” (Eph 4:26, 27). In this passage, Paul introduces one of the several channels, or means, by which the devil gains control over the human will—through anger. However, he also demonstrates that whatever human emotion is not mastered can become a portal by which demons gain control over a person.

It is also noteworthy that Paul states, “be angry, but sin not;” in other words, to be angry is not necessarily a sin. Evidently, it is when anger is not properly managed that it becomes a foothold for the devil. When anger is cherished and nurtured to the point that it becomes cancerous—resulting in bitterness—then the Spirit of the Lord is driven away and demons can have sway over the person, dictating what to do. On the contrary, when anger is surrendered to the Lord and the spirit of forgiveness embraced then the devil or his demons find no means to gain control over the individual.

## Footholds in the Lives of Selected Characters

A study of selected biblical biographies is illustrative of how the devil has historically found footholds in the lives of certain characters, with these stories providing lessons to be learned from them. The examples to be considered are from the experiences of Cain, Balaam, Samson, Solomon, and Judas. Additional comments from Ellen White on these characters serve to illuminate the lessons.

### Cain

One of the earliest and clearest cautions in Scripture against providing a foothold for the devil was given by God to Cain (Gen 4:6, 7). Sequel to the entry of sin into earth's pristine environment God announced to Adam and Eve the penalty and consequences for their rebellion, but also pronounced the promise of their redemption. A Savior was to be born who would bruise the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15). As a sign of their acceptance of this divine means of salvation and of their allegiance to God, Cain and Abel were required by God to offer sacrifices to the Creator. While Abel obediently offered a sacrifice of the flock, Cain presented a sacrifice of the fruit from the field. The Lord accepted Abel's sacrifice but rejected Cain's, which caused Cain to become very angry. As a result, God gave the divine caution, "Why are you so angry?" the LORD asked Cain. "Why do you look so dejected? You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master" (Gen 4:6-7).

There are two explicit lessons God sought to convey to Cain from this passage. First, the reason for the rejection of his sacrifice lay in his wrong choice, his refusal to offer the right sacrifice. Second, Cain was warned that sin was crouching right at the door of his heart, personified as a stalker, seeking any opportunity to overcome him. It is noteworthy that the foothold into Cain's heart, which the devil exploited, was anger against his brother. However, God makes it clear that sin—in its myriad forms—is the main culprit.

Commenting on this incident, Ellen White provides the following insight regarding Cain's reaction to God's admonition:

Instead of acknowledging his sin, Cain continued to complain of the injustice of God and to cherish jealousy and hatred of Abel. He angrily reproached his brother, and attempted to draw him into controversy concerning God's dealings with them. In meekness, yet fearlessly and

firmly, Abel defended the justice and goodness of God. He pointed out Cain's error, and tried to convince him that the wrong was in himself. He pointed to the compassion of God in sparing the life of their parents when He might have punished them with instant death, and urged that God loved them, or He would not have given His Son, innocent and holy, to suffer the penalty that they had incurred. All this caused Cain's anger to burn the hotter. Reason and conscience told him that Abel was in the right; but he was enraged that one who had been wont to heed his counsel should now presume to disagree with him, and that he could gain no sympathy in his rebellion. In the fury of his passion he slew his brother. (White 2005d:74)

Rather than master the feelings of anger and resentment he felt towards his brother Abel, Cain succumbed to the demon of anger, allowing it to take control over him. The result was tragic—the first act of murder in human history, a fratricide.

Ellen White, however, traces the roots of Cain's transgression to the primal act of disobedience committed by the parents, Adam and Eve:

Made in the image of God, the human family lost their innocence, became transgressors, and as disloyal subjects began their downward career. Satan gained control of man's power of action. Through the senses he influenced the mind. Thus it has been from the beginning of the world. Instead of remaining under God's influence, in order that he might reflect the moral image of his Creator, man placed himself under the control of Satan's influence and was made selfish. Thus sin became a universal evil. And what a dreadful evil is sin! Yielding to Satan's suggestions, our first parents opened the floodgates of evil upon the world. The questionable principles of the father and the mother of the human race influenced some of those with whom they associated. The evil that began in Paradise has extended down through the ages. Although Adam and Eve related with sorrow to their children the sad story of the Fall, their family became a divided family. Cain chose to serve Satan, Abel to serve God. Cain killed his brother Abel, because he would not follow his example. (2008:41)

### Balaam

Balaam is another character whose experience reflects the terrible consequence of yielding a foothold in one's life to the devil. It is significant to note that very few prophets had God speak to them the way God did to Balaam in vision (Num 24:3-4). Also, it was the prophecy of Balaam that led the wise men (*magoi*) to Bethlehem at the birth of the Messiah (v. 17; Matt 2:1-3). Unfortunately, greed for profit was the foothold the

devil found in Balaam's heart. Departing from the pathway of righteousness, Balaam followed after the profits of unrighteousness (Jude 11; 2 Pet 2:15) and

“loved the wages of unrighteousness” 2 Peter 2:15. The sin of covetousness, which God declares to be idolatry, had made him a timeserver, and through this one fault Satan gained entire control of him. It was this that caused his ruin. The tempter is ever presenting worldly gain and honor to entice men from the service of God. He tells them it is their overconscientiousness that keeps them from prosperity. Thus many are induced to venture out of the path of strict integrity. One wrong step makes the next easier, and they become more and more presumptuous. They will do and dare most terrible things when once they have given themselves to the control of avarice and a desire for power. Many flatter themselves that they can depart from strict integrity for a time, for the sake of some worldly advantage, and that having gained their object, they can change their course when they please. Such are entangling themselves in the snare of Satan, and it is seldom that they escape. (White 2005d:439)

Balaam's tragic story demonstrates the blindness and dumbness that can overcome even a prophet when the devil finds a foothold in a life. This is also graphically portrayed in the role-reversal which occurred when the prophet became blinded by dreams of wealth—he began to speak and act like an ass, while his ass spoke and acted like a prophet (Num 22:22-33). Eventually, rather than dying the death of a righteous man, which he sought (23:10), he was killed ignominiously by the conquering Israelite forces. Just as the devil found a foothold in Balaam's life through his craving for wealth and honor he seeks to control and dominate the lives of men and women today, whether godly or ungodly. He promises them, as he did to Balaam, wealth, fame, and worldly honor, and too many appear to give in to that temptation.

### Samson

The story of the Israelite judge, Samson, is another illustration of how when Satan gains access through a foothold in a person's life he can bring ruin and great destruction to a promising life. Samson was the original, authentic, superman. Lions could not stop him, chains could not bind him, and gates were no hindrance for him. He was a one-man army, a genuine superhero; however, the devil found a foothold in his heart through lust. By his constant lust for Philistine women the devil overcame Samson's scruples, disarmed, neutralized, and took captive the mighty warrior.

Ellen White states, “In the society of this enchantress, the judge of Israel squandered precious hours that should have been sacredly devoted to the welfare of his people. But the blinding passions which make even the strongest weak, had gained control of reason and of conscience” (1881:1).

### Solomon

The golden era of Israelite kingship flowered under the rule of Solomon. Solomon took over the reign from his father who had established the greatness of the Israelite nation. He went on to forge political and economic ties with the surrounding nations. Solomon had a favored status with God—he was named by God, Jedidiah, or beloved (2 Sam 12:24-25), and God in a dream revealed himself to the king asking him to request whatever he desired. His name and fame spread globally leading to the visit of the Queen of Sheba, who came to ascertain whether the stories she had heard about the glories of his kingdom were really true (1 Kgs 10:1-13). Twice in dreams the Lord appeared to Solomon, the first time promising him wisdom, wealth, and fame, and the second time giving him assurance of his continued presence if he remained faithful to God (3:5-15, 9:1-9).

Unfortunately, the devil found a foothold in Solomon’s life through his lust. His unrestrained love for women eventually led his heart away from God (1 Kgs 11:1-4). Ellen White ruefully observes,

The life of Solomon might have been remarkable until its close, if virtue had been preserved. But he surrendered this special grace to lustful passion. In his youth he looked to God for guidance and trusted in Him, and God chose for him and gave him wisdom that astonished the world. His power and wisdom were extolled throughout the land. But his love of women was his sin. This passion he did not control in his manhood, and it proved a snare to him. His wives led him into idolatry, and when he began to descend the declivity of life, the wisdom that God had given him was removed; he lost his firmness of character and became more like the giddy youth, wavering between right and wrong. Yielding his principles, he placed himself in the current of evil, and thus separated himself from God, the foundation and source of his strength. He had moved from principle. Wisdom had been more precious to him than the gold of Ophir. But, alas! lustful passions gained the victory. He was deceived and ruined by women. What a lesson for watchfulness! What a testimony as to the need of strength from God to the very last! (1923:582).

Ironically, as is evident from the accounts of the lives of Samson, David, and Solomon, the strongest, greatest, and wisest of leaders the nation of Israel ever had were brought low through lust—a foothold the devil found in their lives.



## Judas

During His life on earth, Jesus had an inner circle of twelve followers or disciples who were always with him. Judas was one of the apostles of Christ, those who were among the closest persons that lived and walked with the Savior. Despite his proximity to the Lord Judas permitted the devil to find a foothold in his heart through the lust for filthy lucre. The gospel writer, John, observes that although Judas enjoyed a position of high esteem among the apostles as the treasurer, he was a thief who often helped himself to the purse he controlled (John 12:6). Through this point of entry, the devil took control of Judas' life and eventually used him to betray Christ for the meager sum of 30 pieces of silver (John 13:26-27). Similar to the case of the apostate prophet Balaam, Judas traded his soul for money. Comparing John and Judas, Ellen White observes:

In striking contrast to the sanctification worked out in the life of John is the experience of his fellow disciple, Judas. Like his associate, Judas professed to be a disciple of Christ, but he possessed only a form of godliness. He was not insensible to the beauty of the character of Christ; and often, as he listened to the Savior's words, conviction came to him, but he would not humble his heart or confess his sins. By resisting the divine influence he dishonored the Master whom he professed to love. John warred earnestly against his faults; but Judas violated his conscience and yielded to temptation, fastening upon himself more securely his habits of evil. The practice of the truths that Christ taught was at variance with his desires and purposes, and he could not bring himself to yield his ideas in order to receive wisdom from heaven. Instead of walking in the light, he chose to walk in darkness. Evil desires, covetousness, revengeful passions, dark and sullen thoughts, were cherished until Satan gained full control of him. (2005a:557)

## Strongholds

In two major passages in his epistles Paul discusses the great conflict involving all Christians (Eph 4:24-26; 2 Cor 10:3-5) in which he provides insights into the strategies and devices of the devil and his demonic forces. Besides seeking for a foothold, the other way that the devil and his demons exercise control over humans is by establishing strongholds in the lives of their victims. What are these strongholds and how are they established? Paul explains, "For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing every

thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:3-5, emphasis added). The word translated "strongholds" in this passage is a unique Greek expression that can also be rendered as "fortress." In other words, beyond establishing a foothold in the hearts and lives of humans in order to enfeeble their resistance to his control and to subsequently lead to their moral and spiritual destruction, the other strategy is to establish a stronghold, or fortress of resistance in their minds against everything godly or holy.

It seems clear from the passage what Paul is referring to as strongholds or fortresses. These are "arguments" (NKJV, NIV, NET), "speculations" (NASB), "human reasoning and false arguments" (NLT) that are in opposition to the knowledge of God (2 Cor 10:5).

Concerning the passage in question, it has been remarked that "the imagery is of a stronghold breached and those sheltering behind its walls taken captive. The apostle's purpose is not only to demolish false arguments, but also to bring people's thoughts under the Lordship of Christ" (Kruse 1987:174, 175). Human reasoning, philosophies, logic systems, and worldviews in opposition to the knowledge of God therefore seem to be what Paul is referring to. In other words, every belief system, assumption, or perception of reality contrary to the Word and will of God is here implied.

Fortunately, Paul reminds Christians that although these may constitute strongholds or fortresses in human minds, the weapons in the divine arsenal are formidable enough to destroy them. In contemporary imagery the passage brings to mind how explosives are employed by road construction engineers for blasting through rock formations and mountains in order to create a new path for a highway.

In ancient times, however, the fortress constituted the last bastion of defense and protection of a city. Once it was breached defeat was imminent. The fortress or stronghold was designed with a watchtower and lookout post but served primarily to keep invaders out; it was intended to be impregnable.

In the African context, strongholds could be regarded as those beliefs, philosophies, and worldviews in opposition to the Word of God, and to his divine will and purposes. These would include beliefs regarding the dead, reincarnation, the spirit world, and the power of the devil. Therefore, it is important for Christians to remember that at the cross, as Paul plainly demonstrates, Jesus destroyed the strongholds of Satan, disarmed principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, leading them captive in his victory procession (Col 2:15).

Other footholds that the devil can employ to gain entry, hold hostage, and exert complete control—becoming impenetrable strongholds in

human lives—include pornography and sex, alcohol and drugs, addictions of any kind, appetite (White 1901:1), rebellion (White 2005a:61), occult/sorcery (61), deception (White 1969:37, error/false doctrines (White 1973:589), worldly entertainments (White 2006:332), including receiving the glory due to God (White 1986:294). In other words, any habitual behavior, practice, or belief, contrary to the Word and will of God can provide a foothold into an individual's life and become a stronghold in opposition to the kingdom of God.

### Divine Strongholds

On one hand, Paul reminds Christians that enemy strongholds need to be demolished by employing the formidable weapons God has provided for taking as captives of war the devices of Satan. On the other hand, the Scriptures in several passages make it unambiguously clear that the Lord is a stronghold the righteous can flee to in order to find refuge and security (Ps 18:2, 31:3, 91:2, 144:2; 2 Sam 22:3). Against the relentless attacks of the enemy in the Great Controversy, and the devil's unabating efforts to control and have dominion over humans, the Christian's only refuge and defense is the Lord. When in earnestness and helplessness Christians cry to the Lord in prayer they can be sure help will be sent to withstand the fiery attacks of the devil. Divine assistance is always available to those who sense their weakness and inadequacy and reach out to the Lord for power. Ministering angels will also be sent to strengthen them, as in the temptations Jesus endured in the wilderness (Heb 1:14; Matt 4:1-11).

The other related divine stronghold the Bible presents is the name of Jesus. In the name of Jesus, the impotent were healed (Acts 3:6), signs and wonders were performed (Acts 4: 28-30), demonic spirits cast out (Acts 16:18), and in the end of time every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall confess the Lordship of Jesus (Phil 2:10-11). A note of caution, however, is necessary for the name of Jesus is not magical, as the sons of Sceva discovered (Acts 19:13-16). In their attempt to exorcize a demon they were under the false assumption that all they needed to do was to mention the name of Jesus and the demon would depart. Unfortunately, because they had no relationship with Jesus they were routed by the demon and managed to escape naked with serious bruises and a thorough trouncing. Despite this traumatic encounter God demonstrated through Paul's ministry the power in the name of Jesus over every demonic stronghold of the devil.

The apostle Paul, in his labors at Ephesus, was given special tokens of divine favor. The power of God accompanied his efforts, and many were healed of physical maladies. God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul: so that from his body were brought unto the sick

handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them. These manifestations of supernatural power were far more potent than had ever before been witnessed in Ephesus, and were of such a character that they could not be imitated by the skill of the juggler or the enchantments of the sorcerer. As these miracles were wrought in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the people had opportunity to see that the God of heaven was more powerful than the magicians who were worshipers of the goddess Diana. (White 2005a:286)

Another notion that emerges from a study of the Scriptures is that *the way of the Lord* is a divine stronghold against demonic influences and attacks (Prov 10:29). Safety and security is found only as God's people walk in his way, in obedience to his will, keeping his commandments.

### The Role of the Will

In the course of his itinerant ministry Jesus once encountered two demoniacs who lived in the tombs. Several times chains had been used to bind them, but they always managed to break loose (Matt 8:28-34). Ellen White explains that these men, in their abject depravity, represent precisely what the devil would like to do with everyone who yields their will to the control of demons. "The encounter with the demoniacs of Gergesa had a lesson for the disciples. It showed the depths of degradation to which Satan is seeking to drag the whole human race, and the mission of Christ to set men free from his power. Those wretched beings, dwelling in the place of graves, possessed by demons, in bondage to uncontrolled passions and loathsome lusts, represent what humanity would become if given up to satanic jurisdiction" (2005b:341).

Notice a similar warning:

There are multitudes today as truly under the power of evil spirits as was the demoniac of Capernaum. All who willfully depart from God's commandments are placing themselves under the control of Satan. Many a man tampers with evil, thinking that he can break away at pleasure; but he is lured on and on, until he finds himself controlled by a will stronger than his own. He cannot escape its mysterious power. Secret sin or master passion may hold him a captive as helpless as was the demoniac of Capernaum. (White 1958:312)

Therefore, each individual has to make a decision to allow or deny demons access to their lives and to live in them. The will needs to be exercised to resist the evil one.

The tempter can never compel us to do evil. He cannot control minds unless they are yielded to his control. The will must consent, faith must let go its hold upon Christ, before Satan can exercise his power upon us. But every sinful desire we cherish affords him a foothold. Every point in which we fail of meeting the divine standard is an open door by which he can enter to tempt and destroy us. And every failure or defeat on our part gives occasion for him to reproach Christ. (White 1958:125)

As God's people prepare for the second advent Christ's example must be their standard; in Christ the devil found no foothold, no entry point with which to control Him (John 14:30).

Now, while our great High Priest is making the atonement for us, we should seek to become perfect in Christ. Not even by a thought could our Savior be brought to yield to the power of temptation. Satan finds in human hearts some point where he can gain a foothold; some sinful desire is cherished, by means of which his temptations assert their power. But Christ declared of Himself: "The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me" (John 14:30). Satan could find nothing in the Son of God that would enable him to gain the victory. He had kept His Father's commandments, and there was no sin in Him that Satan could use to his advantage. This is the condition in which those must be found who shall stand in the time of trouble. (White 2005c:623)

The call therefore to all is for a life of soberness and vigilance realizing that the enemy is like a lion that is constantly on the prowl seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8, 9). As a result, effort is necessary on the part of all to resist the devil, and to shut up every avenue by which he may gain entry and control of lives.

The Christian life is a warfare, not against believing brethren, but against the seducing spirit of the enemy, against the subtle, deceiving influence of the serpent, which creeps into our thoughts and minds. "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you." Make no provision for the flesh, to deceive, to falsify, to work just as Satan worked in Eden. He is watching his chance to develop if he can only have an opportunity. Give him no foothold. There is something we are charged to do: "Resist the devil," and the promise is, "he will flee from you." Why? Because the angel of God lifts up for you a standard against the enemy, and he flees. (White 1905:327)

## Conclusion

In his second epistle to the Corinthian church Paul declared that he would not want the saints to be ignorant regarding the devices of the evil one so that the devil might not take advantage of them (2 Cor 2:11). Among the battle strategies the devil employs against Christians and in the great cosmic conflict are the establishment of footholds and strongholds in human lives. It is the duty of every child of God to resist in the following ways:

1. Carefully block access of your hearts by the devil so that no entry point may be established. In our age this includes caution in the use of modern technology, social media, and various entertainment platforms that could become access points for the devil (Prov 4:23).
2. Daily study and obedience to Scriptures help realign our lives with the will of God. By employing the power found in the Gospels every stronghold of the devil may be breached and destroyed and every thought brought under subjection to the Lordship of Christ (2 Cor 10:3-5).
3. The weapons in the Christian arsenal include the Word of God and prayer. Through the power of prayer the seemingly impregnable strongholds of the enemy can be destroyed and captives set free.
4. Believers can find safety and security behind the unassailable divine strongholds of the Lord by abiding in Christ (John 15:1-7; Rom 8:1-2) and putting on Christ (Rom 13:14; Col 3:5-10). As Christians walk the narrow way, and regularly practice Christian disciplines they will find freedom in Christ and thereby escape the footholds of demons and the strongholds of the devil.
5. Exceeding, great, and precious promises have also been provided for God's people to live victorious lives and escape the snares of the devil (2 Pet 1:4). Furthermore, God has promised to rescue captives from the hands of the warrior, even those who sold themselves into captivity, and God will deliver his children who call out to him for help (Isa 49:24-25).

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MICHÉE BADÉ

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# How to Engage Voluntary Spirit Possession Rituals in Mission: The Case of the Dendi Adorcism Ritual

## Introduction

Missionaries face unique challenges when confronted with spirit possession rituals. Because not all spirit possessions are regarded as negative in some cultures, some spirit possessions are sought through adorcism rituals. Such spirit possessions are considered advantageous for the individual or the community. Contrasted with exorcism which is to expel or bind troublesome or uninvited entities, adorcism creates or strengthens beneficial ties between the possessed person and the spirits (Openshaw 2020:6).

Spirit possession is considered a life crisis in most cultures (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiéno 1999:316; Love 2000:24) and are believed to cause bad luck, curses, strange events, chronic illnesses, repeated accidents, and even unexpected death (Hiebert et al., 316). Hence, crisis rituals such as exorcism to free people from evil spirit attacks or possession are conducted in many societies (147; Love 2000:24, 179). Hiebert and others argue that mission among such people groups should necessarily include power encounters and exorcisms (1999:171). Consequently, Hiebert and his colleagues contend that “when encountering spirit possession, missionaries must be prepared to pray to God to deliver the victims. For those raised in the West, this often means rethinking their understanding of demonic realities in light of Scripture. Biblically, it is clear that demons are real and that they plague people, but they must submit to the authority of Christ” (171).



As Hiebert puts it, if the very core of God's mission (*missio Dei*) to any culture believes in the emphasis of his dominant authority and power over Satan and his agents, then the manifestation of God's power as part of his nature in relationship with his creation should be, for every missionary, a matter of faithfulness to the owner of that mission (1989:55).

This article seeks to show that the practice of adorcism rituals, as is the case among the Dendi people in the northern part of Benin, presents a unique challenge to Christian mission. Therefore, the classical approach to spirit possession with exorcism needs a critical evaluation. Peiter Craffert (2015:7), for instance, argues that intentional spirit possessions do not need exorcism.

### Adorcism Rituals in Various Cultures

Adorcism was coined in 1962 and further used in 1971 by the Belgian structuralist Luc de Heusch (1927-2012). The term was used in contrast to exorcism as the ritualistic invitation of "entities whose presence is deemed valuable to the possessed persons and their communities" (Openshaw 2020:6; Lewis 1996:122; Moro and Myers 2010:192). In such forms of spirit possession, the spirit possessed person benefits from the ties he or she has with the spirits for "connections and dialogues beyond the human realm" in order to receive gifts of healing, sacred knowledge, and guidance (Openshaw 2020:6; Love 2000:94). Hence, adorcism does not seek to expel the spirit, rather it "endeavors to come to terms with it, reaching an accommodation with it.... Possession then becomes the first step in initiation into a spirit cult." (Moro and Myers 2010:192). Thus, adorcism is a ritualistic voluntary invitation to a spirit or spirits in an individual or individuals.

According to Openshaw adorcism rituals happen worldwide "and are embedded within the sociocultural contexts in which they occur" (2020:6). Ioan Lewis (1996:xii), for instance, argues that in some cultures where shamanism is a profession, adorcism is viewed as "the domestication of spirits in the course of the development of the shamanic career, or more temporarily as a treatment for a specific affliction." Thus, many cults such as the *zar* (found in the northeastern part of Africa—Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia, and the Sudan), the *bori* (found mainly in West Africa among the Hausas), and the *holey* (also in West Africa but among the Songhay people like the Dendi of Northern Benin) perform adorcism (Brohm et al. 2017; Openshaw 2020:5-7; cf. Lewis et al. 1991:81-230; Morton 1977; Young 1975, cited in Lewis 1996:124).

François Laplantine (1974:154-155) identified six major regions in the world with specific ethnographic adorcisms. In the West African region,

Laplantine lists (1) the slow and tranceless adorcism ceremonies of the Fon of Benin and the *ndöp* ritual among the Lebou and the Wolof of Senegal; (2) the different forms of spirit possessions in Yoruba rituals with the *Imole* (divinity) and *Ogun* (masquerade); (3) in the East African region, the *zar* cult of the Ethiopians; (4) toward the South and Central Americas are adorcism rites with animistic voodoo practices in the Afro-Brazilian spirit world with the Exu and Pomba Gira and in Haitian voodoo rituals with the central deity papa Legba; (5) on the island of Madagascar, the Malagasy adorcism ritual with the *tromba* developed in reaction to the negative effects of colonialism and in particular against “the establishment of Christianity on the island;” and (6) the North African adorcism rituals of the Aissaouas Sufi order in Morocco.

### Adorcism Rituals among the Dendi

My family and I served ten years as missionaries with Adventist Frontier Missions (AFM) among the Dendi people of North East Benin from December 2006 to December 2016. The country of Benin is a former French colony in West Africa. The Republic of Benin is considered the “least evangelized non-Muslim country south of the Sahara” (Joshua Project 2022). The country has the “highest percentage of ethnic religionists,” or “Africa’s highest percentage of followers of traditional religions” (Joshua Project 2022).

On March 1, 2009, my wife Elmiere and I coauthored a field article “Possession Troupe” for the AFM magazine—*Adventist Frontiers* (Adventist Frontier Missions 2009). For many years supporters and others who read the article wanted to know more about the Dendi possession troupes. In this article I refer to this rite as the Dendi adorcism ritual.

Most Dendi villages “have possession troops, magician-healers, and witches,” and “in some places, ceremonies of spirit possession occur at least once a week” (Joshua Project 2022; Bello 2005; Bello and Giannotti 2017; Mauranges 2005). These animistic beliefs and practices exist among the Dendi people despite the fact that 99.97% of the Dendis highly identify with Islam as a religion (De Souza 2014:103, 228; Joshua Project 2022). As descendants of the ancient Songhay empire, the Dendi people embraced Islam around 1010 (Davidson 1959:97). However, “Islam merely introduced new elements to their culture and left the underlying framework of custom and tradition virtually untouched” (Joshua Project 2022; Bierschenk and de Sardan 1998:107; Gosselain and Smolderen 2013). Consequently, sorcery, ancestor worship, witchcraft, and spirit possession, remain vital components of the Dendi’s beliefs, resulting in the Dendi people practicing a very syncretistic form of folk Islam.

Some estimate that 70-85% of the Islam practiced worldwide is folk Islam or animistic Islam (Parshall 1983:16, cited in Love 1994:87). As such the Islam of the Dendi people is tainted with their pre-Islamic animistic beliefs and practices—a cult characterized by an adoristic ceremony called the *danfou* ritual, which uses a symbiotic accommodation of ancestor spirits or other sprits in the Dendi pantheon of gods and goddesses by one or many *zimas* (local traditional healers, priests/priestesses). The purpose of the Dendi *danfou* crisis ritual is to address individual or community times of great distress (Bello and Giannotti 2017:5, 111, 125, 127, 138, 151) and to receive guidance and revelation from the hosted spirits, to treat patients with malevolent spirits that require exorcism, or to treat any kind of illness or predict future calamities that will affect the community (Bello 2005:13).

The Dendi people believe that a person with a case of involuntary spirit possession is a victim of an enemy's witchcraft, spell, curse, or spiritualistic attack of any sort. Hence, the adorism crisis rituals they organized are intended to treat spirit intrusions, which people believe can cause illness, bareness, celibacy, disturb a marriage, or cause a person to lose their mind (Bello and Giannotti 2017; Guest 2018:381-382). This reception or descent and embodiment of spirits into the *zimas* or any individual is often accompanied with all kinds of violent manifestations. The entire adorism ritual often lasts seven days and has most of its important ceremonies conducted around midnight and in sacred forests (Mauranges 2005:46-49; Bello and Giannotti 2017:53-91). Below are the seven main phases of a typical Dendi adorism ritual.

1. The *zima* or the traditional priest in charge of the patient consults first with the chief spirit (*sidikoye*) in Dendy mythology and finds out if *sidikoye* consents to cure or set free the sick patient. If that consent is not assured, any attempt to assist an individual will be in vain.
2. The *zimas* and the music band (the *kabu izé* family—the children of the *kabu*, or the initiated) are alerted to prepare the adorism ritual.
3. The white sand, the purification water to be used for the patient bath, the ointment oil, the plants to be used for the drinking concoction, and the protecting incense are prepared.
4. The patient is admitted to the sacred hut for generally a seven-day and seven-night treatment period that often begins at the appearance of the new moon.
5. The spirits reveal the required sacrifices for the case. Generally, milk, honey, chickens, or goats are involved. But more sacrificial elements could be demanded by the spirits on a case-by-case basis.

6. Intercessory prayers for help in treating the case are made to *Dan Kama* and the *toorous*, the deities in relationship with the local Dendi ancestors.
7. One or several spirits respond by possessing either the *zima* in charge of the case or any *zima* chosen that day to serve as the channel of revelation and to guide the ill patient. (Bello and Giannotti 2017:51).

Bello reports on one of his experiences during the first phase of an adoricism ritual in these terms:

I spread the white sand while I meditate on Hadjoo's case. My fingers, under the control of the spirits, begin to trace several dotted lines in the sand. Seven signs appear. Five are positive and two are negative and supposedly masculine. This masculine connection could be with Hadjoo's husband, her father, her brother, a troublemaker, or her masculine side! This uncertainty in the diagnostic could mean that Hadjoo's treatment will be difficult. But there is also a good possibility of success from the sings. I must make my preparations accordingly. (Bello and Giannotti 2017:51; my translation from French).

As one of the experts of the Dendi adoricism ritual, Dr. Bello is a consultant in ethnomedicine where he combines Western psychiatric services with Dendi traditional healing practices (see Kristof-Lardet 2001).

### **A Christian Exorcism as a Response to the Dendi Adoricism Ritual: A Critical Engagement**

Exorcism seeks "to expel or bind troublesome or uninvited entities" (Openshaw 2020:6; Hiebert et al. 1999:147; Toner 1913:709). Patrick Toner's holistic definition of exorcism covers not only tribal exorcism rites, but also what was known in Christendom at that time. In Toner's view, exorcism should be considered holistically since it involves "(1) the act of driving out, or warding off demons, or evil spirits, from persons, places or things, which are, or are believed to be possessed or infested by them, or are liable to become victims or instruments of their malice; (2) the means employed for this purpose, especially the solemn and authoritative adjuration of the demon, in the name of God, or of any higher power to which he is subject (Toner 1913:709).

While Toner admits that the word *exorcism* is not found in the Bible (709), he points out that the word was coined from the verb ἐξορκίζω (*exorkizō*, "to cause someone to swear" (709). Hence, according to Toner, ἐξορκίζω is used in different Old Testament texts in the Septuagint. For instance, in Genesis 24:3 where it means "cause to swear" or in 1 Kings

22:16 where it means to “adjure” or in Matthew 26:63 where it is used in the high priest’s exclamation to Christ, “I adjure thee by the living God” (709). Toner also notes that in Acts 19:19 the verb ἐξορκίζω is used in its non-intensive form (ὀρκίζω) and the plural form of the noun (ἐξορκιστής) which means ‘exorcists’ (709). Consequently, Toner concludes that “expulsion by adjuration is therefore the primary meaning of exorcism” (709).

Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiéno use exorcism and deliverance interchangeably with a preference for the word deliverance in connection with a Christian ministry (1999:171-172). Whether exorcism or deliverance, the practice “to free people believed to be attacked and possessed by spirits” exists in most cultures and in most religions (147). Hence, although Satan and demons are real as is spirit possession (Owusu-Antwi 2011:55), missionaries should not fear it. Rather they should have pity and compassion on people who are under spirit control as they could have sympathy for sick people (Hiebert et al. 1999:172). Owusu-Antwi observes that in the interactions between Jesus and Satan, “Jesus and demons before their exorcism demonstrated that the demons or evil spirits were real, intelligent, spiritual beings” in opposition to “God, His kingdom, and values” in a spiritual kingdom of fallen angels led by Satan (2011:55-56).

### Exorcism and Consent

Viviane Stacey used exorcism as a ministry tool to meet the needs of the people she was working with. She has a list of eight questions she asks before any exorcism and one of them is if the person desires to “be released” from spirit control (1989:298). Love also concurs on the importance of the consent of any person under spirit manifestation or control before any deliverance ministry could be considered. He asserts that healings and exorcisms work best in theory and practice in terms of a kingdom theology. In other words, when people acknowledge and accept the rule and sovereignty of God in their lives (2000:17; 161,162). Accordingly, exorcism is only a solution to spirit possession if the person under the spirit’s control is seeking for deliverance from the intruding spirit. As indicated earlier, such a condition has antisocial repercussions and the hosted spirit or spirits have negative and destructive characteristics.

### Exorcism and Abuse

Most exorcism recipients are women. According to Lewis (1996:123) “although men are not entirely exempt, spirits prey particularly upon women, causing a wide range of illnesses.” In such contexts some see exorcism as a type of female abuse in male-dominated religions such as Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam (122). Lewis argues that “from the point of

view of the male religious establishment, at best, women are here engaged in obscure therapeutic activities: at worst, they are involved in dangerously superstitious traffic with occult forces which threaten the established religious order" (123)

My point is not to make allegations of sexual harassments or abuse of women common in some exorcisms and deliverance ministries around the world (Dobash and Dobash 1998:104-106; Moro and Myers 2010:193). A recent publication in Adventist circles on deliverance ministry (Bauer 2018) makes practical suggestions on how to engage in this sensitive ministry while avoiding the appearance of evil and remaining morally and physically pure. The 2018 *Deliverance Ministry (DM) Manual's* article on "Ethical Guidelines for Deliverance Ministry" (Vine 2018:68) includes among other key recommendations the clear commitment of every DM advocate to "never require, suggest, or intimate the need for any individual to make a payment or return favors of any kind, including but not limited to financial, sexual, or institutional in exchange for deliverance" (69). The article also stipulates that "in order to avoid any hint of indiscretion DM advocates must avoid at all times any DM activity that involves exclusive one-on-one contact with a member of the opposite sex" (68).

I argue that Lewis' statement above is rather in conjunction with Craffert's assertion that exorcism has been "consistently and pejoratively employed as a solution to" spirit possession in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (2015:7). Craffert contends that like the other two monotheistic religions that Christian tradition "sees possession mostly in negative terms as a disease with demonic or hostile forces that require exorcism or the driving out of the invading entities as the cure" (Bourguignon 2004a:141; 2004b:562; Sluhovsky 2011:78 cited in Craffert 2015:2). Hence, Craffert notes that for these religions, "demons are bad news and exorcism is a good thing; possession is the disease or problem, and exorcism is the solution or cure" (2).

According to Craffert such a unilateral view of exorcism is wrong and abusive. He points out that based on cultural and ethnographic reasons adoricism like exorcism is considered in some cultures as a "therapeutic" process with the same aim as exorcism (Bourguignon 2004b:560, 562; Csordas 1994:176; Lewis 2003:29 cited in Craffert 2015:7). However, Lewis asserts that exorcism seems to appeal to men in a "dominant male religious establishment," while adoricism seems to be "more attritive to women" (1996:123). In Lewis' view men see exorcism in such cultures having women adoricism cults as a means of keeping women's spirit possession from developing into formalized adoricism, which according to Lewis "represents a reaction by women to oppressive male religiosity, usually in conditions of social change in which the position of women deteriorates" (Hiebert 1989:12, cited in Lewis 1996:123).

Although Lewis' point above is persuasive because abuse of women is a potential danger in exorcism and gender discrimination and preference in exorcism or adorcism is real in some cultures, his claims that formalized adorcism "represents a reaction by women to oppressive male religiosity" (1996:123) are not sustainable. Among the Dendi for instance, both men and women practice adorcism/exorcism. While, for each patient a *zima* is appointed, during the *dafou* ritual, a possessing spirit is the master of both the choice of a human host and the approach to heal a patient. So, the spirit can pick anyone as a channel for a particular case (Bello 2001:45).

Among the Chukchee people the shaman is born male; however, female shamans exist among the Chukchees. Nonetheless, the Chukchee have more than two genders in their culture. As a shamanic tribe a Chukchee shaman can change sex and appear as male and female; assume feminine social tasks and even marry a man, but without the biological expectations of a woman. (Power 2004:153-159; Winkelman 2004:63-69). Hiebert (1985:182) describes a male Chukchee shaman adorcism ritual as follows: the Chukchee shaman "becomes possessed by [a] spirit of healing, speaks in strange tongues, and goes to the spirit world to bring back the soul of the patient who has gone astray."

### **Adorcism and Exorcism as Two Equal Therapeutic Processes**

While referring to the ethnographic works of authors like Bourguignon 1968, 2004a; Salman 1968; Giles 2004; Cohen and Barrett 2008; Cohen 2008. Craffert contends that exorcism should not be considered as a "clear-cut and worthy of emulation" therapeutic approach considering such diverse beliefs and definitions of spirit possession (2015:1). Thus, citing Lewis (2003:29), and others like Bourguignon 2004b:560, 562; and Csordas 1994:176; Craffert further argues that both exorcism and adorcism are therapeutic processes which address the causative problem of spirit possession (2015:7). As Lewis rightly states "exorcistic procedures may be invoked to drive out the spirit(s), or attempts may be made to placate the spirits by cultivating a viable (and often enduring) relationship with them" (1996:122).

Similarly, Moro and Myers (2010:192) point out that exorcism and adorcism are two equal treating rituals with "opposed possible outcomes" when dealing with illness and afflictions caused by spirit possession. While the former is familiar among Christians the later contrasting treatment is not; however, because most demons clearly resist exorcism (see Craffert 2015:7), it appears logical that some societies favor adorcism. Craffert believes that spirit possession either voluntary or involuntary, is

a phenomenon always in social contexts “like all other alternate states of consciousness in cultures where they are cultivated” (Laughlin 2013:44, cited in Craffert 2015:7). As such, Craffert asserts, spirit possession is almost never self-diagnosed but rather diagnosed by a community or a power person such as a healer, shaman, witch doctor, priest, pastor, or a prophet (Csordas 1994:224, cited in Craffert 2015:7).

## A Christian Response to the Dendi Adorcism/Exorcism Ritual

### Jesus’ Model of Ministry

Bosch asserts that Jesus’s ministry was characterized by “an all-out attack on evil in all its manifestations” (2011:18). According to Bosch “God’s reign arrives wherever Jesus overcomes the power of evil” (18). Hence, Jesus’ ministry included feeding the hungry, healing of all forms of sickness and infirmity, acts of deliverance of the demon-possessed, “proclaiming the forgiveness of sins to the penitent and believing” and “demonstrating an outgoing love for the marginalized and rejected of society” (Glasser et al. 2003:198-199).

The Dendi adorcism/exorcism ritual is also intended to overpower evil in its local manifestations. When there are misfortunes like droughts in the community, mysterious sicknesses, or folly in individual lives, accommodation of spirits (adorcism) with the purpose of exposing and expelling intruding spirits (exorcism) is used as a therapeutic and apotropaic means for the Dendis. Hence, through their religious mechanism of adorcism the Dendis hope to limit or eliminate the negative social consequences of involuntary spirit possession. However, Kraft comments on the danger of such cultural practices in these terms: “Both within and outside of Christianity, there are people who cast out demons, using spiritual power to limit the social consequences of demonization. Unfortunately, like the witchcraft eradication societies, many such efforts often do more harm than good. The fear engendered by the use of spiritual mechanisms often becomes a powerful tool in the enemy’s hands, keeping people in his grip.” (1996: 351).

Kraft notes that although some spirits are capable of either good or bad activities, they are not serving God when they do good. From a Christian perspective both black or white magic are empowered by the evil one although the so-called white or good magic is intended to do suitable things like providing protective measures (205). Hence, when some societies “elevate some of their prominent ancestors to positions as ‘hero’ spirits” (203), as the Dendis channel ancestor spirits in order to receive gifts of healing and exorcism, sacred knowledge, and guidance



(Bello and Gianotti 2017; Love 2000:94; Openshaw 2020:6), these ancestral spirits regarded locally and culturally as benefactors are just another form evil could take locally. According to George Ladd “the kingdom of God” is nothing less than the rule, the reign, and the sovereignty of God in action (1959:14). This means that the authoritative and sovereign reign of God is at the core of mission (*missio Dei*).

### Confronting Evil through Prayer

In Scripture, God manifests his power by design and not by coincidence. This means that missionaries must pray for God to wield his power according to his will in every situation in the mission field. Missionaries can learn from Moses’ encounter with Pharaoh’s magicians (Exod 5–12), Elijah’s confrontation with the prophets of Baal (1 Kgs 18:30-40), Jesus’ contest with the legion of demons (Matt 8:28-33; Mark 5:1-16), and Paul’s rebuke of the python spirit—the spirit of divination in the slave girl (Acts 16:16-18). In dealing with local rituals like the Dendi adorcism/exorcism ritual in mission, missionaries cannot expect consent of the community before praying for the manifestation of God’s power.

Paul, for instance, did not ask the slave girl if she wanted to be set free from the spirit controlling her. Greatly annoyed after being patient for many days while the spirit of divination in the girl exhibited its ability to predict accurately, Paul said to the spirit, “I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her” (Acts 16:18, NKJV). The spirit obeyed and the girl was set free “that very hour.” Through the bold ministry of Paul, the slave girl, although under voluntary spirit possession (adorcism), was set free. As White notes:

While most people who are captives of evil spirits suffer greatly, there are those that willingly receive the power promised by those spirits and are thus not in conflict with the enemy. . . . Those possessed with devils are usually represented as being in a condition of great suffering; yet there were exceptions to this rule. For the sake of obtaining supernatural power, some welcomed the satanic influence. These of course had no conflict with the demons. Of this class were those who possessed the spirit of divination—Simon Magus, Elymas the sorcerer, and the damsel who followed Paul and Silas at Philippi. (White 1911:516-517; see also Colman 2015:112)

Similarly, Elijah’s cry, “How long will you go limping between two different opinions? If the LORD is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him” (1 Kgs 18:21, NIV) surprised the people. He received no answer “And the people did not answer him a word” (v. 21). But Elijah was on a

mission to “vindicate the honor of Jehovah” (White 1917:147). And Elijah was not alone:

Above and around him are the protecting hosts of heaven, angels that excel in strength. Unashamed, unterrified, the prophet stands before the multitude, fully aware of his commission to execute the divine command. His countenance is lighted with an awful solemnity. In anxious expectancy the people wait for him to speak. Looking first upon the broken-down altar of Jehovah, and then upon the multitude, Elijah cries out in clear, trumpetlike tones, “How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow Him: but if Baal, then follow him.” (147)

White further reveals that “gladly would Satan have come to the help of those whom he had deceived, and who were devoted to his service. Gladly would he have sent the lightning to kindle their sacrifice. But Jehovah has set Satan’s bounds, restrained his power, and not all the enemy’s devices can convey one spark to Baal’s altar” (150).

White’s comments above implicitly imply that the Baal prophets could not bring down fire from heaven, not because they were attempting it for the first time, but because Jehovah’s power restricted their power. Unfortunately, missionaries often ask very little from the owner and master of the mission. Bruce Bauer rightly illustrates this fact in his philosophy of intercessory prayer in these terms:

I believe that this world has been captured by the evil one. I believe that because the battle between Christ and Satan is not yet finished that God’s power and interaction in human affairs is often limited to those circumstances, where through the petitions and prayers of God’s people God is invited to intervene in the affairs of this world. I believe that God desires to be much more active in our lives, but we receive little because we ask for little. I strongly believe that our intercessory prayers invite and then permit God to do much more than he can do if we do not pray. (2015:41)

Mission in cultures with voluntary spirit possession like the Dendi people must be done “within the assumptions and principles that govern” the lives of such societies (Kraft 1996:452). The exercise of the power of God as it was in the case of Elijah is crucial. Such mission strategies among the Dendi have proved to be very effective. Seventh-day Adventist churches were planted where there was no Adventist presence for over 50 years. Many lives that had been captive to the local deities were introduced to the liberating power of Christ. Many adorcism rituals failed because of our prayer ministries and three witch doctors gave their lives

to Christ after experiencing the superiority of God's power (see *Adventist Frontiers* 2006-2016).

## Conclusion

Voluntary spirit possession (adorcism) either with an individual or among individuals of a cult does not represent a traditional case of demonization where the possessing spirit is viewed as a pathogenic spirit-agency, which cause disorder in the life of the hosting person. Rather, the "process of spirit accommodation or internalization usually amounts to a form of initiation, recruiting adepts through illness into a 'cult of affliction'" (Turner 1969, cited in Lewis 1996:122).

Ministering to the Dendi people, who have a strong adorcism ritual tradition, needs to include a demonstration of the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8) and a similar rite of empowering, but by the Holy Spirit through prayer. Missionaries ministering in such cultures should remember that God's mission (*missio Dei*) to any culture resides in following Christ's example. "The mighty works of the Kingdom of God" were that Jesus cast out demons, delivered "men from satanic power" and preached "that the Kingdom of God had come upon them to defeat Satan and to deliver men from his rule" (Ladd 1959:108).

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## Anti-urbanism in Culture and in the Adventist Church: Advocacy and Action for Urban Ministry In the Twentieth Century—Part 2

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This article explores the response within the Seventh-day Adventist Church after Ellen G. White's death to the dual emphases in her writings on the city and rural living. On one hand she strongly encouraged large Adventist institutions and families raising children to locate out of the cities. This was because of the advantages natural surroundings have on physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing, and to shield children and young adults from the evils and temptations of the city. While she recognized the evils in the city and God's impending judgments, she aggressively pushed church leaders to take a more active role in evangelizing the cities, precisely because of their great need.

The church was slow to respond to her plea for greater mission to the cities during her lifetime. Once she passed away, the gains made in city mission during her lifetime were gradually lost. Leadership focused on foreign missions but work in the cities seem to have fallen by the wayside, being replaced with a drive for all Adventists to move to the country. This paper's focus is on the period from the 1910 through the 1990s.

## Introduction

An unbalanced reading and a misapplication of White's writings blunted mission to the cities following her death in 1915. With the exception of a short period around the early 1900s when White was dealing with concerns over John Harvey Kellogg's excesses in the Chicago Medical Mission, White's counsel on city missions was overwhelmingly positive (Butler 1970; Moon 2013). When Adventists started to awaken to their neglect to city mission in the later part of the twentieth century Jonathan Butler suggests:

The early growth of inner-city involvement in the 1880s was only encouraged by Mrs. White, and its decline in the first decades of the twentieth century was only resisted in her writing. A return, then, to early Adventist tradition on this issue, is not a return to the Adventism of the 1920s but to the Adventism of the 1890s. A retreat to the suburbs and tranquil conservatism is not in the spirit of *nineteenth century* Adventism at all. (1970:49, 50)

The objective of this article is to explore dynamics subsequent to Ellen White's death, within and without of the Adventist Church, which resulted in an increase in anti-urbanism and the loss of its earlier focus on urban mission.

### Shifting City Emphasis Within the General Conference

There is no question that A. G. Daniells, General Conference (GC) President from 1901 to 1922, and William A. Spicer, GC Secretary from 1903 to 1922, and then GC President from 1922 to 1930, propelled the Adventist Church into a bold missionary program. With the 1901 to 1903 reorganization of the Adventist Church, the administration of day to day matters were shifted from the GC to the local fields. This prompted Daniels to tell the GC officer group that "he believed the future work for the General Conference would be, primarily, that of a great Missionary Board" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists [GC] 1902:115a). To that end an administrative structure was created within the GC "for recruiting, deploying and maintaining missionaries from the North American homeland and the new European and Australian heartlands to Latin America, the Middle East, Africa, Asia, and the islands of the Pacific" (Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research n.d., 7).

But sadly, the investment in city missions in the homeland did not keep pace with the church's investment in foreign mission. Daniells was most eloquent when he was speaking about the foreign mission movement. In

his 1918 GC address he plead for “plans for a stronger and more extensive foreign mission work than anything we have yet approached.” He boldly proclaimed, “We aim at nothing less than the whole world. This conference should lay plans for more rapid strides, and for mightier achievements” (1918:4).

As a result, the focus on city mission, first of all, shifted in two discernible ways. Reaching immigrants and ethnics became a major priority. Additionally, literature sales and distribution along with large evangelistic campaigns become a primary vehicle for evangelization. At the 1905 General Conference Session the North American Foreign Department was launched (GC 1913, 52). By 1913 the department was well developed and O. A. Olsen, secretary of the department, noted that the foreign born along with their immediate descendants were estimated at forty-six percent of the current population in the United States (52). He and his superintendents reported at length on the ambitious and far-reaching work among Germans, Jews, French, Swedes, and Russians, as well as Hungarians, Italians, and others (52-62).

In order to strengthen lay involvement in evangelism it was recommended at the 1913 session that the “home missionary secretaries, both for the General Conference and the North American Division Conference be appointed for the promotion of the church missionary work. The duty of the secretaries shall be to cooperate with our conferences and missions, each in his own field, in building up the church tract and missionary movement” (GC 1913:293).

Second, the work among Blacks in the United States was beginning to grow at the same time that sentiments towards the growing Black presence in the north was also shifting. These factors prompted Monte Sahlin to conclude the following: “From 1913 through the 1930s, Adventist urban ministry consisted primarily of attempts to reach immigrants and ethnic minorities. It is during this period that the African-American work began to grow, and that many of the German, Italian and other European immigrant churches were planted in the large cities, especially in the northeast” (2007:15). The dynamics connected to race relations is deserving a treatment all its own. Sadly, those findings are beyond the scope of this paper.

It is puzzling why mission to the cities lost steam during this period. Whether Daniells can be faulted for the shift away from work in the large cities is hard to say; however, what can be seen is at about that time a shift in messaging coming from church leadership, which coincides with the beginning of strong headwinds for city ministry.

A survey of Adventist publications after White’s death reveals an increase with her counsel for families to leave the cities and almost complete neglect of her counsel on the urgent need to work the cities.



But before examining this trend it is important to look at Evangelical Fundamentalism and the Adventist Church and its impact on reading Ellen White.

### Adventism in 1919 and Fundamentalism

When assessing the Adventist perspective toward the cities it is important to take into consideration Ellen White's council related to cities. As noted previously, White was adamant about the denomination's responsibility to evangelize the large cities, in particular those of her day in the United States. For a period of time she excoriated Daniells for not doubling down and leading out by example in evangelizing the cities. Yet, there was another theme in her writing where she counseled families about the problems and dangers in the cities to health, evil influences, and raising children. Additionally, on numerous occasions she counseled administrators against locating large educational and health institutions in the city.

While White was alive, she guided the application of these principles by her own influence. But with her passing in 1915 there was a vacuum within the church in this regard and the denomination was searching how to handle this new epoch without the "prophet." With the passing of time, pressure mounted on how to properly interpret her writings. In 1919, four years after her death, the historic 1919 Bible Conference was convened to discuss principles of interpretation (hermeneutics) of both the Bible and the writings of White. This conference was in no small part a result of the burgeoning debate within evangelicals circles due to the modern trends in science and liberal theology.

Fundamentalism, as this reactionary evangelical movement has been called, though not monolithic and by no means static in its beliefs and objectives, shared some general things in common. Between 1910 and 1915 three million copies of a series of twelve booklets called *The Fundamentals* were distributed for free to the English-speaking Protestant workers around the world (McIntire 1984:436). In this regard Michael W. Campbell's summary of the themes in *The Fundamentals* is very helpful.

Approximately one-third of the articles dealt with the inspiration of Scripture and generally endorsed a view of infallibility and verbal inerrancy, at least of the original autographs. (This view stood in contrast to Ellen White's endorsement of thought inspiration as opposed to verbal dictation.) Another third dealt with traditional theological pillars, including the Trinity, sin, and salvation. The last third of the articles contained personal testimonies, attacks against competing, aberrant forms of Christianity (such as Mormonism and

Roman Catholicism), the relationship between science and religion, and general appeals for support of missions and evangelism. Altogether, these articles show that although the emerging Fundamentalist movement did not have a clearly defined set of beliefs, its adherents knew what it was against: anyone and anything that might challenge the divine authority of Scripture. (2019:32)

The important traits that have remained constant among fundamentalists over time is their call “for a return to an inerrant and infallible Bible, to the traditional statement of the doctrines, and to a traditional morality which they believed once prevailed in America” (McIntire 1984:435). Attitudinally, they see themselves as possessing the truth and called to do battle with those whom they see as undermining Christianity and America.

Campbell’s book, *1919: The Untold Story of Adventism’s Struggle with Fundamentalism*, and George R. Knight, *Ellen White’s Afterlife: Delightful Fictions, Troubling Facts, Enlightening Research* provide helpful discussion on the 1919 Bible Conference and the resultant challenges within Adventism with regard to principles of biblical interpretation and how to apply the writings of Ellen White. Suffice it to say that the participants at the 1919 Bible Conference “represented two different, polarized approaches to Scripture” (Campbell 2019:55). Those known as “progressives” were in the majority and they focused on the context of the biblical passage. “They were open to making necessary revisions if they found something that was not necessarily correct, especially when it concerned historical details. The traditionalist emphasized a more literalistic way of interpreting inspired writings” (55, 56). Significantly, those conservatives who embraced verbal inspiration and inerrancy saw any attempt at revision, no matter how minor the detail, as a threat to the faith.

Campbell singles out a third group, not actual participants of the conference, who were disgruntled with church leadership and held a “rigid view that emphasized the verbal inspiration not only of the Bible but also of Ellen G. White’s prophetic writings” (52). Campbell cites two “vociferous critics,” who had an outsized influence at that time, who well represent this segment even to this day, Claude E. Holmes and J. S. Washburn. They were disgruntled Adventists upset by the 1911 revisions to *The Great Controversy*. The militant forces within and without the Adventist Church made it increasingly difficult in the 1920s to navigate between modernism and fundamentalism. “The major casualty in that polarized era was the moderate and open approach to inspiration held by Ellen White and those who had worked most closely with her” (Knight 2019:33).

Knight points out that although the Adventist Church never voted official positions affirming verbal inspiration of the Bible and Ellen White,

this “progressively dominated Adventist thinking in the following decades, although not everyone accepted them among either the laity or the clergy” (2019:34). In illustrating this shift Knight cites examples of individuals whose view shifted toward verbal inspiration during the decade following the 1919 Bible Conference (33, 34).

This shift toward a rigid understanding of verbal inspiration of the Bible and Ellen White along with militant activists who made it their mission to expose and unseat leaders who did not follow their opinion predisposed the church to drift toward an unbalanced application of the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. What resulted was a rigid, literalistic reading of *selective* statements, without due regard to the *context*. Propagated by loud-voiced activists, agitating popular views within the broader evangelical and fundamentalist culture, the Adventist Church succumbed to “proof-texting” itself into new understandings on major matters which impacted both concern for and effectiveness in urban mission (see Knight 2009:17-25, and Novaes and Lima 2019:57 for their discussion of this phenomenon). Specifically, the attitudinal shift within the Adventist Church and fundamentalism in general affected views on social ministry, fanned anti-urbanism sentiments, and poisoned race relations. These shifts in attitudes led to neglect and a stifling of urban evangelism.

### Drift from Concern for to Scorn of the City

With the backdrop of Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism and the Adventist 1919 Bible Conference it is now important to look at the drift within Adventism away from urban ministry. The first example comes from an article written by A. W. Spalding, who was the general secretary of the Home Commission from 1922-1941 (1996:687). The focus of the commission was on helping parents with issues of home life and raising children (Spalding 1922:12). Throughout Spalding’s tenure as secretary of the Home Commission his tone was consistent and focused on exhorting parents in raising their children. But in one of his Home Commission articles in 1926 he dedicates the entire article on White’s counsel to families about raising their children in the country because of the evil influences in the cities and the benefits of being in natural surroundings.

Spalding begins the article by declaring that “the home is the citadel of the church.” He goes on to state that “it is the duty of the church to build good Christian homes,” and that we must not “only proselyte, we must save our homes” (1926:18-19).

In a subsequent section of his article, he puts a critical nuance on how he perceives mission. “Our church has a mission, not to save the world, but to save souls out of the world. Its mission is, first, to save its own

children" (18). Then later in the article, after lamenting the deficiencies in Christian education within the home by parents he writes, "Yet we face the fact that the majority of families in our church membership today are living in cities, where it is practically impossible to carry out these prime principles [found in White's writings] of Christian education" (19).

After quoting excerpts from White's council in *The Ministry of Healing* on the "Choice and Preparation of the Home" (1942:363-367) where she warns that "cities are becoming hotbeds of vice (363) and extols the benefits of living where the family can have access to nature, Spalding writes:

Yet, despite this instruction, our people like the people of the world, are crowding into cities, evangelization of rural districts is more and more neglected, and our church is rapidly becoming preponderantly urban in character. We are by such a course piling up the problems of the family, making almost futile the efforts to regenerate the home, and decreasing the chances of the church to purify and invigorate itself.

Why are not the words of that servant of God, Sister E. G. White, echoed throughout the land:

"'Out of the cities,' is my message." (quoted from White 1948:7:83 in Spalding 1926:19)

Several things in this passage must be noted. First, Spalding's critique that the Adventist Church is rapidly "becoming preponderantly urban in character" is being leveled when over half of the USA population had been living in cities since 1920 (U. S. Bureau of the Census 2012, Table 10). Furthermore, in the previous decade the church had doubled down on evangelizing migrant populations which had settled predominantly in the USA cities. Additionally, some Adventist leaders were beginning to recognize that their fields were becoming predominantly urban (Olsen 1918:168). Second, the charge that evangelization of rural districts is being neglected intimates that city evangelism was no longer needed, or at least out of balance with rural evangelism. Finally, Spalding's lifting of White's statement "'Out of the cities,' is my message" out of its context aimed at physicians developing sanitarium work *close* to the cities for the benefit of reaching the cities distorts her original intent.

Much is being made of the points in Spalding's article because I believe it illustrates how our denomination began to use White's writings to excuse turning its back on reaching the cities. The Adventist Church was not alone in its growing negative view of the large cities. Sadly, the church was simply mirroring Evangelical Protestant attitudes toward urbanization which was associated with secularization and the increasing immigration from Catholic majority countries (Marsden 1991:13, 14).

In Spalding's article one can see the following themes emerging, at least by implication: the mission of the church is seen as one of extraction rather than incarnational ("Our church has a mission, not to save the world, but to save souls out of the world"); the interests of home and nurture of our own children are elevated to primary importance without regard to our calling and responsibility to evangelize the world, including the growing cities ("Its mission is, first, to save its own children"); White's admonition to locate sanitariums out of the cities is being perceived as a blanket admonition for all Adventist work; to remain in the city is to risk Lot's experience in Sodom ("Shall we wait for calamity to fall upon us? Shall we be compelled to go forth from the cities as Lot went forth from Sodom?").

To be fair in the assessment of Spalding's work through the Home Commission, it needs to be noted that in surveying over fifty of his articles, this is the only time that he takes up this theme. Furthermore, much of the article held wise counsel. But what is clear here and in similar cases where writers take up the theme of city living, there is a one-sided focus on White's warnings about the evils of the city with a grave omission to her call for mission to the cities. This tone is increasingly evident from the 1930s and 1940s and becomes significantly amplified with the publishing of the White compilation *Country Living: An Aid to Moral and Social Security*, and the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Commission on Rural Living, both in 1946.

Before examining some examples of the twisting of White's counsel on this topic, it is important to briefly review her views on both sides of this issue. There are various compilations of her writings on this topic (White 1946a, White 2012, Luppens 2015) but for simplicity sake I would like to focus on two of White's articles published in 1906.

The first article begins by recounting the dedication of the Loma Linda Sanitarium. White then turns to writing about the principles and ideals for Loma Linda and sanitarium work in general.

The advantage of outdoor life must never be lost sight of. How thankful we should be that God has given us beautiful sanitarium properties at Paradise Valley and Glendale and Loma Linda! "Out of the cities! Out of the cities!"—this has been my message for years. We cannot expect the sick to recover rapidly when they are shut in within four walls, in some city, with no outside view but houses, houses, houses—nothing to animate, nothing to enliven. And yet how slow some are to realize that the crowded cities are not favorable places for sanitarium work! . . .

One of the chief advantages of the situation at Loma Linda is the pleasing variety of charming scenery on every side.

But more important than magnificent scenery and beautiful buildings and spacious grounds, *is the close proximity of this institution to a densely populated district*, and the opportunity thus afforded of communicating to many, many people a knowledge of the third angel's message. (White 1906a:7, 8, italics supplied)

Two themes stand out. First, there are powerful therapeutic benefits to being situated outside the city in beautiful natural surroundings. This is a psychological and physiological phenomenon that current science is confirming with empirical research (see Kaplan 1989 and Schertz and Berman 2019 as just two examples). However basic and important the first theme is, for White, Loma Linda's close proximity to a "densely populated district" was even more important because it provided the opportunity to share the third angel's message with "many, many people."

The second article concerns things she was shown while still at Loma Linda following the Sanitarium dedication about "The Judgments of God on Our Cities" (White 1906b, 7-9). White shares that although the "scene of buildings shaken down and destroyed, with great loss of life" was awful that "which impressed itself most vividly on my mind was the instruction given in connection with it." The angel shared with her "that God's supreme rulership, and the sacredness of his law must be revealed to those who persistently refuse to render obedience to the King of kings."

Two consecutive paragraphs are worth noting, for they tie together White's warnings about the evil in the city and the divine judgments which will be visited on them with the necessity to warn them before it is too late.

For many years we have known that the great cities would be visited with divine judgments because of long-continued disobedience. In no uncertain words the Lord has warned us not to establish large institutions in the cities. "Out of the cities; out of the cities,"—this is the message that has often come to us. And this is one reason why the Lord has been opening the way so wonderfully for our publishing houses and sanitariums and schools to be located in country places.

The cities must be worked. The millions living in these congested centers are to hear the third angel's message. This work should have been developed rapidly during the past few years. A beginning has been made, for which we praise God. Outpost centers are being established, from whence, like Enoch of old, our workers can visit the cities and do faithful service. (White 1906b:7)

In the next paragraph White combines the themes of the previous two paragraphs of working the cities, but without "establishing institutions in the heart of these cities," and rather working from "outpost centers." And

once again she would repeat the emphatic statement, “Out of the cities; out of the cities!” She concludes this paragraph by reminding her readers that “we must make wise plans to warn the cities, and at the same time live where we can shield our children and ourselves from the contaminating and demoralizing influences so prevalent in these places” (1906b:7).

Much has been made of White’s counsel to work from “outpost centers” and for decades it has produced more heat than light (Oosterwal 1980; Wilson 1980). Whatever White meant by working the cities from “outpost centers” one thing on which she is abundantly clear, there is a heaven sent imperative that the cities must be warned. And although her most quoted statements relate on what not to do, she has plenty of statements which qualify and provide nuances to what has already been singled out.

Later in this same article she recounts a dream she had thirty years earlier about two “beehives, one in San Francisco and one in Oakland” (White 1906b:8). At that time believers were few and sources for financing the work were limited. White and her husband decided to sell their property in Battle Creek and use the proceeds for the work and building churches in those two cities.

In November of 1900 White had the opportunity to visit a church she and her husband had helped build almost 30 years earlier. “As I stood before the people, I thought of the dream and the instruction which had been given me so many years ago, and I was much encouraged. Looking at the people assembled, I felt that I could indeed say, The Lord has fulfilled his word” (1906b:8).

Sadly, over time White’s catalog of “many lines of Christian effort” enumerated in this same article have been passed over by most in favor of the sensational “Out of the cities!” and the convenient “labor from outposts.” Efforts she enumerates include visiting the sick, homes for orphans, work for unemployed, nursing the sick, distribution of literature, classes on healthful living and care for the sick, a school for children in the basement of the Laguna Street meeting-house, a working men’s home, medical mission, a branch of the St. Helena Sanitarium, a health food store, a vegetarian café, a ship mission on the water front, and evangelistic meetings in large halls.

I would dare say that this “beehive” does not comport to the type of activity that most Adventists would have imagined of comprising an “outpost” city mission. All of these enterprises could not have been maintained by staff who commuted into the city in the morning and left by evening.

A survey of the *Pacific Union Recorder* for 1901 provides hints of the scope of the work and the number and enthusiasm of the local Adventist population. The opening of the Workers’ Training School in San Francisco took place in September (Rose 1901a:7). In November W. S. Sadler

reported that in June a flat had been secured, large enough for eight to ten workers “who might desire to connect with the work for training.” Financially this workers’ home was set up so that the conference assumed no financial responsibility. “The board is conducted on the community plan, each worker paying his share of the actual cost.” Sadler clarifies that the training classes for workers begun in September are held two evenings a week (1901:5, 6).

In the December 5, 1901 edition of the *Pacific Union Recorder* H. W. Rose reported in detail on the Laguna Street Church harvest ingathering service. This is the same “meeting-house” that White mentions as the location for the school for children in her visit one year before to San Francisco. In this celebration service for the “blessings enjoyed by the church during the past year” the children occupy a prominent part in the program. Rose concludes his remarks by observing that this was “one of the most interesting, most enjoyable, and most profitable services ever held in the San Francisco church” (8, 9). The evidence is that the San Francisco Adventist community was dynamic and thriving. No wonder White was so encouraged by her visit there one year earlier.

But the myth that White “instituted a blanket prohibition on city living” (Trim 2017:10) persist despite much scholarship to the contrary (Sahlin 2007:16, 17; Jones 2013:716, 718; Fortin 2013:742, 743; Knight 2013:715, 716). Had the church used White to qualify her own statements it would have been abundantly clear this is not what she meant. One White quote, in my mind, captures the lost mission opportunity of our cities in this regard.

We see the great need of missionary work to carry the truth not only to foreign countries, but to those who are near us. Close around us are cities and towns in which no efforts are made to save souls. *Why should not families who know the present truth settle in these cities and villages, to set up there the standard of Christ? . . . There will be laymen who will move into towns and cities, and into apparently out-of-the-way places, that they may let the light which God has given them, shine forth to others.* (1891:593, italics supplied)

Current doctoral research in this area is promising to provide greater clarity on the comprehensive plan outlined by White for reaching the city’s poor and the elite, through resources and institutions outside (outposts) and from inside the city (beehives). One such study is Doug Venn’s historical Geographic Information System (GIS) study into the San Francisco work circa 1900.



## The De Facto Adventist Sentiment on Urban Mission

How far much of the church leadership's thinking had drifted from White's emphasis on city mission can be seen by an article promoting the work in the Alaska Mission by H. L. Wood. Before entering the ministry, Elder Wood was a successful businessman, running his own car dealership. Feeling a call to ministry he eventually sold his car business and served the church as a layperson. Upon coming to the notice of his local conference president, he and his wife were asked to join the conference workers. Wood demonstrated exceptional administrative abilities and served the Alaska Mission tireless for 15 years, from 1929 until his untimely death in a plane crash in 1944 (Emery 1944:20). In 1931, in making a plea for members to move to Alaska to help with the work he wrote: "You who are hovering in the wicked cities which have been hearing the message for many, many years, will you not heed the instruction given long ago to this people, 'Get out of the cities where you are not needed, and move to places where they have not heard the truth for this time, and there let your light shine'" (Wood 1931:16).

Undoubtedly, Elder Wood's intentions were worthy. He mentions that there were only three workers at that time in the vast Alaska Mission. The attention being given to this passage is not to criticize this dedicated and hardworking leader, nor to discount the desperate need for more workers in his field. Rather, what I believe this passage demonstrates is a de facto perspective that was generally held, so much so, that even the editors of the *Review* would allow this passage to go into print without challenge.

Though no reference is given, the wording of Wood's paragraph in question implies that White is the source of the words in quotation marks. The supposed quote is not only a conflation of White's words, but a distortion and contradiction to the one quote that comes closest matching part of his paragraph. The White passage his "quote" alludes to is, "It is not God's plan for our people to crowd into Battle Creek. Jesus says: 'Go work today in My vineyard. Get away from the places where you are not needed. Plant the standard of truth in towns and cities that have not heard the message. Prepare the way for My coming. Those in the highways and hedges are to hear the call'" (White 1948:216).

By his wording Wood does the following injustices: (1) casts city ministry in a pejorative light, "hovering in the wicked cities;" (2) implies that cities have been thoroughly evangelized and no longer need or are worthy of hearing the gospel, "have been hearing the message for many, many years;" (3) the leading phrase within quotes, "get out of the cities where you are not needed," conflates White's often misunderstood advice to get "get out of the cities" and the advice to specific individuals in Battle

Creek, “where you are not needed;” and finally (4) his joining the two phrases “get out of the cities” and “where you are not needed” directly contradicts the original message—to leave Battle Creek in order to “plant the standard of truth in towns and cities that have not heard the message.”

In White’s view it never was a question of one over the other. It had always been both rural and urban mission. But over time, for various reasons which deserve more consideration than space will allow in this article, urban ministry was no longer seen as an urgent necessity. In fact, in its more biased expression there was a view that to minister in the cities was a sign of spiritual apathy and neglect, even disrespect to White’s counsel. This apathy and neglect for the large cities would have pained the prophet. All the while urban populations in the United States and the rest of the world were exploding.

### Institutionalizing Rural Living

In 1946 the General Conference took several steps which served to institutionalize what had already become a de facto stance on rural versus urban living and ministry. The General Conference Committee recommended the formation of The Seventh-day Adventist Commission on Rural Living. E. A. Sutherland was appointed secretary, and C. B. Haynes the assistant secretary. The objectives given for the commission were:

- A. To foster and develop self-supporting missionary work and institutions.
- B. To encourage and assist in the formation of the Association of Self-supporting Institutions, and the development of the holding corporation outlined in the action of the 1945 Autumn Council.
- C. To encourage our church members in cities to study the instruction in the Spirit of prophecy about country living and to develop plans whereby they can fulfill this instruction; to provide counsel and information to those who are considering moving to the country; to hold regional institutes for self-supporting missionary workers and individuals interested in country living. (Nichols 1946:24)

Sutherland led the commission until his retirement in 1950 where upon a short time later the name of the commission was changed to Commission for Self-supporting Missionary Enterprises (Nichols 1951:19). In tandem with the formation of the Commission on Rural Living was the publication of a compilation of White’s writings called *Country Living, An Aid to Moral and Social Security* (1946a). With the memory of World War II still fresh in the corporate memory and with the disproportionate impact of the war on the large European cities, the church took this message in. Sutherland positioned “removal of our people from the cities, and the establishment

of families on the land where they are to operate as mission centers and rural outpost from which to carry the closing message to the cities” as a test. He asked, “Will we be able to meet this test? If we do not, then World War III, with all its attendant troubles, will be upon us, and our people may be like Lot and his family when Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed” (1951:19).

Sutherland’s intent may have seemed noble at that time. But over the years the outcome of the selective use of White’s writings combined with radical personal interpretations of the same has led to the blunting of urban mission with the loss of a wholistic incarnational approach.

It bears repeating again. There is no question that living in less congested, natural surroundings has physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits. When White contrasted the benefits of natural settings with the problems and evils found within the city, she had two things in view. First, she was emphasizing the law of cause and effect. Our surroundings affect our health, our mood, even our spiritual outlook. Second, when she so graphically and pointedly laid out the conditions of the city, it was to drive home the need of the cities for the gospel and the responsibility of the church to meaningfully engage with those who do not know Christ.

Although families with children were counseled to live away from the temptations inherent in the cities and where they were able to benefit from a healthier environment, this did not remove any Christian duty to ministering to the cities. At the same time that White counseled large institutions such as sanitariums, schools, and publishing houses to be in rural environments, she even more adamantly counseled them to be close to large population centers (1906b). *If anything trumped the other, it was Christian duty to witness.* Reading White’s counsel on rural living *without* her concern for city evangelism in full view radically distorts her message. Sadly, for some in the Adventist family it has become a badge of virtue to not only move out of the city but locate far away from the nearest population centers in the wilderness. The call has devolved to “end-time country living” rather than “end-time living witness” to the teaming millions in the megacities of the world.

### **Country Living, One Side of White’s Message**

The overall zeal in getting Adventist members to leave the cities culminate in the publication of *Country Living, An Aid to Moral and Social Security* (1946a). I suspect that this small 32-page “pamphlet” has had an outsized negative impact on urban mission. By selectively lifting passages out of their context, the editors left an impression that all committed Adventists should exit the cities before the cities were destroyed by God’s wrath.

What they left out was that the spiritual need, due to the prevailing evil in the cities, was the precise reason Christians should become more involved in working for the cities. What follows is a brief review of a few examples from *Country Living* with the hope that those examples from that compilation will suffice to illustrate this point.

On page 8 of *Country Living*, there is a section entitled “Imminence of God’s Judgments.” This section is made up of three separate quotes, each a one or two sentence paragraph. These isolated passages, taken by themselves could give the impression that all should leave the cities at once because God’s judgments are soon to be poured out on these wicked places. But upon examining the original context it is important to note that White was either directing the location of a specific type of ministry, or making the case for the church to engage the cities.

The first passage reads, “There are reasons why we should not build in the cities. On these cities, God’s judgments are soon to fall.” This paragraph is from a letter to Brother and Sister J. A. Burden (White 1902), advising him on strategies, including the location of the health institutions he is helping to develop. This is not a blanket prohibition against building Adventist institutions in the city. Elsewhere, White advised leaders to build churches and schools in the city. As noted elsewhere, White was particularly concerned that sanitariums, large training schools (what today would be called colleges and universities), and publishing houses should be built outside of the cities. This concern for placement of large institutions makes a lot of sense. Cost of building in the city, the likelihood of loss of property due to city wide fires, so common in her day, combined with the benefits of a rural environment for patients, students, and families employed by these institutions, and raising children were major reasons for her advice.

What must not be lost sight of is that elsewhere she would also counsel that proximity to large urban areas was of highest priority. Historical research of urban mission during White’s life with her counsel and approval is clarifying the symbiotic relationship between the “outpost centers” and the “beehives.” The Sanitariums, flagship schools, and publishing houses had an elaborate system of satellite branches in the city that were staffed by “missionaries” who lived in and served the city.

The second paragraph simply reads, “The time is near when large cities will be swept away, and all should be warned of these coming judgments.” This is probably the most poignant example of how lifting a passage from its context can alter its intended message. As this sentence stands in *Country Living*, the phrase “all should be warned of the coming judgments” would imply, “Christians need to be warned to leave the cities.” But this is not White’s intent. Here is the context before and after this sentence: “The

*inhabitants of the ungodly cities so soon to be visited by calamities have been cruelly neglected.* The time is near when large cities will be swept away, and all should be warned of these coming judgments. But who is giving to the accomplishment of this work the wholehearted service that God requires?" (White 1946b:29, italics supplied). The distortion to White's intent here is abundantly clear. This is one of the more dramatic examples of how lifting a sentence out of its context completely alters its message. And in terms of the topic of this paper it must be one of the most egregious missuses.

The third paragraph reads, "O that God's people had a sense of the impending destruction of thousands of cities, now almost given to idolatry." The fuller context is, "O that God's people had a sense of the impending destruction of thousands of cities, now almost given to idolatry! *But many of those who should be proclaiming the truth are accusing and condemning their brethren.* When the converting power of God comes upon minds, there will be a decided change. Men will have no inclination to criticize and tear down. *They will not stand in a position that hinders the light from shining to the world.* Their criticism, their accusing, will cease" (White 1903:6, italics supplied). This final paragraph, within its full context, best sums up Adventism's struggle with urban mission. There has been lots of controversy over this matter resulting in neglect and missed opportunities in reaching the world's cities.

### Course Correction: Restoring an Urban Mission Focus

This pamphlet, *Country Living*, or more precisely, many peoples' subjective understanding of it became the "bible" for many Adventists on how to relate to the city. For many it codified White's counsel in very black and white terms. Cities are evil, the country is good. In fairness to the compilers, they did include a short section on working the cities. But again, the focus of the passages centered on "outpost centers," the evils of the cities without White's other counsel about the urgency and "beehive" approaches.

What began to resonate through Adventism is, "Out of the cities; out of the cities!"—this is the message the Lord has been giving me" (White 1946a:31). Generally, the sentiment came to be that no Adventist, at least no good Ellen G. White believing Adventist, would live in a city. This created a great deal of headwind when church leadership began to realize in the 1960s and onward that the large cities were being neglected and that a course correction was necessary.

First, the leadership needed to deal with their own feelings toward the city. Even to this day, and I include myself in this statement, there is an ambivalence, a questioning of "loitering" in the cities. I fear that for too

many of us, our hearts are not in it yet. So, although the statistics relating to the needs in the city and the size of the population was getting leadership's attention by this time, it would take time for passion, creativity, and a long-term commitment to catch up with the facts.

Second, the membership was rightly confused. Having been raised with a steady drum beat of "Out of the cities" minus the counterbalancing responsibility of city missions and a balanced view on how to work the cities, the rank and file greeted this sudden about face with suspicion.

Such was the case in 1990 when Ritchie Way asked, "Can we preach the gospel in *all* the world while living in the country?" This article entitled "The Paradox of Our Mission" was the first of a four-part series called "Country and City Living." In it he observed that "few evangelists, pastors, and teachers are able to live in the country and minister effectively to these cities," and even so, "few do." Therefore, he posited, although country living is desirable, it is an ideal, much like marriage, that some should forgo for the kingdom. But he went further, suggesting that "we should not withdraw from the world—and its cities—prematurely," and that "there are ways to embody the spirit of country living within the city" (1990:8-11).

Way's article drew this response: "I am somewhat concerned with 'Country and City Living' (Aug 9). Nowhere in *Country Living*, the compilation of Ellen White's remarks on this subject, in word or in spirit does she advance the 'take it or leave it' attitude put forth in this article" (Musson 1990:2). One can be certain that this reader was not alone in being "somewhat concerned" by new ideas being floated by some church leaders.

In 1997, in response to an article entitled "Flee to the City," a reader writes, "Why does the *Review* publish counsel that opposes earlier counsel from the Lord? In the July 5, 1906, *Review* Ellen White wrote, 'Out of the cities; out of the cities!—this is the message the Lord has been giving me'" (1946a:31). The writer concludes, "Work the cities? Yes. But we were told to labor from 'outpost centers'" (Morrill 1997:3).

But even the leadership's messaging was mixed. Way's article was the first of four in the "Country and City Living" series. The second article featured "A Modern Experiment in Primitive Living," featuring a family who moved "40 miles from town." Their focus on self-sufficiency led them to boast that "they could live comfortably for a year or more without visiting a grocery store" (Juberg 1990:14).

Although the third and fourth articles reengaged the topic of mission to the city, in the end the series comes off more as a referendum on country and city living, as the series was so titled. This is disappointing considering the introductory editorial by Kit Watts begins by putting the spotlight squarely on God's call to evangelize the world's cities of our

day. She begins with, "I have always sided with Jonah. It seems preposterous that God would ask him to go on a mission to a huge city filled with wicked people. . . . Today many Christians look at the world's cities with as little relish and as much pessimism as Jonah did." But then she pivots to White's "repeated and extensive appeals to help city people," and follows up with driving home that cities are where the majority of people are living. "Obviously, if we are to fulfill the gospel commission to make disciples among all nations and peoples, Adventists must take cities seriously." Ironically, in reporting "a hopeful sign that we will," the establishing of the "Center of Global Urban Mission," she confirms that in fact the church is not yet ready to make urban mission anything close to a priority. "It's small and low-budget (only a part-time office manager is paid), but the center is poised to raise our consciousness about the huge task before us." (1990: 5).

Watt's introductory editorial, "Balancing Act," and George E. Rice's closing "Perils and Possibilities: A Look at Ellen White's Concerns about Where We Live" (1990:11) bookmarked this series. What a contrast to Butler's bold historical assessment, quoted at the beginning of this paper. Both Watts and Rice soft-pedaled the need for incarnational, boots-on-the-ground to effectively reach the cities. This is in contradiction to what is evident from the successful urban mission in White's lifetime.

The preoccupation on "balance" and "perils" as a determinate in doing foreign mission would have seemed very odd to early Adventist missionaries. The early frontier missionaries hardly blinked an eye at the prospects of laying down their lives. Many succumbed or laid to rest loved ones within the first six months of arriving at their fields of service. Like the disciples of old they went because God said, Go! What is needed today is fearless modern missionaries who by God's Spirit boldly enter the mega-cities and work an interconnected network of ministries leveraging flagship institutions (outpost centers) with centers of influence (beehives).

Typical of Adventism thinking at that time, Rice, an associate secretary of the Ellen G. White Estate, ended the series with the caveat that "of course, the time will come when all of God's people will receive a signal to leave the large cities, never to return" (1990:11). City evangelism was not popular in White's time, and the reticence by many today to a full engagement continues. Rather than doubling down to reach the cities before it is too late, with every major world catastrophe even more move further into the country and add to their emergency supplies. The twin fears of contamination by the world and vicissitudes of the final time of trouble have been a continuing deterrent of a full engagement with the world's cities.

As I conclude writing this article, the world is moving out of the COVID-19 pandemic. The disproportionate devastating impact on the

largest cities is once again confirmation of White's warnings about the inherent problems and dangers in the city. If she was still present today, what would her counsel be? I believe her message would be the same. Our flagship institutions should be away from the congested cities so that they can function efficiently and effectively, but close enough to impact the large urban population centers and the branch ministries in the city. More than ever, our church needs to be in the city providing practical assistance and sharing a message of hope and salvation.

When the reality of this current pandemic was setting in, I received an email from someone I know at church with a link to a video by Walter Veith presenting his version of conspiracy theories in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Part way through the video he brings in White's counsel of rural living and then asks if there is still time or are we too late in getting out of the cities (Veith and Smith 2020, starting minute 40). My question is, Why is our first thought about escaping the time(s) of trouble, and not even thinking about the salvation of lost people in our world? Though Veith does not speak for the official Adventist Church, his type of messages, unfortunately, attracts too many from our midst.

While Adventism as a whole has been fleeing the cities the urban population of the world has been exploding. Do we not believe that the Three Angels' Messages is for all, not just some? Why then, at the first hint of world troubles, is our first inclination to flee for the hills, rather than seek the shalom for the multitudes of lost everywhere, including in the mega cities?

## Conclusion

Over the last hundred years certain perspectives have overtaken the church, which in my view are an aberration of Adventism's original eschatological understanding. There seems to be a greater emphasis on protecting one's own purity than warning the rest of the world about God's impending judgments. In the closing months before the expected return of Christ in 1844, the Millerites did not withdraw from the world. Rather they doubled down in engaging the world so that as many as possible might be warned and saved. Ellen White never lost that Millerite burden for the lost. Her graphic description of the evil in the cities were, in the majority of the cases, in the context of addressing the need to take the gospel to the cities before God's impending judgment.

It is my conviction that until there is a fundamental change, deep within the heart and psyche of our church, from leaders to members, our church will not begin to touch the massive challenge of urban mission. We must repent from our neglect and sanctimonious shunning of the cities.



We must turn to God and plead that he will take our hearts of stone and give us a heart of flesh that will empathize with the lost millions in the cities. Then, and only then will we be ready to join God in his mission to the cities.

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ANDREW TOMPKINS

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# Ellen G. White's Statements in Their Original Context on the Heathen Being Saved<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

This article is a study of a number of statements found in the writings of Ellen G. White on the experience of the heathen who have not heard about Jesus or God's law. A brief section on the historical theological setting during the lifetime of Ellen White, specifically as it relates to the question of the eternal destiny of the heathen, will preface the primary portion of the study. The question of the eternal destiny became a major discussion issue, in the wider Protestant world, during the lifetime of Ellen White. It was also an issue that John Wesley addressed on a few different occasions in his sermons. The Wesleyan approach to the issue is mirrored in many ways in the writings of Ellen White. This article seeks to highlight some of these.

The main sections of the study contain analysis of three chapters in White's writings, one from each of the following: *The Desire of Ages*, *Christ's Object Lessons*, and *Prophets and Kings* with a few additional notes on some other passages she wrote. The goal is to place the statements of Ellen White on the heathen within their literary context in order to have a more complete understanding of these statements. Part of the reason this is needed is because these quotations are often quoted without reference to their wider setting, and sometimes in contradictory ways.

For Seventh-day Adventists the question of the unevangelized has not always been clearly answered either from Scripture or the writings of Ellen White. This article seeks to shed some light on Ellen White's understanding in order to create a balanced view of Ellen White's statements on the eternal destiny of the heathen.

## Historical Setting

During the lifetime of Ellen G. White, the Protestant missionary movement had sent missionaries around the world. As a result, North American and European missionaries were encountering people from vastly different cultural and religious backgrounds. While these encounters resulted in a wide variety of new types of questions for missionaries and theologians to grapple with, there was one particular question that challenged the theological constructs of many. This was the question of the “unevangelized” millions who had never heard of Jesus or the Bible. Not only were the missionaries encountering such people, but it was clear that many millions had died before having the opportunity to hear of Jesus. Had they all gone to hell? Were some of them saved, and if so, how?<sup>2</sup>

Literature on this issue began to proliferate with a variety of different views and understandings emerging. While there was no one clear consensus on the issue of the destiny of the unevangelized one thing was clear, this issue had become a front and center question during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. The proof of this lies in the Edinburgh mission conference of 1910 in which a consensus statement was drafted, known as Commission IV, on how to understand the theological significance of the unevangelized.<sup>3</sup> Prior to the era of Protestant missions those outside of Christendom had been labeled heathens (with the exceptions of Muslims and Jews). After the great century of missions this was no longer a fitting term. The issues were more complex than many had imagined and the result for many was to turn away from Calvinistic determinism towards Arminian freewill.<sup>4</sup>

Ellen White also dealt with the issue of the unevangelized in her writings; however, she dealt with it from a different context than most of the missionaries who were dealing with the question. Ellen White did not have much experience in dealing with people who, for that matter, had not heard of Jesus or that were from outside of Christendom. For Ellen White the issue arises in the setting of careful Bible study and making sense of the realities she was hearing about in the mission field from the framework of her Wesleyan Methodist theological background. White did not quote the major authors who were dealing with the issue of the unevangelized during her lifetime. A careful review of the books that we know were in her library does not reveal any works by these authors and yet the issue was still something Ellen White dealt with, often in an indirect way while writing on major theological or biblical issues.

What does become clear in the study that follows is that Ellen White was thoroughly Wesleyan and Arminian in her theology. This is not new to most who have given careful study to her writings. However, a careful

review of her statements on the heathen within her Wesleyan theological context is still needed.

John Wesley, in several of his sermons, spoke concerning the eternal destiny of the unevangelized. For Wesley the idea that all humanity had the ability to make an intelligent choice for or against God was essential to his theology. This is known as the work of prevenient grace which, according to Wesley, is essential in order for all humanity to be “moral agents” (1985:489). Wesley preached that “I am persuaded every child of God has at some time ‘life and death set before him,’ eternal life and eternal death, and has in himself the casting voice” (490). From the same sermon, however, Wesley describes a day that he hopes is coming when Christians will live temperate lives which will break down barriers to those who currently view Christian habits as uncouth and to be avoided. Many Muslims and Hindus of India had made such statements about Christians during Wesley’s life, comments that much vexed him. Wesley felt that the actions of Christians were vital in sharing God with the heathen (495, 496). There was a tension in Wesley between the idea that all people have a chance to hear about God and the need for human agents to take the message out to save the world. His freewill theology demanded the former while his missional understanding of Scripture required the latter. It will be shown later in this study that Ellen White had a similar tension in her writings.

In another sermon entitled “On Living without God” Wesley discusses the worthlessness of morality outside of the grace of God and makes the following comment:

Let it be observed, I purposely add, “to those that are under the Christian dispensation,” because I have no authority from the Word of God “to judge those that are without.” Nor do I conceive that any man living has a right to sentence all the heathen and Mahometan world to damnation. It is far better to leave them to him that made them, and who is “the Father of the spirits of all flesh,” who is the God of the heathens as well as the Christians, and who hateth nothing that he hath made. (1987:174)

Wesley’s understanding of human freewill and prevenient grace made possible a statement like the one above. He strongly believed in going out in mission to the heathen, but this did not mean the heathen were outside the possibility of salvation simply because they were heathen.<sup>5</sup>

Statements like these found in the sermons of John Wesley may have influenced Ellen White’s statements on the issue. There is no evidence that I am aware of in which any of Ellen White’s statements on this issue can be directly traced to John Wesley or any other author for that matter. But as will be shown below Ellen White made clear statements on her

understanding of God's ability to save the heathen even before they hear about Jesus using similar language to that utilized by John Wesley. Ellen White's thoughts on this issue fall within Wesleyan Arminian thought, which fits well with the rest of her teachings on salvation.

### Ellen G. White's Statements on the "Heathen"

Probably the most often quoted statement written by Ellen White on the salvation of the "heathen" is found in *The Desire of Ages* (1898:638). Below I have given this quote in full in order to guide the discussion on this topic. As will be shown, the elements that make up the chapter surrounding this quote are similar to other portions of Ellen White's writings and will help clarify some of the more relevant quotations and chapters that are connected to the concept of the "heathen" and the possibility of their salvation in the writings of Ellen White.

The following is a direct quotation from chapter 70 of *The Desire of Ages* entitled "The Least of These My Brethren."

Those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. Through the influence of the divine Spirit they have been a blessing to those about them. Even among the heathen are those who have cherished the spirit of kindness; before the words of life had fallen upon their ears, they have befriended the missionaries, even ministering to them at the peril of their own lives. Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, yet they will not perish. Though ignorant of the written law of God, they have heard His voice speaking to them in nature, and have done the things that the law required. Their works are evidence that the Holy Spirit has touched their hearts, and they are recognized as the children of God (1898:638).

There are several portions of this quotation that are relevant to the overall question of what Ellen G. White understood would happen to those who had not explicitly heard about Jesus or the Bible. I have given this quote in full because it is the most often used quote by Adventist authors discussing the destiny of the heathen. The quotation also leaves little room for doubt as to the fact that Ellen White did believe some heathen, who did not hear about Christ and did not know God's law would be saved.

In order to look more closely at the challenges the above quote raises I have looked carefully at chapter 70 of *The Desire of Ages* entitled "The Least of These My Brethren," which is an exposition on Matthew 25:31-46. Ellen White works off of Matthew's emphasis on righteous works to develop a

way of understanding how God is working all over the world all the time, as seen through the actions of people. The second chapter I looked at is *Christ's Object Lessons* entitled "Who Is My Neighbor" (1900). This chapter is similar to chapter 70 in *The Desire of Ages*, although it works off of a different narrative from the life of Jesus. The last chapter that was most relevant to this study is found in *Prophets and Kings* and is entitled "Hope for the Heathen" (1917). In many ways the title gives enough information to show how this chapter would be relevant to this study. In that chapter Ellen White primarily deals with the prophetic utterances of the Old Testament dealing with nations outside of Israel. In several of the sections below there are additional writings of Ellen White reviewed to add to the overall argument, but in general these three chapters serve as the primary sources.

## Christ's Light Has Touched All Human Beings

### *The Desire of Ages* Chapter 70

Ellen White develops the concept in her writings that no human being that has ever lived is without some sort of connection to God. She states this in a few different ways in chapter 70 of *The Desire of Ages*. On page 638 she has this to say regarding Christ and his love: "He identifies Himself with *every* child of humanity. . . . He is the Son of man, and thus a brother to *every* son and daughter of Adam (1898:638, emphasis added). Commenting on the work of the angels who are "sent forth to minister" on earth she says, "*Not one* is neglected or passed by. God is no respecter of persons, and He has an *equal* care for *all* souls He has created (639, emphasis added). Finally in the last paragraph of the chapter White writes, "*To every* soul a trust is given (641, emphasis added). Ellen White is clear that all human beings are given an opportunity to know God in some form or another. This is founded on a strong theological conviction of equality and fairness that is a part of God's character. If God were not somehow reaching out to all humanity, he would not be who he claims he is. Therefore, the heathen need to receive some sort of revelation from God, even if they do not know it comes from God, or else God is not fair. Referring back to the introduction section on the historical background it was shown that John Wesley had developed a very similar sort of theological framework. Both Wesley and White cited John 1:9 as a key text in their understanding on the issue of God sending his light to all people.



*Christ's Object Lessons* Chapter 27

As seen in the chapter quoted above, it is common for Ellen White to emphasize God's all penetrating love towards every single human being who has ever existed. This is also true of chapter 27 in *Christ's Object Lessons*.

In relation to mission Ellen White set the tone of this chapter by reminding the reader that Jesus was clear—our neighbors are not only those within our faith community or part of our ethnic group. Instead, our neighbor is “every soul who is wounded and bruised by the adversary. Our neighbor is everyone who is the property of God” (1900:376). In other words, everyone is our neighbor.

This is a theme she hammers home in other parts of the same chapter. She states that “no distinction on account of nationality, race, or caste, is recognized by God. He is the Maker of all mankind. All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption” (386). This kind of inclusive statement was common in the writings of Ellen White and was often used when discussing the fate of the heathen. It was of the utmost importance to Ellen White that the reader understand God was fair in reaching out to all humanity in some form or another. In this particular chapter she uses this theological concept to inspire humanity to reach out to each other, because this is what God was already doing, and we are to follow his example.

We find another quotation, which is also found in *Prophets and Kings*. “His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere” (1917:386). This chapter emphasizes that “Whatever the difference in religious belief, a call from suffering humanity must be heard and answered” (386).

*Prophets and Kings* Chapter 31

In chapter 31 in *Prophets and Kings*, Ellen White makes some additional statements on the heathen concerning events in the Old Testament that are very similar to some of those found in the *Christ's Object Lessons* chapter mentioned above. After briefly discussing some of the people of the nations surrounding Israel, Ellen White has this to say, “No distinction on account of nationality, race or caste, is recognized by God. . . . All men are of one family by creation, and all are one through redemption” (1917:369, 370). This is quickly followed by another quotation concerning God. “His love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates *everywhere*” (370, emphasis added). She has once again reiterated that God's love, in some way, touches every person who lives on earth.

Later in the same chapter she states, “Heaven’s plan of salvation is broad enough to embrace the whole world. God longs to breathe into prostrate humanity the breath of life. And He will not permit any soul to be disappointed who is sincere in his longing for something higher and nobler than anything the world can offer” (377, 378). No one slips past God’s ever-seeing eyes. He is interested in all humanity and is ready to reach out to anyone who shows the slightest inclination towards Him.

### Other Relevant Passages from Ellen White’s Writings

Commenting on the case of Naaman, Ellen White notes that “today in every land there are those who are honest in heart, and upon these the light of heaven is shining” (253). “Every land” is pretty clear language to suggest that there is no place on earth where the light of God is completely absent. The life of Naaman is proof of this, to a certain extent, although the maid who lived with Naaman’s family was part of the light given to Naaman; however, the work of the Spirit was also active. In the following paragraph Ellen White says that “to every sincere soul ‘that walketh in darkness, and hath no light,’ is given the invitation, ‘Let him trust in the name of the Lord, and stay upon his God’” (253). This is a reminder that Ellen White felt all humanity had a chance to hear about God or experience him in some fashion and that they then had to make a choice to follow God or not.<sup>6</sup>

The idea that God’s light has shown on all humanity in some capacity is very similar to John Wesley’s concept of prevenient grace. While neither White nor Wesley used this exact terminology it seems to accurately define what both of them believed. For Ellen White that is most clearly seen in her clear belief that there was no human being who had ever lived that did not receive some amount of light from God (see Oden 1993:41).

### **Some Who Have Not Heard of Jesus or His Law Will Be Saved**

Each of the chapters from *The Desire of Ages*, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, and *Prophets and Kings* contains material that deals with the issue of those who have not heard of Jesus or the law of God but who still live up to the requirements of Jesus.

#### *The Desire of Ages* Chapter 70

There are clear statements in chapter 70 in *The Desire of Ages* that there are people who display kindness and even “minister” to others as Jesus

would have them do without knowing about Jesus. She even goes so far as to state that these “heathen” are actually worshipping “God ignorantly.” She is also clear that they “will not perish” which is a reference to an eternal state not their temporal life on earth. Many Seventh-day Adventists have used this statement to answer the question of what happens to those who have not heard of Jesus, but few have taken the time to comment on this quotation both from within its own paragraph and in the wider chapter in which it is located.<sup>7</sup>

The last part of this chapter in *The Desire of Ages* is extremely important in understanding why Ellen White made the comments she does concerning the heathen. First, Ellen White notes that while they have not had access to the written word of God, these heathen have “heard His voice speaking to them in nature.” Ellen White was a firm believer in the power of nature to witness to God, as this quote shows. It may, however, be the last sentence that is the most important in this context. The comment she makes on nature, if taken alone, sounds a lot like a natural approach to theology. The last sentence disabuses the reader of this. She is clear that it is not just the natural surroundings that draw people to God, but the active work of the Holy Spirit, which the rest of the chapter in *The Desire of Ages* thus illuminates.

The overall thrust of this chapter is similar to portions of John Wesley’s sermon “On Living without God.” Wesley stated plainly that he could not say for sure what the fate of those who had not heard about Jesus was. Wesley did feel however that God “respects the goodness of the heart rather than the clearness of the head” and that this meant some would not be thrown into hell even though they had not explicitly put their faith in Jesus (1987:175).

### *Christ’s Object Lessons* Chapter 27

Chapter 27 in *Christ’s Object Lessons* contains quotations similar to those in *The Desire of Ages*. This chapter is focused on interpreting the work of the Samaritan as an outsider of Israel who would not have had knowledge of God in the same way as an Israelite insider. In relation to the sympathy and love shown by the Samaritan, White states that “the Holy Spirit has implanted the grace of Christ in the heart of the savage, quickening his sympathies contrary to his nature, contrary to his education. The ‘Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world’ (John 1:9), is shining in his soul; and this light, if heeded, will guide his feet to the kingdom of God” (1900:385).

In this chapter Ellen White also wrote, “Wherever there is an impulse of love and sympathy, wherever the heart reaches out to bless and uplift

others, there is revealed the working of God's Holy Spirit. In the depths of heathenism, men who have had no knowledge of the written law of God, who have never heard the name of Christ, have been kind to His servants" (385). White leaves no doubt in the minds of her readers that she is referring to people who do not have knowledge of God's law nor of Christ. This does not keep them from living lives that show they are being influenced by the Holy Spirit. This seems to imply that they are saved people.

Below this quote Ellen White writes the following, "The glory of heaven is in lifting up the fallen, comforting the distressed. And wherever Christ abides in human hearts, He will be revealed in the same way. Wherever it acts, the religion of Christ will bless. Wherever it works, there is brightness" (386). The use of the term "wherever" is important because it implies that these things happen all over the place and with people not having explicit knowledge of the law of God or of Jesus. Keep in mind that these works are never done outside the influence of the Holy Spirit, but rather display proof of the working of the Holy Spirit in the lives of people around the world who act in ways of service towards those around them.

### *Prophets and Kings Chapter 31*

Speaking in the present tense, but commenting on the prophecies concerning the heathen in the Old Testament, Ellen White gives the following example:

Among all nations, kindreds, and tongues, He sees men and women who are praying for light and knowledge. Their souls are unsatisfied; long have they fed on ashes. See Isaiah 44:20. The enemy of all righteousness turned them aside, and they grope as blind men. But they are honest in heart and desire to learn a better way. Although in the depths of heathenism, with no knowledge of the law of God nor of His son Jesus, they have revealed in manifold ways the working of a divine power on mind and character. (1917:376)

This sounds a lot like the language used in *The Desire of Ages* passage quoted above. Based on the "manifold ways," which can be loosely understood as "works," these people show that the Spirit of God has been at work in their lives, even though they do not explicitly realize it.

The very next paragraph states the above in even clearer language:

At times those who have no knowledge of God aside from that which they have received under the operations of divine grace have been kind to His servants, protecting them at the risk of their own lives. The Holy Spirit is implanting the grace of Christ in the heart of many

a noble seeker after truth, quickening his sympathies contrary to his nature, contrary to his former education. The 'Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world' (John 1:9), is shining in his soul; and this Light, if heeded, will guide his feet to the kingdom of God. (376, 377)

The reference to John 1:9 is used by White to strengthen her argument that God is reaching out to all humanity. This act of "divine grace" can probably be understood on a salvific level, although this is again not explicitly stated in the quote. Ellen White is again clear that God is working among those who have never heard his name, and that this is evident through the actions of people in varying circumstances.

#### Other Relevant Passages from Ellen White's Writings

Manuscript 130 written in 1899 contains a very strong quote in regards to those who have not known Christ. "God's test of heathen, who have not the light, and of those living where the knowledge of truth and light has been abundant, is altogether different. He accepts from those in heathen lands a phase of righteousness which does not satisfy Him when offered by those of Christian lands. He does not require much where much has not been bestowed" (1899; Nichol 1976-1980:5:1121; see also White 1948:365).

The context of this quotation, as found in its original form in MS 130, is very different from the passages discussed above. The focus is not actually on the heathen (for most of the manuscript), rather it is on the use of our bodies for God. Within this discussion Ellen White felt it necessary to include this quotation on the heathen, probably in order to show how God was fair to all humanity in his requirements. This statement makes more sense when read within the theme of the great controversy over God's character that is found in much of Ellen White's writings.

In the *Desire of Ages* Ellen White makes a similar point when she writes:

Our standing before God depends not upon the amount of light we have received, but upon the use we make of what we have. Thus even the heathen who choose the right as far as they can distinguish it are in a more favorable condition than are those who have had great light, and profess to serve God, but who disregard the light, and by their daily life contradict their profession. (1898:239)

This makes much more sense when read with the understanding that Ellen White wrote on many occasions that God has not left himself

without witness to any person who has ever lived. Therefore, all have had some sort of light shining on them and they are responsible for living up to that light.

### Those Who Have Not Heard the Gospel Are Perishing

While it is true Ellen White believed that God had given enough light to all humanity to help them make a decision to follow him, she also felt that some would be lost. Not only would they be lost but it may actually be the fault of God's followers who do not go out among the masses that results in them being lost.

#### *The Desire of Ages* Chapter 70

In *The Desire of Ages* chapter 70, there is a lengthy quote that at first glance seems to contradict the quote from page 638 given above. White writes:

Millions upon millions of human souls ready to perish, bound in chains of ignorance and sin, have never so much as heard of Christ's love for them. Were our condition and theirs reversed, what would we desire them to do for us? All this, so far as lies in our power, we are under the most solemn obligation to do for them. Christ's rule of life, by which every one of us must stand or fall in the judgment, is, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them," Matthew 7:12. (1898:640)

Again, on the same page, "It is because this work is neglected that so many young disciples never advance beyond the mere alphabet of Christian experience" (640). Both of these quotes lead the reader to believe that it is in the power of human agents to make a major difference in whether or not someone accepts God and is able to grow in their faith in him. White becomes even more explicit on the next page. "The great topic of interest will be, how to save the souls that are ready to perish" (641). These quotes seem to put the responsibility of salvation on the shoulders of human agents.

A closer reading, however, may lead in another direction. While the above quotes show Ellen White felt that human agents had a major role to play, the readers should be careful to recognize that nowhere does she state that the work of humans is the means of salvation for the heathen. Rather she is clear that as human followers of God there is a sacred responsibility to share with those who are perishing with no knowledge of God the message that God loves them. Towards the end of the chapter

Ellen White has written a paragraph that sounds like a theology of mission in a nutshell.

Love to man is the earthward manifestation of the love of God. It was to implant this love, to make us children of one family, that the King of glory became one of us. And when His parting words are fulfilled, “Love one another, as I have loved you” (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His *mission* is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts (641, emphasis added).

For Ellen White the mission is God’s. This is the basic concept of the *missio dei* which was only formulated decades later when the term became popular in the wider Christian study of mission. What this means is that the work of humans is to spread the love of Christ that they have received and experienced in their own lives. This may even lead some who are “perishing” to be saved. A balance must be struck between the early statement Ellen White made on page 638 and the later statements she makes about people perishing and about the mission of God to share his love. When these are all read together it becomes clear that in this chapter Ellen White is exposing the reader to God’s mission of love to all humanity, in the midst of the great controversy, in which it is the privilege of human followers of Jesus to be a part of. This may lead some to accept Jesus as their savior and to grow in faith, but this work of humans is not the final judge of who is or is not saved. As Ellen White stated early in the chapter, the Holy Spirit is active in all humanity, and this often manifests itself even among the heathen who know nothing about Jesus or God’s law and yet display character traits that are in accordance with both Jesus and His law.<sup>8</sup>

### *Prophets and Kings* Chapter 31

In Ellen White’s chapter entitled “Hope for the Heathen” in *Prophets and Kings*, she is clear that Israel was specifically elected in order to bless the nations surrounding them who did not have a full knowledge of God (1917:367, 268). She comments on the words given to Isaiah regarding the nations as proof of this calling” (367). Without commenting explicitly on the salvation of the nations surrounding Israel, Ellen White does make it clear that in the eyes of Israel the “heathen came to be looked upon as beyond the pale of His mercy” (371). The result was that God’s love “was little known; error and superstition flourished” (371). It is interesting that in this particular sentence White does not write that God’s love was completely unknown, but rather uses the terminology “little known.”

Significantly this chapter is really about the mission task given to Israel to share the blessing of the knowledge of God, which Israel failed to do for the most part" (372). Mission was to the nations who were struggling in darkness, much like the perishing heathen found in *The Desire of Ages* chapter above.

This chapter of *Prophets and Kings* makes the additional point that is not found in chapter 70 of *The Desire of Ages*. Ellen White brings the prophecies given to the prophets of the Old Testament into her present-day situation. After quoting Isaiah 60:1-4, 10, 11 and 45:22 she states, "These prophecies of a great spiritual awakening in a time of gross darkness are today meeting fulfillment in the advancing lines of mission stations that are reaching out into the benighted regions of the earth. The groups of missionaries in heathen lands have been likened by the prophet to ensigns set up for the guidance of those who are looking for the light of truth" (375, 376). This quotation makes it sound like the great Protestant missionary movement that was in full swing during Ellen White's lifetime, was to her a fulfillment of the unfulfilled prophecies of the ancient prophets concerning the heathen nations around Israel. Could it be that Ellen White saw a difference in how God treated the heathen prior to the "Great Century" of Protestant missions and how God treated the heathen after? This question deserves a more comprehensive answer, which is beyond the scope of this study.

### The Great Controversy Theme

A number of scholars have correctly recognized Ellen White's emphasis on the ongoing conflict between Christ and Satan, which she labeled the great controversy. This theme ran through much of her writings and is especially prominent in her sweeping review of biblical and current history found in the five volumes that make up the Conflict of the Ages series.<sup>99</sup>

#### *The Desire of Ages* Chapter 70

The great controversy theme also is a factor in the way Ellen White understands the work of God among the heathen. Chapter 70 in *The Desire of Ages* contains the following quotations regarding the work of Satan among those who are unacquainted with Christ and who neglect the poor and needy among them. "Satan had blinded them" (1898:639). It was not purely ignorance but the actual work of Satan that kept some of the heathen from following God. Just as Christ, working through the Spirit, could be seen working among the heathen by their deeds, so Satan was and is also visible among the heathen. She devotes an entire paragraph to point out



that many among the rich of the earth have purposefully neglected those around them for their own selfish reasons (639). These two points together are written to demonstrate that while it is true that God has reached out to all humanity and that some even among the heathen have responded to the Spirit, others have imbibed the work of Satan, which is demonstrated by their actions. It is important to note that just prior to Ellen White's statements regarding Satan and the rich she makes clear that angels are sent out to all humanity to minister (639). There is an ongoing back and forth between God and Satan that is being played out among all humanity throughout all time.

Because of Ellen White's Wesleyan approach to freewill she is constrained to demonstrate that God has not left any person without an opportunity to know God in some form or another. This is what has been theologically termed prevenient grace. For Ellen White this grace can be salvific and is for many who demonstrate that they love Christ, even without explicitly hearing about him or knowing him. White's developed understanding of the great controversy gives balance to the issue of the destiny of the heathen. It helps explain why it is that so many who have not heard of Christ fail to live up to the calling of the Spirit. Satan and his followers have blinded them and led them astray.<sup>10</sup>

Humanity is given a role in this ongoing conflict. This is demonstrated in White's continual calls for mission and outreach to a "perishing world." While there appears to be some theological tension between White's recognition that all humanity has been given enough grace to be saved and the need for missionaries to spread the gospel because people are perishing, this may be somewhat reconciled when read within the great controversy theme which is so prominent in her writings.

### *Christ 's Object Lessons Chapter 27*

The two sides of the great controversy are discussed in this chapter as well. "It [God's love] lifts out of Satan's circle the poor souls who have been deluded by his deceptions" (1900:386). White also mentions that the "Angels of heaven were beside the Samaritan who cared for the wounded stranger. Angels from the heavenly courts stand by all who do God's service in ministering to their fellow men" (388). Satan is busy trying to deceive people into selfish actions while God and his angels are busy guiding and helping those who are reaching out to their fellow human beings with acts of love and kindness. Those working on behalf of humanity are part of the great controversy since there are unseen players behind the scenes, both evil and good.

*Prophets and Kings* Chapter 31

The theme of the great controversy is also present in chapter 31 in *Prophets and Kings*. It is implied throughout the chapter but there are a few instances where it becomes explicit. Ellen White writes about the effects of God's love on some heathen when she says, "It [God's love] lifts out of Satan's influence those who have been deluded by his deceptions, and places them within reach of the throne of God, the throne encircled by the rainbow of promise" (1917:370). This follows the sentence quoted above where it is stated that God's "love is so broad, so deep, so full, that it penetrates everywhere" (370). This snatching away from Satan is occurring among the heathen, through the divine grace mentioned above.

Part of God's mission, in the context of the great controversy, involves "sending His angels to those who, while surrounded by circumstances the most discouraging, pray in faith for some power higher than themselves to take possession of them and bring deliverance and peace" (378). While Satan is not directly mentioned in the passage, it is implied that those doing the praying are under oppression, and that their only hope lies in the deliverance brought to them through the angels sent by God.

From the time of Israel up to Ellen White's lifetime she argued that God was calling his faithful followers to recognize their role in reaching out to all nations. This is not simply a human endeavor, however, since it also involves angels. That is because the battle over the heathen is a cosmic battle involving humans and their choices but is not limited to them or their own power.

## Other Relevant Passages from Ellen White 's Writings

In the chapter in *The Desire of Ages* entitled the "Fullness of Time," Ellen White describes the work of Satan as turning people away from the worship of God towards the worship of the created order. This also led to people attempting to earn salvation through works rather than through faith in the grace of God. While she does not say all humanity fell under this spell, she is clear that many, if not most, were deceived, leaving a pretty bleak picture of humanity at the time of Christ's incarnation. This should be read with the other quotations found above in mind, however. For Ellen White it is not appropriate to see Satan at work throughout the world while God is left to work only within the realm of his people. On the contrary God and Satan are both vying for all humanity at all times. Ellen White recognizes that at the time of Jesus' incarnation Satan had done a masterful job of bringing large masses of people under his deceptive sway, but this should not be read to show humanity as a hopeless rabble

in which God was not at work (see 1898:35).” It is true that elsewhere Ellen White does state that “the class of worshipers who follow the example of Cain includes by far the greater portion of the world; for nearly every false religion has been based on the same principle—that man can depend upon his own efforts for salvation” (1958:73). It is clear that Ellen White felt that Satan had certainly swayed many, according to this quotation a majority, to follow his empty path towards a works focused salvation.

Although brief, Ellen White’s chapter on Naaman in *Prophets and Kings*, does mention the great controversy. “Truth is of God; deception in all its myriad forms is of Satan, and whoever in any way departs from the straight line of truth is betraying himself into the power of the wicked one” (1917:252). This was in reference to the actions of Gehazi in the narrative of 2 Kings 5, but it is done in such a way so as to juxtapose Gehazi’s actions with Naaman’s. This is important in light of the fact that Gehazi was an Israelite and had more light than Naaman, yet Naaman’s actions displayed the working of God’s Spirit in a much more real way than in Gehazi’s actions.

### Summary

A careful review of the statements of Ellen White concerning the heathen’s destiny within the statements wider literary contexts reveals four major themes that are intertwined with each other. First, Ellen White, on numerous occasions, writes of God’s light and love touching all humanity. She is clear that no human being who has been created falls outside the influence of God. This does not mean that all have equal access to a clear knowledge of God, but it does mean that all have enough light to make a decision in favor of God through his Spirit. This is what makes the first point above possible. This is reminiscent of language that Wesley used to describe God’s work among those who had not heard of him. This has since been labeled prevenient grace.

Second, Ellen White made unequivocal statements that there are people who have never heard of Jesus’ name and have not learned about God’s law but have acted in accordance with the light that they have received through the Spirit in positive ways. These people will not “perish.” By their actions it is revealed that they belong to God’s people. This is also similar to the way Wesley described the destiny of the “heathen,” some would be lost, but others would most likely be saved due to the hidden work of grace on their hearts, which results in good works.

Third, even though all have a chance to make a decision to follow God, even if they do not explicitly know it, Ellen White is adamant that God’s people must go out in mission. This is often stated in the context of

a world that is perishing and in desperate need of the love of God which brings salvation. Some of the chapters discussed above imply that, for Ellen White, mission was primarily the sharing of God's love just as he shared his love with those who know him. Salvation is a prerogative of the Holy Spirit, but human beings can play a role in sharing this message with the whole world. Ellen White felt that the missionaries who were going out during her lifetime were fulfilling the call of God to share his love with the masses. In some ways this seems to contradict or be in tension with points one and two, but this does not necessarily need to be the case.

Fourth, the great controversy theme found throughout the writings of Ellen White brings these three elements together under one overarching framework.<sup>1</sup> Ellen White demonstrates that among the heathen both God and Satan are at work influencing humanity to make decisions in their favor. Many have fallen into darkness due to the influence of Satan, but others have shown through their actions that they are under the Holy Spirit's control. The angels are constantly being sent out to any person around the world who shows an inclination to follow God. The ongoing conflict includes the work of human agents who represent Christ as his missionaries. It is God's character that is under attack in the controversy with Satan, and this worldview is a guiding principle in Ellen White's theology. When combined with her Wesleyan leanings, points one and two become clearer. Ellen White was concerned that God not be understood as unfair, therefore it is necessary that no human has an excuse as to why they did not choose to follow God. All have enough light to make an intelligent decision to follow God. John 1:9 is a key verse for Ellen White in this regard, because it lends strength to her argument that God has shown his light on all people. God is a fair and just God and cannot be accused of leaving anyone without some level of witness as to who he is, at least as has been manifest in Ellen White's theological framework.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Originally published as "A Fresh Look at Ellen G. White's Statements within Their Original Context on the Heathen Being Saved." *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 29, no. 1-2 (2018): 50-72. This article was republished with permission from the Journal of the Adventist Theological Society.

<sup>2</sup> For an extensive study of the historical mission context that birthed the growth in the discussion of the issue of the unevangelized in theological studies see Cracknell 1995. Notice that the years Cracknell studied correspond almost exactly with Ellen White's years in ministry.

<sup>3</sup> For more on the studies that led up to the drafting of Commission IV see Cracknell 1995, chapter 4.

<sup>4</sup> For more on the debates and theological shifting in connection with Calvinism and Arminianism that occurred as a result of questions coming from the mission field see Cracknell 1995, chapter 1.

<sup>5</sup> For a very accessible description of John Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace as well as some additional relevant quotations from Wesley's sermons on the fact that there is no human being who falls outside the pale of God's grace, see Collins 1989:22-25. For more detailed descriptions of Wesley's understanding of prevenient grace see Collins 1993:63-66; Oden 1994:243-252.

Another important aspect of Wesley's theology is his emphasis on God's omnipresence; therefore, there was no human being who had not encountered God in some form. For more on this, see Oden 2012:41. It will be shown later in this article that Ellen White had a similar understanding.

<sup>6</sup> In the third chapter of *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White repeatedly refers to the work of God among people from outside the Jewish nation. These were prophets and others who had somehow gotten a hold of the Scriptures and believed in them. This is probably an indirect reference to the wise men who she more explicitly discusses in a later chapter. I have not included this data in this section because these people had access to the Scriptures and therefore are in a bit of a different category than those who had never heard of the law of God. See *The Desire of Ages* chapter 3. For more on Ellen White's interpretation of the wise men see *The Desire of Ages* chapter 6.

<sup>7</sup> Examples include Staples 1992:10-13; Pfandl 2012; Maberly 2006:53-90; Oosterwal 1999:45-53; Dybdahl 1999:54-61; Venden 2005; Bruinsma 2009. These authors use Ellen Whites quotes in various ways. I am not trying to say whether their interpretations are right or wrong, but that they have quoted Ellen White without giving the wider background to her statements.

<sup>8</sup> In the book *Education* Ellen White's discussion of the work of Daniel is mission oriented. She compares this with the then current work of missionaries around the world. It is interesting to note that her emphasis in this passage is on bringing the knowledge of Christ to all humanity because they deserve to hear about Jesus just as much as anyone. The knowledge is the "knowledge of God's love" (1903:262). The spread of God's love does appear to be one of the primary mission motivators in the writings of Ellen White. In some ways this takes away the emphasis that many Evangelicals have put on mission as taking salvation to the world. Ellen White believed that God could save any person who showed that they were following the promptings of the Holy Spirit. Mission is, for her, more about sharing the love of God than it is about carrying salvation. This does not mean that one does not lead to the other, but the focus is on sharing love.

<sup>9</sup> For a short and concise description of this theme in the writings of Ellen White see Whidden 1995, chapter 5. For a more in-depth review of this theme see Fortin 2013:241-286. For another detailed and comprehensive review of this theme on the works of Ellen White see Whidden 2015:198-214.

<sup>10</sup> For more on Ellen White and her Wesleyan roots including prevenient grace, see Whidden 2015:199, 200; Fortin 2013:248-255.

<sup>11</sup> According to Whidden there are a number of theological themes that find their fullest meaning for Ellen White when understood within her cosmic conflict framework (see Whidden 2015:198-214).

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Andrew Tompkins worked in India in various capacities that included school teacher, church pastor and planter, lay minister trainer, and Associate Director of the Global Mission Center for South Asian Religions at Spicer Adventist University. He is currently Assistant Professor of Mission and Intercultural Theology at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University. Andrew is married to Anuradha and has two sons Abishek and Andre.

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## Dissertation Abstract

### **The Contribution of Paul Hiebert to Folk Religion: A Missiological Study among the Dendis of Northeast Benin**

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Adviser: Pieter Verster, PhD  
Date completed: September 2022

Paul Hiebert contends that one of the reasons Christian mission has failed or has not been very successful among folk religions, is the long-standing ignorance of folk religion worldviews held by many of the early Western Christian missionaries (1982:35-47). Building on insights from his classic essay on the “excluded middle,” Paul Hiebert suggests the need for a new concept and paradigm for cross-cultural mission—a three-tiered view of the universe (1982:44-47).

First, I used the Dendi people of northeast Benin as the context of the empirical study. This research examined the impact of a phenomenological study of folk religion mission among folk religionists. I argue in this research that the implications for missions of Hiebert’s three-tiered view of the universe necessitates the development of two theological concepts: “a theology of the invisible” (Hiebert et al. 1999:370) and “a theology of the kingdom of God” (Love 2000:40; cf. Bosch 1991:10; Glasser et al. 2003:74; Hiebert et al. 1999:25; Ott et al. 2010: 65, 315).



Second, I reviewed the Dendi responses to spirit attacks with *ruqyah* and adorcism and discussed how a Christian ritual of exorcism could replace these Dendi crisis rituals. The objective of this study was to evaluate how life crises or special events in the life of the Dendi people call for radical shifts or paradigm shifts. The ethnographic research of this study comprised interviews conducted in two different cities (Kandi and Malanville). The data randomly collected from 28 Dendi adult men and women was analysed and interpreted using ATLAS.ti 9, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). The qualitative data obtained from the field not only established the fact that the Islam practiced by the Dendi is still heavily influenced by the Dendi animist pre-Islamic worldview, but that a mission strategy that focuses on the people's felt needs would be most efficient.

This study concluded that a felt need approach to mission among folk religionists should be preferred and encouraged in Christian mission, because it is Christological missiology and holistic mission, which leads to worldview transformation and conversion: first meet the felt needs of the people and then invite them to follow Jesus (Love 2000:91; Ott et al. 2010:276; White 1905:143).



Michée Badé is a pioneer worker in the Maghreb. He successfully completed his PhD requirements in September 2022 with the department of Practical and Missional Theology of the University of the Free State, South Africa. Michée is also a Doctor of Missiology (DMiss) candidate at Andrews University.