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Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission

Global Mission Issues Committee Papers

1998-2005

Bruce L. Bauer
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Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission

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Department of World Mission
Andrews University
Berrien Springs, Michigan
2006
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INTRODUCTION

MICHAEL RYAN

Mission has always been a foundational value of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Even prior to 1844, those who studied, prayed, and were led by the Spirit to the distinctive beliefs of the Adventist Church were passionate about sharing those truths with neighbors and countrymen. By the 1870s, the Church’s definition of mission had grown to include the whole world. Seventh-day Adventists believed they were a special part of God’s great plan to invite every person in the world to know Christ and the saving truths of the Bible.

By the year 1900, a small number of missionaries were serving in selected countries around the world. Over the next ninety years the number of missionaries increased and the church grew rapidly in the Americas, the southern part of the continent of Africa, selected countries in Asia, and the Pacific islands. By 1990, there were 6 million members and the Church had a presence in more than 200 countries—all but 28 countries. A network of schools, hospitals, clinics, publishing houses, food factories, and radio stations served the church in countries around the world. In 1990, every day, one new church was established and more than 1,000 people were baptized into church membership.

God be praised, the growth had been remarkable and a worldwide foundation had been established. And yet, it was as though God, in his all-knowing and caring wisdom, then began to move the church to understand more fully the mission challenge that still remained. World population had exploded to 5.4 billion people. Several studies conducted by non-Seventh-day Adventists and data coming from inside the church strongly suggested that the mission challenge was far greater than previously understood.
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The church initiated a study to discover where the presence of the church was located across the countries of the world. Membership and church locations were compared with populations in the context of territories that had been organized into groups of one million people. Of 5,400 segments (the world population in millions) data revealed that the church did not have a presence in 2,300 of those million population segments.

Quickly it became apparent that the Adventist Church was best represented in rural, island, Christian, animistic, and poor areas in our world. In 1990, nearly half the world’s population lived in cities and the vast majority held values represented by Islam, Communism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and a growing secular/postmodern generation. These world religions, governments, and ideologies held more than 70 percent of the world’s population. These territories were becoming known as the 10/40 Window—the great Christian mission field of the world. In these areas the Seventh-day Adventist Church had only a small presence.

In 1990, the highest authority in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the General Conference in session, voted an initiative called Global Mission. Global Mission was mandated to establish a church in every segment of 1 million people. The action of the world church called for the establishment of religious study centers to develop methodologies and materials for advancing the mission of the Church into those great unentered areas of the world.

By 2005, world population had increased to 6.3 billion adding another 900 segments of one million beyond the 1990 total of 5,400. The data indicated that of 6,300 segments of one million, the Adventist Church now had a presence in all but 430 of them. Every day, 11 new congregations are being established somewhere in the world. Every day, somewhere in the world, 2,800 people are joining the Church.

While urban and 10/40 Window mission advances seem considerable, the church has really only just begun. Without question, the early pioneers’ struggle to establish a foundation from which to initiate mission was both testing and considerable. However, the church of 2006 may possibly face the Church’s most challenging years.

Rapid growth in the 10/40 Window has forced the church to look at the interface between members and a population who come from different worldviews and religious backgrounds. While the Church’s doctrinal message remains biblical, mission methodologies and the logistics of providing language and culture-relevant literature, radio, television, education, nurture, and training...
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have stretched the church into unfamiliar territory. Additionally, the Church is challenged to keep alive the interest and vision for mission in the hearts of those whose support is critical—3rd, 4th, and 5th generation Adventists.

As the Adventist Church has advanced into vastly diverse cultures, tribes, and peoples, a wide array of issues have arisen that must be addressed if the church is to remain a unified world community. The biblical principle of unity is vitally important to the mission of the Church.

The Administrative Committee at the world headquarters established a Global Mission Issues Committee (Issues Committee) to meet each year at the time of the Church’s Spring Council. The Issues Committee's immediate task is to prepare an agenda of current mission issues that have potential to advance or disrupt the mission of the church or challenge world unity. The search for contextualized methods provides a wide array of issues for discussion and resolution.

The agenda of the Issues Committee is often expressed through papers that present the context and history of an issue and that then suggests a rationale and lists values to serve in developing solutions or resolutions. Committee membership includes a wide spectrum of administrators, biblical scholars, and those training frontline workers. The Issues Committee has no constitutional authority.

After the presentation of informative papers and lengthy discussion, representing a wide discipline of experience and academia, a small writing committee is appointed for each issue to express the consensus of the wider committee. The position paper is brought back to the Issues Committee to be discussed. If the majority of the Issues Committee agrees with the position paper, it is recommended to the Biblical Research Institute (BRI) to be studied, edited, and considered for recommendation to the General Conference Administrative Committee (ADCOM). ADCOM takes responsibility for processing the recommendation. Depending on the issue, ADCOM may extend the process to include additional developments and endorsements.

One must ask the hard question—does the Global Mission Issues Committee help advance the mission of the Church? Or, is the Issues Committee just another theoretical exercise gathered around a few well-crafted words, which issues resolutions and returns home with the misguided impression that those serving on the frontline of mission are immeasurably benefited?

An immediate response to this question must recognize that if the Issues Committee makes any contribution to mission it is only because of the faithful
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work of the Holy Spirit. The Issues Committee is part of a network receiving information and providing information. It is a critical part of the mission information system.

As methods, theology, resources, policy or structure advance or restrict mission, all levels of the Church structure and their officially recognized committees may submit items to be considered for the agenda of the Issues Committee. The Issues Committee provides a forum to discuss worldwide opinions on mission issues.

The opinion of the Issues Committee does not represent the position of the Adventist Church. However, the Issues Committee, as an official committee of the Church, has the authority to recommend an opinion to committees whose terms of reference provide the power to act. Because this forum exists to discuss mission issues and recommend opinions it helps focus the mission and protect the unity of the world church.

As recommendations are endorsed by committees with power to act, a consensus is built that can guide administrators and educators in advancing mission. A healthy mission culture, guided by understood parameters, serves the long term mission of the Adventist Church.

It is only fair to say that all meaningful mission issues come as a result of the Church being involved in mission. Issues that signal opportunities to be more effective and efficient emerge from the toil and sacrifice of believers wrestling to advance God’s cause. The Global Mission Issues Committee processes issues; it does not create issues.

While the papers that follow will provide examples of how the work of the Issues Committee has been used, one example might be helpful.

Global Mission pioneers are lay missionaries that plant churches in unentered areas of their home countries. Thousands of pioneers work in areas where the vast majority of the population lives in fear of evil spirits. When most of these sons or daughters of God begin to catch a glimpse of freedom in Christ they immediately ask, what can your Jesus do about the evil spirits that control our lives? Other questions about the Sabbath, the second coming, the state of the dead, etc, are usually not foremost in their minds.

Most answers from church workers are good biblical answers. However, some have advised the seeker to be careful not to anger the spirits. Accommodating evil spirits is not part of Adventist theology. Why was such an answer given? What was the problem?
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While Seventh-day Adventists have a theology on evil spirits and God’s supreme power over them, this theology was assumed but never stated in the Church’s Fundamental Beliefs. When it became apparent that most people in the 10/40 Window, home to 70 percent of the world’s population, live in fear of evil spirits, it also became imperative that the church provide a statement that correctly states the church’s theology, guides frontline workers, and assures seekers of God’s victory and power over evil.

The issue came to the Church because the Church is involved in mission. The Issues Committee represented just one step in a process that eventually brought the Adventist Church to vote a new Fundamental Belief. Frontline workers now have a statement that guides them in providing assurance in Christ to those who would otherwise live in fear.

We pray that these papers will benefit the larger Adventist Church as it responds to Christ’s command to teach all nations. Until Jesus comes, the Church will always seek better ways to go about God’s business. If it is to successfully serve the Church, the Global Mission Issues Committee must continue to see itself as an instrument of God’s will and his eternal plan for people.

Silver Spring, MD, March 1, 2006
Introduction: The Religions of the World

Humans are incurably religious. Wherever there are people, there too is religion. It is not always in an easily identifiable form like a denomination or a people group. But humans everywhere reach out to some great unknown. Over the centuries literally hundreds of religious groups have developed, often so influenced by the local culture that the line between religion and culture can hardly be drawn. Many religious systems have lived and died within the relatively short span of recorded history. But most definable religions today can be grouped into four categories: basic or primitive religions, religions originating in India, religions originating in China and Japan, and religions originating in the Middle East (Hopfe 1991:13, 14).

Basic or primitive religion generally refers to the religion of people in undeveloped areas of the world about whom we know little. There is great variety here. Their beliefs may include an animistic view of nature and a kind of polytheism. Native Americans and many groups of Africans are believed to hold such views. The religions originating in India include Hinduism, Jainism, Bud-
dhism, and Sikhism and include the theories that there are many gods and that a person may lead many lives through a system of reincarnation. The ultimate concern of these religions is release from the cycle of life, death, and rebirth and the achievement of non-life, which is called *moksha* (14). Sometimes this goal is achieved through the aid of the gods, but often believers are expected, by their actions or lack thereof, to work out their own release.

The religions originating in China and Japan include Taoism, Confucianism, and Shintoism. These religions share the belief in many gods and include the worship of nature, veneration of ancestors, sometimes a deep reverence for the nation itself, and are quite tolerant, allowing their adherents the freedom to accept and even adopt the religious positions of others (Hopfe 1991:14).

The religions originating in the Middle East include Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Baha’i. All these believe in one supreme creator God. In contrast with the Indian religions, they believe that each person lives only one life on this earth; they regard the material universe positively, hold a linear view of time, and believe in divine judgment of the world. Of these groups, Christianity is by far the largest, with numbers estimated to be climbing toward two billion (Hopfe 1991:340).

**The Source of Each Religion’s Authority**

But what is the source of authority behind these various religions? One theory is that religion developed because humans were weak and fearful of the forces of nature. Since they were at the mercy of those forces, religion provided a system of thought about gods and spirits that could explain some of the mysteries of the universe. Of course, humans then had to figure out how to placate and appease those forces and those gods and thereby survive. The driving force or authority behind such a system of thought would be the superstition that created the fear of the gods in the first place, and then the manmade rules that grow out of that superstitious fear.

But there have been other suggestions. In the nineteenth century the German philosopher Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) in his books *The Essence of Religions* and *The Essence of Christianity* articulated the view that religion was merely a projection of the wishes and needs of humanity (Hopfe 1991:12). He said since people see themselves as weak and helpless, they seek to overcome their problems by imagining and creating a god of power who can come to their aid. Thus humanity is not created in the image of God; god is created in
the image of an idealized human. So religion is really just a form of wishing. People seek in a heaven what they cannot obtain on this earth. As people become more knowledgeable and powerful, religion withers away and is replaced by technology and politics. Incidentally, Feurbach’s younger contemporary, Karl Marx, was deeply influenced by him.

Of course the more traditional view of most religionists is that there is a supreme God who, in some way, has revealed himself and his expectations to humans. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, this revelation from God has come by means of oral and written communication, usually through a prophet or prophets. For Judaism, the present form is the Old Testament and the many Talmudic and Mishnaic interpretations. For Christianity the revelation took the form of both Old and New Testaments. In fact it is important for us to keep in mind that the Christian Church and the Bible are inseparable. Even the apostolic church which had no New Testament had the Jewish Scriptures. There simply “never was a time when the church existed without the Bible or when the church did not acknowledge the authority of the Bible” (Richardson 1962:248).

Islamic teaching is based on a series of revelations that came to Muhammad at frequent intervals over a period of twenty-three years of his life, purportedly from the angel Gabriel (Haneef 1982:18). In Muhammad’s role as spokesman for God, he viewed himself as the last and greatest of the prophets, even transcending such luminaries as Abraham, Moses, and Jesus. His adherents accept this conclusion, hence the authority and permanence of his work is assured.

Buddhism presents still other kinds of revelation. Here the messages were revised, interpreted, and given articulation as much by later followers as by Buddha himself (Hopfe 1991:159). One result of the Buddhist diversity of revelation is an openness that allows great diversity of belief among its members. Hence the concept of authority is more diffused.

### Biblical Inspiration

The Bible has always been the final authority for Christians, but scholars have debated the meaning and precise weight of that authority, even though that debate has occurred mostly in recent years. For the first eighteen hundred years of Christian history, biblical authority was largely unchallenged and was widely assumed to be inviolable. But the nineteenth century saw the birth and development of a much more critical and “scientific” approach to biblical in-
interpretation that became known as the historical-critical method. While that method was largely rejected by conservative churches and seminaries like our own, a certain amount of debate about the precise nature of biblical interpretation continues. In the past, ideas have ranged from the dictation and verbal theories of inspiration on the far right to a high-critical view of individualism on the left. In our church there is still some debate near the center of that spectrum, with disagreements over the meaning of inerrancy. Although in Adventism I am convinced, having observed and analyzed the arguing for some time, that it is more like a cat fight in which there is considerably more noise than substance to the fight. But more on that issue a bit later.

Historically, Christians have believed that since the written record came from God, its preservation and transmission has been protected from loss and corruption by means of the phenomenon called “inspiration,” and here we must add that “the issue of inspiration is fundamental to the question of the nature and authority of the Bible” (Hasel 1980:248). This issue of inspiration is simply part of the process of understanding how the will of God can be accurately transmitted through certain human beings to other human beings. As mentioned earlier, for historic Christianity the answer is easy— the Bible and the Bible only is our inspired rule of faith and practice. This, of course, assumes that the Bible is, in a general way, God's voice. But since there are those who do not accept our view of biblical inspiration, is it enough to hold to our position as long as we admit that it is a faith statement and then assume that as others come to our level of faith, they will accept our position? Or is it more reasonable to look for supporting logic and evidences to undergird our faith in the Bible as inspired of God?

Throughout Christian history, the latter path has been the one most consistently followed, even though attempting to identify empirical evidence for inspiration is fraught with difficulties. For example, as mentioned earlier, when certain nineteenth-century Christian scholars looked behind the issue of inspiration and biblical authority, they concluded that the supernatural events in Scripture were beyond proof, were supported only by presuppositions of faith, and were thus suspect as history. So they studied and evaluated Scripture with the same analytical and critical discipline as one might use of any literature that evolved in that era. Thus miracles and the creation story came to be known as myths and so had to be demythologized before their deeper message could be grasped. In reaction to this critical liberalism, conservative believers attempted to articulate a view of plenary inspiration that said that every aspect
of Scripture was not only equally inspired, but was also inerrant in its original autographs. No writers of Scripture could or would make a mistake of any kind since their very words were under the complete control of God. Any apparent discrepancies or errors of concepts were explained as due to insufficient knowledge on our part or mistakes by copyists. Any lesser view of inspiration was seen as stepping onto a slippery slope that would inevitably lead to complete uncertainty about all biblical authority. In other words, uncertainty anywhere would mean uncertainty everywhere. As mentioned above, it is this issue that animates considerable discussion in Adventism today.

While a full discussion of the Adventist debate goes beyond the purview of this paper, we must attempt to clarify some aspects of inspiration and biblical authority to make certain that we are singing on the same page. In the recent past the Adventist debate has heated up, due in part to the publication of two books on the subject that set out opposing views (Thompson 1991 and Koranteng-Pipim 1996). While both books have had a certain polarizing effect, the more recent one has been more severe in this respect, since the author puts all Adventists in one of two camps. Readers are pushed toward the conclusion that if they do not accept the author’s view of verbal inerrancy, it is because they are liberals who accept higher-critical methodology, deny the authority of Scripture, and thus are a danger to historic Adventism (Koranteng-Pipim 1996:60, 61). But “the world of understanding the Bible, like most worlds, is more diverse than that” (Young 1997:50). This recent author makes little room for those who fervently believe the Bible is God’s authoritative Word and, at the same time, believe it contains a few minor discrepancies of names and dates.

But we must not allow the current debate to blur the basic truth that the Bible is the authoritative revelation of God’s will, and though it was mediated to us by fallible human authors and through fallible human copyists, its authoritative message about sin, salvation, the Sabbath, the Second Coming, et.al., comes through uncorrupted. In other words, beneath the lively discussions, for most of us, our points of agreement regarding biblical authority are much more basic and important than our points of disagreement. Consequently, we must pull together and turn our attention outward for the common goal of Christian witness to those who have no Savior even though the differences mentioned above animates considerable discussion in Adventism today.

While this paper will not attempt a complete resolution of this longstanding inspiration debate, readers should know that this author stands firmly between the two extremes of inerrancy on the one hand and historical criticism
on the other. I simply reject the liberal, critical approach with its naturalistic presuppositions, its fear of the miraculous, and suspicions of predictive prophecy. But I cannot leap immediately into the lap of the inerrantists. There are simply some discrepancies in the synoptic gospels and John that do not lend themselves to an easy solution. In addition, if it is so vital that the original autographs be error free, why should the work of copyists be any less important to the error-free process? In other words, the inerrantist view holds that the original authors were directly controlled by God but the later scribes were less so. But this view of inspiration seems based on the notion that unless God has total control of the authors, Scripture will have no authority. But to be consistent, that total control should extend to every copyist and translator as well.

Another view that is held by some is that since it was the church and its councils that decided the issues of canonicity and which books were included, then obviously it is the church that has supreme authority over the Scriptures. But such a view “confuses authority with authorization; the church authorized the canon of the Bible but it did not confer its authority upon it. In authorizing a canon of scripture, the church recognized an authority which it did not create” (Richardson 1962:250). This principle is born out in the fact that after the canon was authorized, the church then felt constrained to submit every question of faith and morals to the test of Scripture, since it held the final authority, even over the church.

It is helpful to keep in mind a distinction between “inspired truths” and “human words.” In ways that defy complete understanding, it is apparently possible for fallible human words to articulate inspired, even infallible divine truths. That distinction between the human and the divine is clearly made in the following statement (emphasis mine).

*The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all “given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have themselves embodied the thought in human language (White 1950:v).*

Of course, when Christians tell non-Christians that the Bible is God’s inspired Word, it is important to try to remember how they will interpret that statement. For example, Muslims also believe in the written Word of God, only
theirs is the Qur’an. Furthermore, their Word of God came verbatim from Gabriel to an illiterate Muhammad who wrote it down word for word exactly in the form it has to this day. It has been preserved in the original Arabic and has experienced virtually no revisions or even any significant interpretation (Haneef 1982:18). Even translating it out of the original Arabic is done with great reticence and has been viewed by many conservative Muslims as having a corrupting influence on the text.

In contrast, Christians of all varieties, including inerrantists, believe their inspired Word of God came through a much more convoluted process. First, it was written by many men from all walks of life who lived in many differing circumstances. Few of the writers knew any of the other writers; neither were they members of a select group who had the task of composing a large collection of inspired books. In addition, those many books have come down to us by means of hundreds of manuscripts and scraps of manuscripts of very uneven style and quality. Furthermore, Christian scholars continue to compare and collate manuscripts in the attempt to form the most accurate text possible. All of which must be viewed with considerable wonderment by Muslims as they compare this rather messy compilation of literary witnesses with their one text by one man in one language.

While the task of presenting our Bible with some sense of unity and authority is not a simple one, it is not impossible either. There is a positive, even authoritative aspect in how our Bible came together. For example, God’s presumed dictation of the Qur’an through Gabriel to Muhammad could certainly be viewed as miraculous. But to confront one hundred different men from many varied backgrounds over a period of fifteen centuries and without dictating every word, yet still produce a harmonious story is no less miraculous. In fact, some might well view this phenomenon as the greater miracle.

Christ, the Authority of Scripture

The most adequate answer to the question of biblical authority lies in Jesus Christ himself. The biblical account of Israel’s history with its Messianic message that culminated in the coming of Christ to earth is truly unique. No other historical development is a parallel to what the Bible portrays about the centuries that led up to and followed the Christ story in the New Testament. The dying and rising gods of Greek mythology may sound similar to the Christian message, but in none of those stories was there a vicarious, prevenient grace
aspect. The whole idea of a triune God creating the race, revealing himself, warning about disobedience, and then intervening by means of his own death sentence cannot be compared with any of the non-Christian religions. “The notion of God’s love coming to us free of charge, no strings attached, seems to go against every instinct of humanity. The Buddhist eight-fold path, the Hindu doctrine of *karma*, the Jewish covenant, and Muslim code of law—each of these offers a way to earn approval. Only Christianity dares to make God’s love unconditional” (Yancey 1997:45).

Furthermore, it is this uniqueness of story that impinges directly on the authority of the story book. Put very simply, “the Scriptures have no authority apart from Christ” (Richardson 1962:250). Many parallels can be found in non-Christian writings that mirror the Bible’s poetry, its morals, and even a certain amount of its God concepts. But its Christ story sets it totally apart. Furthermore, its outrageous claims about Christ underscore this point. If Christ was just a good man or even a religious genius, then the Bible is a very interesting book, but basically just another history book. But if, as the New Testament claims, he pre-existed with God (John 1:1), was equal with God (Phil 2:6; Col 1:19), and created the world (Heb 1:2), then the accounts about him transcend the simply historical. Consequently, any conclusion we reach about the authority of the Bible is inextricably linked with the authenticity of Christ as Lord. To put it another way, the uniqueness of Christ as Lord and the authority of the Bible stand or fall together.

In addition there is a close parallel between the complex nature of the God-man and the complex nature of the inspired writings that tell about him. The fourth ecumenical council held at Chalcedon in 451 A.D. concluded that in his incarnation, Jesus had two natures, the human and the divine and neither was lost nor diminished in any way (Boer 1977:43). In a similar way the Bible has its human and divine aspects. “The Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that ‘the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us’ John 1:14” (White 1950:vi).

The Bible was written by real humans and went through all the processes of human literature. It was not a docetic book that only appeared to be human. It was written by truly human fallible people. At the same time it stands as a judge and illuminator of all other books. Just how the deep things of God can be couched in human terms yet not distort will remain mysterious, enigmatic.
But surely the weightiest of divine truths could never be understood apart from everyday human form and expression. “The humanity of Christ and the humanity of Scripture both hide and reveal the divine reality that found embodiment in the creaturely form” (Boer 1977:47).

Clearly both Old and New Testament writers are preoccupied with telling his story. The Old Testament prophets wrote largely in anticipation of what the history of Israel was pointing to, while the New Testament writers are convinced that Jesus of Nazareth is “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16). To put it another way, faith in Christ as Savior and Lord implies that the Bible stands alone in its position of authority, for its primary message is to witness to and about him. The high biblical standards of morality and the behavior it teaches, which can be compared favorably with some non-Christian writings, is quite secondary. In other words it is pointless to draw up a list of similarities between the biblical teachings of morality and those in the writings for other great non-Christian religions for the purpose of authenticating the latter. There is simply too great a vacuum in the other writings at the crucial point of sin and salvation. As we will later show, for purposes of kindness, compassion, and gentleness, there is value in acknowledging areas of common ground between Christianity and other religions. In fact such an approach should be a given in all our outreach endeavors. But it is the uncommon ground of the deity of Christ that makes the Bible both authoritative and hard for non-Christians to accept. “The purpose of Scripture is identical with the purpose of revelation itself: to witness to Jesus as the Christ (2 Tim 3:15). It is not an almanac of sundry information, nor a book of historical curiosities. It is at heart Christocentric. He is the hub of its message, and the fulfillment of its hope (Acts 17:2, 3; 28:23)” (Pinnock 1971:36). The primary problem of the human race is the sin problem. So the writers are not just teaching superior ethics, they are bearing witness to the only person who can solve the sin problem. As Pinnock puts it, “Because Scripture is Christological, it is soteriological. It belongs to the divine plan for redeeming sinners” (36). This constant monaural theme of the redemption from sin of the lost race is simply not well articulated in any other religious writing. From beginning (“In the day you eat of it you shall die” Gen 2:17) to end, (“I saw a new heaven and a new earth” Rev 21:1), the Bible hammers home this one idea that sin doomed everyone to death, but God has worked out a solution and that solution is presented in Christ.
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This is why the canon of the NT closes about the end of the first century A.D., there is no more historical witness to be had, for those who had been in touch with the original eyewitnesses were now almost all passed from the scene. It is not a question of the “progressive revelation” of ideas about God, but of the testimony of eyewitnesses to the unique and saving act of God in history, the Christ event, which is the Bible as a whole (Richardson 1962:251).

The Necessary Role of the Spirit

Still the correct perception of that biblical message must be helped along to our dulled minds by the same God whose story it is. Scripture is made up of fallible human words that are historically and culturally conditioned. But with the aid of God’s Spirit, helping the authors and also helping the readers, those words tell the most profound story of God’s loving intervention in the human disaster. We dare not overlook that God-mediated step of the Holy Spirit. “The fact that God has revealed His will to men through His Word, has not rendered needless the continued presence and guiding of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary, the Spirit was promised by our Savior, to open the Word to His servants, to illuminate and apply its teachings” (White 1950:vii).

Just as it could only be God who could take a poor slave tribe and fashion it into an instrument for his saving purpose, so also did he have to guide the halting expressions of numerous writings and make of them a harmonious testimony to his own saving acts. Accordingly, the authority of the Bible will likewise be perceived accurately only by those to whom the Spirit of God brings conviction. “The authority of the Scriptures needs no testimony from man, because it rests on the testimony of the Holy Spirit Himself, confirming His truth without by the creation of an echoing truth within” (Robinson 1935:122, 123). Although it may seem like rather circular reasoning, the Holy Spirit can only bring that conviction of authority as the written word is read.

The Christian, the Bible, and Outreach

As the Christian considers the issue of mission or outreach, there are additional aspects of biblical authority that come into focus. First, Christians consider the Bible not simply as a tool of mission but as the basis of mission—the very reason for that mission. The Bible writers were gripped, not only by the Christ event, but by the conviction that it was the unique message that must go to the ends of the earth. “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them” (Matt 28:19). Other religions may have an evangelistic zeal
about the importance of their beliefs and behavior, but only Christianity puts so much emphasis on the resolution of the devastating problem of sin. Furthermore, that problem cannot be solved by several solutions. Christ alone is the source of salvation (“there is no other name under heaven . . . by which we must be saved” Acts 4:12), and apart from him, all is lost for all humans and for all eternity. Other religions teach how humans can achieve personal peace and fulfillment. They teach how to live peaceably with others and how to please God by appropriate behavior. They teach how to escape the endless drudgery of reincarnations. But Christianity teaches that human history had a beautiful beginning, but developed a fatal sin problem. It goes on to present, not only the awful consequences of that sin problem, but also the complete solution to that problem in the Christ event and the final eradication of the problem. Thus, its message is comprehensive and unique. Consequently, Christians do not believe that their message is simply one among several or even the best of the various options in the religious marketplace. Christianity is “a way of life rooted in and organized around a genuine experience of ultimate reality mediated by the crucified and raised Messiah, Jesus” (Johnson 1996:57). To view Christianity as simply another world religion arising out of its own cultural milieu is a most serious distortion. For Christians, it is a do or die mentality. While for reasons of diplomacy some may agree to work within certain territorial limits, such restrictions will always be difficult for most Christians to accept. Their religion can never be likened to the best medicine among several good ones. It is more like the only anti-venom available that will save the life of the victim. Others may provide a temporary palliative, but the patient will finally die anyway. Only Christianity offers a real, life-giving solution.

In addition, Adventist Christians add to that the conviction that they must help prepare a lethargic world for the second advent of Jesus. While we are not alone in this conviction, we feel burdened with a specificity of detail about eschatology that we feel absolutely constrained to share. This part of our message may not have the weight of the first advent message, but it is surely just as universal in its thrust. Consequently, territorial boundaries are anomalies that do not fit easily into the Adventist lexicon.

Such conviction about the messages in Scripture has its impact on the unique authority of Scripture as well. In other words, the validity of other religious writings will be determined, not by whether or not their ethics concur with Scripture, but by whether or not they affirm the life and message of Jesus’
first and Second Advent. Needless to say, that will leave most all non-Christian writings rather barren in the eyes of Adventist Christians.

Of course it is important in our outreach to various people groups that over and above the issue of scriptural authority we remind ourselves of the well-established fact that, first and foremost, it is friendship and warmth that win people to our faith, not unbeatable argumentation and superior doctrine. This is especially important when the audience is a group that seems to be more distant from us than groups we are familiar with. Obviously we feel most comfortable approaching people with backgrounds like our own. But here the non-Christian religions pose special challenges and some more than others. For example, thanks in part to increased Asian immigration and endorsement by celebrities like actor Richard Gere and Chicago Bulls coach, Phil Jackson, Buddhism has grown rapidly in the United States. But because its philosophy is so different from the Judeo-Christian worldview, few American Christians have taken on the challenge of witnessing to Buddhists, either here or overseas. The Buddhist ideas of reincarnation and the desire to seek release from the wearisome cycle of birth and rebirth makes Buddhist doctrines seem strange and distant from us. Similarly, what we know about the Muslim philosophy and theology is aggravated by the selective processes of the media which thrive on the spectacular and the negative. Accordingly, our notions of Islam are quite distorted, with the result that we put great distance between us and them. But fundamental to any strategic plan for evangelizing them is loving and praying for them. “We must see our fellow travelers on planet Earth as our Lord Jesus Christ sees them . . . made in the image of God” (Guthrie 1994:73). In a recent Review article, Reg Brown, a retired pastor/evangelist from Australia, pointed out that Jesus’ approach was to socialize and sympathize with people first. Then, after he had ministered to their practical needs of healing and comforting, he invited them to follow him. But, as Pastor Brown asserts, “Too often we ask people to take the fourth step—to follow Jesus—before we have built bridges into their lives through the first three” (Brown 1997:16). Of course, we bring this point even closer home when we confront and acknowledge our historic dif-fidence toward Catholics.

At the same time, there is biblical precedent for approaching non-Christian people groups not only with compassion for the persons but with respect for their writings. Paul, the first Christian with a global mission mentality, set the stage for approaching people who are at some distance from our theology and background. In his approach to the Athenian philosophers, Paul not only
demonstrated some deference to their practiced religion (“I perceive that in every way you are very religious” Acts 17:22), he went so far as to use their own writings to help create some common ground. I think it is quite significant that, at an impassioned moment in his apparently extemporaneous speech on the Arepagus, he chose to include a couple of references from their own poets (“As even some of your own poets have said” Acts 17:28). True, he put a bit of a contextual spin on them, clearly implying more than the original poets had in mind. Nevertheless, the fact that he was not only familiar with their writings, but used them to ease his way into their thought processes should be instructive to us and should come as no surprise. After all, it was part of what shaped evangelistic methods. “To the Jews I became as a Jew . . . to those outside the law I became as one outside the law . . . to the weak I became weak. . . . I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:20-22). Clearly Paul saw the necessity of adaptability and accommodation, of reaching out to people in more than just physical and geographical ways. Such an approach demands serious thought by Christians doing similar outreach today.

Adventists have for many years through the Institute of World Mission acknowledged the importance of meeting people on their ground, in their culture, in their language, and to a large degree, on their terms. “The church is not to carry the stigma of being an alien body, drawing men away from their natural social and political institutions” (Phillips 1948:129). But important cautions should leaven our proclivity to meet people on their own ground. First, we must rigorously discipline our tendency to be condescending in our manner and methods. Since we approach people with the conviction that our message is an absolute must for all, it is a natural thing for us to assume a certain air of superiority. It is not that we would arrogantly and overtly treat other groups as inferior, but rather that our certainty about our remnant status might cause us to unconsciously give the impression that since we are doing them this incredible favor, they should demonstrate their appreciation by ready acceptance of our various admonitions and instructions.

Of course if we pause to think about how non-Christian groups, especially conservative Muslims, view us, it will provide a certain check on our temptation toward glibness and superiority. In their eyes, Adventists are not the unique embodiment of Christianity. We are one small segment of a very large group of people who have a religious name but at the same time get drunk and enjoy and are entertained by people of very low moral behavior. With such
presuppositions on their part, it is difficult to convince them, especially the devout ones, that they must give up their belief system and adopt ours. When we remember this, surely all our attitudes of condescension are inappropriate and perfidious.

A second caution we must consider is the need to carefully distinguish between accommodation and compromise. This, of course, touches the nerve center of the whole issue. In our drive to reach people where they are, how do we make certain that we preserve those aspects of the gospel message that we consider truly unique and non-negotiable? Such a question assumes that we have identified and agreed upon what is truly global and non-negotiable in our biblical message and what is cultural and subject to accommodation. Since Paul apparently faced this very issue, it would be helpful if we could turn to some passage and find there his concise list of “testing truths” about which he would brook no compromise. But our problem cannot be resolved so simply, for he left us no such list. Consequently, after coming to some agreement about the authority of Scripture, we have to decide just how rigidly we should present our twenty-seven statements of fundamental beliefs.

In this regard, Adventist Christianity approaches some of the Indian religions at a distinct disadvantage. With their eclectic approach they are quite open to allowing adherents to include various of their own ideas in their broad landscape of beliefs. However, as they talk with us, they rightfully detect a very narrow attitude on our part that will allow no changes or additions to our twenty-seven propositional statements. But if the apostle Paul is our hero of global mission, we should follow his lead and make every effort to determine early on where there are areas of common ground between us and our target audience and use them unapologetically. And the operative word is “use” them. As mentioned above, in Paul’s approach any accommodating on his part was clearly a means to a very well-defined end—“I have become all things to all men that I might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22, emphasis mine). That ultimate goal of saving some at least gives us a start on the non-negotiables, for we must, like Paul, keep the crucified and resurrected Christ at the center of all else. But we may be able to use several different approach roads before we arrive at that destination.

Referring again to Paul’s work with the Athenians, we must clarify the aftermath of that episode. Some have felt that Paul went too far in his accommodating to the Athenians and that he later regretted his calculated attempt to meet them on their own ground. The idea is held largely because of a brief
paragraph in *The Acts of the Apostles*. Describing Paul's reflection on his work in Athens, Ellen White observes that there “he had met logic with logic, science with science, philosophy with philosophy. As he thought of the time thus spent, and realized that his teaching in Athens had been productive of but little fruit, he decided to follow another plan of labor in Corinth, in his efforts to arrest the attention of the careless and the indifferent” (1911a:244). But the reason his Athenian work had been “productive of but little fruit” was not because he had been overly accommodating or compromising. In the preceding chapter Ellen White makes it clear that the reason Paul had difficulties with the Athenians was because of their “pride of intellect and human wisdom” (1911a:240). In fact she goes on to speak well of his somewhat oblique approach in that setting.

Paul's words contain a treasure of knowledge for the church. He was in a position where he might easily have said that which would have irritated his proud listeners, and brought himself into difficulty. Had his oration been a direct attack upon their gods and the great men of the city, he would have been in danger of meeting the fate of Socrates. But with a tact born of divine love, he carefully drew their minds away from heathen deities, by revealing to them the true God, who was to them unknown (White 1911a:241).

Furthermore, another reason he changed his approach in Corinth was because he had a very different audience. In Ellen White's words the Corinthians were “careless and indifferent,” which would hardly describe the intelligencia on Athens' Areopagus. For the philosophers he clearly felt that an oblique approach to the resurrected Christ was necessary. For the happy-go-lucky and licentious Corinthians, a more direct route to “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2), would be much more effective than the somewhat philosophical approach used in Athens.

In neither case was his method flawed and thus later rejected. His approach in Athens, while seeming at first to be tentative did not at all avoid or in any sense dilute the “testing truth” of the resurrection. As mentioned above, the common ground he used was Athenian poetry. But in the overall approach to them he does not linger all that long on the common ground. Just two verses after his last quote of their poet, he refers to their pagan practices as the “times of ignorance” which God was willing to overlook. But he immediately cautions them that now everything has changed and he expects them to repent. For a group of philosophers who “spent their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new” (Acts 17:21), Paul had a lot of courage to ask them to
repent in his very first Bible study. Not only that, but he quickly forged ahead into something similar to our “mark of the beast” sermon in that same first study. He pressed it home with some urgency by confronting them with the idea that a judgment day was coming. And the “proof” of the judgment lay in Christ's resurrection from the dead. In Paul's work there is hardly an example of over-accommodation to local beliefs and practices that he later regretted. Rather, it is a very instructive example of starting on their turf but then moving rather quickly to issues at the heart of Christianity that were known to be foreign to their thinking and difficult for them to accept. Keep in mind, in those early days, the resurrection of Jesus was surely the Achilles heel of evangelistic preaching. Did he know that that would be as far as he could go with them and that most of his hearers would look with some amusement and total disbelief on this novel idea? Perhaps. Should we follow his lead? I think so.

But back to the question of the common and uncommon ground. As we have mentioned there is not much wiggle room in our twenty-seven fundamental beliefs in the sense of adjusting them to fit into regional religions and cultures. But if Paul and the apostolic church is our model, we can and must seek creative ways to make approaches while keeping the content of our message intact. After Paul became “all things to all people,” his final goal was to “save some.” Since saving them could only happen when they heard and accepted the testing truth of “Jesus Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor 2:2), it is obvious that Paul's accommodation was only at the beginning and was really quite utilitarian. But as we have seen, even with his calculated approach, Paul's results were mixed. In Athens, the very place where his attempts at accommodation are described with the greatest detail, the number “saved” was rather small (Acts 17:34). It should be remembered that at this time in his ministry, it was not uncommon for Paul to be run out of town after only a very short campaign, so his evangelistic count, I think, was often quite low. Still, as we approach the Eastern and Middle Eastern religions, we must be wise and utilitarian in approaches if we are to be effective in our witness. Paul and the Athenians must continue to be the painful paradigm that instructs us. Surely we must always seek the common ground, but at the same time keep in mind that it is only a very temporary resting place. Paul spent little time there. It seems his real concern was to move his hearers rather quickly to the not so crucial issue of the resurrection. Not surprisingly, the attrition rate was high.

With our non-Christian friends, we can enjoy and even press home our common ground of similar life styles and devotion to God. However, if our
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ultimate goal is to woo them into the Adventist fold, the common ground will take us only a little way toward that goal. For Paul, the Rubicon was the resurrection. For us, it is the cruciality of Christ and the authority of our Scriptures. They are virtually one and the same.

And at the heart of “being effective in our witness” is convincing non-Christians that the final authority in all this is our Bible. And about this we can brook no compromise. We may take considerable time with them in their “Scriptures” as a legitimate application of being “all things to all people.” But in time, we must keep in mind that the story of Jesus and the final authority of the Bible are inseparable. It is simply not enough to say that other religious written works are inspired or prophetic. We have to help others see that down through time God has worked through all kinds of people and events to make himself and his message understood. To many people he gave understanding of some small detail. But few of God’s human agents or prophets could grasp the entire picture or present the whole body of knowledge about God and his plan for saving the lost race. Often their partial knowledge was a necessary, even inspired piece of the larger puzzle. Speaking of the messianic anticipation prior to Christ’s first coming, Ellen White clearly articulates this idea. “Outside the Jewish nation there were men who foretold the appearance of a divine instructor. These men were seeking for truth, and to them the Spirit of Inspiration was imparted. One after another, like stars in the darkened heavens, such teachers had arisen. Their words of prophecy had kindled hope in the hearts of thousands of the Gentile world” (White 1911b:33).

It may surprise some that Ellen White uses such terms as “Spirit of Inspiration” and “prophecy” for persons who wrote no portion of Scripture. But it fits with this idea that in a world of vastly different people groups, God has to be utilitarian too. After all, it was his idea to fling them in all directions. “Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the languages of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth” (Gen 11:9). The resultant diversity of languages and cultures now presents us with our greatest opportunity and our greatest challenge. Building bridges is never easy. When Jesus’ own disciples were suddenly confronted with a “foreign” people group who treated them badly, they reacted with surprisingly little tolerance; “Lord, do you want us to bid fire come down from heaven and consume them?” (Luke 9:54). But such sentiment was directly antithetical to the mission and message of Jesus. His words made it abundantly clear that although there were sheep “not of this fold,” they were to be viewed
as candidates for the kingdom; “I must bring them also” (John 10:16). But the hostility of the apostles toward people who were “different” shows that the divisions begun at Babel have always been difficult to bridge. Little has changed with the passage of time.

**Difficulties in Bridge Building**

For years we have sought to find common ground in our evangelistic approaches to people whose belief systems differed from our own. In some areas such as healthful living we have much to build on. However, with groups such as Muslims, our strong stand on the authority of the Bible remains a point of no small contention. As mentioned above, while there is some internal squabbling about the precise meaning of inspiration, there is broad agreement that our entire belief system is founded on the Bible and converts must come to accept that idea. This is truly a non-negotiable article of faith for Adventist Christians.

At the same time we must be aware that to others we appear as purveyors of double-speak when we go on to add Ellen White as another authority. Our fervid assertions that she is not a second Bible but only a kind of commentary on the Bible often fails to really clarify or convince. Surely this step in our instruction must be presented late if we are to follow Paul’s calculated style of being “all things to all people,” in his approach stages.

In addition to keeping in mind how our position is perceived, we must be keenly aware of how other groups view their “Scriptures.” Muslims in particular hold the Qur’an in such esteem that for us to treat it lightly would doom any further efforts on our part. For example, Muslims make a strong point of the fact that of all the various “Bibles” of religious groups, only the Qur’an has been preserved in its exact original form. In contrast, Muslims assert, segments of the Torah, the Psalms, and even the Gospels “are so heavily intermixed with human additions and alterations that it is very difficult to determine what part of them constitutes the original Message (as many Biblical scholars admit only too readily), much less to guide one’s life by them” (Haneef 1982:18). In addition Muslims believe it is a mark of authenticity that the Qur’an has been preserved in its precise Arabic wording in the exact order in which it was received. In fact, when cited in public it is always to be read in the original Arabic. As mentioned above, it is only with a certain condescension that Muslims make allowance for translation into other languages, a practice that comes from their strong belief in the verbal inspiration of the Qur’an. Muslims recognize two
levels of inspiration, *external*, by which the word of God came from Gabriel to Muhammad, and *internal*, which guides the thought and reasoning of the Prophet (Oster 1975:75).

There is some common ground since this view equates somewhat with the Christian terms of *revelation*, which describes how God confronts the prophet, and *inspiration*, by which the prophet is empowered to accurately transmit the divine message. But, unfortunately, that which divides us in this matter of scriptural authority is greater than that which unites us. Muslims go on to speak of the authority of the Hadith or “authentic tradition” that has been passed on regarding Muhammad’s handling of all kinds of issues. How he related to commonplace decisions, “how he combed his hair, his likes and dislikes—all became important patterns of life for the faithful Muslim. To imitate the Prophet was the highest goal piety could aim at” (Goldzihir 1917:3, 22). Thus in Muslim thought, Muhammad nearly reached the level of divinity, so that disrespect shown him has given rise to the charge of blasphemy and has even resulted in the death penalty. Many have viewed him as sinless and some have even suggested that light emanated from the prophet. “It is told that the Prophet did not cast any shadow, for he was filled with light and ‘your cheek is the *Surat an-Nur* (light), sang an eighteenth-century Indian mystic” (Carmody and Carmody 1988:82). Thus, the way of life of Muhammad became the way of life of Islam. The accurate transmission of all these details forms the Hadith and this process shifted the emphasis from the revelation of the *Book* to revelations about the *person* of Muhammad. As Oster puts it, “Part of the difficulty in evangelizing Muslims lies in their great dependence on and belief in the Traditions that have far exceeded the Koran in quantity and almost in importance” (1975:77).

It is a difficult chasm to cross. Not only must we deal with the vastly different content in the two “divine” sources, the Bible and the Qur’an, but we must also deal with the authoritative traditions that have developed around the person of Muhammad. Of course, we should at least be able to cultivate a sympathetic mindset, as we also have some rather well-defined traditions. For example, what is the source for much of our modern Sabbath-keeping behavior? We have few “direct” words from the Lord about twenty-first century Sabbath-keeping. While our credo is “the Bible and Bible only,” we have many “traditions” that have taken on the weight of “virtual inspiration.” For example, Sabbath outings to the beach may include walking or wading, but not swimming or organized volleyball. Canoeing and bicycling are acceptable, but scuba diving and water skiing are not. Eating out on Sabbath is acceptable if it is on a
necessary trip, but not if the trip is unnecessary or the dining is only for pleasure. The point is that our source of authority regarding various Sabbath behaviors comes across as laced with tradition. Consequently, we should approach other groups that hold strong traditions with gentleness and understanding.

But gentleness and understanding can only take us so far. Considerable distance remains between the concepts of a morally impeccable Muhammad or Buddha and a divine Christ. The Muslim assertion that they actually exalt Christ as a prophet still leaves him incapable of being Lord and Savior of the race. But on this issue we must acknowledge that this starts a debate that is essentially un-winnable in the realm of logic or proof. The intellect is not where this issue can be resolved. And the moment we acknowledge that it is a spiritual puzzle, at that moment we admit that only the Holy Spirit can completely resolve it. And if that is true, then we must be prepared to exercise patience while the Spirit impresses hearts and minds in his way and in his time frame. Paul, who was probably not known for his patience, clearly acknowledged the limits of cool rationality when he reminded the Corinthian believers that preaching was really just so much “folishness” to many of his hearers. Of course, his example helps us see that we do not give up the battle just because it is un-winnable from the standpoint of logic. Paul’s continuing proclamation illustrates for us that our commission remains unchanged, regardless of the odds. No matter how “foolish” or difficult it may seem, our telling the gospel story is still the method through which God has chosen to appeal to and even save “them that believe” (1 Cor 1:21). As Paul told the Corinthians, he planted and Apollos watered, “but God gave the growth” (1 Cor 3:6).

From this some might conclude that since God’s Spirit is responsible for the outcome, how we go about planting the seed is of little consequence. After all, the sower in Jesus’ parable seemed to throw his seed about pretty carelessly. Of course, a story designed to stress the importance of how we listen should not be turned into one about how we are to plant. Surely it is incumbent upon us to plant our seed as carefully and wisely as possible, acknowledging that how we approach people can affect how they respond. Since God has chosen us to speak for him, I do not think it was his intent that he would always have to do his part in spite of us rather than in cooperation with us. And to continue the sower analogy, while there have always been sowers of weed seed, there have also been a variety of sowers of good seed; hence it is not too strong to admit with Ellen White that even divine messages have come through a variety of instruments. Of course, such an attitude will appear to damn with faint praise,
but that is really all we do. God communicated bits and pieces of his wishes through the pagan Nebuchadnezzar, through the renegade Balaam, and even through the lips of the unprincipled Caiaphas (John 11:51). But Christians feel that the Old and New Testament comprise a larger whole. The Bible, as no other revelation, presents the entire picture from the beginning of evil to its ultimate defeat. As other sources of spiritual instruction such as the Qur'an add some harmonizing details, we may acknowledge and accept them as pieces of the larger puzzle. But in time, Muslims and others must be confronted with the core of Christianity which is Christ. To the degree that their sacred writings do not detract from the Christ story, they can be viewed as instructive. But to the degree that they differ with or are hostile to the Christ story, they must eventually be seen as misleading and wrong. Such writings cannot be presented as alternate paths that will, by themselves, lead to eternal life.

Occasionally extra-biblical writings may bring clarification or may even serve as a corrective to some erroneous belief and behavior. When that happens, Christians believe that the biblical message was not necessarily wrong or needing to be replaced. Rather the correction came because the biblical instruction was not being followed. An example is the Islamic emphasis on the absolute sovereignty and oneness of Allah. When Muhammad came on the scene in the seventh century, Middle-Eastern Christianity was in a sorry state. Disputes over the nature of Christ, the Trinity, Mariolatry, relics, and prayers for the dead had terribly fragmented the religion. It was hardly a good representation of Christ or the God he represented. “The virtual polytheism to which the Byzantine Church had fallen heir made nominal Christianity little better than the pagans of Arabia during the period known by Arab historians as the Jahiliyah days, usually rendered “time of ignorance” (Oster 1979:29). Consequently, the vigor with which Muhammad stressed the oneness and sovereignty of Allah can be viewed as a much needed reform, and even an inspired corrective.

“The Qur’anic philosophy or basic outlook, then, pivots on the supremacy of Allah and the divine revelation. In light of this revelation, human beings are but bits of dust or clots of blood. God is all-sovereign, and the prime task and glory of any creature’s life is to submit to God in both obedience and reverence” (Carmody 1988:70).

There is little question that the Christian presentation of God as tolerant and almost indifferent to lax behavior would benefit by the awe and reverence fostered by Muhammad’s teaching. Was his view of a God of rigor given to Muhammad by divine revelation? Since the biblical prophets all presented mere
pieces of the puzzle and not the entire picture, in that same limited way it is possible to give a tentative yes to that question. But does such a position imply that other teachings by Muhammad bear a divine imprint? Not necessarily.

As stated above the biblical writers each give only limited aspects of the entire revelation of God to man. However, they all lead positively to the ultimate revelation which is the Logos of God in Christ Jesus. Most of Muhammad’s writings do not point positively toward Jesus, and many actually point away from him. Which means, from the Christian perspective, they have authority only in those areas where they affirm and strengthen some aspect of biblical revelation. But even there, the Christian must exercise caution.

The fact is, while Islam’s view of Allah is a lofty one that was badly needed in the world and even in Christianity of that era, it also set forth a kind of severity that needed the warmth and relief that the Christian God of love and forgiveness offers. In fact, through so much of the Qur’anic instruction runs a theme of threat and dire consequences to the unresponsive that is both frightening and tiresome. Much of it does not make pleasant or inspiring reading. It is easy to get the feeling that Allah is to be feared, in part, because he is fearsome and scary. “If Allah were to afflict thee, there is none that can remove the affliction but He, and if He were to bestow upon thee some good, He has power to do all that He wills” (Al-An’Am, 6:7). And a few lines later, “Who is guilty of greater injustice than one who fabricates a lie against Allah or rejects His Signs as falsehood? Surely the wrongdoers shall not prosper.” And again, “Those who deny that they are bound to face Allah are indeed the losers, so much so, that when the Hour shall come on them unawares, they will exclaim: Oh, the bitterness of our remorse at neglecting this Hour! They will be carrying their burdens on their backs; and evil burdens will they be” (Al-An’Am, Chap 6, part 7:32-33). Admittedly the Bible likewise speaks of punishment for the impenitent, but it is not the constantly recurring theme that it is in the Qur’an.

While the Muslim stress on the transcendence and utter otherness of God can be welcomed by Christians, there is sharp division on the meaning of monotheism. We Adventist Christians have no trouble marrying the concepts of monotheism and trinity, but Muslims view a triune god as a false god. As a result we must guard against ignorant naiveté when using common Christian terminology for seemingly similar phenomena in non-Christian groups. In other words, to say that both Christians and Muslims are monotheists is objectively true, but quite misleading in its implications. The Qur’an stands strongly against the notion that God had a son, so the Christian doctrine of the divinity
of Christ is anathema to Muslims. Acknowledging this basic difference again forces one to confront the issue of the authority of Scripture.

Conclusion

Although we have said that the various Bible writers each presented only pieces of the puzzle, each piece had divine backing, so the entire work is tied together with a divine thread. Accordingly, if the authority of Scripture extends throughout its entirety, then those passages that speak of Christ being “in the form of God” and even “equal with God” (Phil 2:6) must be accepted as true. In which case, given the Muslim low view of Jesus, when confronting the issue of the authority of the Bible as a whole and the authority of the Qur’an as a whole, it has to be an either/or situation—it clearly cannot be both/and. As to whether or not bits and pieces of the Qur’an, or other extra-biblical religious source books, could be called “inspired,” the Adventist Christian can only respond, “How does it compare with the Bible?” We simply have no other sieve through which to screen out error. Anyone can say with the false prophets of old, “I have dreamed” (Jer 23:25), and no one can effectively dispute such a personal “experience.” But the biblical canon, which has withstood centuries of intense scrutiny by friends and foe alike, remains the only source of the Christ story and thus the only safe standard by which to judge all other stories. Where other writings agree with and strengthen the truth about God and his message of salvation in Christ, we welcome them. Many approaches and various methods may be used, but there is a non-negotiable center that must eventually be made clear. “Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry . . . out of partisanship, not sincerely. . . . What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed” (Phil 1:15, 17). Whatever assists in that proclamation, we welcome and encourage. Whatever detracts from that proclamation, we must eventually reject.

References


24  Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission


Mission Outreach and Biblical Authority  


Chapter 2

* * *

THE CHURCH, STRUCTURAL ORGANIZATION, AND ACCULTURATION

B. B. BEACH

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Object of God’s Supreme Regard

There are religionists who today think in terms of a “churchless Christianity.” Many encourage an organizationless religion. The idea is that you can worship without going to church—lying on the beach contemplating the blue or starry sky or the waves or just staying in a mountain cabin or simply being at home.

While private, unorganized oblations are fine in their place, they must not be confused with communion in a church communal setting. The Lord’s Prayer starts with “Our Father.” John Wesley stated that “the gospel of Christ knows no religion but social” (Wesley 1868:xxii).

God loves individuals, but “nothing else in this world is so dear to God as His church,” (White 1948:42) and it “is the only object upon earth upon which Christ bestows His supreme regard”(White 1923:49). Therefore, in discussing the church, we are dealing with something of paramount importance.
Defining the Church

There has been in this century a great deal of study regarding ecclesiology. It is a complicated topic. It was only in 1964, after being in existence for well over a millennium, that the Roman Catholic Church adopted a dogmatic constitution regarding the church. Even at Vatican II the original draft was changed radically before final approval in 1964. It is both interesting and surprising to note that in Catholic history infallible pronouncements regarding the doctrine of the church have been consistently avoided.

Defining the church is complicated by two facts: it is human, but it is also God’s church. Because it is human, it exists in time and looks at current reality. As a human institution it also exists in space. It has human weaknesses. Nevertheless, it is also God’s church. Therefore, it exists for eternity and universality and maintains a glorious vision of the final eschatological kingdom where God will be all and in all (1 Cor 15:28).

Matters are further complicated by the primitive organization in the early church. There are not many church structures in the New Testament. However, quite understandably, as the church grew, organization became more formal. The same happened with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Some of our early pioneers, as is well known, did not want any church organization.

The People of God

The first century church had both beginnings of presbyteril and congregational aspects, but the episcopal system was absent. The New Testament Church was not a hierarchal structure. It was the ecclesia, a society of the faithful “called out” to be the “people of God,” a movement with a mission to preach the gospel to the entire world in preparation for the return of Jesus Christ as Lord and King. In short, the church is the assembly of all those who believe in Jesus Christ. Thus, the task is essentially to carry on the work of Jesus Christ through (1) witness (martyrion), (2) service (diakonia), and (3) fellowship (koinonia).

The New Testament concept of church leadership was far removed from any monarchical episcopacy or corporate CEO concept, but was based on spiritual gifts, and certainly not on any imitation of secular, state, or industry models. The unifying forces of the early church were the gifts of the Spirit and the universal priesthood of all believers. These are important concepts in facing the issues of this global mission consultation.
As found in a rudimentary way in the New Testament, the Seventh-day Adventist Church today operates as congregations, as regional groupings of churches, and as a global church. The General Conference is not a church in the congregational sense. However, through delegated representative authority, it is in effect the church in all the world. For over three-quarters of a century the Adventist Church has been operating on four organizational constituency levels: church, conference, union, and General Conference (including its divisional sections). I believe that this is, to some extent, a pragmatic arrangement, though the hand of God was clearly involved in our church organization and it had the approval of Ellen G. White.

Anyone looking for the solution to finishing the work by doing away with church organization should not look to Ellen G. White for support. She strongly believed in organization, even in the end of time: “Some have advanced the thought that as we near the close of time, every child of God will act independently of any religious organization. But I have been instructed by the Lord that in this work there is no such thing as every man's being independent. . . . We want to hold the lines evenly, that there be no breaking down of the system of organization and order that has been built up by wise, careful labor” (White 1923:489).

What does it take to be part of the church? Jesus himself implies that where two or three (or two or three thousand) are gathered in his name, when he is in the midst of them, there is a church. This is not a hierarchical or juridical concept. Hierarchical and sacramental churches have special problems in facing the issues we are considering. This is not the case of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Seventh-day Adventists need not be dogmatic about church structures. They are important and, in God's providence, have served us well. We are a pragmatic church; we use what works. Experience has shown that our structure has served us effectively, but it is not sacrosanct. It has been tested and proved to be God's own over many decades.

Special Situations Need Special Organization

There are special situations which can only be effectively met by special organizational approaches. This we have done in various ways. Where it has not been feasible to organize churches, we have organized companies. In some areas
of the world we organize districts, with district leaders. In some countries it has been felt that neither a conference nor a union conference fits the bill, and we have organized unions of churches. In other places we have “attached unions” or “attached conferences.” Where local churches have not been permitted, we have had house churches. These do not fit into our regular structure, but the system works under the circumstances. Where it has not been possible to send missionaries or regular employed workers, “tentmakers” have been sent. Modified organizational terminology has also been used, such as “field” or “diocese” instead of conference or mission. Other terms for president have been used where this term is not permitted. In places where our churches were closed, the people have met under trees. Where the use of banks, regular accounting and auditing were not permitted or caused a serious disadvantage for the church, these methods were abandoned. Where the church was banned, underground or secret churches, committees and cash transactions have been used. Much of this is not in harmony with the organizational policies of the church, but in harmony with pragmatic pursuit of the church’s mission.

There are areas in the world where the church can function in a regular organizational way. There are places where in order to function, the organizational structures have to be adapted or changed. Then, there are places where the religious liberty situation is such that the church cannot function in an organized way at all. Where that is not possible, Adventist pragmatism dictates that other approaches should and must be used.

In my view, there are five different possible organizational approaches, depending on the circumstances: (1) ideal church organization, (2) pragmatic church organization, where the ideal is not possible, (3) permitted or experimental organization to test or try out new structural or institutional approaches, (4) underground church organization, where regular church work is not permitted, and (5) no church organization as such.

Organization must be pragmatic and flexible since there are abnormal situations. Where socio-cultural and/or political circumstances make it impossible or inadvisable to operate with regular church structures, we have to work in the best way we can, using ad hoc structures in the most effective way. Certainly, under these circumstances desire for power and control should play no role.

Adaptation is both unavoidable and necessary. Translation itself involves a degree of adaptation.
Helpful Theological Concepts

There are several concepts that are or can be helpful to the global mission of the church. First, the biblical concept of *laos*, designating the church as the people of God. This word is mentioned some 140 times in the New Testament. The word *laos* does not represent organizations or institutions as such, but designates the vehicle for God’s mission of proclamation and service in the world. *Laos* represents the totality of God’s people, including the ordained ministry. It has been a grave mistake to take *laos* and derive from it the concept of laity, thereby dividing the church into groups composed of “laity” and “clergy.” To compound the mistake, clergy are often called “workers,” implying that the non-ordained do not work for the church.

A second useful concept is of the church as both visible and invisible. The church is invisible in the multitude of devoted and sincere people of all churches and even those belonging to no organized church, who worship God in spirit and in truth to the extent of their knowledge and understanding.

While hearing the Word is important, Paul makes it clear, however, that there can be salvation for those outside the regularly organized church who have not heard the written Word: “When Gentiles who do not possess the law carry out its precepts by the light of nature, then, although they have no law, they are their own law, for they display the effect of the law inscribed on their hearts. Their conscience is called as witness” (Rom 2:14, 15 NEB).

In this connection there are two theological concepts that we might wish to explore and which Catholic theologians use to balance the *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* (no salvation outside the church) teaching: (a) “invincible ignorance” and (b) “desire for the church.” The thought is that anyone living in “invincible ignorance” of the Christian faith may be living outside the organizational borders of the church, but still belong to the people of God, and therefore, can be saved. Desire for the church and baptism is a related concept. Genuine desire to do God’s will and what is right provides an implicit desire for baptism and church membership, though the individual concerned may not even be aware of this. Thus, a person can be attached to the church though not institutionally a member. Certainly God himself seems to contextualize people when we are told in Ps 87:6: “The Lord shall count, when He writeth up the people, that this man was born there.”

Third, it is helpful to note that Seventh-day Adventist Church governance authority moves upward, not downward. This should be kept in mind in start-
ing new work in so called unentered territories. Any authority from above, or from elsewhere, should really be temporary, somewhat like using another car and battery to jump start your car.

In preparing this paper, I was surprised to run across the following statement I wrote thirty-two years ago: “In order to keep its missionary outlook and the dynamic character of a movement, the church must continually keep its ecclesiological definitions and institutions operational and evangelistic, within the framework, of course, of the New Testament concept of ecclesia, rather than frozen in narrowly hierarchical and legal forms of church organization, in imitation of political government” (Beach 1968:91).

In keeping things operational, organization may require adaptation. Many aspects of organization are not part of the laws of the Medes and Persians. Music needs to be adapted. Reverence in worship, social habits, and parliamentary procedure all need to be acculturized. Ellen G. White gives us this counsel: “There is to be no change in the general features of our work, . . . we are to enter into no confederacy with the world, supposing that by so doing we could accomplish more. . . . No line of truth that has made the Seventh-day Adventist people what they are is to be weakened. We have the old landmarks of truth, experience, and duty, and we are to stand firmly in defense of our principles, in full view of the world” (White 1948:17).

It is clear to me that she is here speaking about the work of the church in what we might call normal situations. There are situations where you cannot operate “in full view of the world.”

**Windows of Vulnerability**

As church leaders we need to be aware of the dangers of syncretism—the reconciliation or union of conflicting beliefs, especially religious beliefs. There is one faith, one Lord, one baptism. Indeed, there is “none other name to obtain salvation.” On the other hand, Paul encourages Christians to be “all things to all men” (1 Cor 9:22). The motivation is “that I might by all means save some.” Paul became a Jew for the sake of the Jews, and without law to those without law (1 Cor 9:20, 21). While there is such a thing as organizational apostasy, the windows of vulnerability are smaller and fewer than in doctrine. While the Bible tells us there is one faith, it does not say there is one church organization or structure. In all these issues of acculturization Plato’s golden mean is a valuable aid: “Not too much or too little, but just a middle.”
Sure Foundation

There are always organizational challenges to be met. Life in a missionary church is not static or unchanging. The church, with God’s help, can meet these challenges and foil all attacks on her basic organization and beliefs. The foundations are sure and the people of God can build on them evangelistically.

Reference List


New Structures Needed for Effective Mission, Nurture, and Growth

The increasing diversity in the church and particularly the mission to the large non-Christian blocks represented by the Global Mission Study Centers has raised questions regarding the most effective structures for implementing mission and subsequent nurture and growth among these peoples.

Given the understanding that God is active in mission among the peoples both at the macro level in working “above and behind the scenes” in the affairs of nations and at the micro level in people groups in order to preserve truth among the peoples (White 1940:59) and in the lives of individuals to lead them in spiritual growth in context (Cornelius, Ethiopian eunuch), the question this paper develops is how does an organizational structure remain sufficiently flexible to cooperate with, encourage, and serve as the avenue for God’s present and intentional activity in mission?
There is a certain tension in the Adventist Church’s understanding and practice of church governance and mission. The church has espoused theologically the priesthood of all believers and its concurrent theme of the empowerment of the local congregation as the focus of the church’s mission activity, but in practice it has been difficult to actually implement a strategy empowering members and local congregations.

The avoidance of congregationalism on the one hand has caused the Adventist Church to lean towards hierarchical and institutional models of church governance on the other hand, which hamper true member and congregation empowering strategies.

The growth in interest in the church planting and the cell church movement are examples of strategies which are gaining momentum, while at the same time there is a certain momentum towards maintaining more hierarchical structures and governance.

As we face the non-Christian religious blocks there is need to rethink our structures, particularly as new initiatives in contextualization are being experimented with.

It is important that the Adventist Church recognize from the outset that this is not simply the result of some human devised strategy or a new evangelistic method. None of the study center directors view it that way, but rather see the contextualized ministries as a very intentional effort to identify God’s spiritual work in the various focus groups. It is an effort to cooperate with God’s working within the cultural context of the focus group, to encourage spiritual growth, and development within that people group a viable witness to the truth about God and end time verities.

In this paper I will first summarize in concise form what I see as the issue and then the remainder of the paper will attempt to clarify from our field experience what is driving this as an issue.

If mission to a particular unreached people group (I use the term unreached with some caution, since it conjures up a series of questions as to what we mean by unreached and why a people are unreached or resistant, or is the difficulty with us, with them or with both them and us?), is found to be more effective when conducted overtly separate from identity with the existing church organization; how, organizationally, will the Adventist Church relate to and encourage such mission initiatives?

Further, if the result of such mission to the focus people group is better served, more sustainable, more spiritually nurtured and able to propagate itself
more effectively as God’s last day people in that context, by maintaining a “remnant identity” and organizational linkage distinct from the existing church, how will the Adventist Church relate to such “parallel” or “para” structures?

Will the linking with God’s mission among the peoples of the earth take precedence and be the primary factor for developing structures that will facilitate mission while preserving the essential unity and mission identity of God’s last day people? Or will organizational preservation take precedence over mission?

If we agree to “para” but strategically linked structures it raises another series of questions: (1) How do we administer church authority in these contexts? (2) How much church authority is necessary? (3) What linkage with the worldwide body of Seventh-day Adventist believers is essential? (4) How will tithe be channeled and utilized? (5) What organizational identity would we allow? (6) What are the essential elements of unity of the world Adventist family that must be maintained that yet allows for such diversity? (7) Where are the theological controls? (8) How will ministers be ordained and leadership appointed?

Let me broaden the issue a bit. Historically the cross cultural mission emphasis carried by the missionary to a foreign field was, in time, institutionalized and came under the control of the local church structure. The increasing demands of the institutional structure of the church, which in most cases tended to propagate itself within its own or closely related people groups, squeezed out the interest and the ability to move cross culturally into new unreached people groups. Now we have a presidential level entity, Global Mission, that has been assigned that task. Will the Adventist Church grapple with the structural changes necessary to facilitate this mission to the unreached? Will the resources, responsibility, and authority be provided to structures at the field level to affect cross-cultural mission to the unentered, resistant, unreached areas? Will all peoples be given access to the good news for the end time?

Is a somewhat separate but strategically linked structure necessary at the field level in order to facilitate the entry into unreached groups while not endangering the existing work?

What new structures could potentially funnel more resources, both personnel and funds, into the pioneer work necessary to reach the unreached?
Summary of the Issue

Certain New Believer Groups Are Not Able to Integrate into Existing Churches

The work being facilitated by the Global Mission Study Centers is resulting in new believer groups which are not able, for various reasons, to integrate into the existing local church. This has resulted in the establishment of new structures in order to provide nurture and allow for new growth among the new believers and to protect the existing church.

New believers from unique non-Christian backgrounds and high solidarity cultural groups coming into Adventist circles have essentially three options: (1) remain as some kind of “Jesus Jew, Jesus Muslim, Jesus Buddhist, etc.” and remain in the synagogue, mosque, or temple; (2) integrate into the existing church which is often culturally and socially distant; or (3) form some kind of new believer group composed of members from a similar background. Option two, which is the assumed normal way to proceed, has not been very successful in either accepting the new believer or in encouraging a vital, vibrant local church. Option two more often than not isolates new converts from different backgrounds and requires an acculturation into a foreign church for survival. Option one may be necessary in certain intolerant situations. Option three is a reality in current Seventh-day Adventist mission to unreached groups. What is happening reinforces the maxim that when we focus on building the kingdom of grace in people’s hearts the church happens, in context, and it may look different than policy would encourage. When Adventists focus on building the church, they tend to reproduce human weaknesses and specific cultural understandings of church.

Security Issues Often Prevent Integration

The issue of security for both the existing church and the new ministry for an unreached group who are generally hostile towards Christianity is also a factor in looking at new structures or even separate structures for certain groups. In the Muslim context, the work of the existing church, for people from similar background as its members, would be jeopardized if it were openly involved in “converting” Muslims. Where the church has been established for many years and has built up around a minority group in the country, that work needs to be encouraged and safeguarded while not preventing work for the other groups
as well. But in order to safeguard the existing church and the developing group of new believers it has been decided in some cases to keep the two activities separate.

Who Is Responsible for Mission to the Unreached?

This raises further questions: (1) Is the Adventist Church bound to the local congregation in order to reach out to other unreached groups in its territory? (2) If that local congregation, for whatever reasons such as historic prejudices, social class disparities, protectionism, or ethnic hatreds, all of which may be very deep seated and resistant to change, is unable to reach out to a large unreached group in its territory, what should Adventist leaders do? (3) Can the Adventist Church justify not taking the gospel to the Muslim majority in a country because the Hindu minority constitute the membership of the existing church? (4) If the church in a Muslim country is based on a refugee minority who have been historically mistreated by the Muslim majority, can Adventist leadership expect the existing church to reach out effectively to the Muslim majority? It seems obvious that in the human context in which we operate this is expecting too much at least initially. (5) Should the Adventist Church wait until God transforms the existing church into a loving body of believers who can reach across the gulf? (6) Or, should the Adventist Church look at other structures that may be more effective to implement a work and then work to bring understanding across the gulf?

Using a “Non-Institutional” Base for Mission To Non-Christian Blocks

Following on the issues noted above, it has been found more effective in certain non-Christian blocks to initiate mission activity from a non institutional base. This illustrates what has been referred to by others as the difference between the fortress model for the church and the salt model. The fortress model carries a strong institutional identity in its work, while the salt model suggests a more dispersive way of working with less concern about organizational identity.

The existing structures have simply been unable to effectively implement mission initiatives for the major non-Christian blocks. The reasons are many:
1. Ethnic prejudices which prevent reaching out to others of different background when the church structures are dominated by one ethnic group. Such tensions in the church often reflect the larger tensions in the society at large.

2. The identity of the Adventist organization with a very Western paradigm which is unwelcome among many major religions, cultures, and political blocks.

3. The identity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with the rest of Christendom, an identity which in some areas Adventists have courted in order to become accepted as a mainline Protestant denomination but which theologically Adventists reject in another sense, based on “Come out of her my people” mission. If our calling out mission is really important, to warn that Babylon is fallen, that apostate Protestantism has in fact sold out to ecumenism and is already evidencing the hands across the gulf towards spiritism and Catholicism, then why are we so keen on identity as a Protestant denomination?

4. Islam, for example, sees Christianity in general, somewhat similar as did early Advent preachers, that it has become corrupted, that it has become the “inhabitant of every foul and hateful thing,” and that it does not represent a godly way of living, etc. To be identified with the institution of Christianity is to place ourselves out of reach of the Muslim world.

In Eastern cultures a truly incarnational ministry is needed. When mission is conducted from an institutional base it is suspect. Association with a particular Western based religious organization tends to attribute to the missionary a list of questionable motivations: (1) personal gain, (2) institutional protectionism, (3) ethno-political domination, and (4) religious imperialism.

Institutional mission also impacts the “seeker” by generating devious motivations such as (1) immigration, (2) job security, (3) freer sexual standards, and (4) Western leanings in a person already marginalized in his own society.

Eastern cultures have been affected most profoundly, not by institutional structures, but by itinerant preachers, by pious men and women who lived, taught, and demonstrated true religion. Jesus himself was the supreme model. “The evidence of His divinity was seen in its adaptation to the needs of suffering humanity” (White 1940:217). This was non-structured mission of an itinerant preacher/healer. Mother Teresa is not revered because she was a Catholic, but because she was a godly, caring, and loving woman who put her faith into action in the streets and alleys of the big cities to the sick and dying, the widows and orphans. Such ministry does not require, in fact is perhaps more effective without, an institutional base for such ministries move from the heart base.
If the Adventist Church is really serious about creating a last day movement of godliness to prepare a people to meet the Lord at his soon return, it seems it will be more effective from a “movement” paradigm than from an institutional paradigm, particularly in the large non-Christian blocks.

**Effective Structures for Sustainability of Mission**

In our mission within most non-Christian blocks, establishing a *sustainable* witness that will continue effective mission and nurture requires a separation from identity with Western and Christian institutional structures.

There is a certain identity of Jewish-ness, a certain Muslim-ness or Hindu-ness or Buddhist-ness that must be maintained if one is to survive in that community while adopting a new spiritual understanding.

In the Muslim setting, identifiably Christian church structures (both organizational and buildings) are seen as the fortress of the enemy. As such they have been attacked, burned, and isolated, with the people being ordered and programmed to avoid them. Christian building and organizations are seen as unclean places, as attended by people who have given up faith in God, who eat unclean things and who are generally not truly spiritual people. Once the identity of “Christian Church” is attached to a group or a building in a village it is then off limits to the faithful in Islam. In strict Muslim communities the building of a Christian church would not be allowed. In more tolerant Muslim societies it would be tolerated but boycotted. In either case, it becomes very difficult for an identified church building or Christian group to witness effectively in a community. Cell groups in homes or groups meeting in prayer rooms or houses of prayer have been found more acceptable. In some places “Adventist mosques” or similar titles are being experimented with.

On the individual level when a Muslim identifies himself as having crossed over and become a Christian he immediately joins the camp of the enemy. Western Christians little understand the depth of feeling this generates in the Muslim community. Conversion to Christianity is seen as a denial of faith, spirituality, moral values, cleanliness, family values, and of God himself. Islam, being a shame honor culture, sees only one way to rectify this great shame that has brought dishonor to the family and the *Ummat Islam*. At the very least, in order to rid the family or community of the shame object, the person must be put out of the family; however, it often includes the killing of the offending person. Putting out or killing must be done to restore the honor of the family and
of the name of God and Islam. This is an inviolate rule. It carries no remorse or twinges of guilt on the part of the Islamic faithful when it is carried out. Therefore, it does not produce a reaction in Islam that would generate inquiry or searching after what made the person take such a bold stand in the face of death. The killing of a convert is not a “witness.” The father who can kill his own daughter when she has been discovered in premarital relations, and do so without a twinge of remorse, will take not a second thought about killing his son who becomes a kafir (Christian). If this seems harsh, consider the Old Testament laws which God provided to meet his people in the context of just such a shame/honor/revenge culture.

In this context, it is necessary to understand the cultural rules and adjust Adventist mission to be able to survive in that context (as God did in the OT). While at the same time Adventists must bring Islamic peoples the principles of the gospel and move them towards a belief in salvation. Such a ministry must be perceived by the society as not challenging their traditional values and spirituality. Instead it must call them to a deeper faith and spirituality in their context, at first as they perceive faith and spirituality, and then as the Bible instructs. To do so requires a divorcing from Christian identity and structures.

An example that could be developed in the Adventist interface with Islam is the concept of a truly faithful people at the end of time (God’s remnant in Biblical terms), a concept already present in Islam. The prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, is reported to have said, “The time will come when you are divided into seventy-two sects. A group among you will be my people, the people of Salvation.” It has, therefore, been found effective to call Muslims to build on their Muslim spiritual heritage, to come into God’s last day faithful people within the Muslim context, while still maintaining a basic Muslim identity which does not contradict biblical principles while moving to a more complete faith. The alternative of extraction and crossing over to Christianity has proven ineffective and destructive of viable spiritual growth in the majority of cases.

What Local Church Structures Are Being Encouraged?

What local church forms or structures are presently being encouraged? In looking at these alternatives Adventists should ask three questions about the particular location and people: (1) What is possible? (2) What is effective? (3) What is sustainable?
What is possible implies evaluating the local environment both within the Adventist Church if it exists in the area and in the Muslim and political environment.

What is effective asks what will effect spiritual conversion, nurture, and growth among the new believers. Also what will be effective in turn in reaching out to others from the identified people group?

What is sustainable is related to the first question of what is possible, but pushes us to think of the long-term survivability of this new believer group in context so as to continue to be an effective witness. This specifically challenges us to look further than the traditional extraction methods to building a community of faith that can support itself and propagate itself in its context.

We have found it helpful to describe the different local church structures and forms on a spectrum of C1 being a totally foreign body to C6 being a secret body of believers in a hostile context.

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<th>C3</th>
<th>C4</th>
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<td>Traditional National Church</td>
<td>Traditional National Church</td>
<td>Contextualized Congregation</td>
<td>Contextualized Congregation</td>
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<td>Foreign Language and Forms</td>
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<td>Redeemable Local Cultural &amp; Islamic Forms, “Muslim-Adventist”</td>
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<td>Common “Christian” Language</td>
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**C1: The Traditional National Church**

In linguistic, cultural, and religious forms, these churches are either foreign, or even offensive to the local Muslim population. By definition, C1 churches do not use the daily vernacular of the surrounding Muslim population (i.e., churches in Cairo speaking English rather than Arabic).

**C2: Traditional National Church Using the Common Vernacular**

Same as C1 except the mother tongue of the surrounding Muslim community is used. The religious vocabulary however may still be seen as “Christian” or “churchy” (i.e., names of prophets, holy books, etc.).
**C3: Muslim Convert Congregation Contextualized to Selected Redeemable Local Non-Islamic Forms**

A C3 congregation adapts local music, artwork, dress, ceremonies, folklore, customs, leadership patterns, and lifestyle rituals that are not Islamic in nature or which have had the perceived Islamic elements filtered out. Unless there was some reason not to, the mother tongue of the surrounding Muslim population would be used. A C3 congregation is linked at the local level to the Adventist organization. Example: Muslim converts going to local churches and having to adapt and use Hindu background forms which are used by all Christians in the area.

**C4: Muslim Convert Congregation Contextualized to Selected Redeemable Local Forms, Both Islamic and Non-Islamic**

This type of church would be similar to C3 except for the addition of some useful, biblically redeemable perceived Islamic forms which could include ways of praying, vocabulary (Islamic words replacing Christian terms where appropriate), dress, and lifestyle habits (i.e., choosing not to eat pork or having a dog). Unless there is some reason not to, the mother tongue of the local Muslim population would be used. A C4 congregation would be linked at the local level to the Adventist organization. Some have characterized this type of group as a “Muslim-Adventist” group.

**C5: A Congregation of Believers Still Maintaining an Identity within Islam**

These believers meet together and follow Jesus as Lord, but would call themselves followers of Isa or Hanif Muslims (pure Muslims). They are by definition not linked to the local church, but may have loose ties to the church at some level. Over the past few years several such groups have developed in the Muslim world. By staying loosely within the framework of Islam, they avoid the stigma of “becoming Christian” or “becoming an apostate.” In some contexts, due to legal restrictions, C5 would be the only way for Muslims who have accepted Christ to have fellowship with each other. Some would choose to still meet in the mosque, yet, they would also meet regularly with other Muslims who have accepted Christ as Lord and Savior, study all the Holy Books but use the Scriptures as the primary source of truth, keep the Seventh-day Sabbath,
and confess belief in all Adventist beliefs. C5 is a reality in today’s Islamic milieu. It has been characterized by some as Adventist-Muslims.

**C6: Secret Followers of Jesus within Islam**

Either due to fear, isolation, lack of a local fellowship, or government ban on Christianity, C6 believers, either individually or in small groups, worship secretly. Many C6 believers have come to faith in the Messiah through dreams, miracles, because of radio broadcasts, or literature. C6 believers have little or no fellowship with other believers.

**No Specific Entity Assigned Responsibility And Authority to Reach the Unreached**

After the Foreign Mission Board was phased out in 1903, there was no entity assigned the sole task for devising and implementing strategies to reach the unreached or to share the Three Angels’ Messages with unentered people groups. The General Conference Committee assumed this responsibility as did the executive committees at each level. However, the rapidly growing institutional work meant that the unentered territories and the remaining unreached people groups gradually was pushed aside and soon ignored under the pressures of the growing institutional work. Adventist mission became almost entirely focused on the reaching of peoples similar to existing members.

Global Mission has thankfully been created to begin to reverse those trends. But, I would submit that it is only at the General Conference level that we have even a person(s) assigned full time to reaching the unreached. I am not aware of any division let alone Union, that has even one person assigned full-time to reaching the unreached in its territory. All Global Mission coordinators at the division level share their responsibility with one, two, or three other departments. Essentially all efforts are aimed at maintenance and reaching people similar to existing members through traditional evangelistic methods.

Just in the past two years I am aware of a local conference president in one of the largest, fastest growing unions in the world field, ordering a local pastor to stop his successful work with Muslims, since it would not contribute significantly to church growth. Dare I say that I am pleased he did not follow the advice? The pastor was soon called to another field whose president was supportive and he is now involved in a successfully growing work among Muslims.
But that pastor has continued to face obstacles from certain leaders located two organizational levels above him who feel his Muslim work is a waste of time. Because of this, much of his work has been supported by private donations. Global Mission funds have been requested but not approved by either the Union or Division.

Should the Adventist Church allow the work for unreached peoples, making up nearly one-half of the world's population, to be at the mercy and the whim of a particular church leader? Or, should Adventist mission be crowded out by the pressures for church growth? Or, should Adventist mission be hindered by the pressures of institutional maintenance?

Some have proposed a reinstatement of a semi-autonomous but strategically linked Adventist Mission Board to focus on the needs of the unreached. Adventist Frontier Missions has begun to fill some of the void, but is this adequate? What structures are necessary to provide, at the local field level, the resources and the authority to implement initiatives to reach the unreached while not neglecting the existing work?

Specific Examples of Ministries Which Are Exhibiting New Structures

Asian Ministry

The contextual ministry in the Muslim community was begun in January 1990 after approval of a three-year pilot project plan by the Division Committee. At that time after 86 years of mission in the country, only twenty-two Muslim background individuals had been baptized through the traditional Christianizing approach. This traditional method of extraction had required a change of name, from a Muslim name to a Christian name, and a change of identity card with the government. In short, the new Muslim background believer was forced to reject everything Muslim and to identity and acceptance the totally new and foreign culture of the Adventist Church which was entirely of Hindu or tribal background. The resultant disorientation and instability seen in all of the converts, can be attributed to this loss of identity, loss of value reference points (which exist in the family in a group culture), and the burden of the shame that they brought on their family. These converts essentially “fell into our hands” since there was no open mission to Muslims. In fact,
converting from Hindu and tribal background members who constitute all of the existing church members in that country find it difficult if not impossible to support work for Muslims. The language and customs are different. There is a long history of tension and bloodshed which is still present today in the society between the Hindu and Muslim peoples.

Initially the plan for this ministry called for a simultaneous education of the existing church workers in contextual methods and in Islam, in an attempt to bring understanding and dialogue between the two groups. There seemed to be no enthusiasm on the local church’s part at that time to pursue the sensitivity education. Then, in 1993 a disgruntled church employee who had been released for just cause, in seeking revenge, reported to the intelligence bureau of the government that the Adventist Church was involved in proselytizing Muslims and provided a list of names of those involved. An arrest warrant was issued for the president of the Adventist organization and the leader of the contextual ministry. The leader of the contextual ministry was able to leave the country for a few weeks, and the president of the organization was able to directly confront the intelligence officials, challenging them to provide evidence. The case was dropped, but as a result the church leader took the position at that time that there would be no further communication between the local church office and the contextual ministry. The name “contextual ministry” was dropped, and it was reorganized as a local ministry. The ministry has been able to receive a legal registration with the government. The linkage with the Adventist organization is only loosely maintained through a church leader in the country and more directly with the division office. The local church leader meets regularly with the leader of the contextual ministry to monitor the work, and there are at least annual visits by division personal. The ministry conducts an annual camp meeting which has been attended by sixty to eighty delegates from the growing work of the contextual ministry. Outside representatives from the division and another church representative from outside who are experts in contextual Muslim ministries have also attended on a regular basis.

Presently, the membership of the contextual ministry stands at around 2,000. Members are baptized by immersion after confessing belief in the Scriptures as the source of truth, Jesus as their Savior from sin through his death on the cross and present priestly work on their behalf, the Seventh-day Sabbath, and the other fundamental Adventist beliefs. The word Adventist is not used but rather a Islamic word is used to describe their deep commitment to God. The believers are also taught to defend themselves and their beliefs by using the
Qur’an. The believers identify themselves as God’s last day people, a remnant in the Muslim community the same as there are God’s last day people within the Hindu, Buddhist, and other religious communities. Many of the believers understand that there are other groups of God’s last day people in other countries and that there is a worldwide group of believers who share the same beliefs who are called Adventists. The leader of the group is an ordained Seventh-day Adventist pastor whose service record is kept at the division office. Land has been purchased and registered in the name of the group and a training center is being developed. Tithe is collected and sent to the coordinating office of the group and is utilized internally in the ministry for spreading the gospel. There is an internal governing committee with the leader as chairman and composed of trusted, long standing members of the contextual ministry who serve as undershepherds in the ministry. All baptisms are conducted by the ordained Adventist pastor.

**African Ministry**

The following story occurred recently in an African country: On 7 February 1997 a message was received from a certain African country with a 5 percent Muslim population that a Seventh-day Adventist retired pastor had attempted to hold a “crusade” in a Muslim village. Because he had insulted Muhammad he was attacked and stabbed twice. His associate pastor was hidden by a Muslim woman to protect him. Two church members were beaten, the public address system, bicycles, and other equipment were taken, and the literature and Bibles were burned. Further reports later noted that the pastor had proclaimed that Muhammad was an epileptic, the Qur’an therefore being a product of epileptic fits, and that Jesus was, therefore, obviously superior.

On 15 February, just a week after the incident, a second pastor from the same country who is very knowledgeable about Islam and is working full time in an Islamic area, was asked to go to the village where the attack took place to see what he could do to help the situation. Apparently the offending pastor was still in danger since the local people had put a reward on his head. Pastor “O” went to the area and took the offending pastor with him to meet with the Muslim leaders of the village. They both apologized for the unkind and inaccurate remarks. Further, pastor “O” explained to the Muslim leaders who Seventh-day Adventists are, emphasizing that they are people looking forward to the soon coming of the Messiah, that they believe the day of judgment is at
hand, and that the end of time is very near. He further explained that they are a group of people that are submitted to Allah and live godly lives in preparation for the end of time. Then pastor “O” pointed out to them that the Qur’an refers to a true people of the Book who believe in Allah, the last day, angels, practice works of charity, are steadfast in prayer, and forbid that which is forbidden. Adventist fit these qualifications. Pastor “O” further suggested that for the sake of greater understanding they engage in a series of dialogues on various topics. He and his assistant (a church member whom he had trained) would present the Adventist material and the Muslims could have two of their leaders present Islamic material on the same topic. The series was ten dialogues on the lives of the prophets. The Muslim leaders were so impressed by the apology and explanation which had never happened before that they agreed to the dialogues as a gesture of reconciliation.

The dialogues began on 19 February and were open to the village. As a result, on Sabbath, 1 March, 20 people were baptized. The Muslim leaders said, “We apologize for our attack on you. We did not know that you were fellow Muslims, of the Adventist sect.” The Muslim leaders have agreed that those baptized were being baptized as “Adventist-Muslims,” and have designated a piece of land for an Adventist house of prayer. There are no Christian churches in this village and no Adventist church. On 5 March two more Muslims were baptized. All equipment that was stolen has been returned. A lay pastor with a Muslim background, trained by pastor “O” has been assigned as the spiritual leader for the new “Adventist Muslim” group.

Ministries in Other Locations

Principles from the Asian ministry experience are being adapted and applied in ministries in other countries. These are at various stages of progress but all are showing promise of believer groups being established. The rates of growth will naturally vary since we are dealing with a variety of contexts. Countries which are directly applying principles from the Asian ministry include countries in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa. Other countries are further adapting the principles and trying various forms of a contextualized ministry can be found in Central Asia, West Africa, the Philippines, and in North America. Plans are in process for developing contextual ministries in additional locations.
Adventist World Radio—Radio Church

Adventist World Radio (AWR) has sensed the need to develop a way to effectively disciple its listeners in areas where either there is no existing church and where open Christianizing is prohibited. AWR leaders have conceived of an AWR Radio Church which would allow membership by written declaration with the base in a neutral country. This concept has been approved by the AWR executive committee and is presently waiting for a specific need to arise for implementation.

ADDENDUM

Summary of Historical Background to Mission Structures
In the Seventh-day Adventist Church

At the risk of oversimplification I will include a brief look at the history of mission structures in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In the period 1889 to 1903 the rapidly growing mission work of the Adventist Church was managed semi-autonomously by a Foreign Mission Board, in the same way that the Sabbath School, Lay Activities, Publishing, and Health work of the young Adventist Church was managed by semi-autonomous associations. The reorganization process begun in 1901 gradually eliminated these and created Departments of the General Conference for all of the formerly semi-autonomous entities. All that is, except the Foreign Mission Board which was dissolved in 1903 and its work taken over, not by a department but by the General Conference Committee. This seemed, at the time, to work well under the leadership of Daniels and Spicer. The period of 1901 to 1930 saw the most rapid expansion of the mission work in Adventist history. Mission giving in North America as a percentage of tithe peaked in the two decades of 1910 to 1929 at 48 percent. Ironically, however, the seeds of decline of mission emphasis in the church had been sown.

1. No entity was assigned the responsibility of strategizing entry into new territories or for starting new work among unreached peoples. No entity was given the authority and resources to implement new work. The General Conference Committee assumed this function along with the management of the existing work. This worked well while Daniels and Spicer were in charge and while the institutional structure of the existing church was relatively small.
Membership in 1901 was around 78,000 and the number of institutions was small.

2. The period of 1901 to 1930 saw the most rapid growth of institutions in our history. This dramatically changed the character of the work. The focus of our mission endeavor shifted from entering new territories to operating and sustaining the institutions of the church.

3. Since the executive committees at each level were responsible for both new work and for staffing, supporting, and maintaining the exploding institutional structure, it does not take too much thought to see the result in terms of decrease in emphasis on cross-cultural, pioneer mission work. Beginning from about 1910 the travel and focus of leaders at the General Conference and division levels was almost entirely focused on the existing structure or on evangelizing through the existing structure to peoples similar to the existing members.

4. The secretariat took over the responsibility of recruiting missionaries for foreign mission service. But in actuality, the secretariat became a conduit for calls and requests from the overseas divisions. Instead of acting like a mission board, strategizing, and directing work for unreached peoples, the secretariat has functioned more as a department for interchurch aid, filling the needs of the existing institutional structure. This is good and necessary but should not preclude the other focus on the unreached that is equally necessary.

5. During this period the financial support of mission shifted from a mission appeal to a policy directed support as policies for tithe sharing and Sabbath School offering use were enacted. This shift has certainly provided a more predictable and stable resource base for the international mission work, but it has also seemed to distance the member from direct involvement in cross-cultural mission. The resultant gradual decline in mission giving and recent calls for more of the tithe to stay with local work should give us reason to re-evaluate the present giving policies.

6. The effect at the field level has also been profound. Without any specific entity assigned the responsibility and authority to enter new territories or begin work for unreached peoples, the maintenance of the institutions, the creation of new institutions, and the focus on evangelizing people like ourselves has shifted the focus from the initial cross-cultural momentum of the Adventist Church to the point where missionary outreach was absorbed and then lost as Adventist mission came under the control of church organization, which was completely absorbed with the existing work.
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Chapter 4

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ADVENTIST USE OF NON-CHRISTIAN SCRIPTURES

CLIFTON MABERLY

January 13-14, 1998

The Religious Study Centers have been set up to reach previously unreached religious groups. Adventists have been particularly unsuccessful in reaching those within the four major living world religious traditions: Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Chinese religions consisting of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism mixed in various combinations. More than a quarter of the world lives within these traditions. Neither have Adventists been very successful among the smaller living religions such as Judaism, Jainism, Sikhism, Shinto, and Zoroastrianism. Something that marks these religions from other religious traditions is that they all have canonical scriptures. Many new religions have begun over the last century. More than 130 million people are members of new religions. They are often based on one or more of the living religions, and focus on the same older canonical scriptures.

In addition there are more than 100 million followers of the traditional religions of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the South Pacific. While some have authoritative writings, most are ritual focused and their oral teachings have not become standardized. While Adventist mission cannot ignore these traditional religionists, they are beyond the scope of this discussion. There are also an increasing number of people who have no canonical scriptures who reject
A Scripture Focused Religion

Adventists are a “people of the book” and a scripture-focused religion who evangelize with the Bible. Adventists regard the study of Scripture as essential for congregational and personal practice of religion. Adventists begin their definition of who they are with a statement of belief in the Bible and support their Fundamental Beliefs with Scripture references. As Adventist work with devotees of the living religions it soon becomes apparent that these people have a knowledge and respect for scriptures—their own scriptures and little knowledge or regard for ours. Christians seldom have any acquaintance with the scriptures of others, but we cannot ignore the issue of non-Christian scriptures.

Practical Use of Non-Christian Scriptures

A review of a range of ways scriptures are currently being used in Religious Study Center field projects might be helpful to start this discussion and begin to highlight the issues involved. The use of non-Christian scriptures falls neatly into three areas.

First, non-Christian scriptures can be positively used in our evangelism as a bridge from the known to the unknown in teaching new believers. They can also be used in subsequent worship to affirm the continuity of spiritual traditions and to give something familiar in worship for community visitors. For example:

a. The use of familiar stories from the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana* and the *Puranas* as illustrations in the evangelism of Hindus.

b. The use of the Qur’an in “Adventist” mosques and even in non-public house congregations in Muslim areas.

c. The use of Jewish prayers in Adventist “synagogues” in Chile.

d. The chanting of Buddhist liturgical requests for the five (universal) Buddhist precepts in Adventist congregations in Cambodia.

The Islamic case needs special focus, as the first questions about the use of non-Christian scriptures came out of the Islamic contextual mission experience. In the violently dangerous environment of a Muslim community, it was decided to initiate and nurture an Islamic remnant movement. To all intents
and purposes the converts remain integral members of their Muslim congregation. They continue to worship in Qur’anic worship environments in public, and in more biblical environments in private—“more” biblical, in that they continue to worship and study the Bible through and alongside the Qur’an in their home circles. This approach seems appropriate to develop contextual understanding of the faith among new converts, and to give them reasons for their faith so they are able to share with Muslim family and community.

There is also the element of safety. In places where Shariah law is honored, it is honorable to take the life of a convert. And apart from that, if the movement is exposed too soon to the community it could result in a violent reaction to the movement. Recently leaders of a congregation of Adventist “Muslims” were arrested and charged with being Christians masquerading as Muslims. Familiarity with the Qur’an paid dividends when these leaders were able to give reasons for their divergent beliefs and practices from the Qur’an, and they were acquitted of the charge. They were declared to be within the fold, albeit idiosyncratically. They were not identified as Christians.

Adventists are not comfortable being identified as “Christians” by the Muslim definitions for we repudiate many practices of other Christians. So, in such communities we feel more comfortable being identified as spiritually Islamic. But the point here is that Adventists do use non-Christian scriptures in study and worship.

Second, the use of our Scriptures in Adventist worship can be used in ways more familiar to people already using non-Christian scriptures in other ways. Like the way our contextual congregations in Sri Lanka use the Bible. Since the groups often include enthusiastic Buddhists, the groups meet on new moons to recite (chant) and memorize sacred ancient texts, texts like a modified Ps 119. By using our Scripture in ways that avoid unfamiliar usages in public, in preparation of new believers, and in initial worship we reduce the sense of foreignness.

Third, Adventists can offer their Scriptures to others to use in their ways, apart from evangelism or Adventist worship: like the 1,200 Burmese Buddhist soldiers who are now chanting the 23rd Psalm “twenty times a day” to calm their fears, and to protect them in battle situations on the Myanmar-Thai border. (Incidentally they are fighting against the rebel Karen “Adventist” army of General Bo Mea. Even “enemy” soldiers are anxious for their lives, and for the future support of their beloved ones. Adventists have not offered them Balaam.
curses to use against their enemies yet, only white magic for personal protec-
tion so far.)

There are other ways of using scriptures such as solicitous community-ser-
vice chanting of our “ancient sacred texts” before ancestor shrines in Buddhist
homes, blessing the living and the dead in Hong Kong (where there are not
enough Buddhist monks to do the job); and Friday evening candlelight scrip-
ture recitation and memorization, hopefully together with “Buddhist” neigh-
bors in our usually-avoided churches in Japan.

**Current Adventist Use of Non-Christian Scriptures**

**Use of Non-Christian Scriptures in Polemics**

One Adventist use of non-Christian scriptures is their use in polemics, in
unfavorably contrasting the teachings of defective “scriptures” with the teach-
ings of the Bible. The intention of polemics is to defeat, convert, or at least dis-
able a religious opponent or dissident. Polemics are opponent focused. Honest
polemics are addressed openly; less respectful polemics attack religious com-
petitors and opponents behind their back, or in their absence.

Christians usually conduct their worship services exclusively for believers
and potential believers, so we feel safe becoming polemic. However, in most
places this is a risky business. In some places polemics are a legal offense. In
most places it is offensive to devotees of that religion who attend the services,
or who will bear the brunt of the polemic when it is shared with them by good-
intentioned believers. It is often also offensive to sensitive non-devotees, espe-
cially if the polemic is not accurate or fair.

There is a need for polemics, as Adventists help those struggling with a
decision to become an Adventist. I would suggest that until a thorough com-
parative study has been done, a convert from another religion is only partially
converted. There is a tendency among new converts to violently reject out-of-
hand anything to do with the previous religion, which leaves the new convert
religiously and culturally bankrupt. This also means the new convert will mul-
tiply unnecessarily the suffering of their family and friends as they observe the
wrenching experience of conversion. On the other hand, many converts bring
hidden, unresolved, incompatible ideas, attitudes, and even continued hidden
former practices into the church. Polemics would help the new convert face up
to both these dangers. There are contrasts and commonalities that need to be
addressed. However, polemics are usually best addressed privately not publicly. And polemics for potential non-Christian converts must necessarily focus on non-Christian scriptures.

Although we would feel comfortable with polemic use of non-Christian scriptures, we seldom use them this way. Most of our leaders are not familiar enough with the scriptures of their audiences to confidently use them in polemics. Some do use polemics, but unwisely and unadvisedly.

Use of Non-Christian Scriptures in Apologetics

Apologetics are the defense of orthodoxy against the challenge or attacks by heretics or by other religions. The challenge could be open, or it may even be implied or feared. The intention of apologetics is to strengthen the believers against the attraction or the confusion brought by exposure to other teachings. To the extent the attack on Adventism is public, to that extent apologetics can also be public. If the threat is more unintended, then apologetics are best handled more personally, with the people likely to be affected. Non-Christian scriptures are probably occasionally being used and referred to in the process of apologetics.

Use of Non-Christian Scriptures in Liturgy

The quoting of non-Christian scriptures in either attack or in defense is unlikely to be an issue for the Adventist Church: however, a new issue before this Mission Issues Committee is the positive use of non-Christian scriptures, particularly in worship. Can the Qur’an be used as a scripture for worship in hidden Adventist contextualized public worship? Can it be used co-jointly with the Bible in private, or authentic, contextualized worship among converts from Islam? Can Judaistic liturgical elements be included in contextualized worship in Jewish cultural contexts? Can such worship include the use of non-canonical Jewish texts? Can Buddhist scripture selections and liturgical elements be incorporated into contextualized Adventist worship?

Apart from their use in experimental contextualized congregations and alternative movements, the Adventist Church does not use non-Christian scriptures liturgically.
Use of Non-Christian Scriptures
In Sabbath School Study

The quintessential use of scriptures in Adventism is in Sabbath School classes. In the Sabbath School Lesson Guides we have not quoted from Lao Tzu or Buddha or Mohammed or Shankara, nor have we quoted from a respected psychologist from New Delhi, a social worker from Uganda, an orthodox bishop from Georgia, or a farmer from Peru, for that matter. The non-biblical authorities quoted are usually Western, and often secular, authorities.

Study guides could be enhanced by references to the readers’ own respected authorities. And among the most important and respected authorities are their scriptures. Such connections are not merely interesting for the members, but a source of ideas and arguments to share with family and neighbors. We have found that one year after being inducted into Adventism, new members have nothing to talk about with non-Adventists anymore. The worlds have moved too far apart. Sabbath School lessons contribute significantly to this re-education.

Should we, then, quote from the Qur’an, the Bhagavadgita, the Tripitaka, or the Lotus or Heart Sutra in our lesson guides? How would the average American Sabbath School member respond to authorities like that? Would they yawn, or would they protest?

Should Adventists be striving to produce universal authoritative study guides? The argument for standardized lesson guides is to hold errant ideas at bay; however, the errant ideas focused on are almost exclusively North American ideas. The problem areas being dealt with in the Religious Study Centers are seldom protected by the universal lesson guides. Is there a case for regional cultural versions of the study guides on selected common topics? Relevant to our discussion here, how can we begin to introduce informed references to respected non-Christian scriptures for the sake of regional Sabbath School members?

The Use of Non-Christian Scriptures
In School Religion Curricula

The same issues are reflected in religion curricula. We could assume that where most of the students are from Adventist families, teachers would feel comfortable with using both polemics and apologetics openly in class. How-
ever in many, if not most Adventist schools, we have a mixed student body, and both polemics and apologetics are often counter-productive. That would be especially the case in mission schools where the student body is mainly non-Christian.

So the question that needs to be addressed is the degree to which non-Christian scriptures, and non-Christian religions, should be introduced into the religion curricula in Adventist church schools, mission schools, colleges, universities, and seminaries? And to what extent could their treatment be positive?

There is general resentment among both non-Christian students and their parents towards the level of Christianity and Adventism that has to be dealt with in Adventist schools. While we might feel that the non-Christians have the freedom not to come to our schools, in many cases it is not that simple. In many places we have the most conveniently located school, or might offer the most desirable education, or we capture the market with the only affordable education alternative so non-Christians have to choose our school. In such situations, does our ownership justify our religious agenda? We attract non-Christian students (we could not survive without them) then impose our religious curriculum on them. Aside from our right to provide a complete Adventist education for the (few) Adventists attending, and our desire to maximize the exposure of non-Christians clients to our beliefs, what about the spiritual rights of the students? Youn people from other religious traditions spend the only childhood and youth they will ever have being heavily evangelized by those in authority over them. Does that not border on professional abuse?

We rejoice with those who find a saving relationship with God in our schools, but we should cringe at the number of young people who end up rejecting all religion as the result of our aggressive curriculum. As I have talked with non-Christian students in our schools and colleges, as well as listened to the evaluations of their believing classmates, I have been grieved at the levels of resentment left after years of Adventist education and have wept for the lost years of spiritual blossoming that have been missed.

Both students and parents have expressed immediate enthusiasm for a curriculum which would take seriously the religious traditions of the students and their families. Such a curriculum would necessarily include sensitive and even positive introduction to, evaluation of, and use of non-Christian scriptures. As far as we are aware, our schools usually do not deal seriously or positively with non-Christian religions or their scriptures in the religion curricula.
The Use of Non-Christian Scriptures
In Seminary Training

Although non-Christian scriptures are so crucial to the interaction between our Scripture-focused religion and the world religions with their scriptures and uses of scriptures, seminary training virtually ignores non-Christian scriptures. Apart from general comparative religion introductions, the seminarian is not equipped to handle non-Christian scriptures in any of the ways needed to interact with serious non-Christians. As far as we are aware, our seminaries do not deal seriously with non-Christian scriptures or in the non-Christian uses of their scriptures in their courses.

The Theological Issues

In the past, discussions on biblical authority have not usually begun with a consideration of Hinduism and the Vedas, Buddhism and the Tripitaka, Islam and the Qur’an, and so on. But it is the logical place to start. And in the future it will be the strategic place to start in tomorrow’s world. “Increasingly, behind the questions having to do with biblical authority will lurk the specter of competing authorities inherent in the sacred books of the non-Christian religious traditions” (Hesselgrave 1994:18-19).

The Religious Study Centers have been set up to reach previously unreached religious groups. To the extent we have tried to respond to, deal with, and even use the canonical scriptures of the people we reach out to, we have seen how effective that has been. However, effectiveness aside, close encounters with non-Christian scriptures raises a number of theological issues. We should begin by affirming our support of the Adventist view of our own Scriptures: Seventh-day Adventists believe that the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.

The issue before us today is not the revelation and inspiration of the Bible, but what to do about and with non-Christian scriptures. The first issue is the issue of revelation and inspiration. Are non-Christian scriptures also inspired by God in any way, to any extent? Do they include revelations by God, or not? They obviously contain truths, but tested by the measure of biblical truth, those truths are always mixed with error. What has been God’s role, if any, in the production of these mixed teachings? Some of the truths within non-Christian
canonical scriptures seem to have been a force for good. They seem to have held the world back from a horde of evils. Some of the errors allowed and even promoted within the canonical scriptures of other religions have had profound negative effects, especially as barriers to accepting the gospel. Can God have been in any joint partnership with the great deceiver in producing erroneous non-Christian scriptures?

We know the familiar, “all (Jewish) scripture is given by inspiration from God, Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” What about those who spoke and wrote the non-Christian scriptures? Were the authors of non-Christian scriptures inspired or moved by the Holy Spirit? Can any of them be regarded as inspired prophets? How we respond to these questions will affect our use or non-use of non-Christian scriptures.

Other Christians and Non-Christian Religions and Scriptures

The ultimate object of faith is not Christ, the Mediator, but God, the Father. . . . So it does not seem surprising that there are a lot of Jews, and Gentiles too, who are saved although they believe in God alone, either because they lived before Christ or because, though they have lived after him, he has not been revealed to them. In spite of this they are saved by means of Christ (John Milton, in Christian Doctrine)

There are a whole range of evaluations of non-Christian religions and scriptures to be found among various Christian traditions. John Sanders in No Other Name: An Investigation into the Destiny of the Unevangelized, classifies the positions broadly as: restrictivists, universalists, and inclusivists. Inclusivists are those that allow for revelation among the unevangelized, and the possibility of salvation for the unevangelized. Of interest to us is that John Wesley was the most famous proponent of inclusivism in the eighteenth century. Is it possible that Ellen White also supports the inclusivist position because of her Methodist background?
In the light of the Bible’s relative silence on the subject, Ellen White’s state-
ments about truth and inspiration among the heathen, that is, among the non-
Christians, is astounding. In the Spirit of Prophecy commentary of the Christ-
mas story in *Desire of Ages*, the providence and inspiration of God among the
heathen is almost a major motif. “Outside the Jewish nation there were men
who foretold the appearance of a divine instructor. These men were seeking for
truth, and to them the Spirit of Inspiration was imparted. One after another,
like stars in the darkened heavens, such teachers had arisen. Their words of
prophecy had kindled hope in the hearts of thousands of the Gentile world”
(White 1940:33).

So the writings of “teachers” among non-Christians and among other reli-
gions include truths revealed to them by God—inspired truth. But those truths
are not so clear—the Old Testament had the clearest revelation of truth. That
there is error in other religions is clear in the same Spirit of Prophecy passage:
“At this time the systems of heathenism were losing their hold upon the people.
Men were weary of pageant and fable. They longed for a religion that could sat-
isfy the heart” (32). “Through heathenism, Satan had for ages turned men away
from God. . . . The principle that man can save himself by his own works lay at
the foundation of every heathen religion. . . . Wherever it is held, men have no
barrier against sin” (35-36).

So there are truths within the authoritative writings of non-Christian
scriptures. But not all is true. Presumably we are to use the truth in the Bible
to determine what is true and what is not true in the non-Christian scriptures.
And whatever is in accord with biblical truth can be assumed to have been
inspired by God, and the rest not. That places a heavy burden on the cross-
religious evangelist. Final judgment on a teaching can only be made after the
exegete has come to a definitive understanding on the teaching of the Bible.
We all know how often a new understanding of a passage, even of a truth, has
dawned on us. And yet we need to evaluate the validity of teachings found in
non-Christian scriptures. We will certainly not want to be more than tentative
in our judgments.

The process seems so involved that some may ask why bother seeking for
pearls in the chaff of non-Christian scriptures? The missiological reason is be-
cause they are important for our hearers. Because they have heard the voice of
God speaking to them in their scriptures, and because they should continue to rejoice in the way the Lord has led them and their culture in the past.

By ignoring the revelation of God in the scriptures of others, we belittle their previous religious experience. By continually ignoring their religious heritage we pronounce damnation on their religious heritage. We can expect the effect on those who accept our implied judgment to be emotionally and spiritually crippling. More often the sincere seekers in that other tradition reject our judgment of what they have known to have been good, and reject the religion we promote instead. Could it be possible that Adventists have been particularly unsuccessful in reaching those with canonical scriptures, because our open or implied demand has been for those scriptures to be totally rejected?

The Scriptures Use of Other Scriptures

The outside sources and references in the Bible are not easily accessible. Here we need the input of our Old and New Testament scholars.

In the Old Testament there is apparently significant borrowing and modifying of motifs, symbols, and even stories from surrounding societies in the Old Testament. I have read that some Psalms could be appropriated pagan hymns. Psalms 29 could be adapted from a hymn to Ba-al. Verses 1-2 seem to be a believer’s introduction to the appropriated hymn, but from verse 3 onwards the psalm is possibly the hymn. Ba-al was god of the waters, of the well-heads and springs, thunder was his sign, he was the cloud-rider, and was the god of fecundity and birth, even of animals. Some say the “cry” in Ps 29 (in his temple all cry, “Glory”) is not a Hebrew worship form, but was more characteristic of Ba-al worship. If Ps 29 was a hymn to Ba-al re-ascribed to Jehovah we would have an example of an Old Testament use of non-Hebrew scripture.

It is not much easier to find evidence in the New Testament. Jesus left no writings at all. There are many quotations and allusions to known and sometimes unknown Jewish sources. Even quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures often seem remarkably loose by our standards. Apparent quotations of accepted canonical oral sources are used. Sometimes to undergird arguments like, “you have heard that it was said to the people of long ago,” and sometimes as points of departure like, “but I tell you” in the Sermon on the Mount.

I have been told that John 1 is probably an appropriated pre-Christian hymn to logos, or wisdom. The form is poetic, in Greek the object of one phrase becomes the subject for the next, and so on. The name of Jesus seems to be
suppressed until verse 17. The historical “comment” in verses 6-9, “there came a man who was sent from God,” seems to be added into the middle of the poem. It has been noted that the logos theme of this passage is not developed or even used for the rest of the epistle, strengthening the argument that John 1 is quoted from another source, possibly from non-Jewish scripture.

Clear examples of use of non-Christian scriptures in the New Testament are hard to locate. There are few extant writings from the period or even from among Jewish writers. It would be expected that a study of Paul’s use of other writings would be the most informative; however, his letters are not easy to decipher at this distance—it has been said they are full of ambiguities, complexities, and attacks on half-forgotten adversaries. Some scholars identify some hymnic features that indicate when Paul is quoting from now unknown (therefore non-canonical) ancient liturgies or ritual settings. We would need to know a lot more about the scriptures of those to whom Paul was writing before we could know how he used non-Christian scriptures.

However, there is that remarkable address to the members of the Areopagus, where Paul makes no reference to the Jewish canon at all, but quotes from a philosopher and from a poet known to the listeners. Of particular importance to the issue of non-Christian scriptures is Paul’s references to a Greek poet in this sermon. The whole body of this message reflects the teaching of the Stoics. He establishes several points of agreement. He says God does not dwell in temples. The pantheistic Stoics would not disagree. He says God gives life to all things. The Stoics would agree. Then in verses 26-29 he presents two core ideas of the Stoics—that the entire race is one offspring from God, and that God exercises providential care for his creation. To establish those commonalities Paul quotes from Stoic writings.

But just as significant is the absence of any reference to the Jewish Scriptures whatsoever. Summaries of other sermons in the Early Church record typically not only refer to biblical persons, but actually quote from the text of the Scriptures. Here the lack of reference to “our scriptures” is deafening.

Surely the absence of biblical quotations and the entirely positive quotations from non-Christian known literary sources is instructive for cross-religious evangelism.

Then there is that remarkable parable of the rich man and the beggar. The story contains many heretical elements—truth mixed with error—but Christ relates, or even creates, the story uncritically. Ellen White’s commentary on Christ’s method here is remarkable: “In his parable Christ was meeting the peo-
ple on their own ground. The doctrine of a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection was held by many of those who were listening to Christ’s words. The Savior knew of their ideas, and He framed His parable so as to inculcate important truths through these preconceived opinions” (White 1923:263).

While scriptures are not specifically mentioned, to meet people on their own doctrinal ground, to teach truth through the beliefs they held, even though those beliefs included error is a close parallel to using non-Christian scriptures to teach particular important truths. It is contextualization to a degree we have seldom dared attempt.

Although some may plead it as a special case, the New Testament use of Jewish authoritative scriptures in evangelism among Jews may be indicators of how to use non-Christian scriptures among other people. Peter’s sermon during Pentecost, Stephen’s speech to the Sanhedrin, Paul’s sermons to the Jews of the Diaspora in synagogues, especially early in his missionary experience, are examples of extensive quotation from the scriptures of the listeners.

Neither the Old Testament nor the New Testament have any witness to the use of non-Christian scriptures in the ways the Religious Study Centers have tried using them, and are proposing to use them. We expect that changed circumstances create new issues that need new solutions, not inconsistent with the solutions for previous issues, but nevertheless new. We are doing mission in a post-Christian age. The rejection of Christian mission has become institutionalized, in some cases has become canonized dogma. In these circumstances we find that use of non-Christian scriptures, especially in positive ways, is one of the most effective methods to cut through generations of prejudice. And even more important, in some places it is essential for the physical survival of the church.

Other Cultural Issues

Scripture Behavior: Non-Christian and Adventist Treatment of Their Scriptures

And finally, there is the separate subject of how we should treat and use our own Bible in public, and among ourselves, in the face of the traditions and practices of the religious communities we want to evangelize, and the religious communities among which we establish ourselves. In many places Adventists
are seen as arrogant and disrespectful of the traditions of others. But even worse, Adventists are seen as very crude religionists—ones who teach their followers not to respect their parents, or their ancestors, and who do not even show proper respect for their own holy places, their own sacred times, or toward their own sacred Scriptures and objects.

Islamic treatment of the physical scriptures ought to suggest many issues for both mission to Muslims and worship practices in relation to Bibles for Adventists in Muslim communities. Should Adventists adopt Islamic scripture-handling traditions, invent their own distinct practices, or consciously reject and declare their rejection of elements of Islamic practice? It seems that whatever we do, it would be good to raise the importance of scripture treatment to an issue for official decision.

The same question could be asked of mission to people with other traditions and practices of handling, reading, and listening to scriptures.

Buddhist scriptures are often written in particular languages, inscribed with particular scripts, on particular materials, in unique formats. They are kept in particular cupboards, are held in particular ways, are listened to with particular specific postures and hand positions, and so on.

Should Adventists give attention to developing their own distinct respect conventions, or to what extent should they adopt and adapt the traditions of the religions in the communities they are reaching into, or are living among? Treatment of scriptures needs to be a focus of mission, not just Scriptures as standards of doctrinal belief and life-practice orthodoxy.

**Conclusions**

This paper deals with the issue of the use of non-Christian scriptures. We have looked carefully at scriptures because we are scripture focused—in our belief and practice, and in our traditional mission approaches. However, the focus on scriptures is somewhat artificial. We need also to look at other modes of spirituality—at the use of images, icons and imagery, ritual and liturgy, mantras, chanting, sounds and silence, dance, apparel, food offerings and fasting, flowers, incense, and pilgrimages. Even our second mode of worship, song and music, might do with re-analysis in the various environments we wish to witness and live. Sometimes what we do is as problematic as what we do not do. But maybe the issue of scriptures is the best place to start—at a place nearest home.
We have naively believed that we can ignore the authoritative texts and beloved scriptures of peoples, and still make an irresistible appeal to their spirituality. That we believe it is reflected in our seminary curriculums, where we seldom make serious study of the scriptures of others, let alone the use of scriptures. We are so confident about the unimportance of religious culture that we send mixed-up college kids around the world as student missionaries, in some cases as our front-line evangelists into religiously complex worlds, worlds less secular by far than our own.

Appendix A

God Outside of Israel and Christianity

Behind the issue of revelation and inspiration is the question of God’s providence, of faith, and even salvation outside of the economies of Israel, Christianity, and even Adventism.

In the Old Testament

The Old Testament is a revelation of the role of God in the history of one nation, Israel, and so has little to say about the role of God with relation to the other nations. Commands discouraging positive contact or association makes positive information on other nations even rarer. There are, however, glimpses of God’s providence and even revelation outside of Israel.

In the Pentateuch there was high priest Melchisedek of Salem; blameless and upright, God-fearing Job of Uz; priest Jethro of Midian (allowed to offer sacrifices in the tent of meeting, Exod 18:12); commended Rahab of Jericho (cf Heb 11:31); prophet Balaam of Pethor, in connection with the establishment of Israel, and alternate arrangements provided for displaced nations (Deut 2:5, 9, 19, 21-22; cf 2 Kgs 5:1).

In the historical books there is the commended marginal Ruth; the truth-seeking queen of Sheba; the commended and never nationalized Naaman; the independent servant of God, Cyrus of Media-Persia (Isa 45:1-7).

In the prophetic writings there are Gentile sailors who “feared the Lord greatly,” and “offered a sacrifice to the Lord and made vows” (Jonah 1:16); there are hints of God’s other “exodus” interventions for other nations (Amos 9:7). In these writings sometimes the prophetic evaluation of other nations is positive, and sometimes positively contrasted with Israel.
However, in the Old Testament there is no clear positive evaluation of any non-Christian religions or scriptures. God calls nations to account for moral failures, rather than religious variations (Amos 1:1-2, 8; Obad 15; Nah 1:2; Zech 9:1).

**In the New Testament**

The New Testament focuses on the revelation of God through Jesus Christ, and on the early development of the religion that takes its inspiration from Jesus. It has little to say about other religions. There are glimpses, however.

In the gospels there is the astounding role of the God-guided (inspired) wise astrologers of the East; there is Christ’s positive identification of faith, even superior faith, among non-Israelites, in retrospect in the widow of Zarephath and in Naaman of Syria, and in his time, in the Centurion of Capernaum (Matt 8:10), the Canaanite woman (Matt 15:21-28), and the Greek woman of Syrophoenicia. (That is not inconsistent with positive appraisals of the faith, and even salvation, of particular Gentiles as found in current Jewish literature, like in 1 Enoch 108:11-14.)

In the record of the post-ascension Early Church there is Peter’s astonished discovery that God has no favorites, but “accepts from every nation those who fear him and do what is right.” Luke’s treatment of the God-fearing Roman centurion is critical for this issue. The Gentile is informed by an angel that his prayers and alms are accepted by God. He was accepted, and therefore already saved while worshipping God as he knew him, not God as revealed through Israel, or as Jesus as recently revealed. In this context Peter declares that “anyone” who fears God is acceptable to God; he declares Jesus is the Lord of all, without exception; recollects that Jesus healed all who were oppressed by the devil, without religious distinction; that the same universal Jesus will be the fair judge of all; and concludes that everyone who “believes” will receive forgiveness (Luke 10:35-43). Peter’s insight was of a righteousness derived from an appropriate relationship with and towards God regardless of the nature of the revelation.

The record of Paul’s revolutionary re-evaluation of God’s role in the nations is one of the main motifs of the non-Jew Luke. He features the paradigm shifts of this Hebrew of Hebrews, who eventually declares publicly that God made all nations, and was intimately involved in their particular histories with salvific intention that all men would seek him, and perhaps reach out for him and
find him. Luke features three sermons by Paul—a sermon to Jews, a sermon to pagans, and a sermon to Christians. The tenor of the whole address of Paul before the image-making and image-worshipping Areopagus is astoundingly complimentary, “I see that in every way you are very religious.”

This is the end of a journey for Paul, and is not typical in early Christianity. Paul later declares that God is the God of the Gentiles (Rom 3:29); however, there is no record of a focused Church discussion of the other religions and scriptures.

Implied Teachings on Non-Christian Religions

Universal Intentions

Apart from these specific instances of God’s intervention in the lives of individuals, there are a number of texts that give indications of God’s positive attitudes and intentions towards non-Israelites, and even non-believers. There is Paul’s statement, “We have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers” (1 Tim 4:10). There are the texts declaring that Jesus came into the world to save sinners, which does not seem to exclude all non-Israelites (1 Tim 1:15; John 3:16-17). The portrayal of Jesus as the light to every human who has ever been born is another indication of universal availability of salvation (John 1:9). Jesus’ success in attracting sinners, that is, in the synoptic gospels, those who willfully refuse to follow Mosaic commands, would be inconsistent with intention not to attract sincere people outside the purview of revelation (Luke 15). Jesus’ prayer for the ignorant Jews, “Forgive them for they don’t know what they are doing,” would seem too inconsistent with an exclusion of the non-Israelite or Christian ignorant peoples (Luke 23:34). Another example is the indication in the parable of the wedding that people are rejected because the bridegroom does not know them, not because they do not know the bridegroom. These texts support the universal intentions of God.

Universal Covenants

The covenants between God and man are not exclusive. The Adamic covenant is universal (Gen 1:26-28); the Eden covenant has no exclusions (Gen 3:15); the Noahic covenant is made “with all flesh” (Gen 9:18-19); the Abramic covenant has the blessing of “all the families of the earth” as its purpose (Gen 12:3); all other references to the Abramic covenant include the universal in-
tention of the covenant (Gen 18:18; 2:18; 26:4; 28:14); and no later covenant abrogates this universalism.

Appendix B

Non-Christian Scriptures

Canonical Scriptures and their Uses

The invention of writing has led inevitably to written formulation of religious thought that claims sacred status. The special status is attested by both popular tradition and elite religious authorities. The teachings of this canon can serve different functions—as a standard of orthodoxy, a source of religious prestige (possessing, preserving, interpreting or transmitting them), a basis for spiritual practices in which words have spiritual efficacy (written on protective charms, chanted in rituals, or inscribed on monuments), and as sources of reliable divination.

A revealed religion like Christianity tends to be exclusive in its claim to orthodoxy. The Bible is the revealed will of God, and so is the judge of all other claims to truth. Other scriptures are unnecessary, and even suspect or dangerous, and their study, let alone use, would not be encouraged. Adventists have not used non-Christian scriptures positively in mission or worship. However, in our encounter with religions with written canon the question has arisen, can we ever use non-Christian scriptures at moments, and in the particular (sacred) way, we use our Scriptures? Can we use non-Christian scriptures at the most sacred moments of our reform Protestant tradition—in formal worship and in the sermon discourse?

Coming from the reform Protestant tradition, Adventists focus on scriptures as the standard for orthodoxy. However, a careful look at popular Adventism finds evidences of the use of the Bible for other functions, such as for identity, status affirmation, and for spiritual efficacy. A correlate issue relating to the use of scriptures should be the use of our own sacred writings. Can we, either in mission or in worship in particular religio-cultural settings, use our scriptures in ways more nearly approximating the way non-Christians use their scriptures. This is an issue that goes beyond the issue of orthodoxy.
Use of Non-Christian Scriptures

Our use of non-Christian scriptures could vary according to the nature of the various kinds of scriptures. We should take a moment to review the scriptures that are authoritative for non-Christians. This is not a theoretical exercise. For a majority of the world these are the most sacred teachings. The teachings are treasured. It is the mission of the remnant Church to develop a clear message in the face of these scriptures. Just reading through the list will be a useful exercise in expanding our sense of mission unaccomplished.

Scriptures of the Major World Living Religions

The scriptures of the world religions demand special attention. There are five major living world, religious traditions: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Chinese religions consisting of Confucianism and Taoism.

The Islamic Scriptures

The scripture most accessible to Adventists is the Qurān with its claims of being a revealed scripture that overlaps the subject matter of the Bible. For Muslims the prophets are the intermediaries between God and man. Christians and Muslims hold our prophets in common—Adam, Noah, Abraham, and Moses. All the prophets, named and unnamed, had a single message—submit the self to the will of God. Jesus is one of the prophets of Islam. The revelation of Mohammed is believed perfect and final, and an accurate record of God’s message by the prophets of every age.

The basic scripture of Islam is the Qurān, which was revealed by the angel Gabriel to the prophet Mohammed. The Qurān was revealed in the Arabic language, and the 114 suras were gathered into the definitive text within a generation of the prophet’s death.

Sunnī Muslims revere the Sunnah, the teachings of Mohammed based on the hadith, the sayings of the prophet collected by his companions and dealing mainly with Islamic law. The Shi’ite Muslims revere the Nahjul Balagha, the collected sermons and sayings of Au, the son-in-law of Mohammed.

The Buddhist Scriptures

Therevada Buddhist Scriptures. The sacred records and commentaries of the Tipitaka of Therevada Buddhism are primary scriptures for 110 million people in Sri Lanka (Sinhalese), India (in Mahadastra and Naga Land), Bangladesh (the Barua, Racine), Myanmar (the Burmans, Shan, Mons, and Racine),
Thailand, Laos (the Lao), Cambodia, and for Western Theravada Buddhists (particularly in the UK, Germany, and the USA).

This Pali language canon consists of three kinds of scriptures: the *Vinyana Pitaka*, rules and precepts for monastic life; the *Sutta Pitaka*, discourses and dialogues of the Buddha; and the *Abhidhama Pitaka*, scholastic and philosophical treatises. In all there are about 67 books.

Selections from these scriptures that are primary texts are: the *Dhammapada*, verses of righteousness—sayings on practice and ethics taught in all schools; the *Khuddaka Patha*, a simple catechism of precepts and teachings; the *Sutra Nipata*, the *Udana*, and the *Itivuttaka*, the Buddha's teachings on the way of liberation, balance, and self-control, condemnation of prejudice, and traditionalism. These scriptures are as well-known to Theravada Buddhists as the Bible is to Christians. Our mission to Theravadins must begin with these texts—using them in the development of apologetics, to defend ourselves against the opposition and prejudices against Christianity that is built on them, and in polemics, to stand clear on our differences with them.

*Mahayana Buddhist Scriptures.* The Pali canon, in its various Sanskrit translations, is also authoritative, but less familiar, for another 200 million Mahayana Buddhists in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Vietnam, among the Chinese in Southeast Asia; and among the Vajrayana Buddhists in China, Tibet, Mongolia, Russia (Buriyata, Kalmykia), Nepal, and Bhutan.

Mahayana Buddhists all identify an eternal, transcendent reality, much more specifically than the non-theistic Theravadins. They focus on the ideal of the Bodhisatvas, persons of infinite compassion who pledge to help others to salvation. A number of identified Bodhisatvas are worshipped at a popular level, as spiritual benefactors. There are vast collections of scriptures, written in Sanskrit, and collected in the Chinese and Tibetan Tripitaka. Each Mahayana school venerates particular canonical scriptures, supplemented by texts from the founders of the school.

The *Saddharma-pundarika*, or Lotus Sutra, is the most important of all Mahayana scriptures and is of most importance to a mission and message for Mahayana Buddhists. It teaches the doctrine of one vehicle—it promises that regardless of their sect or practice, all beings will surely attain Buddhahood. It contains the doctrine of the eternal cosmic Buddha, whose abundant grace is the source of all salvation. And it teaches that salvation is available through faith in the sutra, faith in the “gospel.” Attitudes and values and prejudices arising from these teachings are the biggest challenge to Adventist mission in
countries touched by Mahayana Buddhism; thus, it deserves the attention of our sympathetic use, our apologetics, and our polemics.

The Lotus Sutra has long been a primary Buddhist scripture in China. It is the central scripture for the T’ien-t’ai school of China, Tendai school of Japan; and the sects inspired by Nichiren in Japan. The important scriptures of Pure Land Buddhism, the grace-focused protestantism of Buddhism, are the two Sukhavativyuha Sutras, which describe the vows of Buddha Amitabha to lead all people to the Pure Land; and the Amitayur Dhyana Sutra, the meditations on Buddha Amitayur.

The Avatamsaka Sutra, or Garland Sutra, is the scripture of the Chinese Hua-yen, and the Japanese Kegon schools.

The sutras on the perfection of wisdom, the prajnaparamita, are widely studied in all schools. The most famous are the Prajnaparamita-hridaya Sutra, or Heart Sutra, on the naiveté of Therevada teachings; and the Vajracchedika Prajnaparamita Sutra, or Diamond Sutra, the paradoxical utterances which stimulate a deeper apprehension of emptiness.

The Diamond Sutra is the starting point for Ch’an Buddhism of China, and Zen Buddhism of Japan. The primary scripture for Ch’an Buddhism is the Sutra of Hui Neng, or the Platform Sutra. The Mumonkan, or the Gateless Gate is as close to a scripture as you will find in Zen Buddhism.

Located as they are on the watershed between the two main schools of Buddhism, Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism has the most complete collection of Buddhist scriptures. While studying and preserving the texts of the Therevada canon, Tibetan schools also revere the great commentators, Nagarjuna, Shantideva, Aryadeva, Vasubandhu, and Dharmakirti, as The Bodhisatvas, and their commentaries as scriptures. The works of the founders of the four Tibetan traditions are also accorded scripture status: the teachings of Gyalwa Longchenpa, Sakya Pandita, Milarepa, and Lama Tsong-ka-pa.

Any mission for particular Mahayana sects must take in serious account the favored Tripitaka canonical text of that sect or school, and the primary work of their founder.

Vajrayana Buddhist Scriptures. Alongside Mahayana Buddhism, the Tantric Schools of Tibet have their own esoteric practices and sacred texts. Some of the better known are the Hevajra Tantra, the Kalakakra Tantra, the Guhyasamaja Tantra, and the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

Other Buddhist Scriptures. There are hundreds of other Buddhist scriptures, many little known to the West, many untranslated. These are known, studied,
and practiced by particular groups of Buddhists. But as we have not begun to tackle the major schools, perhaps analysis of the more esoteric scriptures needs to be postponed.

The Chinese Scriptures. The Chinese blend the teachings of what they call the Three Teachings (San Chiao)—Confucianism for education and ethics; Taoism for personal enlightenment, and in the face of crises; Buddhism in regard to death and the afterlife. It would be artificial to divide the scriptures into separate religious categories.

The Classical Scriptures. The five ancient scriptures of China are: the historical Book of History (Shu-ching), the Spring and Autumn Annals (Ch’un-chu); the almost biblical, poetic Book of Odes (Shih-ching) and the idealistic Books of Rituals (Li-ching); and the divinational Book of Changes (Yi-ching or I-Ching). The Book of Changes has become canonical for both Taoism, focusing on divination; and, with a Confucian commentary, for Confucianism, focusing on yin-yang metaphysical philosophy.

The Confucian Scriptures. While maybe less than scriptures, the commentary of Chu Hsi, together with the four books of Confucianism approach scripture status for neo-Confucianism today—that is the Analects (Lun-yu), the aphorisms of Confucius; the Mencius, the work of his successor, the Great Learning (Ta-hsueh), a foundation text for education; and the Doctrine of the Mean (Chung-yung), a philosophical exposition on Confucian thought.

The Taoist Scriptures. The most important scriptures of Taoism are the most difficult to translate or understand Tao-te-ching, attributed to the legendary Lao Tzu; and the Chuang Tzu, which contains the essence of Taoist thought. There is a vast Taoist canon of mystical and ritual texts, often emphasizing divine rewards and punishments which affect life-span in this life and in the hereafter.

We have never begun a serious mission for Chinese. Chinese believers are “brands plucked from the burning” and their descendants. Chinese social structure makes change particularly difficult. So, for two strong reasons, our Chinese Adventist churches are caught in time warps of outdated Adventism. It is difficult to see how a powerful message for Chinese religionists can be developed.

The Scriptures of Hinduism

Hinduism defies description. It is not a specific religion, but is the name given to a range of religions from the Indian sub-continent. As stated so long ago in the Rig Vega, “truth is one, and the learned call it by many names.” There
are, however, a number of common features between most Hindu religions. Adventists have hardly dealt with any of these doctrines and practices.

Hinduism’s long tradition has produced many sacred texts. The most ancient are the “revealed literature,” the shruti. These include the Vedas, the Rig Veda, the Sama Veda, the Vajur Veda, and the Atharva Veda. These have been transmitted orally for 3,000 years. They are hymns, ritual formulae, chants, and prayers. They are addressed to the powers of nature, as manifestation of cosmic truth. It is said that all essential elements of Hinduism can be found in the Vedas. The Brahmans are prose amplifications of the Vedas. The 108 Upanishads are philosophical and mystical deliberations on germinal ideas in the Vedas. The greatest commentator, Shankara, identifies the eleven most important Upanishads. The general trend of the Upanishads is to identify Reality as a supra-personal Brahman, who is “not this not that,” and who is one with Atman, the universal self found in all men. Liberation is to realize the Atman within, but transcend ego-self—our actions and desires.

The most widely known Hindu scripture is the Bhagavadgita, and it is here Adventists might make a proper start. It has been called “India’s favorite Bible.” Its emphasis is on selfless service. It sanctions several paths for salvation, but is distinctively monotheistic—teaching devotion, or bhakti, is the supreme way to approach God and receive his grace.

Other later texts are called sacred traditions, or smriti, and have less authority. These include the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Although these are less authoritative, their influence has spread wider than the revealed scriptures. They can be vehicles for Adventist comment throughout Indo-China and even in other parts of Southeast Asia.

The smriti texts dealing with dharma, duty or law, such as the Laws of Manu, and the Puranas, may be an important backdrop for the Adventist judgment message. The Puranas are concrete stories and examples of the ethical basis for Hinduism, and are enormously influential in the popular religious expressions of modern India. Adventism must deal with the Puranas.

Tantras are manuals of religious practice. A mission focused on those following or influenced by yogic techniques, whether Hindu, Buddhist, or New Age, will need to speak to the tantras. Tantras are manuals for a symbolic ritual training to transmute ordinary desires into practicing identification with the universal reality. A beginning point could be the Kularnava Tantra.

Hindu philosophers, saints, and poets have produced voluminous literature. The Sutras and their commentators delve into specialized realms of phi-
Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission

For many in India, devotion literature speaks more powerfully than the philosophical. It is doubtful that Adventists with a mission for these peoples have developed the devotional aspects of our faith, or have considered appropriate use of devotional expressions that are familiar to the people. Perhaps a prime example of a devotional people are the Lingayats of Karnataka province in southwest India. They have a personal religion of devotional monotheism that has dispensed with temple and priesthood. They probably would not be attracted by propositional Adventism. Their scriptures are the *Vacanas*.

In recent days Hindu ideas transcend cultural limitations, and varieties of Hinduism have moved beyond the cultural limitations. And progress in speaking with and to the essential elements of Hinduism would probably find a wider usefulness in the New Age influenced post-modern urban cultures.

The Scriptures of the Smaller Living Religions

Then there are the scriptures of smaller living religions. Those religions are often more cultural-specific, and include religions like Judaism, Jainism, Sikhism, Shinto, and Zoroastrianism.

The Scriptures of Judaism

The Jewish Bible, or *Tanakh*, consists of the Law, or *Torah*, the Prophets, or *Nebi‘im*, and the Writings, or *Ketuvim*. In addition there is an oral Torah, the *Talmud*, including the *Mishna* and the *Gemera*. These interpretative perspectives of rabbis are considered authoritative for the observant Jew. Beyond these, the Jewish tradition hallows the books of statutory prayers. The Kabalah or mystical tradition has canonical status for many Jews. A number of theological works, like *The Guide to the Perplexed* by Moses Maimonides, and the *Shulhan Arukh* of Joseph Caro, are also held in high regard.

The Scriptures of Jainism

Jainism has around ten million followers in India. Their scriptures, or *agamas*, began with the *Purvas*, the sermons of Mahavira, most of which were lost. The two branches of Jainism disagree on the canonicity of the surviving agamnas. The *Tattvarthasutra* and the *Sanmatitarka* are authoritative to both. The Shvetambara Jains revere another twelve scriptures and thirty-four subsidiary texts. The best known are the *Uttaradhyayanya Sutra* and the *Kalpa*.
Sutra. The Digambara Jains look on a large collection of scholastic expositions (anuyoga) as authoritative. What messages and practices can Adventists bring to their mission to the Jains?

The Scriptures of Sikhism
Sikhism is a monotheistic religion with about 20 million adherents. It teaches devotion to God and denial of egoism as the basis for a good life. It is a reform of Hinduism and Islam. The writings of the first five Gurus, or reformers, were collected as the Adi Granth, and have been granted the status of an eternal living Guru in themselves, the Guru Granth Sahib which is the object of ultimate sanctity and the source of sacred inspiration, and the highest authority for the Sikhs. It is a collection of sacred poems, sung to music. It seems that a serious mission to Sikhs should take seriously the Adi Granth itself as well as the forms of reverence and means of devotional expression. The Adi Granth contains verses from Hindi and Muslim poets. Can Adventist worship include singing selected verses from the Adi Granth?

The Scriptures of Shinto
Shinto is the indigenous religion of the Japanese people. It coexists with Confucianism and Buddhism. Shinto is centered on worship of mystical deities called kami. It emphasizes inner harmony and sincerity. It is not a religion mediated by written scriptures, but certain writings are central to its spirit. The classics are the mythologies of the Kojiki and the Nihon Shoki; the ritual texts of Engishki and the Kagura-uta.

The Scriptures of Zoroastrianism
Less than 100,000 Parses practice Zoroastrianism today, mostly in the Bombay area. However, Zoroastrianism has had considerable influence on many branches of Christianity and Islam. Their scripture is the Avestra, the main liturgical text, the Yasna, and the core are the Gathas, or hymns of Zoroaster. An Adventist mission to modern Zoroastrians will need to deal with their liturgical practices.

Traditional and New Religions
There are more than 100 million followers of the traditional religions of Africa, the Americas, Asia, and the South Pacific. The largest is perhaps the Yoruba religion, with 30 million adherents. Some have authoritative writings,
however many are ritual-focused, and their oral teachings have not become standardized. While Adventist mission cannot ignore these traditional religionists, those concerns are beyond the scope of this presentation.

Many new religions have begun over the last century. More than 130 million people are members of new religions. Often they are based on one of the world religions; sometimes they are a syncretism of two or more religions. Most have their own sacred writings, often commentaries by their founders on earlier scriptures. Some of these writings have achieved the status of scriptures—they are the measure against which all other teachings are tested. Rather than list all those commentaries, some of the larger movements and more canonical scriptures will be identified.

Among the Hindu new religions are the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, the Theosophical Society, the Arya Samaj, the Brahma Samaj, the Ananda Marga, Transcendental Meditation, the international Society for Krishna Consciousness, and the movements of Meher Baba, Sathya Sai Baba, Bhagwan Rajneesh, and others.

Japanese new religions include the Buddhist new religions of Rissho Kosei Kai, Soka Gakkai, and Agon Shu; the Shinto new religions of Tenriko, with its four scriptures, Mikagura-uta, Ofudesaki, Osashizu, and Koki; the new syncretistic healing religions of Omoto Kyo, Sekai Kyusei Kyo, the Society of Johrei (with its scripture Johrei), Mahikari and Sukho Mahikari (with the Goseigen), Sekai Kyusei Kyo (with the Holy Sutra for Spiritual Healing), and Perfect Liberty Kyodan.

Korean new religions include indigenous revivals of Tan Goon Church, the Tae Jong Church, the Hab Il Church, the Chun Do Church. Their most important scripture is Chun Byo Kyung—the principles of heaven which govern the prosperity of man and the cosmos.

The Baha’i Faith grew out of Sufi Islam. It has its own scriptures, Gleanings from the Writings of Baha’u’llah, the Book of Certitude, the Hidden Words of Baha’u’llah, and Epistle to the Son of the Wolf.

Christian new religions include the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints with its Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price; and the Jehovah’s Witnesses, with their own Kingdom version of the Bible, and the authoritative writings of The Watchtower. There are new syncretistic independent churches like the Kimbanguists in Zaire; the Brotherhood of the Cross and Star in Nigeria; and the Rastafarians in the Caribbean. The Church of Christ, Scientist, relies on Science and Health with a Key to the
This compendium of non-Christian scriptures will undoubtedly have been tedious, and not surprisingly so. No one has to deal with all religious traditions at the same time. Those working with Muslims only have to look at issues relating to the Qur’an, and perhaps to the Sunnah or the Nahjul Balagha. Those working with Jodo Buddhist devotees could start with just the Lotus Sutra. However, this is a committee of Global Mission. It should have become very apparent to us here that we have not begun to take the non-Christian scriptures seriously.

Appendix C

Other Christian Scriptures

Working among non-Christians is a challenge to consider, but work among Christians might be a challenge that needs revision. Reflecting the insights we gain from working with non-Christians, we might find that our attitudes towards (in comparison) fellow Christians also need new thinking. Attitudes have changed in a changing world, but sometimes our Protestant-Catholic stances seem frozen in another time. We have to decide what to do about Christian traditions that also have to hear our message. Is it enough to just be publicly polemic these days?

When working among Catholics and the Orthodox we have to decide what to do about the heir deutero-canononical books, such as Sirach, the Wisdom of Solomon, Tobit and Judith, and the Macabees. Among Roman Catholics and the various Orthodox and Oriental Christian churches we have to decide what to do about their versions of the Bible, and their other authoritative texts, like the writings of their Church Fathers, and authoritative documents like the Papal Encyclicals. Among Christian denominations we might have to decide what to do with particular Bible versions, like the Schofield Bible when working with dispensationalists. Or even how to deal with the more liberal translations and paraphrases which signal drifts in how scriptures are seen, and how revelation and inspiration are perceived and responded to in this age.
Other Adventist Scriptures

While we continue to debate the relative roles and levels of inspiration of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, it should be apparent by now that that issue will not be so critical in the eyes of religions that have many levels and kinds of authoritative and sacred text. We will need, however, to clarify the authority of both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy differently in different environments. A standard introduction just will not do. Read this now, in the shade of the introduction to non-Christian scriptures:

Seventh-day Adventists believe one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is an identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested (Ministerial Association 1988:216).

This special role of the Spirit of Prophecy is easier to present to Buddhist listeners than to most Christians.

Scripture Versions

In reaching, and subsequent work and worship among converts from various Christian traditions, the use of particular versions of Scripture may be significant. Insistence on using particular “more holy” versions we are attached to may be an obstacle for mission among some people. Often our choice of versions rests on cultural biases more than on theological or missiological principles. We might need to take some positions in relation to our undisputed canonical scriptures—particularly in relation to authoritative dialects and versions.

Appendix D

Adventist Use of the Christian Scriptures

Christians are one of the three so-called “peoples of the Book” religions that are theistic religions with a clearly revealed and communicated Word of God. That is not typical of all religions. Among the non-revealed religions of Asia, the scriptures are never a final word. Adventists have looked on the non-
theistic religions in a particularly negative way. It should be noted that the Christian use of the Bible is at the very least a puzzle, and often seems ridiculous to Buddhists.

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam claim spoken and written divine origins for their canonical scriptures. Adventism is clearly in that tradition: “Seventh-day Adventists believe the Holy Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, are the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration through holy men of God who spoke and wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (Ministerial Association 1988:4).

Use as the Authoritative Word of God

Adventists have largely truncated the use of Scriptures to their use as standards of orthodoxy—orthodoxy of belief and practice. Listen to our creedal definition of scripture: “Seventh-day Adventists believe that in this Word, God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are the infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history” (Ministerial Association 1988:4).

The narrow role of scriptures represented here becomes particularly evident as we examine and experience the ways other religions use their sacred writings. We scour the scriptures for what they have to say about what we should believe and how we should live. That is not typical of the use non-Christians make of their scriptures.

Use as a Sacred Object and for Divination

Exegetical study of the Scriptures for standards of orthodoxy is not the only way ordinary Adventists use the Bible. That is particularly so, but not exclusively so for Adventists converting from non-Christian traditions. Among the less orthodox use of the Scriptures by Adventists are: singing scripture as a more sacred expressions of praise; reading and recitation of favorite scriptures, for their spiritual effect; memorization of scriptures with no attention to spiritual effect, as a kind of rite of passage, a rite of identification—in family worships, Sabbath School classes, and for qualification for advancing in youth leadership levels.

Adventists are not entirely unfamiliar with the use of the Scripture for spiritual efficacy or even divination. The reciting or reading of particular scriptures
at dangerous moments, such as fear, danger, loss, sickness, death, and uncertainty often involves more than just reminders of authoritative belief. The use of texts on plaques, in posters, and on stickers seem to border on use as charms. And then there is use of scriptures for divination: excessive dependence on randomly selected texts, with utter disregard to exegesis, as a primary, if not sole, basis for life decisions. Random selection of words and sentences are treated as clear messages of direct divine guidance. It is notable that the same divination process is not used with non-sacred text, like, say, from a newspaper.

Adventists also have many ritualistic ways of treating the Bible as a sacred object: only having it handled or read by qualified, or non-unqualified persons at services; reading it from a particular lectern in services; reading it in a particular voice or tone; favoring archaic dialects (not just in the English-speaking church) because it sounds more religious; displaying the Bible on dedicated stands in churches; favoring binding it in particular colors (black, navy blue, maroon) and peculiar cover materials (leather); holding and carrying the Bible in particular ways; keeping it in a higher place; not placing anything on top of it; keeping it off the floor; carrying it on a cushion at weddings; carrying it in a breast pocket in war; placing it above the headboard at night, during sleep, or under the pillow, in times of fear or ambivalence. And, strangest of all, the trivial use of scripture information in quizzes and games, not for any spiritual function, but as an acceptable activity for sacred time on the Sabbath.

As this is unofficial behavior, our authoritative statements make mention of only the use of scriptures in establishing orthodoxy. Later we will contrast this with the focus non-Christian religions make on behavioral aspects of the handling, reading, listening, and keeping of sacred scriptures.

Use for Prediction of the Future

Adventists bring another function of the study of Scripture that is even less typical. Focusing on an event, the Advent, we have become super-chronologically focused in our study of our Scriptures. We leave no text unturned to discover the chronology of sacred history, particularly in the inaccessible pre-historical past, and the inaccessible prophesied future. That use of Scripture is familiar only to millenarian cults among the non-Christian religions.

The orthodox among the world religions look with a jaundiced eye on those within their own tradition who focus on prophetic interpretations of
scriptures. And we wonder why they are not attracted to prophecy-focused evangelism advertising, or to Daniel and Revelation seminars.

**Adventist Secondary Scriptures**

While we continue to debate the relative roles and levels of inspiration of the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, it should be apparent by now that that issue will not be so critical in the eyes of religions that have many levels and kinds of authoritative and sacred text. We will need, however, to clarify the authority of both the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy differently in different environments. A standard introduction just will not do. Read this now, in the shade of the introduction to non-Christian scriptures: “Seventh-day Adventists believe one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is prophecy. This gift is the identifying mark of the remnant church and was manifested in the ministry of Ellen G. White. As the Lord’s messenger, her writings are a continuing and authoritative source of truth which provide for the church comfort, guidance, instruction, and correction. They also make clear that the Bible is the standard by which all teaching and experience must be tested” (Ministerial Association 1988:216). The special nature of the Spirit of Prophecy is easier to present to Buddhist listeners than to most Christians.

**Favored Versions of the Bible**

Surprisingly enough, we may need to re-examine our position in relation to our undisputed canonical scriptures—particularly in relation to authoritative dialects and versions.

**Other Adventist Scriptures**

Taking a broader definition of scriptures, the *Church Hymnal*, the *Lesson Study Guides* are treated by some and view by on-lookers as scriptures or quasi scriptures.

**Appendix E**

**More on Sabbath School Study Guides**

The quintessential use of Scriptures in Adventism is in the Sabbath School classes. At a recent annual division meeting it was stated, once again, that the
Sabbath School study guides were one of the most important instruments for world unity, and that, whatever other changes are made, the study guides should be used universally. Have we looked at these study guides from the perspective of other cultures? I personally try to use them. I often teach classes from them in a range of countries and communities. But has the church really looked at the study guides as religio-cultural documents?

For example, a recent lesson, Lesson 6, 2-8 November 1997 entitled “Modern Demons” is about the demons of secular Western societies. The people who wrote the lessons must of necessity write from their own experience—they have no other experience. But their experiences are not universal, and the problems they have encountered are not universal problems, absolutely not. The writer for that week obviously had two heresies in mind—Western power encounter theologies, that see demons everywhere on the one hand, and secular skepticism that explains away all demons on the other. However, these are not universal demons. Other places have different “modern demons,” ones not addressed in this lesson.

And then there were the extra-biblical authorities quoted in the study guides. The authorities quoted in this one lesson include: Mark I. Bubeck, of Chicago; Chris Thurman, of Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Moore, of New York; Herbert Benson, of unknown origin; Elisabeth McSherry of the National (presumably USA) Institute of Health.

The writers must quote authorities they know. But for the quotations to be interesting or effective, they must be authorities the readers know and accept. Have the study guides ever quoted from South American, African, or Asian authorities?

You might say, the local translators and teachers can bring in local color in their translations and teaching. They could, but they do not. Translation is usually done in a rush, by translation experts. Teachers either do not have the expertise or the time to be original, or more often, try to be faithful to the study guides, so we get translated quotations from Marki Iya Bubeck of Chicago (“how do you spell that,” the faithful ask), and so on, over and over and over again.

Have we considered the cultural messages we drive home when every perspective is a Western perspective, every question is a Western question, every authority is a Western authority, and every illustration is a Western illustration? When have we referred to Lao Tzu, or Buddha, or Mohammed, or Shankara? When have we quoted from a respected psychologist from New Delhi, a so-
cial worker from Uganda, an orthodox bishop from Georgia, a farmer from Peru? Not that even those kinds of insertions would solve anything either. How would the average Western Sabbath School member respond to authorities like that, from experts they had never heard of before? Would they yawn, or would they protest?

Just as it makes the lessons more interesting, more relevant, and more current to American members to quote from interesting and respected American authorities, so lessons would be enhanced for other members by referring to their respected authorities. And among the most interesting and respected authorities are their scriptures. Not merely interesting for the members, but a source of ideas and arguments to share with family and neighbors.

When did we last quote from the Qur’an, the Bhagavadgita, the Tripitaka, or the Lotus or Heart Sutra in our lesson guides? I have noticed that one year after being inducted into Adventism, new members have nothing to talk about to non-Adventists any more. Their worlds have moved too far apart. Sabbath School lessons contribute significantly to this re-education.

I am not advocating peppering the Sabbath School study guides with quotes from the non-Christian scriptures either. Can you imagine the response to a quote from the Bhagadvagita in a Bible-belt Adventist church? Most would not even have a clue what the quote was all about to begin with. At worst, some might become angry and upset at the use of pagan scriptures and see proof of an omega conspiracy; however, a focus on Sabbath School study guides does spotlight the cultural and religious bias of everything Adventists do in their churches, for it points out a bias that affects our capacity to use non-Christian scriptures.

So let us get back to study guides consisting of safe cut and paste selections from Spirit of Prophecy and Bible texts, you might respond. But that would not help the cultural bias very much. The selection of topics, the logic of the argument, the assumptions of local teachers and members, and the assumptions concerning the types of discussion that are appropriate all introduce a cultural bias into the classes.

The Spirit of Prophecy is not free from cultural bias, and needs extensive interpretation to make Ellen White’s inspired insights understandable and relevant in some settings. We do that exegesis all the time for our own use of the Spirit of Prophecy. But in the study guides that exegesis is pre-packaged for the teacher and for the member, and the religio-cultural effect is irreparable.
Neither is the “plain Word of God” free from cultural incomprehension and bias. The moment we begin to interpret and explain the Bible for the class, or the congregation, a cultural bias is introduced.

But there remains this perennial heavy message—we must hold to the Sabbath School study guides, they are the only thing holding our church together. And maybe they are. In many places they are followed slavishly by the devoted few; it keeps them together.

What are the alternatives? Should the preparation of the guides be shared around among the dominant cultures of the church on a quarterly basis? Should each week be presented from a different cultural bias? Can you imagine the incomprehensible combinations that would result? How long would it take for a universal rejection of such guides?

Should we give up on worldwide study guides and leave every cultural region or even every teacher to their own bias and resources? I do not think so. I have been made aware of the theological and philosophical forces even within our church that are laying siege to even non-negotiable beliefs and practices of the church. And how crucial the standardized study guides are to balance the heresies offered regularly to church members, even from their own church pulpits. So I do not think a free-for-all is advisable. However, once again, the focus is on the dangers in the Western church—and particularly the American church. The church in other places is wrestling with issues not imagined or reflected in the study guides.

I agree that we must try to keep this church together. However, rather than striving to produce universal authoritative (orthodoxy standard) documents, the Sabbath School Department could put much more effort in soliciting universal issues from the world field. On the basis of worldwide expressed concerns they could come up with topics for Sabbath School study. They could then facilitate regional discussion and identification of the relevant regional perspectives on the selected topics. They could provide a range of the more universal resources for the topics—biblical passages, Spirit of Prophecy selections, and a range of commentary materials. They could encourage regional seminaries or other experts to provide a range of regional resources addressing the topic. Then they could facilitate, in every way, the writing of regional cultural versions of the study guides on the selected topics.

If we wanted to really develop into a global church, summaries of the concerns of each cultural region could be made available as part of the study guides—either as the introductory lesson (“our members in Africa will be look-
A broader spectrum of voices is needed in deciding which topics are presented in the Sabbath School study guides. For the church to hear only one voice is inadequate. Perhaps a General Conference committee comprised of a range of members able to appreciate the regional perspectives could give final approval to the range of study guides produced. In this electronic age, these committee members would not need to meet on location.

However, whatever checks and balances get put into place, we have to trust God’s various servants in the end, anyway. As it is, the most corruption of the message occurs at the local church level. However, a regional version would be followed more enthusiastically and faithfully than the current, often incomprehensible and definitely religio-culturally biased, guides. In other words, the firewall function envisioned for the current study guides would be multiplied to the world church, rather than just the innovative Western church.

Relevant to our discussion here is the suggestion that regional Sabbath School Study Guide writers should be encouraged to make informed references to the respected non-Christian scriptures of their region.

Appendix F

More on Treatment of Scriptures

There is the separate subject of how Adventists should treat and use the Bible in public, and among ourselves, in the face of the traditions and practices of the religious communities we want to evangelize, and the religious communities among which we establish ourselves. In many places Adventists are seen as arrogant and disrespectful of the traditions of others. But even worse, are seen as very crude religionists—ones who teach their followers not to respect their parents, or their ancestors, and who do not even show proper respect for their own holy places, their own sacred times, or toward their own sacred scriptures and objects.

Consider the Islamic teaching and practice on respecting scripture:

If Moslems have the space, the Qur’an may be kept in a special room which is kept clean, and used only for prayer and reading the holy text. Others make a shelf for the Qur’an high up on the wall, so nothing can be placed above it.
When not in use, the Book is usually wrapped in cloth, so no dust falls on it. If text from the Qur’an is used as a wall decoration in any form, it is carefully placed on the wall people face, so people do not stand with their backs to the Holy text.

When the Qur’an is in a room, Muslims are expected to act with reverence, and not to behave in that room indecently, rudely, cruelly, or selfishly. Inappropriate television programs should not be viewed in that room. The presence of the Qur’an in a room evokes an attitude of prayer, it is a silent reminder of a Muslim’s submission to the will of Allah.

While the Qur’an is being recited aloud, Muslims are taught not to speak, eat, drink or smoke, or make distracting noises.

Before touching the Qur’an, the Muslim is to be in a state of ritual cleanliness. Full ritual cleanliness involves washing the hands up to the wrists three times; rinsing the mouth three times with water thrown into the mouth with the right hand; sniffing water into the nostrils and blowing it back out, three times; washing the whole face, including the forehead, three times; wiping the top of the head with the palms of both hands together; washing the ears with forefingers; wiping the back of the ears with the thumbs; wiping the back of the neck once; washing the right foot and then the left foot, up to the ankles, three times; and letting water run from the raised hands to the elbows three times. This washing is to be done in a quiet, prayerful manner. While they wash, Muslims are encouraged to pray they will be purified from sins committed by hands or mouth, and that they will be empowered to walk the way of righteousness, and not stray from the path. All this is done before touching the Qur’an. Muslims are encouraged to be ritually and spiritually clean, if possible, or to at least wash their hands.

Women cover their head as they touch or read the Qur’an. Women menstruating or who have recently given birth are discouraged from even touching the Qur’an.

The notion of preparing the heart and mind before opening and reading the scriptures is familiar to all religions. But many Muslims adopt a particular sitting posture to read the Qur’an—a loose cross-legged position that promotes discipline and alertness. The Qur’an is often placed on a special stand, the rehll or kursil, in front of the reader. Muslims are taught it is disrespectful to place the Qur’an on the floor. When the reading is over, the Qur’an is put away carefully. It is never left on a table, where something might be inadvertently put on top of it.
Islamic treatment of the physical scriptures ought to suggest many issues for both mission to Muslims, and worship practices in relation to Bibles for Adventists in Muslim communities. Should Adventists adopt Islamic scripture handling traditions, invent their own distinct practices, or consciously reject and declare their rejection of elements of Islamic practice? It seems that whatever we do, it would be good to raise the importance of scripture treatment to an issue for official decision.

The same question could be asked of mission to people with other traditions and practices of handling, reading, and listening to scriptures.

Buddhist scriptures are often written in particular languages, inscribed with particular scripts, on particular materials, in unique formats. They are kept in particular cupboards, are held in particular ways, are listened to with particular specific postures and hand positions, and so on.

Should Adventists give attention to developing their own distinct respect conventions, or to what extent should they adopt and adapt the traditions of the religions in the communities they are reaching into, or are living among? Treatment of scriptures needs to be a focus of mission, not just scriptures as standards of doctrinal belief and life-practice orthodoxy.

Reference List


Chapter 5

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THE BOUNDARIES OF CONTEXTUALIZATION IN MISSION: HOW FLEXIBLE AND ABSOLUTE ARE THEY? WHAT PRINCIPLES SHOULD GUIDE THE CHURCH?

BERTIL WIKLANDER

January 13-14, 1998

The organizers of this meeting have given me a task that needs to be approached with humility. The topic of contextualization in Adventist mission is complex, and if we are not careful, it may generate discussions of almost anything the church is, does, and teaches. At the same time, it is an important topic that must be handled honestly and seriously. Identifying principles for how we share our faith with the billions of unreached people in non-Christian cultures will always be a controversial venture, inevitable, and yet complex and risky. Needless to say, it cannot be done unless we submit ourselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit and listen to each other.

In this paper I proceed on the assumption that contextualization of Seventh-day Adventist faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary, and that it is already taking place around the world, albeit with varying degree of success.¹ In the paper just presented, Dr. Dybdahl has offered a useful definition of contextualization and has explained why it is an issue in our church. I shall build on his foundation.
I also assume we agree that there are boundaries to how far contextualization can be taken. The question that I seek to address is, rather, where those boundaries are and how we can identify them. What are the core beliefs and practices that constitute Adventism and provide the unifying factors within our diversity? How do we safeguard our core beliefs and practices when they are being adapted to a non-Christian culture? Can we map out some guidelines that help us distinguish between biblical contextualization and the fatal error of syncretism? Recognizing the limitation of time, I can only draw a broad sketch of the issues.

I intend to proceed at three levels: (1) adopting a language, or models, that identify boundaries between the context of human culture and the theological fundamentals of the church; (2) evaluating how flexible and absolute those boundaries are; and (3) discovering guiding principles for (a) protecting the church, its identity, unity and the divine truth that God has revealed to us as his people, and for (b) pursuing our mission in each cultural context without being unduly constrained by foreign or imported cultural elements, or church traditions that are not an integral part of biblical faith and that therefore are irrelevant in leading people to God as Savior and coming to a knowledge of the truth (cf. 1 Tim 2:3-4).

My task is to lay a foundation for a meaningful discussion in this group of church leaders and theologians. I believe that is best done by being a bit provocative, while retaining a constructive purpose. I make no claim to having all the answers, but hopefully, our discussions and prayers may bring further clarity, so that, by the grace of God, the light may increase as we move forward together.

**Authentic and Relevant Contextualization**

The history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the history of how an increasingly institutionalized church, with roots in North America and Western culture, reaches out to the whole world in obedience to the Great Commission and the Three Angels’ Messages. While our theology, ethics, and church life tends to become more and more stable and comprehensive, our commitment to Global Mission calls for a self-critical, open, and dynamic approach, as is appropriate for a mission movement.

During the 1980s our mission focus changed from territories to peoples or people groups, and this Global Mission emphasis has increased the need for the
church to come to grips with the phenomenon of contextualization. We are reminded of its urgency by the front-line mission workers and evangelists who seek to make the gospel relevant to every “nation, tribe, language and people.” In our discussions of the boundaries of contextualization, therefore, we must keep the practical realities of Global Mission in mind.4

This change is not a threat but a challenge and an opportunity. We can meet it by honestly assessing what is unique about our life and message, why it is different, why it should not be absorbed into a general religious perspective or be diluted by any culture in the world.5 This challenge invites us to develop skills in finding and expressing, in every situation and culture, what our faith and practice is and what it means to all peoples of the world. In order to do that, the Adventist Church must open itself to the teaching of the Bible and be driven by how it understands the world for which that teaching is meant, taking seriously that its mission is the driving force in contextualization.

As we seek to expand the Seventh-day Adventist witness to peoples rather than territories, we are moving our work into their collective cultures and individual minds. The conversion of a human heart is ultimately the fruit of the Holy Spirit, but, as Ellen White kept reminding us, this fruit is related to how wisely we work. She recognized that “the people of every country have their own peculiar, distinctive characteristics, and it is necessary that men should be wise in order that they may know how to adapt themselves to the peculiar ideas of the people and so introduce the truth that may do them good. They must be able to understand and meet their wants” (White 1923a:213).

Following Ellen White’s counsel, we need to ask ourselves: How do we work “wisely” in contextualizing our mission? It means to strike a balance between being open and bold, while being careful and aware of the boundaries. I suggest we also need a sound theory of contextualization which we can apply in addressing practical problems. This is not only to avoid confusion caused by terminology,6 but also to understand what we are doing and to provide constructive guidelines.

How, then, can we define what we mean by a legitimate, biblical, Seventh-day Adventist concept of contextualization? It seems to me that the proposal of Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989) offers a useful starting point. In support of the thesis that contextualization is a necessity, they proceed from the following three presuppositions:
First, it is imperative that the Great Commission be fulfilled and the world be evangelized. Second, however world evangelization is defined, at the very least it entails an understandable hearing of the gospel. Third, if the gospel is to be understood, contextualization must be true to the complete authority and unadulterated message of the Bible on the one hand, and it must be related to the cultural, linguistic, and religious background of the respondents on the other (1989:xi).

Recognizing that there are legitimate and illegitimate, or biblical and unbiblical, forms of contextualization, the authors then present what they describe as authentic and relevant contextualization (1989:199 ff). With some slight adaptations and additions of my own, this concept would include four inter-related criteria for legitimate forms of contextualized mission, namely:

**Context**

Contextualization includes correctly understanding and relating to people in their historical and cultural context. This may be termed the *anthropological perspective* and it focuses on the culture (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:158-169).

**Authenticity**

Contextualization should have to do with God’s revelation first of all, with faithfulness to the authority and content of the will of God as revealed in his creation, in man’s conscience, and, especially, in his Son and his Word inspired by the Holy Spirit. This may be referred to as the *theological perspective*, placing the focus of interest on fundamental Christian beliefs (1989:144-157).

**Effectiveness**

Recognizing that, in and of itself, authenticity does not assure us that the message will be meaningful and persuasive to the intended receivers, contextualization must also include effective communication, i.e., our mission is completed only when the receivers have had a fair chance of *hearing and understanding* the message, on *their* terms, not ours. This might be called the *communication perspective*, focusing on the process of communication (1989:180-196).
As pointed out by Ellen White in my quotation from *Gospel Workers*, our mission is contextualized only when the message is presented in such a way that it meets the needs or wants of the recipients, i.e., their needs of *salvation* in a very broad sense. This means that we are looking at their needs of *understanding* in order to *find God*, not our needs of maintaining certain traditional standards. This may conveniently be referred to as the *hermeneutical perspective*, since it involves retrieving the supra-cultural validity of the gospel truth and making it cross-culturally communicable, meaningful, and acceptable (1989:170-179).

In light of this, I suggest that if we want to speak intelligently and legitimately about contextualized mission in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we need to include the four criteria of context, authenticity, effectiveness, and relevancy, or using another set of terms, cultural adaptation, biblical authority, communicative effectiveness, and relevance to salvific needs. This general definition also provides criteria for identifying the borders between an illegitimate adaptation to culture and fundamental biblical truth.

Many models of contextualization have suffered from an imbalanced view of the process of contextualization. Rather than giving due recognition to all four components, they have over-emphasized one or two. I therefore suggest, as a guideline, that we *include all the four components in a balanced way* when we deal with issues of contextualization and that we ensure that our ministerial training programs offer *balanced training* in all these areas.

**The Challenge of People in Their Contexts**

Contextualization deals with people in their contexts. The church needs to understand the nature of this challenge. I suggest it is helpful to distinguish between two types of context, namely, culture and language (1989:158). Culture may be defined as “a system of behavioral patterns which language interprets and realizes,” but also as “the body of knowledge shared by the members of a group” (Gregory and Carroll 1978:78). That knowledge then takes the form of rules which govern the way in which individuals relate to and interpret their environment. The application of those rules produces culturally specific forms of behavior (including language behavior), patterns of communication, sets of values, and types of artifacts (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:158 and Shaw 1988:4, 5).
Culture in this sense is part of a layer of contexts in which every individual lives. It has been noted that “contexts are nested within contexts, each one a function of the bigger context, and all . . . finding a place in the context of culture” (Firth 1964:70). In fact, it has been suggested that each individual has an internal network of the mind, containing everything the individual knows about his world, which is best conceived of as memory (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:167). As we see in figure 1, Layers of Context, this network includes culture, as an overarching determining context, then the social organization, and finally the perceived situation of the individual within his or her social and cultural environment.

Thus, for contextualization to take place, contextual overlap or match is achieved at one or all the levels included here. However, being the overarching and determining factor, the culture of a person or a group of people is the
primary dimension that needs to be affected by Adventist-Christian mission. An Adventist missionary working towards a person’s conversion must therefore translate universal biblical meanings in order to change the non-Adventist culture into an Adventist shaped culture.

Very briefly, change can theoretically be achieved in three ways: (1) by affirming or clarifying the receiver’s cultural concept, but adding to it the context of the Adventist-Christian worldview; (2) by expanding the receiver’s cultural universe, letting it develop into the Adventist-Christian position; and (3) by contradicting the receiver’s culture and replacing it by the Adventist-Christian view, which is something totally different.

In reality, we may often have to realize that no progress can ever be made unless a total conversion of the mind takes place, in the sense that a new biblical worldview replaces the old (see under Some Major Dangers of Contextualization below).

The methods of change include language, attitudes, actions, dress, and social settings of various sorts. Their function would be in one or more of the spheres in which contextualization normally occurs in the church, namely, church life, ethics, and theology, as defined by Jon Dybdahl: “Church life includes the realms of hymnody, architecture, worship style, ecclesiastical structure, methods of governance, decision-making, etc. Ethics involves the standards and moral life of the church. Theology includes doctrinal beliefs, statements of faith, and explanations about God” (1992:15).

While these areas are certainly inter-related, a valid guideline for us would be to evaluate an issue of contextualization according to its intended function in these three contexts. For example, the Bible seems to accept more flexibility for local diversity in the sphere of church life and the ethics of social behavior than in theology and the theology of ethics. This is basically due to the fact that the Bible is limited; it cannot include reference to every single detail of life and behavior, but works through principles that are to be applied in each cultural context, and the church therefore needs to have a procedure for how and by whom that work of application is to be carried out.

The perceived flexibility of the Bible on church life and ethical behavior may also be due to two further factors: First, as written word, the Bible is closer in nature to theology and the theology of ethics, since both use words as medium of communication. The ethics of social behavior and church life, however, include attitudes and actions, buildings, art, and customs, where meaning is not encoded in words and where local non-verbal codes of meaning dominate.
Thus, the church cannot contextualize its message unless there is some sort of connection between the work of theology as an interpretation of the Bible texts at the theoretical level, and that of the practical application in the local culture, where local knowledge is fundamental.

Second, from an ecclesiological point of view, the responsibility in the church is divided, so that theology and the theology of ethics would be decided by the worldwide organization, the General Conference. The daily application of the ethics of social behavior and church life would, however, be the responsibility of the local church, led by the elected elder or conference employed pastor, where a larger degree of understanding of local cultural codes exists. The way in which the General Conference issues directions to the local church is by the Church Manual, and the local church ideally responds to its instruction by an attitude of loyalty.

The point that emerges here is that the issue of church organization and governance is essential for contextualization. As a guideline, I would suggest, therefore, that the unity and diversity of the church may best be preserved by (1) recognizing that the General Conference has the overarching responsibility for determining the core issues that constitute Adventism, but that this work needs to be carried out with flexibility and openness, through constant dialogue with Adventists in local cultures, and (2) that this interaction may be facilitated if the General Conference would focus on general principles of biblical theology and the theology of ethics that may then be applied locally in various forms of ethical behavior and church life. This approach would have an effect on the current shape of our Church Manual (1998).

Editor’s note: This need was recognized by the General Conference in session in Toronto in 2000 when it was voted to re-organize the Church Manual and introduce a general section in each chapter with general principles followed by a more practical section where local unions would be allowed to suggest local practices.

The role of contextualization in mission offers such a mixture of possible approaches that in order to determine the boundaries we need to be very clear, first of all, about the purpose of contextualization. What, then, is the purpose of contextualization in mission?
Salvation As the Purpose of Contextualization

The need for contextualization invites the church to look carefully at its reason for existence. The church exists to bring God’s salvation in Christ to all peoples. Authentic and relevant contextualization meets the salvific needs of all people. One of the best known examples of the concept of contextualization in the Bible is found in 1 Cor 9:19-23:

Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

Note that the purpose of Paul’s incarnational ministry is to “win as many as possible” (verse 19), or “save some” (verse 22) for the “sake of the gospel” (verse 23). Notice Jon Dybdahl’s comments on this text: “to lose sight of this aim is to turn contextualization into an empty intellectual exercise” (1992:15).

An absolute boundary in contextualization would therefore be to refrain from reducing the biblical concept of salvation into something rather superficial in order to accommodate the local culture. Let me make two further remarks on this important point: First, the purpose of salvation implies more than proclamation; it includes the acceptance of Christ as Lord and a continuing process of growth as his disciples. A media ministry, for example, that only proclaims the message cannot fulfill our mission on its own; it needs a local church or local Adventist people who can lead seekers to accept Christ and then join their local fellowship in order to continue to grow. Contextualization is something to take seriously in this age of cross-cultural satellite evangelism.

Second, the purpose of salvation involves more than a universal notion of restoring the broken relationship between God and man. It also needs to take into account the boundless knowledge of God and the potential for growth which God has created in man. Thus, while Paul says in 1 Tim 2:4 that “God wants all men to be saved,” he also says that God wants them “to come to a knowledge of the truth.” While Paul says in 2 Tim 3:15-17 that the purpose of the Bible is “to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus,” Paul also says that Scripture will “train for righteousness, so that the man of God
may be thoroughly equipped for every good work." And Christ in his Great Commission commanded us not only to make disciples and baptize people, but also to teach them everything he had commanded (Matt 28:18-20). Therefore, salvation includes spiritual growth in communion with other believers. Paul says in Eph 3:18-19 that he is praying that the believers “may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” The purpose of salvation is to know God, and Ellen White points out that this is “the most wonderful knowledge that men can have,” for “the knowledge of God’s love is the most effectual knowledge to obtain, that the character may be ennobled, refined and elevated” (1889:285, 286).

Recognizing that the Bible teaches that salvation is a process of spiritual growth, a contextualized mission project must ensure that such growth can take place after conversion. Therefore, somehow, all mission work should aim at providing an organized fellowship of believers as a necessary context for the convert.

At this point, it is proper to remind ourselves of Ellen White’s extraordinary formulation of the mission statement for the Church: “The church is God’s appointed agency for the salvation of men. It was organized for service, and its mission is to carry the gospel to the world. The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to ‘the principalities and powers in heavenly places,’ the final and full display of the love of God” (1911:9).

This wide-ranging definition of the church and its mission suggests that contextualized ministry needs to include more than just proclamation, acceptance of Christ, a transformed life of good deeds, discipling, and growth in the fellowship of the church. It also implies a special calling to serve as a collective community where the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ are shared, a community growing towards the final and full display of the love of God, a community with an eschatological and prophetic identity.

These observations will have a bearing on specific issues raised by some contextualized mission projects, namely those of baptism and membership, the identity of the group of believers and their relation to the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. We will come back to this in a later section.
The Uniqueness of Adventist Faith and Praxis
The Issue of Other Religions

The concept of salvation might be assigned various shifts of meaning by different religions. Where is the exclusiveness of the Seventh-day Adventist Christian concept? Where are the absolute boundaries against other religions?

Seventh-day Adventist mission will, as a rule, affect the entire life of a person. This is a result of our biblical view of man as a whole, as a being where mental, spiritual, physical, and social dimensions interact. Another way of describing this is to apply a model of man in his cultural context.

![Figure 2: Layers of Culture](image)

In the model of culture provided in figure 2, Layers of Culture, we see the areas of an individual's culture that are being directly affected. There is the outer, observable layer of behavior and customs, then institutions such as marriage,
law, and education, then values governing ethical norms and tastes, and finally, the underlying layer of “ideology, cosmology and world view” (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:53). It is often in this latter area that conversion takes place, and that is what contextualized mission needs to target and come to grips with. The fact that the deepest layer is often part of a religious or political system of thought makes this a challenging task. Relating to culture is largely a matter of relating to non-Christian worldviews.

From a biblical perspective, we would see the world, its cultures, and religions as the area of a great battle between the forces of God and Satan. Though the outcome is guaranteed by virtue of God’s sovereignty, ultimate triumph does not mitigate the present struggle. Being created by God, man reflects his image, but, as a result of the fall, man also is corrupted by sin. Supra-cultural messages and phenomena invade the world, but they emanate from God or Satan and are therefore sometimes divine, sometimes demonic. Relating to culture is in this perspective an ethical decision for or against God.

Thus, while the church may relate to other religions in various ways, it must always avoid two dangers: “The fear of irrelevance if contextualization is not attempted, and the fear of compromise and syncretism if it is taken too far” (1989:55). The fear of irrelevance emerges from our obedience to the Great Commission and the Three Angels’ Messages, and the fear of compromise and syncretism emerges from our obedience to the truth and the commandments of God.

Christians tend to take one of four approaches to other faiths: exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism, and relativism. This is how Russell Staples described these approaches in the November issue of Ministry, 1992: Exclusivists maintain that the central claims of Christianity are uniquely true and that the claims of other religions are to be rejected when these are in conflict with Christianity and its major tenets. Inclusivists affirm the uniqueness of Jesus Christ on the one hand and on the other the possibility of God’s saving activity in other religions. Pluralists are prepared to abandon the claims of Christianity to exclusive truth or uniqueness in favor of a willingness to recognize truth and the saving activity of God in all religions, with Christ being one of the great figures God has used to call people to faithfulness. Relativists tend to be agnostic. They recognize no exclusive truth, and as such are diametrically opposed to pluralists who accept the truth claims of religion and advocate a certain kind of missionary activity.
I agree with Russell Staples that “a moderate exclusivist position is most compatible with the Adventist sense of identity and mission” (1992:11, 13). As an absolute fundamental of our faith, we must therefore consider the **plan of salvation** (in its objective/historical and subjective/personal forms) in the context of the **great controversy**. However, the exclusivist position does not exclude a balanced view. Ellen White and the apostle Paul provide guidelines for a degree of flexibility. Ellen White states two important things: first, that the Holy Spirit may work directly on the heart of those who have not heard the gospel; second, that God will judge people according to the light they have. She says:

> 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 (White 1940:638).

Similarly, she says:

> God’s test of the 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 (White 1899).

It seems to me that these statements give room for a degree of flexibility in applying the exclusivist claim to other religions in contextualized ministries. However, I believe it is also clear that we must guard ourselves against devising ready-made theological systems applied in models of contextualization that, so to speak, **a priori** defers from offering the full salvation and the full knowledge that God has revealed in the Bible simply because the missionary does not believe that the people in their culture can take it. Ellen White points out that “millions upon millions have never so much as heard of God or of His love revealed in Christ. It is their right to receive this knowledge” (1903:262). Rather than merely accepting the obstacles of the foreign religion or culture, we need to develop methods of contextualization that gradually brings the people to a fuller knowledge. This ongoing process of teaching may include: (1) helping people to be critical of their hidden assumptions and the ideologies they have learned from their culture; (2) translating the Christian message by the use of
paraphrase rather than too literal renderings; and (3) commenting and teaching by illustrations that are compatible with the local culture.

At this point, a question presents itself: What are the boundaries for how far we should go in adapting our message to a non-Christian religion? There is a fascinating answer to this in the Bible. As a rule, the easiest and most efficient method for the apostle Paul was to go to the synagogue and use the Scriptures and Jewish tradition to proclaim Christ. It worked quite well. In particular, the Hellenistic Jews, “those who feared God,” proved to be most receptive to the gospel. They had an internal conceptual world which enabled them to “hear and understand” the word. But not so the learned Greeks in the meeting of the Areopagus in Athens (Acts 17:16-33)!

How would these Greeks understand the Word of God? By their culture and views they were extremely distant from the proclamation of the gospel. No Old Testament Scriptures, no Jewish tradition, no expectation for Messiah, no eschatology, no belief in the resurrection, but a rich Greek pagan tradition. Paul had to preach the gospel in a Greek “pagan” way. His boldness leaves me impressed.

First, he established a good relationship with the Athenians in order to build trust. Without trust, people will not hear our proclamation. Paul stood up and said: “Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious” (Acts 17:22).

Then he made a connection with idolatry by referring to an altar and the inscription “to an unknown God.” There is not a word of criticism or judgment against idolatry here in the biblical story. In fact, from the Athenian polytheism and false concepts of God, Paul led the Greeks towards the true God. But he was forced to enter into the listeners’ ground, to speak on their terms, if he wanted to be understood and save them. He had to disregard his own knowledge and operate at the level of the receivers. Nobody would accuse Paul of idolatry or apostasy, although in his proclamation he not only refers to altars and inscriptions of idols, but he also quotes a piece of Greek pagan poetry, written by the Stoic poet Aratos (310-240 B.C.), taken from a context where the words are referring to the pagan god Zeus. Thus, using the conceptual world of the recipients, no matter how abominable it definitely was to the pious Paul, he nevertheless argues in their conceptual framework in order to make them hear and understand the word of God.

But notice that Paul ultimately does not hide his purpose, which is the message of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:31), although he knew that many
would reject it. The purpose of contextualization must be clear, namely, that of salvation for all peoples; but the core facts of salvation must be equally clear, namely what God has done for humanity in Jesus Christ. Let me conclude this section by suggesting three guidelines for contextualization, drawing on Paul’s approach.

First, we may use names and concepts of god in other religions, if we re-interpret them to conform to the biblical view of God.

Second, we may use and quote the writings of other cultures and religions, if we re-interpret them according to the biblical worldview.

Third, in mission dialogue we build trust by establishing a common ground with the receivers, but we must proceed into biblical truth when the opportunity comes as the Spirit guides us, especially concerning what God has done in Jesus Christ, even though the Christ event may be a totally foreign concept to our audience.

Paul and the early Christians preached Christ as crucified and resurrected unto a world that perceived this message to be folly: “But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:23-24).

We must not allow the recipient culture or faith to delay the process of sharing truth to such an extent that we avoid sharing the central tenet of the Adventist Christian faith that Christ died for us and that God has defeated sin and evil by resurrecting him from the dead. If we do, the danger of a syncretistic faith taking root would be imminent.

**The Issue of Hermeneutics**

Christian contextualization is a process of communication, in which the gospel is shared in a way that is faithful to God’s revelation in the Bible while being meaningful to receivers in their cultural and existential contexts. It has been pointed out that “contextualization is both verbal and non-verbal and has to do with theologizing; Bible translation, interpretation, and application; incarnational lifestyle; evangelism; Christian instruction; church planting and growth; church organization; worship style—indeed with all of those activities involved in carrying out the Great Commission” (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:200).
What is involved here is a *trialogue*, i.e., “an ongoing three-way conversation among the Bible, the missionary, and the missionized” (Dyb-dahl 1992:16). Some of this interaction is displayed in figure 3, Contextualization—A Three-Culture Model as proposed by Eugene Nida (1960 in Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:200). The trialogue encompasses a process of revelation, interpretation, and application throughout which a *continuity of meaning* is traced. This continuity is essential in order to protect the biblical message from distortion. It is maintained by constant faithfulness to the authoritative biblical text and an exercise of great hermeneutical skills.

The need for a viable hermeneutical model is all the more important in view of what is involved in communicating the Christian faith to respondents in other cultures. It has been argued by experts on contextualization that all messages must pass through the following seven-dimension grid as shown in figure 4, Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Communication.
The many different ways in which these dimensions may be handled in contextualization are too complex to illustrate here. The point is that, whatever the biblical idea or principle to be contextualized may be, it needs to be shared through a complex hermeneutical process involving exegesis of the biblical revelation in its cultural context, interpretation by the contextualizer in his or her cultural context, and application to the mind of the receiver in his or her cultural context, and all of this being done in contextual, authentic, effective, and relevant ways in the spheres of theology, ethics, or church life, and being channeled through a complex set of at least seven cross-cultural dimensions. This is certainly very difficult, but nevertheless a work that must be done. Therefore, great flexibility and skill, and a prayerful commitment to the power of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the church at large, would be necessary.

To help the interpreter preserve the continuity of meaning, I suggest that the following guidelines would apply: (1) faithfulness to the authority of the Bible; (2) faithfulness to the message and mission of God’s worldwide remnant church and an aim to safeguard its unity and fellowship while allowing for a cultural diversity; (3) a hermeneutical skill that enables one to trace a continuity of meaning from the Bible to the missionary’s own cultural context, and

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<th>Source Encodes (S)</th>
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<td>Motivational resources—ways of deciding</td>
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Figure 4: Dimensions of Cross-Cultural Communication
then on to the recipient culture; (4) extensive knowledge and understanding of
the recipient culture, even empathy with it, which is sometimes achieved only
by living it; and (5) applying the universal message of Christian love, interper-
sonal relations, and “the truth as it is in Jesus” (see Ellen White’s concept of “in-
carnational ministry” below). This is not possible to do in an absolute or once
and for all manner. It requires practice, experience, and a process of trial and
error. The church needs to be open to this, so that it does not limit creativity
and fresh ideas. At the same time, the practitioner needs to be loyal and willing
to listen to the values and concerns of the church at large.

Translating Truth into Culture

From among the existing models of contextualization (Bevans 1992), the
translational model seems best adapted for the way our church perceives truth.
Its key presupposition is that the essential message of Christianity is supra-
cultural. A basic distinction is made between the kernel of the gospel core and
the disposable cultural husk. This is, then, the proper context for talking about
the boundaries of contextualization, i.e., the boundaries between fundamental
beliefs and culture.

Any translation process is likely to bring a danger of distortion, because
cultures and languages differ. While we may simplify matters by saying that
language consists of form and content and that translation consists in preserv-
ing the content and changing the form, all who have been involved in Bible
translation or a contextualized ministry know that, in reality, it is much more
complicated. Languages and cultures differ not only on the surface, but in sem-
antic or conceptual deep structures of meaning, in associative or emotive
meanings, in functional rules of language behavior, in social contexts, and in
the overarching worldview that determines the fundamental features of a cul-
ture.

This is, therefore, a vast topic and I can only suggest a couple of general
guidelines. First, as in all Bible translation, some distortion is unavoidable; the
essential thing is to guard the theological fundamentals, as defined in sections 2
and 9 of this paper.

Second, having identified a continuity of meaning from the Bible, across
his own culture and then on to the recipient culture, a contextualizer will use
cross-cultural universals, i.e., concepts, statements, and principles that corre-
spend. Their new form will, however, carry added and sometimes non-bib-
lical connotations embedded in the receiving culture. In order to safeguard the biblical message against improper distortion in this connection, one would recommend (a) constant communication and prayerful dialogue in a congregational context, (b) a gradual broadening of the receiver’s knowledge of the biblical worldview, and (c) non-verbal communication, such as actions and attitudes, pictures and images.

Third, when the receiver’s culture does not have any corresponding element for a biblical concept or principle, i.e., when a gap occurs, material that is as similar as possible may be used, and this needs to be accompanied by the same safeguards as suggested under point two above.

The practical problems facing the translation process as a result of cultural diversity are immeasurable. Some of these problems relate to models of evangelism which we set up, and where we have a choice to make. I guess that is what we should be discussing first of all today. I admit, however, that my knowledge is very limited about such models in our church. In the Trans-European Division, we are at present running contextualized projects in the secular Western culture, we are developing plans for Islamic cultures, and we dream of doing something for Jews in Israel and Europe. The representatives here from the various Global Mission Study Centers could probably tell us more about their experiences and plans in the discussion that is about to follow.

Other issues arise from millions of everyday life situations in which, on first sight, biblical principles seem to conflict with the surrounding cultural values, but where a closer look might reveal that the conflict is between two or more biblical principles. Let me use an example.

A young mother and wife in India became a Christian, while her family remained Hindu. Being responsible for the household, it was her duty to make the evening offerings of food and incense to Vasavi Kanyaka, the god worshipped by the family. The welfare and happiness of the entire family is believed to depend on this act of worship. While her husband is tolerant towards various religions and worship of various gods, he now asks her: “How can your God forbid us to worship our gods?”

What advice do we give her? One way is to refuse in obedience to the literal meaning of the first and second commandments of not worshipping idols which will lead to separation from her husband, child, and family, and her being thrown out of her village. Being cut off from her social context, she would probably not survive and would certainly have very limited possibilities of making a Christian witness in her community.
Another way is to redefine the act of offering for herself, abolishing the idea of an offering to a pagan god but seeing it purely as an expression of love and loyalty to her husband, being void of religious meaning in order to win his confidence and eventually win him for Christ (Hiebert and Hiebert 1987:34-37). She could also be advised to seek to change the objective of the offering, so that, rather than being directed to a pagan god, it could be directed to Christ. Following the second solution, however, it would seem to be an absolute boundary that we are not accepting a Hindu offering as part of Christian faith, but that there is an intentional plan to achieve aims compatible with biblical, Christian faith. To some extent, this course of action might nevertheless result in the incorporation of originally Hindu religious customs being reinterpreted in accordance with our biblical faith.

Some of the objections to this tolerance of an originally Hindu practice may derive from the fact that it is unfamiliar and strange to our Western eyes. However, we should be aware of the fact that even in Western Adventism various examples of similar processes exist, although we have become blind to them. Note, for example, the names of pagan gods for the days of the week in Germanic languages including English (Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday contain the names of the gods Oden, Thor, and Freja in ancient Nordic mythology); the commonly accepted practice of joining hands in prayer which originally derives from pagan Gothic customs; the use of the originally pagan Christmas tree; the use of the originally Roman wedding bands; the Swedish Lucia celebration on December 13; and the Danish national anthem, by which Seventh-day Adventists are invited to use the pagan expression “the hall of Freja” for their country (Freja being the fertility god in Nordic mythology). Adventists, however, and in some cases this would include Ellen White, have reinterpreted ancient pagan customs to express Christian faith. It seems that, in these cases, Paul’s principle of “living as a Jew among Jews and a Greek among Greeks in order to save some” has been applied by the church both globally and nationally. It needs to be recognized, however, that Adventists tend to view these matters very differently, and there is little consensus on what is permissible and what not. I believe this issue would require more extensive study and that our church members everywhere would benefit from a balanced biblical teaching on how to perceive these things.

Another example relates to models of contextualization in Islamic countries. A writer in Ministry notes that “Adventist communities existing in Muslim countries have real problems identifying themselves with local cultures,”
and the effects are a very minimal growth of the church in Islamic countries. He suggests changes in church life and worship styles, including introducing local themes in Sabbath School, Arabic music and singing, adapting to Muslim sacral architectural style, making churches into houses of prayer, and introducing personal dress that is more similar to local customs. The title of the article bears the provocative title: “Would you worship God in a mosque?” (Dabrowski 1995:10, 11).

This is, of course, a very real challenge. Similar examples could be given from the Jewish context. Thousands of Messianic Jews are becoming Christians in Israel and across the world through Jewish contextualized ministries, and there are increasing examples of the same process in Adventism. Planting Adventist synagogues is becoming a goal for our mission.

The church may address these issues by adopting the following guideline: A contextualized local Seventh-day Adventist Church could use forms and customs from the local culture in its church life if the clear teaching of the Bible does not forbid it, if it has a clear purpose to foster genuine Seventh-day Adventist and biblical faith, if it is acceptable to the local church (congregation and mission/union conference), and if the General Conference has in principle accepted that such deviations from the Church Manual can be made without jeopardizing the worldwide unity of the Church.

Universal Actions and Attitudes

Actions and attitudes are powerful communicators in contextualization, sometimes being more efficient than words. Valuable insights may be gained from the incarnational ministry described by Ellen White:

In laboring in a new field, do not think it your duty to say at once to the people, We are Seventh-day Adventists; we believe that the seventh day is the Sabbath; we believe in the non-immortality of the soul. This would often erect a formidable barrier between you and those you wish to reach. Speak to them, as you have opportunity, upon points of doctrine on which you can agree. Dwell on the necessity of practical godliness. Give them evidence that you are a Christian, desiring peace, and that you love their souls. Let them see that you are conscientious. Thus you will gain their confidence; and there will be time enough for doctrines. Let the heart be won, the soil prepared, and then sow the seed, presenting in love the truth as it is in Jesus (White 1948a:119, 120).

The following guidelines for an Adventist contextualized ministry can be drawn from the above quotation: (1) speak upon points on which you can
agree, (2) make pleasant inter-personal relations the key, (3) allow for time to pass and growth to take place, first preparing the soil, (4) let the seed sown be the “truth as it is in Jesus,” and (5) the work of soul-winning is primarily a work of Christian love.

As an illustration of the importance of this method, notice the following comments: “Despite more than a decade in Asia and the Middle East, I have yet to meet a Muslim who has been convinced and persuaded by the quality of our arguments or by the content of our knowledge, to follow the Jesus of the Gospels. Rather, that transformation has only ever been born out of the miracles of love transplanted into theology, life and witness by the power for the Holy Spirit in our lives” (Penman in Schantz 164).

Church Identity and Baptism

The Christian mission of making disciples of all peoples has two related purposes based on the wording of the Great Commission in Matt 28:18-20: One is to lead people to Christ by the experience of conversion and baptism; the other is to lead them into a functional church culture, where they are being taught to keep everything Christ has commanded, and in which they may grow in their faith and discipleship, serving as part of the world fellowship of Seventh-day Adventist believers (see section 3 above).

The question we need to ask is whether both steps are taken at the same time, before baptism, or whether baptism is a confirmation of the experience of a personal conversion to Christ as Savior based on an acceptance of a more general doctrinal teaching, which is then, after baptism, gradually deepened through participation in church life and spiritual growth. It is clear to all of us what the Church Manual currently says concerning “thorough instruction prior to baptism,” but I am putting to you the question if the concept of “thorough” needs to be adapted to different cultures. Perhaps in some places, an early baptism followed by a long time of deepened study of the truth might be considered as a practical way of doing mission.

There are, as you all know, biblical examples of baptism immediately following upon the confession of faith in Christ, for example, the three thousand Jews from various cultures on the Day of Pentecost according to Acts 2, the Ethiopian in Acts 8, and even the Hellenist Cornelius with all his household in Acts 10. The general impression in the book of Acts is that baptism was performed immediately after confession in Jesus as Messiah, that some knowledge
was required for this to happen, and that further instruction was then left to the congregation and the church fellowship. The dual role of the Holy Scriptures according to 2 Tim 3:15-17 seems to be on one hand to “make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (leading to baptism?), and on the other to be “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (in the life of the church fellowship?).

Today, if the Church’s mission is to achieve a complete change of an individual’s worldview, values, institutional patterns, and outward behavior and customs prior to baptism, this will prolong the process of conversion and baptismal instruction. And a long time of preparation for baptism becomes a matter of concern in contexts where the culture itself raises obstacles to Christian mission.

In secular parts of Europe “successful” evangelists now work up to seven years to lead an individual to a decision, simply due to a culture that provides no faith in God, no biblical knowledge, and that predisposes people against making lasting commitments that govern their life values and behavior. In this case, the missionary has no choice. But in an Islamic context, where brotherhood and belonging often functions as conditions for in-depth study of the Bible, an early baptism after confession of faith in Issa al Masih followed by long-term instruction to establish “obedience to everything that Christ has commanded his disciples” may function as a help to fulfill the Great Commission as a whole.

The alternative model to what we normally do in Western churches, a model that reckons with a successive spiritual growth in the life of the believer places a greater responsibility on the Church to provide a functional program of spiritual nurture. The Church may avoid the threat of apostasies resulting from baptizing people too soon if it constantly cares for their spiritual needs. The Adventist World Church Survey in 1993 indicated, however, that we need to do better in this area, otherwise apostasies will increase.

Editor's note: At the Annual Council in 2005 this concern was emphasized by Elder Paulsen and a program was voted that would encourage the Adventist Church to address this need.

It is difficult to suggest any firm principles for this type of issue at this stage. If we are not willing to change our traditional view of a thorough prepara-
tion for baptism, it may be a possibility, in some specific mission projects, to introduce *levels or degrees of membership* to provide for the need of fellowship and a sense of belonging as people continue to grow. In the case of adding a new member to an existing church fellowship, it would, however, be a vital prerequisite that the existing congregation is able to accept the new member. In the case of a newly planted church, there may be greater freedom in terms of what the other members expect, but it would also be more important in that situation to ensure that the new members are given a sense of belonging to the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. If that element proves an obstacle to successful growth, *the aim of preserving a Seventh-day Adventist identity should not be given up*. We need to safeguard the identity of each member as belonging to the global community of God’s people. I believe the theological reasons for this position were adequately presented in section 3 above.

### Using the Bible As a Standard

The importance of using the Bible as the authoritative source of truth and safeguard against syncretism has been repeated in the paper several times. The contextualizer needs to be constantly on guard to faithfully reflect the meaning of the biblical text, needs to establish the truth that has been revealed by defining what the text *says* (revelation), needs to understand what it *means* (interpretation), and needs to *apply* it to receivers in their cultural context (application). This is a hermeneutical task which calls for skills, wisdom, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Criteria for Using the Bible as a Standard for Contextualization

#### The Authoritative Word of God

Our view of the Bible as “the written Word of God, given by divine inspiration,” in which “God has committed to man the knowledge necessary for salvation,” which is “the infallible revelation of God’s will,” and which is “the standard of character, the test of experience, the authoritative revealer of doctrines, and the trustworthy record of God’s acts in history.”

8
The Bible As a Whole
The Bible comprises the canonical writings of the Old and New Testaments as a whole. Fundamental truth is that which is supported by the Bible as a whole. The writings of Ellen White help us understand the Bible and increase our knowledge of biblical truth.

Christ Being the Center of the Bible
Truth being “the truth as it is in Jesus.” The Bible is “able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:15). This would be the core belief which should serve as an interpretive model for understanding the Bible as a unity. It is based on biblical teaching, for example, in 1 Col 1:25, where Paul describes Christ as “the word of God in its fullness.” Ellen White states that “every true doctrine makes Christ the center, every precept receives force from His words” (1948b:54).

Text Explaining Text in the Context of Each Bible Book As a Whole
The basic method of reading, understanding, and interpreting the Bible is to let text explain text, but only after carefully determining the meaning of each text from the context of the individual book as a whole.

Faith in Jesus and Biblical Instruction
The Bible reveals missionary events when the knowledge necessary to become baptized is the acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Savior, i.e., when the knowledge of a systematic view of the Bible is kept pending (Acts 8:26-40).

Specific Issues Concerning Contextualization
First, the biblical core of beliefs that constitute Adventism and provide the unifying factors within our diversity would be the Fundamental Beliefs, or, in some instances, the Baptismal Vows. I am not prepared to suggest reductions beyond that. Certainly, when we translate our beliefs into another language, a degree of contextualization does take place. But to deliberately exclude elements on which the church has united itself would seem to be very unwise. It seems more fruitful to look at ways and methods by which we can teach converts, so that, over time, truth surfaces in their understanding.
Second, it can be argued that, while the authoritative teaching of the Bible always defines the absolute boundaries for any kind of contextualized mission by representatives of our church, the Bible also provides a certain flexibility. The Adventist Church states in the preamble to its current list of Fundamental Beliefs that we accept the Bible as our only creed, and that our beliefs reflect our understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture which are open to revision as we are led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth.

The foundations for this flexibility are several, namely, our view of the boundless nature of God and of our knowledge of him; the nature of the inspiration of the Scriptures; and a certain understanding of the thought structure of language exemplified in the Bible. As we all know, Adventists believe not only that the truth about God and the love of Christ are “immeasurable”11 but also that what is revealed in the Bible is sufficient for our salvation. We believe in the inspiration of the Bible authors and their thoughts rather than their literal words. We understand that different biblical statements may say the same thing, or elaborate and expand on the same theme, although different words are used. Thus, it is entirely possible to propose succinctly worded concepts or propositions that sum up the entire message of the Bible, and, conversely, that may be expanded to account for all the writings of the Bible.12 The choice of statement may be made in view of context, intended receiver, and purpose.

In other words, there is a flexibility in terms of how we word the core truths of the Bible. Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the Adventist Church may revise its understanding of those core truths. As we can see in the writings of Ellen White, such change may be of three types: (1) clarification, (2) progressive development, and (3) contradiction or reversal (Knight 1993:10-15).

It must, however, be made clear that an absolute boundary in this connection, at least for employees of the church, is that no adaptation of our core beliefs should be made individually in the process of contextualization. Dialogue with the church as a hermeneutical community is necessary (Dybdahl 1992:16). Individual decisions are seldom good ones; the Bible encourages us to seek counsel from each other. The church is a body and we are to gain divine wisdom from each other’s experiences. When the Holy Spirit speaks to all or many, the weight of the interpretation increases.

Third, there are attempts by some to contextualize the Bible in non-Christian traditions. Some make it clear; others do not. However, I would agree that “contextualizations (and translations and interpretations) that grow out of a
view of Scripture in accord with the revelational epistemology of Shintoism, Hinduism, and Islam, or some faith other than historic Christianity, will have sacrificed biblical authority by defining that authority in terms more suitable to the Kojiki, the Upanishads, the Koran, or some other understanding of revelation. This is dangerous and can be disastrous” (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:139).

That is not to say that the Qur’an could not be used in an Adventist contextualized ministry in an Islamic country. As the apostle Paul quoted pagan Greek writings when preaching to Greeks, we should be open to using other religions’ holy writings as we lead people to wider understanding. Our usage must, however, be selective and measured by the Bible, since there must be no confusion over the unique inspiration and authority of the Bible. An absolute boundary would be for us not to accept the divine inspiration of the Qur’an as a whole, but accepting that it may contain elements of truth.

A fourth area of concern is the importance of biblical theology to change the worldview of the receivers. Worldview is the basic element of a receiver’s culturally conditioned mindset, and that is where conversion takes place. Worldview may be characterized as “the structure of the universe as the people of a culture see it or ‘know it to be,’” (Robert Redfield as quoted in Hesselgraves and Rommen 1989:212). Worldview governs life and colors and shapes all experiences. Therefore, if a worldview that has not been shaped by Christian thought is not transformed into a biblically shaped one, even though a person may embrace certain truths of the gospel, those truths will be interpreted from a non-Christian perspective. Consciously or unconsciously that person will tend to fashion a syncretistic worldview.

The way to supplant non-Christian worldviews with a Christian worldview is to replace false stories with the true story as it is unfolded in the Bible (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:214). It seems to me to be an absolute boundary in contextualization that we do not supplant a worldview by removing pieces from the false stories and replacing them with pieces from the true story. The truth of the pieces of the Christian story will make sense only in the context of the larger biblical story, which, somehow, must be shared with the receivers. This will also mean, however, that biblical theology from the source of the text itself must generally be favored over against any secondary systematization of the biblical message. With our longstanding confession as Adventists that “the Bible is our only creed,” we should not have difficulties in implementing this
principle. The Bible must have the primary place, because it is “the way God communicated his truth to mankind.”

**Some Major Dangers of Contextualization**

Though contextualization is a necessity, dangers are involved. The best way to handle them is to be aware of them and constantly seek to control them. The first major danger is *superficiality*, arising from ignorance or insensitivity in the process of contextualization (Dybdahl 1992:16). A few outward forms are changed, but there is never any deep awareness of the receivers’ values and culture.

Jon Dybdahl describes a case to illustrate this: “The few who become Christians do so by converting to the ways of the missionary, thus becoming strangers in their own land and ill-fitted to reach their own people.” As a result, “the eternally relevant gospel is perceived as irrelevant, not on the basis of what it really is, but on the basis of the cultural baggage contained in its presentation.” This danger can only be avoided by a constant searching for a clearer understanding of the genuine gospel and how it is best conveyed in each situation, at each point in time, and to each person in his or her cultural context.

The second major danger is *syncretism*, i.e., the mixing of divergent beliefs that takes place when contextualization has gone too far and has lost its faithfulness to the Bible and Christian principles. Both form and meaning have been incorporated from the local culture, and the essence of Christianity is lost.

An example in the ethical sphere is the genocidal behavior of Christians in Rwanda. Another example in the theological sphere is the introduction of modern science or human reason as an authority above the Bible. Instead of Christianity using the vehicle of culture to communicate its message, culture takes over Christianity, using the faith for its own aims. The safeguarding guideline here is, of course, to exercise faithfulness to the authority of the Bible as a standard for faith and praxis.

The third major danger is loss of Seventh-day Adventist *identity*. The local culture may not provide the necessary tools for making the full Seventh-day Adventist message contextualized in a relevant and effective way (while being both contextual and authentic). The loss of some vital elements characterizing the church may develop into either an underground church or a church that lives its life separately from the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. To overcome this danger, certain basic criteria for Seventh-day Adventist contex-
tualization would need to be developed, possibly by a deep study of the form and content of the baptismal vow and the form of organization.

**Summary of Guidelines**

Presently, the Adventist Church does not have guidelines for the boundaries of contextualization in mission. Jon Dybdahl made an initial step in his 1992 article in *Ministry* by mentioning a number of safeguards. Below I submit the following list of possible guidelines for our discussion.

**General Approach to Contextualization**

**Love for Lost People**

Christ’s mission of salvation must be the driving force in contextualization. It is not based only on our obedience to Christ, but first and foremost on our genuine and unselfish love for lost people. Lost people matter to God and therefore they matter to us.

**Spiritual Movement and Organized Church**

The church needs to keep in mind the practical realities of its mission to the peoples of the world. Adventist contextualizers need to keep in mind that they represent a dynamic movement to reach the world’s unreached, in which innovation and change led by the Holy Spirit is needed as well as an organized church, which, under the guidance of the same Holy Spirit, seeks to maintain the stability and unity of God’s people.

**Balanced Contextualization**

We need a balanced view of contextualization, including the components of context, authenticity, efficiency, and relevance. Ministerial training programs need to offer balanced training in all these areas.

**Various Areas of Contextualization**

Contextualization occurs within the church in the spheres of theology, ethics, and church life. Due to the nature of the Bible as a written word and the nature of Seventh-day Adventist Church governance, there would seem to be more flexibility in contextualization related to ethics of social behavior and church life, which includes attitudes, actions, buildings, music, aesthetics, and local forms of action, and which are subject to local church decision.
Adventism as both Global and Local Church

The unity and diversity of the Adventist Church may be balanced by an interaction between the General Conference, where the ultimate responsibility for determining the core issues that constitute Adventism lies, and Adventism in local cultures. This interaction may be both flexible and unifying if the General Conference focuses on general principles of biblical theology and the theology of ethics, which may then be applied locally in various forms in social behavior and church life. This approach would have an effect on the current shape of our Church Manual.

Salvation as the Purpose of Contextualization

The Purpose

The purpose of all contextualization in mission must be driven by the full biblical concept of salvation.

The Full Implications of Salvation

One must refrain from reducing the biblical concept of salvation into something rather superficial in order to accommodate the local culture.

Experience of Salvation and Church Fellowship

The purpose of salvation is to know God and includes growth in communion with other believers. Salvation is a process of spiritual growth, and a contextualized mission project must ensure that such growth can take place after the conversion. Therefore, somehow all mission work should aim at providing an organized fellowship of believers as a context for the convert.

The Collective, Eschatological, and Prophetic Identity of the Church

The biblical nature of the church and its mission suggests that contextualized ministries should be driven by a special calling to serve as a collective community where the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ are shared, a community growing towards the final and full display of the love of God; a community that has an eschatological and prophetic identity.

The Uniqueness of Our Faith

Plan of Salvation in the Great Controversy
The mental and cultural area of ideology, cosmology, and worldview is often where conversion takes place, and that is what contextualized mission needs to target, trying to replace non-Christian worldviews with a biblically shaped worldview. The worldview inherent in the plan of salvation (historical and personal) in the context of the great controversy provides an absolute core of belief in contextualization.

Relation to God without Knowledge of Adventism

Some flexibility exists in how we understand non-Christian peoples’ relation to God: the Holy Spirit may work directly on their hearts although they have not heard the gospel, and God will judge them according to the light they have.

The Goal Is to Lead Converts to a Full Knowledge of the Truth

We must guard ourselves against models in contextualization that, so to speak, a priori defer from offering full salvation and the full knowledge that God has revealed in the Bible, simply because the missionary does not believe that the people in their culture are ready for it. A process of teaching should gradually bring the people to a fuller knowledge.

Adaptation to Other Faiths Versus Confronting Other Faiths with the Gospel

There is biblical support for a degree of adaptation of our message to non-Christian religions. We may use names and concepts of god in other religions as a bridge if we reinterpret them to conform to the biblical view of God. We may use and quote the writings of other religions if we reinterpret them according to the Bible. We may establish a common ground and win confidence in various ways including being culturally compatible with those whom we seek to reach. However, ultimately, at the right time, we must be ready to proceed into biblical truth, especially as far as Jesus Christ and the gospel is concerned, even though it may be a totally foreign concept to our audience. The foreignness of the gospel must not be used as an excuse for not presenting it in its fullness.
Using Universals

Contextualizers seek to use universals in concepts and meanings, which should not be distorted by the recipient’s culture, social organization, and perceived situation. This is done by translating the biblical message culturally into the receiver’s culture, using words as well as personal actions and attitudes.

Guidelines for Protecting Bible Truth

In order to safeguard the absolutes of biblical truth and to preserve the continuity of meaning, the following guidelines may be helpful: (a) faithfulness to the authority of the Bible; (b) faithfulness to the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and an aim to safeguard its unity; (c) hermeneutical skills; (d) knowledge and understanding of the recipient culture; and (e) applying the message of Christian love through interpersonal relations, peace making, consensus, patience allowing for growth, and an emphasis on the truth as it is in Jesus.

The Bible As Standard in Bridging Cultural Gaps

In translating the Bible to the receivers, universal concepts and practices are most useful. When a gap occurs between the biblical concept and the recipient concept, it is particularly important to use the Bible as a standard to safeguard biblical truth.

Primacy of Actions and Attitudes In Communication

Actions and attitudes are useful to communicators and may achieve what words and teaching cannot achieve. There is particular importance in (a) speaking upon points on which you can agree; (b) making interpersonal relations a key; (c) allowing for time to pass and growth to take place; (d) focusing in action and dialogue on the truth as it is in Jesus; and (e) making the work of soul winning primarily a work of Christian love.

Variations in Local Church Life

A contextualized local Seventh-day Adventist Church could use local expressions of art, music, architecture, and worship forms in church life, if the
clear teaching of the Bible does not forbid it, if it has a clear purpose to foster genuine Seventh-day Adventist and biblical faith, and if it is acceptable to the local church (congregation and mission/union conference).

Identity and Baptism

**Baptism and Spiritual Growth**

If a model of contextualized ministry needs to reckon with a long period of spiritual growth after belief has been confessed in Jesus as personal savior, *baptism could take place at an early stage* if the baptized member is involved in a functional program of spiritual nurture with the goal of leading to a fuller understanding of the Bible. The aim of safeguarding the Seventh-day Adventist identity is vital.

**Levels of Membership**

In some cases, it could be a possibility to introduce *levels or degrees of membership* to provide for the need of fellowship and a sense of belonging as people continue to grow.

The Bible in Contextualization

**Core Beliefs**

Core beliefs applying to using the Bible as a standard for contextualization would be: (a) our view of the Bible as summarized in the Adventist statement of Fundamental Beliefs; (b) finding support by the Bible as a whole; (c) Christ as the center of the Bible would be the core belief serving as an interpretive model for understanding the Bible as a unity; (d) let text explain text after careful interpretation from the individual book as a whole; (e) openness for situations in which the knowledge necessary for baptism is expressed in the acceptance of Jesus Christ as personal Savior, while the wider knowledge of the Bible must be given over a longer period of time.

**Fundamental Beliefs of the Adventist Church**

The biblical core beliefs that constitute Adventism and provide the unifying factors within our diversity would be the Fundamental Beliefs, or, in some cases, the Baptismal Vow. By translating the English text of the Fundamental Beliefs into another language, an acceptable degree of contextualization takes
place. In addition to that, ways may be found by which the beliefs are taught in the codes of foreign cultures, so that, over time, truth surfaces.

**Core Beliefs and the Church As a Hermeneutical Community**

There is flexibility in how we may word the core truths of the Bible. An absolute boundary in this connection, at least for employees of the church, is that adaptations of our faith and message should not be made individually in the process of contextualization, but dialogue with the church as a hermeneutical community is necessary. Individual decisions are seldom good ones and the Bible encourages us to seek counsel from each other. The church is a body and we can gain divine wisdom from each other’s experiences.

**Use of Holy Writings from Other Faiths**

Holy writings from other religions, for example the Qur’an, can be used in a contextualized ministry. Our usage must, however, be selective, measured by the Bible, since there must be no confusion over the unique inspiration and authority of the Bible.

**Biblically Shaped Worldview a Goal**

Contextualization in mission must not give up the goal of transforming the worldview of the receivers into a biblically shaped worldview. That does not happen by simply changing bits and pieces; the biblical story as a whole is necessary to provide the truth.

**Primacy of the Biblical Text Itself**

As a rule, biblical theology from the source of the text itself must generally be favored over against any secondary systematization of the biblical message.

**Safeguards Against Syncretism**

**Maintain Close Connection with the Scriptures**

To safeguard against syncretism we must take the Bible as a whole, and use proper hermeneutical keys and models.
Pray for and Trust in God’s Leading
Contextualizers must rely on the Holy Spirit who has promised to guide into all truth.

Check Motives and Attitudes
Are we truly trying to give the gospel as clearly as possible, or are we just making excuses for laxity? Do we have the mind of a servant, or are we just pushing our own agenda and culture? Are we prejudiced?

Dialogue with the Church As a Hermeneutical Community
The Adventist Church should set up proper forums for regularly handling issues dealing with contextualization in mission.

Realize That Over Time Truth Surfaces
Haste sometimes produces wrong decisions. Allow God to work and prove to us what his will is.

Maintain Concern for the Weak
Paul says in 1 Cor 9 that he became all things to the weak. The weak in this context refers to those who are bothered by changes taking place in the church. Committed contextualisers always consider the feelings of their brothers and sisters and try to relate to them while also relating to those who need to hear the gospel. Never forget that we are a world church that both needs to advance the gospel to all peoples while at the same time maintaining unity. If your approach to contextualization offends, which good contextualization tends to do, ensure that it is for the right reasons, not the wrong ones.15

Miscellaneous
Need for Evaluation
For some projects, it will be necessary to exercise a periodic re-evaluation with proper church bodies needing to care for these reviews. Perhaps executive committees should function more like mission boards that regularly follow-up on the challenge of contextualization.
Process

Recognize that contextualization is an ongoing process and that guidelines must be flexible. As our understanding of biblical truth grows, so too will our understanding of the world with which we are to share it.¹⁶

Notes


²Besides the Bible and the writings of Ellen White, our church now has an impressive Working Policy, a Church Manual, Minister's Manual, Elder's Handbook, and an expanding compilation of Statements, Guidelines & Other Documents; the Fundamental Beliefs have been explained in the publication of Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines, Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988.

³Cf. Note Froom’s opening statement: “In every religious movement there comes a time when the call of God to advance is sounded—a summons to quicken the pace, to take higher ground, to break with the status quo, to enter into a new relationship and experience with him. Especially is this true in the new Space Age into which we have now entered, with its stupendous achievements” (Froom 1971:23).

⁴For a practical orientation, see, for example, (Hiebert and Hiebert 1987) and (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:212-257).

⁵Note the concerns of General Conference President, Robert S. Folkenberg, (1995:6-8).

⁶While contextualization is the most common general term used by missiologists for cross-cultural adaptation or incarnational ministry, a number of meanings, methods, and models have been attached to it (see Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989). This is partly unavoidable, since, in its general sense, contextualization may refer to any activity by which the Christian message is communicated in an efficient and relevant way to the peoples of the world.

⁷As noted already by the translator of the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus; see the prologue to the book.

⁸See the first of the 27 Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs.

⁹See (Wiklander 1996:5-7).

¹⁰For further explanation see (Wiklander 1994:7-27).

¹¹See (White 1923b:128ff) where she states that “truth in Christ and through Christ is measureless . . . can be experienced, but never explained. Its height and breadth and depth surpass our knowledge.”

¹²For an attempt to do this on Isa 2-4, see (Wiklander 1984).
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13See (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:215), and note the further elaboration of this theme on pp. 212-221 with relevant case studies linked to Hans Rudi Weber’s demonstration of how the Bible can be taught in a way that provides non-Western believers with a Christian worldview.

14Cf. (Hiebert 1987:110) and (Bruinsma 1997:16).
15See (Whiteman 1997:3).
16Cf. (Knight 1993:10-15).

Reference List


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Chapter 6

* * *

1998 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor’s Note: At the conclusion of each year’s Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 1998 three recommendations were prepared dealing with the use of sacred writings from other world religions, transitional organizational structures, and contextualization.

Statement on the Use of the Bible in Mission, Vis-à-vis “Sacred Writings” of Other World Religions

Recommended 14 January 1998

In “being all things to all men” the Global Mission Study Center directors are understanding and using scriptures highly valued by the people we are reaching out to as an instrument by which we can draw closer to our audience. We are being heard, we “step into their back yard,” we are not humiliating or discrediting them. It is not necessary to take any position regarding the inspiration or holiness of the writings we use, which are known to them, and valued in determining right or wrong in their lives. In our communication with them we use these writings as a very deliberate introduction to the biblical writings, leading to an ultimate transfer of allegiance to the Bible. Not doing so would be
a failure and a discredit to the church. Therefore, the following guidelines are provided for use in the development of models.

1. Use of writings from other religions may have value as points of initial contact to show understanding for and sensitivity to other traditions and cultures, to lead a person initially along paths which are not totally unfamiliar, and to show that pointers which are found also in other world religions/traditions find their richest meaning in the life of faith as presented in the Bible.

2. The process of leading a person to Christ and to a life of faith in a society where Christianity is not established and where another world religion is dominant, shall be done essentially by the use of the Bible as the teaching instrument and source of authority.

3. The nurture and spiritual growth of believers (i.e., after baptism) in such an environment shall be accomplished by the use of the Bible as the sole authority.

Use of the Bible in Mission Vis-à-vis “Sacred Writings”

Statement as Approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee and as Edited by the Biblical Research Institute June and July, 2003

In building bridges with non-Christians, the use of their “sacred writings” could be very useful in the initial contact in order to show sensitivity and to lead persons along paths which are somewhat familiar. They may contain elements of truth that find their fullest and richest significance in the way of life found in the Bible. These writings should be used in a deliberate attempt to introduce people to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and to help them transfer their allegiance to the biblical writings as their source of faith and practice. However, certain risks are involved in the use of these writings. The following guidelines will help to avoid those risks.

a. The Bible should be recognized as the teaching instrument and source of authority to be used in leading a person to Christ and to a life of faith in a society where another religion is dominant.

b. The Church should not use language that may give the impression that it recognizes or accepts the nature and authority assigned to the “sacred writings” by the followers of specific non-Christian religions.
c. Those using “sacred writings” as outlined above should develop or create a plan indicating how the transfer of allegiance to the Bible will take place.

d. The nurture and spiritual growth of new believers in non-Christian societies shall be accomplished on the basis of the Bible and its exclusive authority.

**Transitional Organizational Structures**

*Recommended 14 January 1998*

The Christian mission of making disciples of all peoples has two related purposes, based on the wording of the Great Commission in Matt 28:18-20: One is to lead people to Christ by the experience of conversion and baptism; the other is to lead them into a functional church structure, where they are further taught to keep all things Christ has commanded, and in which they may grow in their faith and discipleship, serving as part of the world fellowship of believers. The Seventh-day Adventist mission of proclaiming the Three Angels’ Messages to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language, and people includes incorporating believers in that message into the world fellowship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been organized to accomplish this dual task of mission and nurture.

With their focus on mission and nurture, Seventh-day Adventists should work within the current church structure, but where this is not possible and transitional variations are being suggested, approval from the appropriate church body should come after seeking advice from church administrators as to whether the situation meets certain criteria, such as:

1. At times experimental organizational structures can be approved for testing, especially as a part of new initiatives in the mission of reaching resistant or previously unreached peoples.

2. Where regular church work and organization is not permitted by circumstances, transitional church organization can be fostered and supported.

3. In circumstances where no church organization of any kind is possible, the church can still foster and support mission.

In certain parts of the world, transitional church organization may sometimes be required for the church’s mission to be effective. However, we must work toward bringing all new believers in such circumstances to an awareness of and a participation in the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church.
According to Matt 28:18-20, the mission of the Church has three major inseparable components: 1) the mission should lead people to Jesus as their Saviour and Lord through conversion and baptism; 2) the mission is to incorporate a community of believers, the church, into an environment where they can grow in faith, knowledge, and the enjoyment of a universal fellowship of believers; and 3) the mission is to nurture and train members as active disciples who recognize and utilize their spiritual gifts to assist in sharing the gospel. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been founded and organized by the Lord to fulfill that gospel commission. The universal nature of the Church requires the existence of a basic and common organizational structure throughout the world that will facilitate the fulfillment of its mission.

Political and religious conditions in some countries could make it difficult or even impossible for the Church to function within its traditional organizational structure. A transitional organizational structure may be needed. In such cases the following guidelines should be employed to deal with the situation:

a. The transitional organizational structure would be justifiable under one of the following conditions:
   1. When new initiatives need to be tested in the mission of reaching resistant or previously unreached peoples;
   2. When regular church work and organization is not permitted due to local religious or political circumstances.

b. Church leaders at the division/union/local field where the transitional organizational structures are being set up should determine the nature of the transitional organization and whether it is appropriate to choose local leadership. They should also define the management of tithe and offerings within the transitional organization.

c. Workers who are providing leadership in the transitional organization should be personally committed to the doctrinal unity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to its worldwide ecclesiastical organization.

d. New converts should, as soon as possible, be made aware of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-
day Adventist Church—and that it has a particular message and mission to the world.

e. As soon as it is feasible, the transitional organizational structure should be replaced by the regular church organizational system.

**Contextualization As a Part of the Mission Of the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

*Recommended 14 January 1998*

Seventh-day Adventist contextualization is motivated by compassion, under the authority of the Scripture and guided by the Holy Spirit. It aims to communicate biblical truth in a culturally-relevant way that is both faithful to the Scripture and meaningful to the new host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged and/or affirmed by the gospel.

Contextualization of the way we express our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it, the church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, these adaptations have been taking place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the Three Angels’ Messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. They should continue.

Contextualization recognizes that people will be the most loving and productive Christians when they can practice their faith, sing their songs, pray, nurture, and reach out within their own heart language and biblically affirmed customs.

There are eternal truths that all cultures deserve to know, which can be expressed and experienced in different ways. Contextualization aims to uphold the 27 Fundamental Beliefs, and to make them truly understood in their fullness. Local expressions of worship, art, prayer, evangelization methods, and Bible study are encouraged as they contribute to the spread of truth.

In the search for the best way to do contextualization, certain guidelines must be followed. The Bible must always be the final standard, the church community must work together on the best way to contextualize; it must be accompanied by earnest prayer, pure motives, and concern for those who have differing views. In the end, all true contextualization must be subject to Bible truth and bear results for God’s kingdom.
Because uncritical contextualization is as dangerous as non-contextualization, it is not to be done at a distance, but in situ. It involves the local people, missionaries, new Christians, and appropriate levels of church leadership in a careful process of (1) an examination of the specific issue in the light of all cultures concerned, (2) an examination of all that Scripture may say about the issue, (3) the application of the Scripture to the issue, and (4) the careful practice of the mutually determined result.

The unity of the global church requires regular exposure to each other, each other's cultures, and each other's insights that “together with all the saints we may grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ’s love” (Eph 3:18).

**Contextualization and Syncretism**

*Statement as Approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee and as Edited by the Biblical Research Institute June and July, 2003*

Contextualization is defined in this document as the intentional and discriminating attempt to communicate the gospel message in a culturally meaningful way. Seventh-day Adventist contextualization is motivated by the serious responsibility of fulfilling the gospel commission in a very diverse world. It is based on the authority of the Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit and aims at communicating biblical truth in a culturally-relevant way. In that task contextualization must be faithful to the Scripture and meaningful to the new host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged by the gospel.

Intentional contextualization of the way we communicate our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it the Church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, adaptation has taken place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the Three Angels’ Messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. This will continue to happen.

As the Church enters more non-Christian areas, the question of syncretism—the blending of religious truth and error—is a constant challenge and threat. It affects all parts of the world and must be taken seriously as we explore the practice of contextualization. This topic is highlighted by the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy between good and evil which explains Satan’s mode of operation—distorting and compromising
truth, not by denying it, but by mixing truth and error, thus robbing the gospel of its true impact and power. In this context of danger and potential distortion, critical contextualization is indispensable.

Since the effects of sin and the need for salvation are common to all humanity, there are eternal truths that all cultures need to know, which in some cases can be communicated and experienced in different and yet equivalent ways. Contextualization aims to uphold all of the Fundamental Beliefs and to make them truly understood in their fullness.

In the search for the best way to contextualize, while at the same time rejecting syncretism, certain guidelines must be followed.

a. Because uncritical contextualization is as dangerous as non-contextualization, it is not to be done at a distance, but within the specific cultural situation.

b. Contextualization is a process that should involve world Church leaders, theologians, missiologists, local people, and ministers. These individuals should have a clear understanding of the core elements of the biblical worldview in order to be able to distinguish between truth and error.

c. The examination of the specific cultural element would necessitate an especially careful analysis by cultural insiders of the significance of the particular cultural element in question.

d. The examination of all the Scripture says about the issue or related issues is indispensable. The implications of scriptural teachings and principles should be carefully thought through and factored into proposed strategies.

e. In the context of reflection and prayer, scriptural insights are normative and must be applied to the specific cultural element in question. The analysis could lead to one of the following results:

1) The particular cultural element is accepted, because it is compatible with scriptural principles;

2) The particular cultural element is modified to make it compatible with Christian principles;

3) The particular cultural element is rejected, because it contradicts the principles of Scripture.

f. The particular cultural element that was accepted or modified is carefully implemented.

g. After a period of trial it may be necessary to evaluate the decision made and determined whether it should be discontinued, modified, or retained.
In the end, all true contextualization must be subject to biblical truth and bear results for God’s kingdom. The unity of the global Church requires regular exposure to each other, each other’s culture, and each other’s insights that “together with all the saints we may grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ’s love” (Eph 3:18).
Chapter 7

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BRIDGES NOT WALLS

BERTIL WIKLANDER

January 13-14, 1999

It goes without saying that Adventist traditional methods of evangelism are inadequate for reaching Muslims effectively. The Adventist Church is still groping for an effective method. The Lord has not opened the way yet. Hence, the quest for guidance from him continues. Meanwhile, I believe that in some places a traditional method like the Revelation Seminars can have some impact on Muslims or other non-Christian communities. Perhaps, what we need to do is to revise the entire Revelation Seminar, especially lesson twenty-three.

Several years ago a Seventh-day Adventist pastor used the Revelation Seminar lessons in a Muslim country, with some impressive initial success. But when he distributed Lesson 23, the hitherto highly interested prospects demanded the lecturer’s head. It may not be necessary to give up entirely on the traditional methods, for with a little adaptation some of them may still yield desired dividends.

We should also work seriously on what to do when Muslims convert to Christianity. Conversion becomes one of the most traumatic experiences for Muslims, for they are almost always forced to leave their loved ones, relatives, and, indeed, their community due to threats to their own lives.
There is an urgent need to develop evangelists skilled in witnessing among Muslims. This is a special weakness in the Adventist Church that needs concerted attention. I have expressed my sorrow over and over on the lack of courses in the Adventist centers of learning to meet this urgent need. Over the years, Adventists have perfected methods of reaching other non-Adventist Christians with the Advent Message, but little effort has been made to develop methods of reaching non-Christian peoples. I do hope some day my cry, and that of other concerned ministers, will be heeded.

Of course, we cannot come up with a method better than Christ’s method. We can only adapt it as his apostles did. Call it the “incarnational methods” if you like. It is clear in the Bible that Christ’s incarnational ministry caused him to condescend, to take our flesh, our experience, and our life of struggle with sin and its effects, including death itself, in order to raise us to his life of glory and immortality. In the same way Christ’s witnesses should be ready to live among Muslims, eat their food, wear their clothes, and both sympathize and empathize with them in order to show them greater light. The witness should remain Christian, serving only as a catalyst within the Muslim community.

Neither do Muslims need to change their names. Interestingly, in the Bible, it was Jewish converts who had their names changed, e.g., Joses changed to Barnabas and Saul became Paul. But Gentile converts like Cornelius and Lydia retained their pre-Christian names. Why then should we even suggest to Muslims that they change their names if they do not take the initiative? Similarly, we need not insist that they change their way of life that is not objectionable to the gospel. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-29) did not insist on that for Gentile converts.

In the presentation of the gospel, Christ’s method is again the most effective model. His encounter with the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well (John 4:1-42) summarizes this method: present the truth from the known to the unknown, from the common to the uncommon. However, Jesus never left his prospect, in this case, the Samaritan woman, where he met her. At the appropriate time, he clearly pointed out to her that salvation was “from the Jews” (John 4:22 NRSV). Likewise, no matter how cautiously we relate to Muslims we must reach a point where we do not leave them in any doubt concerning the fact that there is “no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved”
(Acts 4:12, NRSV). Jesus is the way of salvation, and this point must eventually be mentioned, but always in love.

**Time for Caution**

In our bid to develop methods of reaching non-Christians, especially Muslims, special care should be taken to avoid two undesirable developments: (a) syncretism, and (b) two parallel churches.

**Syncretism**

The Bible (Rom 4:16) and the Qur'an (al-Hajj 22:78) suggest that both Christians and Muslims derive their faith from Abraham. However, al-Baqarah 2:130-135 and al-Imran 3:52 add that Abraham and all the prophets after him, including Christ’s disciples, were “Muslims.” I agree that I am a “Muslim” in the general sense of one who surrenders to God, but I would hesitate to introduce myself as a Muslim, for fear of being misunderstood. Those who are known as “Muslims” today are those who became Muslims after declaring the Shahada: *la ilaha il-Allah, wa Muhammadar Rasul-Allah* (There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is Allah’s Messenger). I am not a Muslim in this sense because the Shahada presents Muhammad as the sole messenger of God, and that seriously contradicts the fourth pillar of the Islamic faith which clearly states belief in all of God’s messengers: “We make no distinction between any of the messengers” (al-Baqarah 2:285) is the comment that follows the fourth pillar of Islam.

Let me remind us of our Christian uniqueness. The Christian Church has a unique gospel of salvation through a crucified but risen Saviour (1 Cor 15:1-4) but which the Qur’an specifically denies (al-Nisa’i 4:157, 158). Christians have a specific Gospel Commission which enjoins believers to go out and “make disciples of all nations” (Matt 28:19). The Church also has unique doctrines, the violation of which amounts to crucifying Christ afresh (Heb 1:1-6). Then 1 Cor 11:2 and 2 Thess 3:6, 7 show that we have our unique traditions and our way of life. Indeed at the very beginning of Christian experience baptism symbolizes death to the old life and resurrection into a new life in Christ (Rom 6:4). Thus Rom 12:1 asserts that anyone who accepts Christ no longer “conforms” to this world, but rather is “transformed” by the renewal of one’s mind in order “to prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (NKJV).

Among the apostles, Paul was foremost in developing an incarnational ministry. Paul succinctly said that he intended to win the people he was working
for “by all means” (1 Cor 9:22). Yet there was a limit as to how far Paul would go. Some Jews insisted that converts be circumcised as a condition for salvation (Acts 15:1), but the Jerusalem Council rejected circumcision as necessary for Gentile believers (Acts 15:29). But the Judaizers continued to make a lot of fuss about circumcision and other divisive rituals with the result that even some of the apostles (Peter and Barnabas) succumbed to the pressure. Paul remained firm, emphasizing (Col 2:11-13) that baptism replaced the important spiritual symbolism of circumcision. But Paul re-baptized some Christians who had experienced only the baptism of John (Acts 19:1-5). So with the apostles, and especially with Paul, there was no room for compromise and or syncretism.

Parallel Churches

The existence of two parallel churches is not a new problem. In Gal 2:7-12 we read that, what began as an evangelistic strategy in the Apostolic Church, eventually divided the church into two groups: one church for the circumcised and another church for the uncircumcised. The first church to go out of existence was, of course, the church of the circumcised. Its doom may be traced to its initial preaching of “another Jesus . . . or a different gospel” (2 Cor 11:4). The church of the uncircumcised survived, but eventually in apostasy, according to Dan 7:25 (see also 2 Thess 2:7-12).

I hope that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in its bid to develop a strategy to win Muslims, will not end up developing two parallel Adventist churches with perhaps two different names, one with a traditional Adventist lifestyle and the other with a kind of Hanif lifestyle. In the same way that the word Muslim can have different shades of meaning, the Qur’an uses the word Hanif with both general and specific meanings. Hanifism can be traced back to Abraham (al-An’am 6:161, al-Nahl 16:123). Generally, the word hanif means one who is “upright” or “righteous.” Of course, it is my earnest desire to be a hanif in this general sense of being upright.

However, originally hanif meant one who turned away from the existing idol worship to the worship the one true God. Thus the hanif were specifically the monotheistic Arabs of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic era. Before Muhammad, hanif believers had no organized community and no well-defined set of beliefs. They believed in the unity of God as the only Creator, had a concept of the resurrection, and engaging in yearly meditation in caves during the month of Ramadan (Sell 1913:1, 2). Waraqah, Muhammad’s brother-in-law,
was a *hanif* who became a Christian; Ubaydallah B. Jahsh, the son of one of Muhammad’s aunts was a *hanif* who became a Muslim but turned Christian while in exile with the rest of the Muslims in Abyssinia (Ethiopia), and Zayd B. Amr, one of Muhammad’s uncles, who converted Muhammad to *hanifism* remained a *hanif* till his death (Sell 1913:25). Caution is needed lest we create a fellowship that may not stand the test of time.

I understand that *hanifism* is now being replaced by “Faith Development in Context” [FDIC]. The term *hanif* is now being reserved, as it were, for those people who feel that they have become better Muslims after accepting and practicing some key Bible teachings. I am glad that reason has finally prevailed in restricting the use of this term. This has partly addressed the concerns I have raised concerning the promotion of an Adventist *hanifism*. However, I shall wait to see how this new approach develops, since I still do not really know the difference between *hanifism* and FDIC. I notice that FDIC is advocating, among other things, the development of “parallel structures” by the denomination, where the regular Church could exist along with a parallel church for Muslim believers.

**The Task before Us**

We must develop an incarnational ministry that will adequately reach Muslims with the everlasting gospel using Christ’s method in a way that will allow Muslims to replace some of their beliefs and practices with better Christian beliefs and practices. Eventually, Muslims must understand that the Sabbath day is the day of worship; that even the Qur’an (al-Nisa’i 4:154) states that God gave Israel a definite command on Sabbath observance; and that (al-Baqarah 2:65, 66) it is a violation of that command that brought punishment which served as “an example to their own and to the succeeding generations and an admonition to the God-fearing” (al-Muttaqeen). Thus, since God did not give such an injunction for the observance of any other day, Muslims do not need to go to mosques on Friday for public prayer any more.

Similarly, Muslims need to come to the point where they are convinced that it is better to fast when the need arises (Matt 9:14, 15) than to engage in the ritual annual Ramadan fast. It is also important to point out to them that Christ ruled out any need for the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to any spot on this earth, because it is now the time for all to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:21, 23). Muslims also should be taught that the *id-ui-adha* (festival of sacrifices at the
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end of the pilgrimage, *al-Hajj* 22:27, 28) has no spiritual importance anymore for the sacrifice of Christ, which was done “once for all” (Heb 10:10), is now appropriately and adequately symbolized by the celebration of holy communion (John 13:1-10). These and other distinctive Christian beliefs and duties constitute the task of the Christian witness to explain to all prospective Muslim converts for their consideration and acceptance before baptism and integration into the Adventist Church.

**Christ’s Goal**

I began this paper with Christ’s method and I would like to close with Christ’s goal. Christ’s primary goal was accomplished because he broke down “the dividing wall” (Eph 2:14) that existed at his first coming through his effective method as explained above. My concern is that we would not do anything to rebuild it or erect another wall. Rather, let us use his bridging method to accomplish his ultimate goal: “I have other sheep that do not belong to this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to My voice. So there will be one flock, One Shepherd” (John 10:16, NRSV).

**Reference List**

Chapter 8

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CONTEXTUALIZATION. CHURCH, AND CONFESSION

RUSSEL L. STAPLES

January 13-14, 1998

Introduction—The Issues

In a memorable phrase that stands out like a beacon in the history of the Christian church, William Temple, at his enthronement as archbishop of Canterbury in 1942, referred to the existence of worldwide Christendom as “the great new fact of our time.” For the first time in human history, Christianity had spread around the globe and become the largest and most widely followed religion. It had gained members from all the religions of humankind, and wherever it entered it wrought change in every dimension of human existence. During the dark days of World War II and faced with an uncertain future, William Temple derived courage from looking outwards at the work of God among the nations. At the time world population was 2.4 billion people with approximately 800 million, or one person in three a Christian. At that same time there were almost 600,000 Adventists.
What no one could then know, or even dare to dream was that the numerical growth of the Adventist Church during the next sixty years would exceed anything that had previously taken place. Growth has been especially rapid in Africa and in other primal societies where the movement into Christianity is without precedent in Christian history. The number of Christians in Africa has grown from about 30 million in 1946 to 350 million today—and it is expected that there will be more Christians in Africa within a few years than on any other continent.

During this period the number of Christians has grown to almost 2 billion, but still remains a steady 33 percent of world population. The Adventist Church has grown with even greater rapidity to about 10 million and the demographic shift from the Western or developed nations to the two-thirds world has been even more dramatic in the Adventist Church than in Christianity as a whole.

The above configuration of growth in primal societies serves to dramatize the comparatively slow progress in reaching the populations of the great world religions, especially those of Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. The missionary challenge and status of the church varies widely from place to place within these religious populations, and in many places substantial gains have been made, but generally the difficulties are great and progress has been slow. Recently, Ralph Winter wrote, “The world Christian movement has largely stalled in relation to the Hindu, Muslim, and Buddhist blocks of unreached peoples” (1998:218).

Missionary societies in general, particularly those within the evangelical umbrella, are much concerned about this challenge and are engaged in serious study and prayer in search for avenues of entry. This is encouraging. Earlier there seemed to be a general mind-set regarding the worst case scenarios of these religions; that not much could be done, that the difficulties were too great, and positive response too little to warrant major investment. Little was done to inspire prospective missionaries to take up the challenge. After all, the reasoning was that there is still much to be done in responsive unreached fields.

I rejoice that much more serious efforts are now being made to find ways of attracting adherents of the great world religions to Christ and of fostering communities of believers. The task is exceedingly complex and differs from religion to religion and even among adherents of the same religion. For instance, it is difficult to conceive of more widely contrasting worldviews than those of Muslims and Hindus, but at a practical level there is a certain kind of parallelism in attitudes and approaches to them. The task we face is not merely that of effec-
tively engaging and appealing to adherents of these religions, an even greater challenge among some, is that of providing satisfying communal and spiritual support. There are no simple answers to the major challenges faced.

The concerns addressed in this paper relate to the following three issues. First, what kinds of missionary approach will best engage and lead to conversion? There is the necessity of contextualization and the attendant danger of syncretism. Second, what kind of Christian community best serves the needs of converts: Messianic communities, new communities of faith, or incorporation into established Christian communities (extraction evangelism)? Third, what is the missional function of confessional statements and catechisms? What is the function of a common confession of faith in promoting worldwide unity and an Adventist sense of identity? What is the purpose and function of local confessions?

Contemplation of such issues in the light of the vast challenge of the unfinished task serves to indicate both the gravity and complexity of the task and the need for divine guidance and willingness to be led along unfamiliar paths. We are reminded that God himself is the Lord of mission and that we are dependent upon him to open the gateways to the nations. Our task is to submit to his ways in obedient discipleship.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate possible avenues of approach to the above issues. In order to provide some basis for this discussion, I turn in the first instance to the example of the revelation of the purpose of God for all mankind in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. This is followed by a description of the experience of the Jewish Christian Church and of the founding and development of thought in the Gentile Church. Concepts gathered from these examples will be applied to the contemporary challenges outlined above.

**God’s Purpose for Humanity Revealed in Jesus Christ**

The ever-present task of mission is the translation of the meaning of Christ, for it is in the incarnation that the purpose of God for humankind is revealed. As the apostle Paul wrote, “He has made known to us His hidden purpose... that the universe, all in heaven and on earth, might be brought into a unity in Christ” (Eph 1:9). Christ belongs to the totality of humankind, and the challenge to every generation of Christians is to make the meaning of the incarnation and of the life, death, and resurrection of the God/man known to every...
human being. We are called to do so in a way that leads to acceptance and a spiritual relationship with Christ.

It is for this reason that mission is called the mother of theology. It is in the missionary situation that decisions must be made regarding the essentials of the gospel, and how these can be best communicated. It is subsequently necessary to analyze what has been heard, what the converts have done with the message, and provide correctives if needed. The theological task is never completed. New situations require new ways of interpreting and communicating the eternal significance of the one who took our human form in order that “we might become partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet 1:4).

A Double Paradox

There is a double paradox at the heart of Christianity.¹ The first is the relation of the human and the divine in the person of Jesus Christ. “The word became flesh and dwelt among us” (John 1:14). This is a mystery of vast significance. We recite the creed as if we understand it:

He is of the same reality as God (homoousion tō patri) as far as his deity is concerned: and of the same reality as we are ourselves (homoousion hēmin) as far as his humanness is concerned. . . . This one and only Christ . . . in two natures, without confusing the two natures, . . . the distinctiveness of each is not nullified by union. (The Definition of Chalcedon 451 A.D.).

The more we contemplate the meaning of the incarnation, the greater the mystery and the greater our wonder at this divine act of translation. It should not surprise us, given the depth of the meaning of the incarnation, that different interpretations, each accenting different dimensions of this mystery, have arisen over the years.

The Eastern Church emphasizes the light the incarnation throws upon our understanding of human nature. In Christ it is seen that the human has a capacity for the divine (co-inherence).

The distinctness of the two natures has been stressed with some laying emphasis upon the human, others the divine nature.

Others have laid emphasis upon the unity of the person of Christ and on the significance of his bearing human nature to the throne of heaven (1 Tim 2:4) as a demonstration of the ultimate destiny of those who follow him.
In Western Christianity there has been a tendency to stress the “work” of the divine Christ—i.e., his vicarious atonement on the cross as the basis of forgiveness and salvation.

The Eastern Church conceives of salvation in more ontological terms. Salvation is thought of as the obverse of the incarnation—Christ became human in order that humans might be lifted up and become partakers of the divine nature.

Others, particularly in American evangelicalism, have emphasized the example of the human Christ—the “In His Steps” theme.

The purpose in listing these aspects of the divine/human mystery (paradox) is to show the depth of meaning in the divine act of translation which lies at the heart of the gospel and not to attempt a theological evaluation of the positions emphasized. There is theological/salvific value in all of the above positions. Theological deviation, as it has been defined by the church, has generally arisen from a tendency to elevate one aspect of the divine/human mystery out of proportion to the whole. There has been a general tendency in the history of Christianity to fragment the gospel, i.e., to emphasize one aspect—i.e., forgiveness (justification by faith) or the opposite extreme, the beautiful example of the human Christ—out of proportion to the totality of the glory of the mystery of Christ. The history of the interpretation of the nature and work of Christ and of what constitutes the gospel of salvation is an illustration of the immense richness of the divine/human mystery. It is also an indication of the complexity of the missionary task of translating the gospel in categories of human thought.

All of this serves as both encouragement and warning regarding the concerns that occasion this conference. If, like Paul, we ask, “Who is sufficient for these things?” (1 Cor 2:16), we can also take courage as we consider the depth and breadth of the divine/human mystery. There is an unfathomable resource upon which to draw as we seek to translate the meaning of Christ to the Hindu or Muslim mind or retranslate it to the secular West.

The second paradox is that of the Jewish particularity of Jesus and the universalism of the Son of the Divine. Jesus took up his earthly pilgrimage as a member of a particular human race and culture. He directed his life in harmony with the Torah and restricted his ministry to the children of Israel (a point not missed by zealous Muslims). One reading the synoptic gospels is impressed by the Jewishness of Jesus. At the same time, there are indications that as the divine Son of God he belonged to the totality of humanity. There is a tension
between the principles of localization and universalization at the heart of the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

The same holds true in every missionary endeavor to translate the gospel. On the one hand, the gospel must be localized as in the ministry of Christ. The significance of Christ can hardly be made too clear. There should be no failure to so translate/localize the message that it faithfully transmits the significance of the incarnation, engages the recipients’ worldview and changes patterns of thought and behavior. The gospel can hardly be made too applicable. As in the ministry of Jesus, it is the task of the faithful disciple to localize the gospel to a particular culture.

On the other hand, the gospel is a powerful universalizing force. Even as it is translated into local significance, the conviction that Christ, the divine Son of God, belongs to the totality of humanity brings with it a realization that the family of Christ is composed of people of every place and culture. The salvation offered by Christ points beyond present reality to the great gathering of peoples from every tribe and nation before the throne of God and generates the realization that “we have no abiding city here.” The more clearly the gospel is particularized, so that the full significance of the person and work of Christ are understood and accepted as revealing the purposes of God for the entire human race, the more powerfully it universalizes.

Fidelity to the gospel leads to both localization and universalization. Thus we have, and accept, diversity within the church within an overriding sense of oneness—of belonging to the family of God. The gospel breaks down the walls of partition between peoples and societies and confers an identity which transcends, but does not displace, all local particularity. Plurality and diversity remain but are relativized by a powerful sense of oneness in Christ.

**Principles of Translation and Pilgrimage**

Consideration of the purpose of God, as it is revealed in the mystery of the incarnation, leads us to enunciate two fundamental missionary principles—those of translation/contextualization and pilgrimage.

**The Principle of Translation/Contextualization**

The first is that of translation. The incarnation, the divine revelation to human beings of the nature of God and of his purposes for them lies at the heart of Christianity. This is the supreme divine act of translation or self-revelation.
God saw fit to reveal his purposes for humankind through an act of translation that brought the mysteries of God to the human level. “And we saw His glory, such glory as befits the Father only. The Father’s only Son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Later, in answer to Philip, Jesus said, “How can you say, ‘Show us the Father?’ Anyone who has seen Me has seen the Father” (John 14:9). So also, the primary task of the missionary disciple is that of translating the meaning and significance of the incarnation. The initial divine act of translation was the harbinger of repeated acts of translation and re-translation as the history of the Christian Church bears evidence. This is an ever present task, and one fraught with complexity and ambiguity—the latter because of the impossibility of conceptualizing the reality of God in human categories. This is an immense challenge to the church in every age and every society.

This process of translation has been given many names over the years—adaptation, accommodation, indigenization, inculturation, to make einheimisch, contextualization, and so on. The latter is the most widely accepted concept in current use. In general the concept is broad, encompassing intellectual explanation (truth encounter), forms of ritual and life style, and at times, also conflict with spiritual powers (power encounter.)

Translatibility lies at the heart of the Christian faith as is demonstrated in both the incarnation and the Scriptures. But with every translation there is the danger of mistranslation. The process is fraught with an inescapable tension of a different kind to that between the particularity and universality of Jesus Christ. Here the tension is between the concern to faithfully translate the message in ways that make it clear and compelling, and yet the possibility of misrepresentation leading to syncretism is ever present. This is a tension fraught with creative opportunities on the one hand (for instance, Don Richardson’s Redemptive Analogies and the Darnell/Whitehouse use of the Hanif theme) and the danger of what is understood to be heretical on the other. There have been many crises in church history in this connection.

The Principle of Pilgrimage

The gospel, translated with fidelity into thought forms that can be comprehended (and the vehicles and categories of communication may be different from society to society), and applied by the power of the Holy Spirit leads to conversion and the transformation of lives and societies. It leads inevitably to
a process of pilgrimage. The gospel meets people where they are, but it does not leave them there. It is the most powerful transformative force on earth. Ironically, social scientists tend to be more cognizant of this than many missionaries. The gospel comes to people as they are, but it leads them to higher levels of thought and life. As Christ begins to rule in the minds of his people, there arises a sense of tension between what they are and think and the way the gospel reveals things should be. Very few if any persons have been able to accept the gospel without change, even change which may be difficult. As Jesus said, “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt 10:34). Christianity becomes the determinative factor in their lives, a force that relativizes all human aims and constraints. The dominion of Christ is extended over earthly relationships, and Christians, in a sense, grow into a dual citizenship. They remain members of the society of their birth and daily lives, but even as they become members of that society which “has no abiding city here,” they, in a sense, feel out of step with their former society. For the gospel judges its principles and values, and they begin to live by a higher mandate.

Before applying these principles to the present circumstances of our missionary task, it may be helpful to see how they functioned in the Jewish and Gentile Churches of the New Testament.

History: The Jerusalem and Gentile Churches

The Jerusalem Church

The synoptic gospels are rooted in the soil of Palestine. Jesus taught about the kingdom of God, and his followers accepted him as the Messiah who was to restore Israel. They identified him as the “Son of Man,” “the suffering servant,” the “redeemer of Israel,” spoken of by the prophets. On the Emmaus Road Cleopas said, “We had hoped that He was the One to redeem Israel” (Luke 24:21). The disciples, as they gathered together before the ascension, asked, “Lord, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel” (Acts 1:6)? The miracle the Jews expected of Jesus was deliverance from the Romans and restoration of the kingdom of Israel (see also 1 Cor 1:22 where “Messiah” became the surname of Jesus).

For a brief period after Pentecost, Christianity was almost entirely Jewish. The believers formed a tightly-knit society with all things in common. They frequently met in the temple where only Jews could enter, they circumcised
their male children, followed the Jewish ritual cycle, kept the law, and read the prophets. They appeared to be what we might call a denomination of Judaism. Some followers even restricted their message “to Jews only and no others” (Acts 11:19). They could hardly even conceive of God bestowing his full blessings upon Gentiles or of admitting them to full fellowship in Israel as the experience of Peter with Cornelius and, subsequently with the elders at Jerusalem, showed. To become a Christian was to be inducted into Israel. Proselytes underwent circumcision which was the sign of the covenant with Israel, they were to learn and keep the Torah, which was the great gift of God to Israel, and in effect to leave their ethnicity and culture behind and become Jews. This is similar to what in contemporary mission practice is called “extraction evangelism.” In the modern situation converts in effect abandon almost everything related to their previous society and their new community of faith becomes a surrogate community/family.

The dominant aspect of Jewish Christology was that they accepted Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah who was to bring in the kingdom. This was a somewhat restricted view of the meaning of the incarnation. This became apparent a little later in church history, when Jewish Christians had extreme difficulty accepting the full divinity of Christ—a position called Ebionitism. Their radical monotheism and elevated concept of Yahweh militated against acceptance of the full meaning of the incarnation. The Messiah was to them more like a very great prophet, one akin to Moses, or a deified person rather than a member of the Godhead, preexistent, and eternal.

The Early Gentile Church

God apprehended Paul and gave him a vision of the missionary task. This was grounded in the conviction of the universality of Jesus Christ—that he had significance for the totality of humanity, that he was more than the Messiah who was to restore the kingdom to Israel. But given the difference between the Greek and Jewish mentality, how was the message of Christ to be construed? Hebrew thought was practical, related to the circumstances of life. It was on the basis of revelation that they believed that God had created the world. The enquiring Greek mind, on the other hand, asked the big questions about life and reality and developed answers that could be rationally substantiated in terms of a given philosophical pattern of thought. What would the term “Messiah” mean to them?
The initial breakthrough occurred at Antioch when Christians from Cyprus and Cyrene began to speak to “Gentiles as well, telling them the good news of the Lord (kurios) Jesus” (Acts 11:20). These disciples dropped the term Messiah which meant so much to them but which was liable to portray Jesus as a national savior. Instead they used the term kurios. This was a bold step, for kurios was the common title given to deities of the Greek pagan religions. But they took the risk and filled the term with universal significance as they taught of the Christ who had come to save all people.

The apostle Paul used the term “Messiah” only in proving to the Hebrews that Jesus was the Messiah (Acts 9:22). In speaking to the Gentiles he too used kurios in the universal sense. He also used other Greek words such as logos and πλορομα which were filled with philosophical meanings that Paul could harness to explain who Jesus was and the significance of the incarnation. In so doing he invested the terms with new meanings. He taught that the purpose of God for the entire human race was revealed in Christ—and this was something the Greek philosophers had failed to find by their wisdom (1 Cor 1:21-24; 2:6-10; see also Eph 1:9, 10; Phil 2:5-11; and Col 1:13-20).

This translation of the message of Christ immensely broadened and deepened the theological understanding of the significance of Christ. In addition, it expanded understandings of who constituted the community of Christ. Paul taught that Christ had broken down the walls dividing Hebrews and Gentiles (Eph 2:11-22). Gentile believers were no longer “aliens, but fellow citizens, members of God’s household.” A corollary was that it was no longer necessary for converts to undergo the Jewish rites of induction or keep all of the rituals of Israel in order to join the new community of Christ.

The Council of Jerusalem at which these issues were discussed was a watershed in Christian history. There were those who were convinced that in order for the Gentiles to join Israel, it was necessary for them to enter the covenant of God with Israel by circumcision, and keep the details of the ceremonial law. After “much debate” (this is not difficult to imagine) the Council in effect decided (Acts 15:23-29) that these traditional rites were for Jewish Christians and not required of Gentiles.

One wonders whether the mother church of Christianity at Jerusalem fully understood the significance of what they had decided. Did they have any idea that the future of Christianity in a sense lay with these Gentile Christians whom they regarded as having an inadequate understanding of the prophets and of the law and its rituals? On the other hand, did they themselves adequately
understand the intellectual breadth and depth of the Christological concerns with which these new, Greek Christians were beginning to wrestle?

The Christological issues the Greek Church faced were quite different from those with which the Jewish Christians wrestled. It was difficult for Greeks to accept the full implications of Christ's entry into human existence, in spite of the teaching of the apostle Paul. John writes of persons who were reluctant to “confess that Christ had come in the flesh” (1 John 4:2). This, it is believed, stemmed from Greek dualism in which the realm of flesh was regarded as the sphere of corruption and unreality. If Christ came to deliver humans from the realm of flesh, it was argued, then his involvement in it could only have been apparent and not real. Such Christians were called Docetists from the Greek dokein, meaning to appear. They accepted the historical existence of Christ and thus reduced it to an appearance. This is almost precisely the opposite of Hebrew Ebionitism. Both views set up an antithesis between the Divine and earthly beings which virtually precluded the union of the divine and human natures of Christ. This was a tragic turn of thought because our Lord took human flesh and dwelt among us to show his closeness to us. Through Christ we have access, open and free, to the Father. Both views blocked the way to a recognition of the immense depth of meaning inherent in the incarnation. The early church wrestled with these and related issues and eventually adopted a creed affirming the double homoousios of our Lord and Savior—his full humanity and his full divinity—which had vast significance for the understanding of the nature and destiny of human beings.

The Gentile Church came to live by a double heritage. They adopted the heritage of the Hebrew Church, particularly that of its elevated concept of God the Creator and Sustainer of all that is, and the concept of a moral universe. But even as they lived by this heritage, their Greek intellectual heritage led them to explore the significance of the incarnation and in so doing they expanded the understanding of the meaning of the gospel for subsequent generations of Christians. The gospel was clarified and enriched during this process of translation.

I recount this history because there is much about the contemporary challenge of translating the gospel for the populations of the great Asian religions that is parallel to the process described above. In addition it illustrates both the necessity of, and dangers inherent in, the process of translation. The Gentile Church faced issues the Hebrews had never faced and could hardly be expected to understand. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit new ways
of conceptualizing the mystery of Jesus Christ were found which have been helpful to this day.

This is probably the greatest example of its kind in the history of the church, but certainly not the only case of reinvestigation of the central meaning of the gospel with ensuing correction and enrichment. This is an ongoing process. I was frequently challenged to examine my own faith in the presence of primal people. Much about the reverence and awe of God can be learned from Muslims. William Temple, who was much preoccupied with the gospel of John, is reputed to have said that we await a commentary, by a Christian who has come out of Hinduism, to open the full depth of this gospel to us.

**Application to Contemporary Mission Praxis**

The purpose of this brief survey of some facets of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and of the experience of the early Jewish Christian and Gentile Churches is to highlight principles intrinsic to the mission of the church.

Mission is God's mission, and the defining act in that mission is the incarnation. This central act of translation sets the stage for all subsequent attempts to translate the meaning of Jesus Christ for the peoples of earth. The immense breadth and depth of the incarnation provides vast resources upon which the disciple can draw in communicating the meaning of the gospel. The tension between the particularity or Jewishness of Jesus Christ and the universality of his status and purposes as the Son of God foreshadows, in a sense, both the particularity of a given community of faith and the universality of the church as the body of Christ. And we have taken note of the twin principles of translation/contextualization in the communication of the message, and of the transforming and universalizing power of the gospel which leads to pilgrimage.

We now seek to apply this pattern of thought to the three issues outlined above, which provide the occasion for this paper. Circumstances of mission and the religious orientation of host societies are diverse in the extreme. Different approaches may be needed, and each of the above topics is worthy of a book. The best that can be done here regarding the first two concerns is to describe cases and situations which facilitate the drawing of somewhat general conclusions. A slightly broader discussion of the use and functions of creeds/confessions follows later.
The necessity of translation/contextualization is so obvious as not to require justification. Unless the message is communicated in terms that can be understood and which engage, there can hardly be an adequate response. The process of contextualization is extremely complex and requires skills of many kinds. But it is a joyful challenge that faces every serious disciple in one way or another, which we gladly accept. The task becomes ever more complex as the cultural and religious distance between the disciple and the prospective convert widens.

It is not our purpose to explore the process of contextualization in detail here. There exists a large and readily available literature. The focus is rather upon the tension between contextualization that conveys the message with fidelity and that which goes too far in utilizing alien religious concepts and opens the way to syncretism. It is not a simple matter in the short haul to differentiate between the two. The focus here will be on a current debate among evangelicals regarding contextualization among Muslims—doubtless one of the greatest challenges the church faces.

Before doing so it seems helpful to point out that a failure to adequately contextualize is fully as fruitful of syncretism, and perhaps on a wider scale, than overzealous contextualization. This is not always recognized because it generally results in a fairly widely-distributed, low-grade form, as over against the more highly visible dramatic examples in the latter case.

For instance, I discovered that prayers were addressed to ancestors as avenues of access to God alongside of Jesus Christ in prayer meeting circles in several Protestant communities in Zimbabwe. I also discovered that several of the independent churches were more successful in combating this trend than were the major churches. On one occasion Bishop Mutendi, one of the noted Zionist leaders in Zimbabwe, explained to me, “We still dance and sing and preach and pray like Africans, but we take the ancestors out of their hearts. Our services are responsive to their needs, (i.e., we provide functional substitutes to traditional rituals for protection and blessing and healing) and give them much happiness. You missionaries change people on the outside but you don’t know what is in their hearts and can’t take the ancestors out.” I knew this movement and this man well enough to know that there was much truth to what he said.

By and large, in many areas of Africa inadequate attention has been given to matters relating to traditional rituals of initiation, protection against sorcery
and evil spirits, divination and healing, and above all to funerals and induction of the deceased into the other world at second funerary services. This has resulted in a sort of dual allegiance in which members appeal alternately to the great transcendent tradition of Christianity and the little African tradition according to need. At the same time, these people are vibrant Christians with a faith in the closeness of the divine that shames ours.

By and large, this is not yet syncretism as is the case when formal prayers are offered to ancestors, but tends to develop in that direction. Several anthropologists, and one Roman Catholic theologian with whom I am acquainted, recognize a parallel in this to the Christianization of Europe in which ancestor-related beliefs were syncretized into the doctrine of holy souls in purgatory and saints in heaven. Of course, this was facilitated by a predisposing Greek dualism.

Objective analysis has led missiologists to the conclusion that this tendency in Africa and among other primal peoples is the result of inadequate contextualization. They suggest that the best solution to remedy the situation is for church leaders and responsible lay persons to engage in an exercise of critical contextualization in which traditional beliefs and rituals are carefully examined as to their compatibility with the gospel. This, in turn, can lead to decision making by the Christian community regarding appropriate theological instruction and forms and occasions of ritual and worship.

A Case in Muslim Evangelism

There is an ongoing debate among evangelicals regarding the extent to which the disciple identifies with and contextualizes the message to Muslims which provides a platform for useful discussion.³

The challenges in the communication of the gospel to Muslims are many and complex and vary from society to society. There has been a conviction that not nearly enough has been done and that much bolder forms of identification and contextualization are needed. Some have suggested that the disciple should declare himself or herself to be a Muslim and participate in prayers in the mosque. Such a person, it is said, becomes like a Muslim in order to win Muslims (1 Cor 9:19, 20). Or, to state the strategy another way, one has to begin within the Muslim mind and heart and identify with them in what they accept and value. There is general agreement that much more needs to be done. The problem is exactly what to do and how far to go.
The issues that stand out in such radical contextualization may be clustered together under several headings. There are, first of all, questions as to how far the disciple should go to win Muslims. Is it advisable to worship and participate in prayers at the mosque and keep the feast of Ramadan? Is it wise and advantageous to take a Muslim identity? Is there the danger that the disciple in going to these lengths sets a pattern that predisposes new converts in the direction of syncretism from which it is difficult to extricate them? Some evangelicals are prepared to make these bold advances. Others are considerably more cautious and regard some such measures as dysfunctional. Experimentation is underway, but it is too early to judge the results.

Without fairly radical contextualization and identification, the disciple fails to engage as has been the pattern in the past. On the other hand, the danger of betraying the Christian faith is real and the line between the two is thin. In addition, practical matters regarding human rights, the exercise of Sharia law, and the degree of social antagonism to conversion vary from society to society. What can be done in one place may not be possible in another.

Secondly, how far does the disciple go in using the Qur’an and Islamic religious terms for God, Jesus, salvation, etc.? Debates and differences of opinion in regards to this go back to early church history. The Tertullian statement, “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” and Ricci and the famous “Rites Controversy” are cases in point. The general consensus in this connection appears to be favorable, but within limits. Throughout its history Christianity has often taken traditional terms and concepts and filled them with new meaning. Why not do so once again in mission to Muslims? The Qur’an has frequently been used as a bridge to convey elements of the Christian faith. Here again unless care is taken, this may serve to affirm the authority of the Qur’an and impede the acceptance of the Scriptures as the final authority. The Global Mission Issues Statement on “Sacred Writings” is similar to the view of evangelical moderates. The second clause of this statement, however, may be a little more restrictive.

The third issue of what to do with new converts is discussed in the following section.

John Travis, (a pseudonym) has drawn up the following scale that compares and contrasts types of “Christ-centered communities” in Muslim societies. I include it here as a basis for discussion. “C” stands for Community. Travis introduces the typology with the following statement of purpose:
The spectrum attempts to address the enormous diversity which exists throughout the Muslim world in terms of ethnicity, history, traditions, language, culture, and, in some cases, theology. The purpose of the spectrum is to assist church planters and Muslim background believers to ascertain which type of Christ-centered communities may draw the most people from the target group to Christ and best fit in a given context. All of these six types are presently found in some part of the Muslim world (Travis 1998:407-408).

**C1 Traditional Church Using Outsider Language**

May be Orthodox, Catholic, or Protestant. Some predate Islam. Thousands of C1 churches are found in Muslim lands today. Many reflect Western culture. A huge cultural chasm often exists between the church and the surrounding Muslim community. Some Muslim background believers may be found in C1 churches. C1 believers call themselves “Christians.”

**C2 Traditional Church Using Insider Language**

Essentially the same as C1 except for language. Though insider language is used, religious vocabulary is probably non-Islamic (distinctively “Christian”). The cultural gap between Muslims and C2 is still large. Often more Muslim background believers are found in C2 than C1. The majority of churches located in the Muslim world today are C1 or C2. C2 believers call themselves “Christians.”

**C3 Contextualized Christ-Centered Communities Using Insider Language and Religiously Neutral Insider Cultural Forms**

Religiously neutral forms may include folk music, ethnic dress, artwork, etc. Islamic elements (where present) are “filtered out” so as to use purely “cultural” forms. The aim is to reduce foreignness of the gospel and the church by contextualizing to biblically permissible cultural forms. May meet in a church building or more religiously neutral location. C3 congregations are comprised of a majority of Muslim background believers. C3 believers call themselves “Christians.”

**C4 Contextualized Christ-Centered Communities Using Insider Language and Biblically Permissible Cultural and Islamic Forms**

Similar to C3, however, biblically permissible Islamic forms and practices are also utilized (e.g., praying with raised hands, keeping the fast, avoiding pork, alcohol, and dogs as pets, using Islamic terms, dress, etc.). C1 and C2 forms avoided. Meetings not held in church buildings. C4 communities are comprised almost entirely of Muslim
background believers. C4 believers, though highly contextualized, are usually not seen as Muslim by the Muslim community. C4 believers identify themselves as “followers of Isa the Messiah” (or something similar).

**C5 Christ-Centered Communities of “Messianic Muslims” Who Have Accepted Jesus As Lord and Savior.**

C5 believers remain legally and socially within the community of Islam. Somewhat similar to the Messianic Jewish movement. Aspects of Islamic theology which are incompatible with the Bible are rejected, or reinterpreted if possible. Participation in corporate Islamic worship varies from person to person and group to group. C5 believers meet regularly with other C5 believers and share their faith with unsaved Muslims. Unsaved Muslims may see C5 believers as theologically deviant and may eventually expel them from the community of Islam. Where entire villages accept Christ, C5 may result in “Messianic mosques.” C5 believers are viewed as Muslims by the Muslim community and refer to themselves as Muslims who follow Isa the Messiah.

**C6 Small Christ-Centered Communities of Secret/Underground Believers**

Similar to persecuted believers suffering under totalitarian regimes. Due to fear, isolation, or threat of extreme governmental/community legal action or retaliation (including capital punishment), C6 believers worship Christ secretly (individually or perhaps infrequently in small clusters). Many come to Christ through dreams, visions, miracles, radio broadcasts, tracts, Christian witness while abroad, or reading the Bible on their own initiative. C6 (as opposed to C5) believers are usually silent about their faith. C6 is not ideal; God desires his people to witness and have regular fellowship (Heb 10:25). Nonetheless C6 believers are part of our family in Christ. Though God may call some to a life of suffering, imprisonment, or martyrdom, he may be pleased to have some worship him in secret, at least for a time. C6 believers are perceived as Muslims by the Muslim community and identify themselves as Muslims (Travis 1998:407-408).

It is probably true to say that Evangelicals are divided between C4 and C5 models; in fact this is what the current turmoil is about. It is still too early to accurately assess the results of this bold evangelical program. Innovative and prudent methods should be encouraged and carefully monitored.

**Individual Christians, Community, and Church**

The purpose of contextualization is to communicate the gospel to particular peoples in thought forms and categories that are understood. Faithful mis-
Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission

Missionary effort is empowered by the Holy Spirit who leads the seeker to conversion. Conversion leads to baptism and baptism has a dual function. It signifies not only death and rebirth with Christ, but also entry into the church, the body of Christ.

The question that then inevitably follows is what to do with, and how best to care for, the new member. Is membership in the visible Christian community intrinsic to conversion? It is hardly a serious issue in some societies, but it assumes immense proportions in some countries in which there is a dominant world religion.

A perusal of the “Country Surveys” in Barrett’s World Christian Encyclopedia serves to acquaint the reader with striking evidence of the enormity of this issue. Barrett lists “Crypto Christians” in sixty-five countries and in some of these they constitute about a third of all Christians. This percentage is generally higher in rigidly Islamic countries, but is also a significant statistic in other countries of Asia. Crypto Christians do not have visible connections with a church. However, Barrett lists them as part of the “underground church” and not as nominal Christians. He describes them as “refusing to publicize their religious beliefs, or divulge them to the state, in order to protect their rights from hostile states” (Barrett 1983:5). He gives no further analysis of the phenomenon, no breakdown as to whether they live as loners in society, or what percentage are Christian Hindus or Christian Muslims in the temple or mosque, but, in fact, pray to Christ. These are largely the C6 type of Christian.

All of this constitutes an enormous missionary challenge. The dimensions and seriousness of the problem varies according to the society. There is abundant evidence that to bring Muslims immediately into a C1 or C2 church may have dire consequences in some countries. Significant numbers either revert or emigrate. Over the years I have seen quite a few references in the general missiological literature to the tendency for Muslim and Hindu converts to emigrate. The cumulative effect of this gives the impression that this is more commonly the case among Adventists than in most other communities. Tension between the Protestant conviction that membership in the church is intrinsically connected with conversion and commitment to Christ, on the one hand and the dangers of physical injury, legal disability, and social isolation on the other are very real in many circumstances.

The missionary dilemma of what to do with enthusiastic converts in such societies is not new. One thinks of de Nobili among the Brahmans, J. N. Farquhar of Christ, the Crown of Hinduism fame, and McGavran, also in India,
who sought a solution in the homogenous unit principle which he eventually expanded into a major factor in his church growth theory. A more recent debate between Lesslie Newbigin and M. M. Thomas serves to clarify the issues involved.  

Sociological surveys conducted in the 1960s indicated that thousands of Christians believed in “Jesus as the only God” in the major cities of India, though they had no visible connection with the Christian church. This was a surprising and shocking revelation at the time. Christian theologian Kai Baago picked up on the issue and asked, “Must Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims become Christians in order to belong to Christ?” Perhaps influenced by Farquhar and the Hindu belief that all religions are equally valid paths to the one unknowable God, Baago advocated that Christians, instead of withdrawing from Hinduism, should form a Hindu Christianity.

This issue was taken up in debate by Newbigin who had been a missionary in India for many years, served in Geneva as director of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism, and had recently returned as a missionary to Madras. A decade earlier Newbigin had written *The Household of God* which is as much an exposition of the church in the Scriptures as a theological study. His theological orientation is clearly stated at the outset.

The whole core of biblical history is the story of the calling of a visible community to be God’s own people, His royal priesthood on earth, the bearer of His light to the nations. . . . There is an actual, visible, early company which is addressed as “the people of God,” the “Body of Christ.” It is surely a fact of inexhaustible significance that what our Lord left behind Him was not a book, nor a creed, nor a system of thought, nor a rule of life, but a visible community. I think that we Protestants cannot too often reflect on that fact. He committed the entire work of salvation to that community (Newbigin 1954:20).

Newbigin maintained the following position throughout the debate,

This inward turning immediately and intrinsically . . . involves membership in a community. “The New Testament knows nothing of a relationship with Christ which is purely mental and spiritual, un-embodied in any of the structures of human relationship.” The essential confession of every new convert embraces belief not only “in the finality of the revelation of God in Jesus Christ, but also in the necessity of this community as part of the response to that revelation” (Hunsberger 1998:12).
Newbigin could not accept the concept of a “Hindu Christianity” or that of secret Messianic Hindu communities. He suggested in a lecture I heard that such were secret only to the Christian community and not to the Hindus. He states forthrightly:

A form of the church that breaks no solidarities is impossible if there is genuinely an explicit link of faith in Jesus. If someone is religiously, culturally, and socially a Hindu and "at the same time, his allegiance to Christ is accepted as decisive, as—therefore—over-riding his obligations as a Hindu, this allegiance must take visible—that is social—forms. He must have some way of expressing the fact that he shares this ultimate allegiance with others—and these ways will have to have religious, social and cultural elements" (Hunsberger 1998:115).

While stoutly maintaining the above position regarding commitment to Christ and membership in the church, he was flexible regarding two subsequent matters. First, that the young church should have the freedom, in fact be encouraged, to adopt forms of worship that are culturally familiar and spiritually fulfilling. Second, that the church have the freedom to wrestle with matters of structure and order and make ethical decisions regarding local issues, provided, of course, that all of this be in harmony with the gospel and the values inherent in it.

Adventist ecclesiology differs somewhat from that of Newbigin, for his ecclesiology is grounded in an ontological conception of the “Body of Christ” whereas Adventist ecclesiology is more functional than ontological and grounded in the sense of being a specially called-out people with a specific message to proclaim. Newbigin, nevertheless, places great weight on the witnessing function of the church. I find myself in agreement with his fundamental affirmation of the intrinsic continuity between conversion, baptism, and union with the Christ-centered fellowship of faith which is the church. The value of the debate lies in the clarity with which the single issue of the necessity of being a fellow member of the community which is the body of Christ comes to the fore.

It has been argued that Newbigin stressed the intrinsic connection between conversion and membership with sharp decisiveness because of the willingness of Hindus to accept Christian Hindus, and that he was the harbinger of a radical call to Christians to come out of the temple. Having read many of his books, I doubt that this was the case—everywhere the centrality of the church stands out in his life and work. Newbigin enunciates a universal tenet of the Christian faith which is as applicable in the Muslim as in every other context. The early
Jewish Christians in Jerusalem desperately needed the strength and support that comes from mutuality, and so do those who convert to Christianity under difficult circumstances.

The old saying, “ecclesiology determines missiology” is not wide of the truth. Years ago, while certainly seeing the direct connection between the two in Catholic and some of the mainline missions, I doubted whether it really held for Adventists. I was inclined to elevate eschatology above ecclesiology. And I think there is validity to this if one thinks of ecclesiology in the generally accepted sense, for we have not paid a great deal of attention to ecclesiology in the classical ontological sense. However, the strong sense of being a remnant called out to perform a specific task toward the end of earthly time constitutes an ecclesiology of a special kind, one that emphasizes the work and witness of the church above ontological conceptualities. It is this, plus distinctive doctrines regarding the significance of the Sabbath and the priestly ministry of Christ, and to a lesser extent a lifestyle that reflects Christian values, that lies at the heart of the powerful Adventist sense of identity. It is this remnant concept that has informed almost everything about the structure and polity and mission of the church. And it is this remnant concept that Whitehouse and Darnell have used so effectively in calling Muslims to a distinctive sense of identity and mission.

Once the intrinsic continuity between conversion and membership is affirmed, the question then arises as to what kind of Christ-centered community most effectively nurtures and enables witness to compatriots and is at the same time sociologically possible? Again, this is an immensely complex matter which requires careful investigation and monitoring.

While, like Newbigin, I have difficulty with indefinite Christian involvement in the mosque or temple and think in terms of distinct Christian communities (house churches) as the model to seek to realize, this kind of judgment must be left to those close to the situation and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Suffice it to say that I rejoice at the efforts that are being made to reach these great population blocks and pray that God will guide and give wisdom to those so involved.

There is a powerful sense of mutuality and support in the ummah of Allah. And, if we are to draw Christians out of the mosque, we will have to equal or go beyond the Muslim’s desire for and practice of prayer. In general, I am informed that Christian communities do not satisfy Muslim converts in this respect. This is a challenge to all of us.
The Christian Church has never been without creeds or confessions of faith. There are several in the Scriptures beginning with the Shema of Deut 6:4, 5. Several of those in the New Testament, especially Rom 10:9, 10 and 1 Pet 3:18-22, are thought to have been baptismal creeds. The most extensive and beautiful creed in the New Testament is 1 Tim 3:16 which was probably recited or sung by the congregation on occasion. As the beliefs of the Pauline churches met resistance from the Jews within the church, and then from philosophically inclined Greek converts, the church felt constrained to develop more nuanced and extensive creeds. These have constituted an essential ingredient in the life and witness of the church and have fulfilled several important functions. In particular three of these functions seem to be of relevance to our discussion.

First, and most important, is the missional function of the confessions. Key articles define the essential beliefs of Christianity and help the church to articulate the faith. Second, from the earliest of days, confessional statements have been used to defend the beliefs of the church against real or imagined attacks. They identify and uphold the essential doctrines and standards of the church and in so doing serve to maintain unity of belief and purpose. Third, confessional statements have served to establish parameters which define one confessional body as over against another. They also define boundaries for purposes of inclusion and exclusion of communities and members. Territory without boundaries has no in or out, and there is no strength in an amorphous multitude.

To claim neutrality in matters regarding Christian confession displays some indifference and perhaps also a lack of certainty about what the Christian faith and church are all about. At the same time, it seems necessary to point to a certain kind of paradox which has always existed, but is now much more in evidence because of the diversity in unity of the worldwide church. As was manifest in the ministry of our Lord, there is both that which is particular and that which is universal in all confessional statements. All were written at a particular time and place and are couched in identifiable thought forms. At the same time all point to the universal truth of God and his purposes for human beings as revealed in Jesus Christ.

It is the particularity aspect of this paradox that has constituted the grounds for the fairly extensive ferment regarding the confessions among the younger churches, especially in Asia, during the past forty years. The major arguments
advanced by the younger churches have been, (1) that the faith needed to be expressed in categories that make sense in local cultures, and (2) that confessional statements should address issues peculiar to particular societies. It is argued that the categories of Western thought in which the creeds are couched do not fit local patterns of thought, and further that the issues of Europe are not applicable to local concerns. As a result, several new confessions have been drafted and accepted and there has been some revision of confessional statements. On balance, perhaps more attention has been paid to the drafting or re-drafting of catechisms in order to make them more effective in addressing local issues.6

In this discussion, several of the older churches have maintained that acceptance of the same confession by member churches of the world body is essential to unity. The counter claim has been that inasmuch as parts of the confession are likely to be misunderstood, the cause of unity is better served by revised or different statements that make the essential meaning clear. There is much to be said in favor of both positions. Two alternative solutions have been employed. In the first, the central tenets of the faith, what is essential to the essence of the gospel and what it means to be a Christian, are gathered together and distinguished from second order concerns (such as matters relating to church order and practice and local ethics) which may be reinterpreted so as to answer local needs. In the second, the confession of faith may be left intact as a universal witness, and the major focus of attention, at least early in the convert’s experience, moved to catechisms. In these, the central tenets of the faith may be gathered together and explained in local thought forms. This may be followed by explication of subsidiary matters, which in turn may be followed by application of the gospel to local issues. I must confess that I leaned toward this solution, and embarked upon a process of critical contextualization in this direction before leaving Zimbabwe quite a few years ago.

The Adventist situation is not exactly parallel to that of the mainline churches. Early Adventists were influenced by the Christian Connection movement which was anti-creedal, anti-formalist, and anti-Trinitarian, and as late as 1872 affirmed, “We have no articles of faith, creed, or discipline aside from the Bible,” (from the 1872 “Synopsis”). The disclaimers attached to the 1872 Synopsis indicate that it was primarily intended to define who Seventh-day Adventists were over against other Adventist communities and not designed in the first instance to secure uniformity within the church. It was not until 1931 that a statement of some eighteen fundamental beliefs was formally accepted and published. This had its origin in a request from missionaries in
Kenya who sought recognition by the Christian Council of Kenya, rather than out of concern for a confession to cement church unity. The long delay in formally accepting a statement of fundamental beliefs is testimony to the strong Adventist sense of identity. The statement of Fundamental Beliefs has been revised several times since, and completely redrafted (the 1980 statement), and has steadily been accorded greater weight in the life and witness of the church in spite of the introductory sentence which reads, “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Scripture.”

As the introductory sentence also makes clear, the statement of Adventist fundamental beliefs owes less to the ecumenical creeds and Protestant confessions, (although it is more inclined in that direction than was the 1931 statement) than are most contemporary Protestant statements and is derived more from exposition of the Scriptures.

We now come to the use and acceptance of the Adventist Statement of Fundamental Beliefs in the mission of the church. There is nothing of what is called foundational theology in the Fundamental Beliefs, i.e., nothing that starts before Scripture that seeks to demonstrate the reasonableness of the existence of God or account for the less-than-perfect human condition or to explore intimations of a consciousness of the divine or to show the reasonableness of revelation. The basis for acceptance of the fundamental statements is prior acceptance of the authority of Scripture. This is of particular significance when it comes to dealing with the mind-set of the great Asian religions. The early Christian creeds interacted with the contemporary mind-set in their world and served a missional function more effectively than do most contemporary confessions. This is due both to the nature of the confessions and of the wide conceptual and religious diversity in which the church seeks to bear witness.

The Adventist Church has a wonderful sense of identity—social scientists describe it, like the family, as a primary society. Religious belief defines reality and constitutes the basis on which important decisions are made. Within this context, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is an instrument that defines purpose and unites. It can certainly serve a missional purpose in communities which accept the authority of Scripture. However, in working with adherents of the great philosophical religions of Asia, it would seem to be necessary to start elsewhere.

Under such circumstances catechisms which start where the people are, [a Roman Catholic catechism for Africa starts, “Your heart knows there is a God .
. .” (quoted from memory)] goes on to expositions regarding belief in God the Father and Jesus Christ, and the central truths of the gospel serve a highly useful purpose. It is the function of such catechisms to lead to understanding of the Christian faith, acceptance of the Scriptures as the revealed Word of God, of Christ as their personal Savior, and in due course to membership in the community of the church. In this way a bridge is built between the local and the universal. Acceptance of Adventist Fundamental Beliefs should grow along the way. In some societies, even though the pilgrim principle is powerful, this may be a slow process, because the convert may have formidable intellectual barriers to overcome. Even if there has been a dramatic conversion experience, the convert may have major adjustments of thought and life to make before the fundamental beliefs in their entirety are experientially helpful.

**Conclusion**

No attempt is made at a full summary; this paper is already somewhat repetitious. Principles intrinsic to the task of mission have been derived from the life and ministry of our Lord and the experience of the early church. Application of these to the task of spreading the message and establishing the church among the populations of the world religions is illustrated with reference to three significant and much discussed issues in relationship to mission among adherents of the great world religions: (1) the relationship of conversion to church membership and witness, (2) the extent to which identification and contextualization may be carried in view of the ever present tendency toward syncretism, and (3) debates between the older and younger churches regarding confessions of faith.

What significance does all of this have for the current concerns of the Adventist Global Mission undertaking? First, the recognition that many of the issues and obstacles we encounter as we seek to respond to the challenges of this particular sector of the missionary task have been, or are being, wrestled with by others. Much careful thinking and dedicated work has been expended on some of these issues and this constitutes a valuable source of information which may be of help to us. I find that most missiologists are quite open to frank discussion and even networking. We have the opportunity of learning from and building on the work of others and adding our own special approach.

Second, recognition of the diversity and complexity of the various missionary situations precludes the possibility of establishing overly restrictive guide-
Translation from the general to the particular can only be properly made by those intimately involved in the local situation. Church leaders should be able to work together in full confidence and those in the field should be accorded the responsibility of making decisions regarding appropriate courses of action. Mutual planning and the free flow of information sustain both support and trust. It would seem that much can be achieved by small teams working together who seek the best information, experiment cautiously, constantly monitor programs, and who are willing to discontinue approaches producing adverse effects, and try alternate or modified methods. Above all, field practitioners need encouragement, support, and the prayers of all God’s people.

The development of catechisms which start where the people are, and outline the cardinal beliefs of the Adventist Church in a way that engages local patterns of thought and concerns may be helpful. This requires a process of critical contextualization involving local leaders, lay people, and one or two who are well acquainted with the ethos and doctrine of the world church and its mission.

The challenge of inspiring and equipping all believers in Christ to become witnessing members of the church is great. Perhaps many will respond to this call if we can lead them to rewarding ways of bearing testimony. May God help us in achieving this.

Third, we recognize that all mission is the mission of God. God can open gateways where there are none, and turn the hearts of people to him. The entire church needs to be much more in prayer for these people and for those disciples who are commissioned to work among them. At times the magnitude and difficulty of the task and the restricted ports of entry constrain us to cry out, “who is equal to these things?” But God has called his church to bear this witness and he will lead us on. Thus we press forward in faith and with the joy of our Lord in our hearts.

A Subscript

In a sense this is a typically Adventist paper. Perhaps because of the topic, perhaps because of who we are, it deals with the intellectual side of issues. But Christianity is more than correct belief. It also has to do with experience, the experience of believers meeting together, experience in prayer, at the communion table, and experience with the Lord. It is experience that drives the well-springs of action. We should not, and may not, neglect the challenge of rational
communication of the message, but do we take the experiential dimensions of
the Christian pilgrimage seriously enough, and do we adequately nurture it in
others? I find a great challenge in this.

May God guide and bless all those who have dedicated their lives to him in
this challenging mission.

Notes

1I am indebted to Prof. Andrew Walls, who introduced this pattern of thought in
a lecture.

2The tension in this case is different from the more usual tension internal to the
principle of translation, i.e. between translation that portrays the meaning of the
gospel with fidelity and a pattern of translation that distorts the meaning of the gospel
and leads to syncretism. This will be discussed later in this paper.

3See articles by Phil Parshall, John Travis, and Dean Gilliland, 1998, *Evangelical
Missions Quarterly* vol. 34, no. 4 (October).

4Details of the debate are contained in chap. 5 in George R. Hunsberger, 1998,*Bearing the Witness of the Spirit*, Eerdmans and *International Bulletin of Missionary

5The term “creeds” is usually restricted to the ecumenical symbols. These are
relatively brief and restricted to the essentials of the faith. “Confessions” is generally
used in connection with statements of belief of the various confessional bodies, i.e.,
the Augsburg Confession.

6All of this has a fairly extensive history which we cannot recount here. See G.
C. Oosthuizen, 1972, *Theological Battleground in Asia and Africa*. Hurst. See Interalia,

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Chapter 9

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1999 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor’s Note: At the conclusion of each year’s Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 1999 three recommendations were prepared dealing with the fundamental beliefs and preparation for baptism, contextualized Adventist communities, and our mission and other Christians.

Fundamental Beliefs and Preparation for Baptism

Recommended 14 January 1999

We recognize that the Adventist statements of belief and practice such as the 27 Fundamental Beliefs, the Baptismal Vows, the Church Manual and even most series of Bible Studies and evangelistic sermons were framed in the context of a relationship to other Christians. The mission to non-Christians demands that we understand and relate to these statements in new ways. New questions will be asked, and thus new methods of explanation must be sought. We affirm the validity of these statements of belief but recognize that their presentation and explication must be altered in order that the non-Christian may adequately understand our message, and we encourage the development of local Bible studies and teaching instruments.
The religious centers, along with front-line workers, must do the work of adapting the message of the Church to their specific targets in consultation with the larger church community, including missiologists, theologians and administrators.

**Baptismal Guidelines**

In the preparation of individuals for baptism into the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these sequential guidelines must all be followed:

1. Candidates must have an understanding of biblical teachings and a personal experience of salvation.
2. Candidates must be mentored by the present community of believers until this community is satisfied that the candidate has reached an adequate Christ-centered experience and a biblically-based faith.
3. The baptismal vow as set forth in the *Church Manual* must be taken as summarizing the minimum required beliefs and experiences for baptism.

*Think it through:* “Before baptism there should be a thorough inquiry as to the experience of the candidates. Let this inquiry be made, not in a cold and distant way, but kindly, tenderly, pointing the new converts to the lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. Bring the requirements of the gospel to bear upon the candidates for baptism” (Testimonies 6:96).

**Fundamental Beliefs and Preparation for Baptism**

*Statement as Approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee and as Edited by the Biblical Research Institute June and July, 2003*

**Fundamental Beliefs and Non-Christians**

The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is an expression of the Church’s message in language that is meaningful to Christian communities. The challenge is to determine how to make this statement meaningful to societies where Christians are a minority or non-existent. The mission to non-Christians will raise new questions which are not addressed in the Fundamental Beliefs, and relevant biblical answers should be provided. The following suggestions could be of help when addressing this particular issue.
a. The way the Fundamental Beliefs are presented and the language used to present them must be carefully studied and selected in order to facilitate the comprehension of the Church’s message by non-Christians. The development of locally-prepared Bible studies and teaching instruments is to be encouraged.

b. The task just described should be done at the religious study centers, with the assistance of front-line workers and in consultation with the church community, theologians, missiologists, and administrators.

c. The religious study center directors should refer local questions and concerns not addressed in the fundamental beliefs to the Office of Global Mission of the General Conference for study.

Baptismal Guidelines

In the preparation of new converts for baptism and membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these sequential guidelines must be followed.

a. A candidate must give clear evidence of a personal experience of salvation by faith in Christ and of a clear understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist message.

b. A candidate must be guided by the local community of believers until the community can testify that the candidate has reached an adequate knowledge and experience of the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

c. The Baptismal Vow, as set forth in the Church Manual, must be taken as summarizing the minimum required beliefs and experiences for baptism.

Contextualized Adventist Communities

Recommended 14 January 1999

Traditionally the Adventist Church has faced great difficulties to produce regularly organized churches in many countries of the 10/40 Window. Such churches were often small and isolated. Growth was discouragingly slow. New believers sometimes reverted back to their old religion or sought relief through emigration, thus leaving the majority of the unreached peoples in the world without sustainable Adventist witness.

Recognizing these difficulties the Church has commissioned and encourages the Global Mission Centers to experiment with new approaches to evange-
Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission in resistant environments. These efforts have led to the successful establishment of various messianic communities that provide a nurturing environment for the new believers without extracting them from their environment. While these communities have been quite successful in generating a sense of identity and mission, their shape often differs from traditional Adventist structures. Some of these communities may be transitional in passage toward full identity with the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church, to be superseded as social and political conditions allow.

The freedom to shape the nurturing context for new believers in non-traditional ways is one of the vital elements of success where traditional church structures are not advisable. In these cases it is recommended:

1. That the new believers be taught from the beginning that there is a larger global community of believers that shares their commitment to God.

2. That a conscious effort be made to establish appropriate links to the existing regional or international structure of the Adventist Church without endangering the survival of the incipient community.

3. That leaders of these communities be brought into contact with the larger Adventist community, as circumstances permit, to ensure a growing awareness of the global mission of God’s remnant.

4. That the Church seeks to provide appropriate support for those who are called to pioneer these approaches as these specialized missions can at times lead to temporary isolation and misunderstanding in the larger Adventist community.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Our Mission and Other Christians

Recommended 14 January 1999

The Church, as the community and sign of God’s kingdom, has been called to embody God’s love in the world through proclaiming God’s everlasting gospel and calling people to trust and follow Christ in sincere worship, honest fellowship, committed discipleship, and humble service and witness.

Seventh-day Adventists believe it is God’s desire that the Good News be preached to all people, that none should perish. We value all Christians who
proclaim Christ's saving power and those agencies that are lifting up Christ as part of God's plan for world evangelization. We consider all Christians to be our brothers and sisters in Christ, desire to treat them with love and respect, and seek opportunities to pray and fellowship with them.

In his providence God has, throughout history, directed persons and movements to emphasize special aspects of the divine message. Seventh-day Adventists believe that their task is to proclaim biblical truth in the setting of a prophetic message, urging preparation for Christ's second coming (Rev 14:6-12). The “everlasting gospel” is to be preached at this time “to every nation, and kindred, and tongue and people” (v 6, see also Matt 28:18-20). Just as Christ did not limit the witness about himself to his immediate followers (Luke 9:49-50), Seventh-day Adventists assert that all Christian organizations should have freedom to carry out their special mission in every place.

While our mission is to the whole world, we recognize the special urgency to reach those who have not yet heard or who live where Christ's name may not be known. The Seventh-day Adventist Church teaches that each member has a biblical responsibility to proclaim the everlasting gospel. While the general church structure provides strategies and policies for mission, it recognizes that church members, congregations, and institutions plan and implement local mission initiatives.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations; and then the end will come (Matt 24:14).

*This statement was prepared November 14, 1996, at Andrews University by Bruce Bauer, Erich Baumgartner, Jon Dybdahl, Rudi Maier, Bruce Moyer, Russel Staples, Werner Vyhmeister, Nancy Vyhmeister (all from the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary), and Glen Wintermeyer (Adventist Frontier Missions), under the leadership of Mike Ryan, Global Mission.*

*Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.*
Chapter 10

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2000 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor's Note: At the conclusion of each year’s Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 2000 four recommendations were prepared dealing with relationships with world religions, the relationship between Adventism and Muslims, the relationship between Adventism and Hinduism, and the relationship between Adventism and Buddhism.

At the 2000 Global Mission Issues Committee no formal papers were presented, but there was discussion, and writing groups that worked on the four statements mentioned above.

Relationships with World Religions

Recommended 7 February 2000

As members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, we rejoice that God loves and cares for his creation—every human being from every race, culture, and belief. We recognize that God has revealed himself in many ways, which include certain values and truths found in the major world religions.

While respecting the beliefs of people of other faiths, as believers in Jesus, we want to share important and unique truths revealed in the Holy Bible. We
want to do so in language and ways that are meaningful and understandable to people in their own cultural context.

We want to treat people with love and respect, and insist that no one should be forced or in any way coerced to alter their beliefs. We expect other religious bodies to respond in the same spirit. We welcome dialogue with all faiths because we believe God is calling people from every race and religion to faithfully serve him and reflect his character.

We look forward to the day when people from all nations, races, and cultures will gather together to worship God.

*Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.*

**A Statement of the Relationship between Adventism and Muslims**

*Recommended 7 February 2000*

**Introduction**

Adventists, like Muslims, believe that the Almighty God created all peoples for good relationships and to understand each other. This belief should be reflected in all encounters with people of other faiths. In this spirit Adventists seek cordial relationships with Muslims. While differences exist, Adventists believe that a relationship based on mutual respect and understanding rather than ignorance and antagonism benefits all. This brief statement aims to promote that understanding and respect.

We acknowledge and regret the misunderstandings that have existed as a result of injustices such as the crusades and some jihads. In contrast, Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to conflict, violence, intolerance, and coercion. We are an “end-time,” world-wide movement of reconciliation that calls all people to prepare for the Day of Judgment.

**General Attitudes toward Life**

Seventh-day Adventists share with Muslims the conviction that life is centered in God as the creator and sustainer of life, permeating every aspect of our existence. We both recognize humanity as God’s stewards.
The Spiritual Life, Values, and Practices

Seventh-day Adventists recognize that Islam is one of the monotheistic faiths that traces its heritage back to Abraham. Submission to God, which is the meaning of the word Islam, is a desirable objective to be shared by all. Adventists see themselves as spiritual descendants of Abraham. Seventh-day Adventists share the strong common spiritual focus of Islam in preparation for the Last Day, the Day of Judgment, and the coming of Jesus (Isa el Masih). Adventists respect the piety and devotion to worship and prayer found in Islam. Seventh-day Adventists and Muslims place a high value on the family. Both teach personal honesty and integrity. Adventists share with Islam a common concern for avoiding anything that would destroy physical health or quality of life. Alcohol, gambling, and unclean meats are to be avoided. Muslim leaders have also issued statements forbidding tobacco and substance abuse.

Adventists recognize that personal faith is based on individual conscience and conviction. Adventists believe that there should be no coercion in religion, and that there should be respect for those of other faiths. We anticipate other religious bodies will respond in the same spirit of religious liberty.

Conclusion

Seventh-day Adventists recognize that there are areas of difference in belief, particularly in the area of God’s handling of the sin problem and the details of his revelation of himself. Areas of difference are seen as opportunities for mutually respectful dialogue, for understanding, honest inquiry, and evaluation.

Adventists encourage active dialogue and sharing with Muslims particularly in those areas of common faith and practice which can mutually encourage spiritual growth of all. It is our desire that this brief statement will lead Adventists and Muslims to respect each other as spiritual seekers and will lead to productive dialogue.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.
Adventists affirm that people of all nations, cultures, and religions are God’s children by creation. We affirm that people of all human civilizations, cultures, and belief systems deserve respect from those of other cultures and belief systems.

The Hindu belief system has an elaborate and highly developed philosophical structure. We recognize that this system developed together with one of the oldest and most highly sophisticated civilizations of history. Christianity has also been a part of this civilization for 2,000 years.

We appreciate that the civilization that has developed in the Indian sub-continent has produced a culture that is deeply religious, spiritually aware, and one that places high value on the devotional life. We appreciate that this culture has a value-system that gives high priority to the family, the nurture and discipline of children, and all interpersonal relationships. Adventists affirm and teach the importance of religious devotion and the cultivation of family values.

While recognizing that there are differences between Adventism and Hinduism, we hold certain values that are similar to those of Hindu culture, such as the respect for human life and the concept of non-violence in human relationships. With Hindus we share ideals of wholistic living, an emphasis on healthful living, and abstinence from alcohol and tobacco. With them we emphasize the value of a vegetarian diet.

We recognize that many Hindus hold Jesus Christ and his moral, ethical teaching in high regard and accept him as an incarnation of deity. Seventh-day Adventists believe that the biblical emphasis on the grace of God, the assurance of forgiveness of sin in this life, and the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ for sinners are concepts that can be highly valued by the people of this great civilization.

We affirm the human right of India’s spiritual teachers to proclaim their religious and philosophical beliefs wherever they choose. We expect the same privileges.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.
A Statement of the Relationship between Adventism and Buddhism

Recommended 7 February 2000

Introduction

Adventists believe that all people were created in the image of God. This belief should be reflected in all encounters with people of other faiths. Adventists seek cordial relationships with Buddhists. While real differences will always exist, Adventists believe that a relationship based on understanding and respect rather than ignorance and antagonism benefits all. This brief statement aims to promote that understanding and respect.

Understanding Buddhist/Adventist relationships is challenging because of the diversity found both in Christianity and Buddhism. Christianity’s three main branches—Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism—are paralleled by the three major branches of Buddhism—Hinayana or Southern Buddhism, Mahayana or Northern Buddhism, and Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhism—which are at least as diverse. Buddhism’s three main branches divide further into hundreds of sects as does Christianity. Adventism is a part of Protestant Christianity. While Seventh-day Adventists manifest some minor behavioral variations in different parts of the world, the Church is somewhat uniform as a whole.

General Attitude toward Life

Adventists and Buddhists believe that the ideal life is carefully lived and that doing good is essential. Religion is central to life and is to be taken seriously. Failure to do so brings unpleasant results which affect this life and beyond. Religion is a benefit to society and contributes to order, peace, harmony, and happiness for people.

Ethics and Morals

Buddhism, like Adventism, sees ethical, moral behavior as being essential to religion. The eight-fold path of Buddhism really is a statement of ethics—what should and should not be done. Proper ethical behavior is crucial
to the future life. In this Adventists also agree, even though the reasons for the behavior differ.

Specific things about Buddhism appeal particularly to Adventists. Buddhists in general are pacifists and normally avoid war. They do not believe in killing people (or even animals). This fits well with the Adventist respect for human life and belief in non-combatancy.

Buddhists also believe vegetarianism is ideal. While their reasons differ, Adventists and Buddhists both see value in abstaining from eating flesh. Both also believe in abstinence from alcoholic beverages and addictive drugs.

**Spirituality/Religious Life**

Buddhists take seriously the spiritual life. For most Buddhists, meditation is a key practice as evidenced by the fact that many Buddhist sects are differentiated not so much on variances in belief, but rather on diverging practices of meditation.

Adventists also take seriously piety and devotion to worship, meditation, and prayer as acts of commitment to a life of faith. Adventists and Buddhists can find common ground through an emphasis on the spiritual life and prayer.

**Beliefs and Doctrines**

Comparing beliefs and doctrines is difficult for two main reasons. First, for Adventists doctrines and beliefs are clearly defined and central to self-identity. For Buddhists the role of doctrine is less central and their definition is less detailed because of their emphasis on philosophical concepts, ethical behavior, and the spiritual life.

Central to Buddhist beliefs are: the Buddha, the monkhood, and the teaching (dharma or truth), and the “four noble truths”:
1. All of life is suffering
2. Suffering comes from desire
3. You get rid of suffering by getting rid of desire
4. You get rid of desire by following the eight-fold path of Buddhism

Underlying Buddhist beliefs and practices, are certain basic philosophical concepts such as Monism (or pantheism) and reincarnation. Seventh-day Adventism sees its self-identity defined in a specific detailed statement of belief based on Scripture.
The second comparison is difficult because Adventism begins with a personal God, while Buddhism does not mention God. Buddhism starts with the human condition, while Christianity starts with God’s revelation.

In agreement with Buddhists, Adventist believe that human beings do indeed suffer. This is common ground where dialogue can begin.

Conclusion

Our desire is that this brief statement will lead Adventists and Buddhists to take each other seriously as sincerely religious people, creating a basis for productive dialogue. Adventists believe that Buddhists should be free to practice and propagate their religion according to their conscience. Buddhists can grant the same freedom to Adventists.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.
To be or not to be a community is not an option for the church. By its calling and function, the church is the whole community of persons drawn together by Christ through the Spirit, to embody and proclaim God’s love and grace for a seeking world. This view of the church is clearly taught in Scripture. As one reads the New Testament, one is impressed by the fact that the word most frequently and expressively used to describe the nature and function of the church is *koinonia*. What is interesting and fascinating about this word is its amazing range and depth of meaning. It is used more than fifty times in the New Testament alone. In its root form it is variously translated as “that which is held in common, community, communion, fellowship, sharing, participation, partnership, generous.”

Community in this sense means having a part in something in which others have a part, consciously sharing something we hold in common, a life consciously grounded in a common element; one faith, one Lord, one hope, one Spirit.
Indubitably, in the minds of the early Christians, beginning with Jesus and the apostles, living in community was central to world mission. As the vehicle of God’s redemptive concern, the Christian community functions in two important and integrated forms. As the gathered community, it meets for fellowship, refreshing, and revitalization to nurture and sustain its internal life. As the scattered community it is sent into the world as witnesses to the transforming powers of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In short, the Christian community is essentially a missionary community and depends for its integrity and vitality on how well it fulfills its mission in and to the world. One of the blessings God has generously bestowed on this community is the gift of diverse cultures with their varied languages, memories, and ethnicities. And the glue that holds such a diverse and multicultural community together is God’s enduring love as revealed in Jesus Christ and the community’s commitment to world mission. Indeed this commitment to world mission defines who Christians are and their reason for existence. Furthermore, the quality of life and the principles that guide Christian community distinguish its role and function locally and globally. The biblical concept of community and living in community rejects the notion that this is a call for isolated saintliness or a solitary greatness as some religious organizations believe and practice. On the contrary the Bible teaches that living in community is a call to the church to be involved in the life of the world in every possible way without compromising its integrity or sacrificing its essential faith and mission. Metaphors such as a “light of the world,” “the salt of the earth,” “the city on a hill,” and “the harvest” all describe the Christian community in interaction with the world. How, in practical terms, could this be done? That is to say, how is living in community central to world mission?

Consider the following priestly model as one way of getting to the question. Douglas Hall, in his provocative study, Has the Church a Future, argues that the Christian community must understand itself and its function as a priestly community. The priestly life of the community is demonstrated in its sense of commitment to the world. Hall states: “If that sense of commitment is really the context of the church’s priestly activity (including its worship), it will help prevent the sin that has plagued it from the onset: its tendency to segregate the church from the world” (Hall 1980:123).

To grasp fully the deep sense of the priestly model, we need to remind ourselves, that the word “priestly” is not used in the catholic sense, a meaning that is vehemently rejected in certain Protestant circles.
In this paper, the priestly model is reminiscent of the Hebrew meaning of the word. The Old Testament uses the priestly concept always in the sense of representation. It was used as a description of the high priestly role of the Hebrew priests in representing the community before God and God to the community. It is also the word that best describes Christ’s ministry in the Garden of Gethsemane and in the heavenly sanctuary. In Gethsemane Christ was not there on his own behalf. He was there pleading humanity’s cause before God. He was there for the world. “Father, if it be possible let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will but thy will be done” (Matt 26:36-46). Both Christ and the Old Testament priests are before God not on their own behalf, but on behalf of the community. Christ represents sinful, broken humanity before God, and he represents God’s love, compassion, care, and justice to the world.

This is the pattern for the Christian community’s involvement in world mission. We do not only represent the crucified and risen Christ in and to the world; we also represent broken sinful humanity before God.

A community that loves and follows its Lord will be involved in the life of the world, just as Christ was involved. This was and remains the incarnational model that calls us to a deep level of commitment to world mission. The Christian community will understand its priestly role as central to world mission and consciously, bravely, and courageously enter into the human quest and struggle for love, justice, righteousness, hope, and the promise of a better world. In short, it will stand in solidarity, service, and sacrifice with suffering, estranged humanity with the hope of bringing them the Good News of God’s transforming love and grace, while at the same time sharing its goods in concrete ways. Incarnational witness is at times difficult, even risky, for the Christian community to so engage the world. The difficulty, in part, lies in our perception of what mission to the world represents.

Mission to and in the world is much more than getting the gospel out to people. It involves standing in solidarity with those among whom we are trying to represent Christ. If this is understood, it produces quite a different idea of mission from the one that has prevailed in much of our preaching, teaching, and writing.

The mission situation is not rooted in the situation of the moment, or in simply relieving the burden of those who are trapped in suffering, oppression, guilt, and sin. The mission to the world is rooted in the gospel itself. And the Christian community can remain true to its mission only if it intentionally structures itself in that society where it performs its services. In this way it will
be challenged to reflect on its life, and relieve itself of all that does not or cannot contribute to mission. Mission then becomes the orientation of the community. To be present with people in a realistic way is essential to our task of taking the gospel into all the world (see Hoekendijk 1966).

The gospel creates the community, while the community is the expression of the message. Christian community then remains central to mission because it is the form of a new society of women and men who are bearers of a distinctive quality of life. Here is the theological root of the new understanding of Christian community in the context of world mission.

To believe that “God so loved the world, that He gave His son,” and not to be caught up into his self-giving love is implicitly to deny that he gave. Just as the love of God has a double movement, inwards into his own being, and outwards towards his world, so the Christian community is to be filled with love towards its own members and towards all who are yet “outside.” Herein lays the Reformation concept of the community “gathered” and the church “scattered.” It is constrained by love and its pledge to represent that love in the world. The Christian message has taught us to care. Caring is the greatest thing in mission. Caring matters. The Christian community is that body or fellowship that lives to tell and to show how much God cares. If the care of God is to lay hold of people it must do so through people who care. The Christian community in the context of world mission will distinguish itself as a community that reaches out to people without regard or consideration of race, economic status, religious orientation, or national identity. Something will shine through with a light that makes people ask about the source of our faith, hope, and love. There is a special quality about the character of that community as a living witnessing fellowship.

The special character is in its message, and, in this case, the medium is the message. It is what we call the gospel, the astounding Good News that God cares. The ringing assurance that, “God so loved the world that he gave his only son,” carries tremendous power. He cares for every soul on the face of the earth. And He will go on caring. Telling and demonstrating this story must be our passion. This was the way the New Testament and early Christian community lived (see Acts 4:32f). For the early church, mission involved the twin notions of koinonia and kerugma—community and message or movement. This was their passion. And through the power of God, they turned the world upside down.
In a little town of nearly 2,000 people in Grenada, the Adventist Church was well-known and highly regarded as a caring community. It all started when a few people suddenly realized the central role of the community of faith as a missionary community. They made a beginning by addressing the needs of the aging, and by starting programs to help repair the homes of those who were poor. They demonstrated a capacity to care that they did not know they possessed. Digging wells, helping children to learn, working with unwed parents, and sharing their goods in concrete ways with the needy was all practiced in that community. Such caring caught the imagination and interest of the people, and the church's mission spread from village to village because of a caring, compassionate church community. We can never rest content to tread the safe and conventional paths of mission to and in the world. There are times when the Christian community must take its courage in both hands and be adventurous, bold, and risky. We may send missionaries to Africa, Asia, Europe, and North America but when the elementary rights of people are rejected or denied because of race, ethnicity, culture, or economic status in the interest of playing it “safe,” or in the name of convenience, or culture, or worst of all Christianity, then some protest from the Christian community calling for better things must be made if we are not to betray our mission or invalidate the claims of our faith.

If the community which claims and proclaims Jesus Christ as the foundation and head of its mission in the world does not speak and act for humanity which is God's; if we adjust our message and mission to accommodate injustice, and suffering, then we are not representing Christ. With the church's recovery, in recent years, of the concept that mission is of the essence of the church's life, and that it exists for mission, the Christian community is challenged to view its role and function in the world in a decisive way as it has never done in the past.

One contemporary theologian framed this concept with the following words:

The church is the people of God and will give an account of itself at all times to the God who called it into being, liberated it, and gathered it. It is therefore, before the divine forum that it will reflect upon its life and the form which this life takes, what it says and what it does not say, what is does and what it neglects to do. But the church is at the same time under obligation to human kind. Consequently, it will at all times render an account to men and women about the commission implicit
in its faith and the way it is fulfilling that commission. It will reflect on its life and the expression of its life in the forum of the world (Mollmann 1977:4).

The Christian community in its attempt to seek and to save those it believes should be brought into a saving relationship with Christ, has to be realistic about the nature of its mission and the challenges that mission presents in a rapidly changing world. In my view global mission, by its very nature and definition, necessitates taking seriously not only the spiritual well-being of non Christians, but the very context in which “they live and move and have their being.” It has to be total mission, otherwise the church will not be carrying out its mandate as God intended.

**Conclusion**

I have tried to show in this paper that the centrality of Christian community to world mission is revealed in the priestly model of representation. Mission necessarily involves pleading humanity's cause before God. It takes its cue from the ministry of Jesus, especially the incarnation, his Gethsemane experience, and his heavenly ministration in the sanctuary.

The Christian community, in order to truly represent God to humanity and humanity before God, has to take account from what obtains in society. If the Christian community claims to speak for God and I believe it does, then it is under obligation to be committed to every aspect of human life. This is not to argue that the church should find solutions to all of humanity’s cries and needs. Practically speaking that is not possible. But showing compassion, care, concern, and doing whatever it could to represent God is in fact central to its mission in any situation. Indeed that is its mission. Again Mollmann's insight is quite illuminating. He states: “What is required is not adroit adaptation to change social conditions but the inner renewal of the church by the Spirit of Christ, the power of the kingdom” (Mollmann 1977:23).

To be sure, our understanding and practice of Christian community in the context of world mission must be grounded in the clear and firm conviction of the theological doctrines of the incarnation and the cross. It must draw its motivation, mandate, and strategy from the relationship between Christ, the world, and the church. We are called to listen to what God says and do what He tells us to do. Our work in the world has to be carried out in harmony with Christ’s teaching example, and as such must be Christo-centric both from
above and from below. We are to ensure that it is practical and consistent with
his method for reaching the people in ways that will encourage them to want
to follow him

Let us, however, warn ourselves against an undue dependence on strategy,
planning, and hard work. Our human self-sufficiency will not bring greater
success than a total dependence on the Spirit who teaches us all we should do
in order to reach people with God’s love and care. Our confidence must never
be in our abilities. It has to be in God. His grace alone enables us to face our
task in the world with confidence and hope. Through Christ, God has prom-
ised to complete what he has begun.

In summary, I would like to suggest the following five points of what con-
stitutes a Christian community in the context of world mission. These are by
no means exhaustive.

First, the community must be rooted in the unconditional acceptance by
God for all. Preaching, worship, and service should reinforce the proclamation
of God’s grace and reflect the spontaneity of the gospel.

Second, the community should be inclusive and organized for a ministry
of mutuality.

Third, people should be accepting of one another, free to acknowledge
weakness, eager to listen to each other, and encourage each other without in-
crimination.

Fourth, the mission of that community should create righteousness in
society and it should include a strong commitment to overcome all forms of
discrimination. We hope such a community will see itself as an experiment in
grace, where God’s vision for humanity is being lived out now.

Fifth, the worship patterns, manner of decision making, structure, and ed-
ucational programs should reflect the strength and needs of the diverse ethnic,
racial, and gender groups that comprise our community.

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SPIRITUAL POWERS

LUKA T. DANIEL

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When I was much younger, I watched a magician conjure up a plate of rice which appeared to have come from no where by invoking what he called “the ninety-nine devils of India.” Are there such spiritual powers? My dictionary seems to give an affirmative answer. First it defines the word “spiritual,” as “pertaining to the spirit or soul, as distinguished from the physical nature, . . . pertaining to spirits or to spiritualists; supernatural or spiritualistic, . . . pertaining to the mind or intellect” (Webster’s Electronic Dictionary and Thesaurus 1994, s.v. “spiritual”) Incidentally, the Scriptures speak of three types of spirits: “the Spirit of God” (Rom 8:9), “spirits of demons” (Rev 16:14), and “the spirit of man” (1 Cor 2:11).

For the purpose of this paper, the best definitions of the word “power” are found in the Bible itself. Power is generally translated from the Hebrew word koach in the Old Testament (Exodus 32:11) and in the New Testament power is generally translated from three Greek words, namely, dunamis, exousia, and energia. However, while dunamis is translated as “power” in Rom 1:16, exousia is translated as “authority” in Matt 28:18 and energia as “energy” in Col 1:29. The English word “dynamite” is derived from the Greek word dunamis. Thus
Rom 1:16 would literally read, “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the dynamite of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile.”

The basic power of God is revealed in his word (Heb 4:12) and the power of Satan is death (Heb 2:14). But Deut 18:5 explains that humankind has the power of choice, and it is clear from Rom 8:16 and Luke 22:3 that our minds can be influenced by God or by Satan. For example, when Peter declared that Jesus was the Messiah, “the Son of the living God” (Matt 16:16), Jesus commended him for allowing God to speak through him (Matt 16:17). However, we read later in (Matt 16:23) how Jesus sharply rebuked Peter by saying, “Get behind me, Satan,” when Peter tried to prevent the Savior from doing what he came from heaven to do, namely, to die for the remission of our sins. Thus, the use of our power of choice plays a significant role in the use or misuse of spiritual powers.

**Gift of the Spirit**

Before the Messiah left, he promised to send “another Comforter . . . the Spirit of truth” or “Holy Spirit” (John 14:16-18, 26). This baptism or coming of the Spirit took place as promised on the Day of Pentecost, according to Acts 2. Peter, who played a leading role in that memorable event, asserted that we normally receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit” at the time of water baptism (Acts 2:38). From the time the Spirit comes to each of us, he is expected to dwell in us, to guide our thoughts and actions, and prepare us for the kingdom of glory. Thus Paul warns, “Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30).

Satan imitates the Holy Spirit, but there are clear differences. The indwelling Holy Spirit operates as a single being, but Satan usually employs a number of demons. For example, Jesus cast “seven demons” out of Mary Magdalene (Luke 8:2) and a “mob of demons” out of the mad man he met in the region of the Gerasenes (Mark 5:9, 15, TEV). Similarly, the Holy Spirit “fills” individuals (Eph 5:18), allowing them the free use of their will, while Satan “possesses” the individual (Mark 1:23), allowing little or no freedom of choice. The Holy Spirit quits peacefully (1 Sam 16:14), but demons never leave without a fight (Luke 4:15; 9:42).
Spiritual Gifts

God gives people natural talents and also enables others to develop certain skills later in life. But God also gives spiritual gifts as mentioned in Rom 12, 1 Cor 12, and in the parable of the talents in Matt 25. God is a good God, and the gifts that come from him are good and are for the building up of the body of Christ. When Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit and God’s power came upon him, he “went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil” (Acts 10:38).

Popular Gifts

When Jesus was filled with the Holy Spirit, he received three major spiritual gifts: the gifts of preaching, teaching, and healing. It is clear from texts like Matt 4:23-25 that, of the three gifts, healing was the most popular among Jews and non-Jews alike. Jesus was literally mobbed to the point that he had to withdraw from the crowds. After Pentecost, the apostles also became popular because of the miracles of healing that they were enabled to do by the Spirit (Acts 5:12-15). It should be noted, however, that Jesus performed miracles only to meet particular needs and not just to satisfy curiosity; otherwise he would have performed miracles on the demand of Satan or his agents, the Pharisees. After all, John the Baptist never performed a miracle (John 10:41). Yet many people flocked to him for baptism. Of course the conversion of a soul is the greatest miracle that can ever be performed, because, among other things, it is the only miracle that sets all of heaven rejoicing.

Another spiritual gift that was popular in the Early Church was speaking in tongues. The tongues the apostles spoke on the day of Pentecost were recognized by people from about sixteen different nations. Some were moved to exclaim, “Are not all these men who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our own native language?” (Acts 2:7, 8). Speaking in tongues became so popular thereafter that the Corinthian Church developed some gibberish popularly called “unknown tongues” (1 Cor 14:2, KJV), probably because they were enshrouded in “mysteries.” Certainly, the knowledge of more than one language enhances one’s gospel ministry among peoples of other cultures as is implied in 1 Cor 14:18. But even though Paul was a linguist, yet he declared, “In the church I would rather speak five intelligible words to instruct others than ten thousand words in a tongue” (1 Cor 14:19).
Today, many preachers of the prosperity gospel insinuate that your ministry is faulty or incomplete at best if it is void of signs and wonders. You also hear some “saints” assert that if you cannot speak in tongues, you are not born again. Christ’s priority list remains the same today, namely, teaching, preaching, and healing. Thus, signs and wonders remain only as an accompaniment to teaching and preaching at God’s discretion. Paul also followed this format. For instance, in the list of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12:28 miracles come after preaching and teaching and speaking in tongues comes at the very bottom of the list. Ellen G. White drives home this maxim by the following warning, “The world will not be converted by the gift of tongues, or by the working of miracles, but by preaching Christ crucified” (White 1923:424). The gospel has power to change a demon possessed person like Mary Magdalene from an immoral sinner into the very first person Christ revealed himself to after his resurrection. Gospel power can transform a terrorist and a sinner like Saul of Tarsus into Paul, God’s chief apostle to the Gentiles.

**Counterfeit Gifts**

The bad news is that the Devil easily counterfeits many of the popular spiritual gifts by giving power to mediums, magicians, witches, and astrologers. Remember the trouble the magicians and astrologers of Egypt gave Moses. Thereafter, God instructed Moses to decree that such evil people should not be found in Israel (Deut 18:9-12). So when Saul became the first king of Israel, he got rid of the witches and wizards in Israel (1 Sam 28:3). However, when God’s Spirit left King Saul, he patronized one of the few remaining witches who had gone underground and asked her to bring forth the prophet Samuel who had stopped communicating God’s will to Saul even before his death. The crucial point in this story is that when the witch told the king that what she saw was “an old man,” Saul “perceived that it was Samuel” (1 Sam 28:14). This may partially explain the experts’ opinion that “while [traditional healers] rely on some supernatural means for some of their cures, many so-called witch doctors among African or American tribes combine a sound knowledge of herbal medicine and subtle psychological techniques and insights which are frequently highly effective” (Encyclopedia International 1972, s.v. “traditional healers”). No wonder those who consult witches and other mystics or psychics often exclaim, “It works!” Here is where the problem lies—in people’s perception.
In its global mission the Adventist Church is faced with the great challenge of how to meet the strong perceptions held by adherents of the various world religions. These religions generally accept the existence of a Supreme God, yet in practice many of their believers rely on supernatural powers to guide their lifestyle. Animists, for instance, believe that everything in nature, animate and inanimate, has a spirit or soul. Hence, many tribes in our world worship trees, stones, or animals. In animism sin is not well defined and salvation is attained from sacrifices to lesser spirits in order to appease the Supreme Spirit through those sacrifices. In Hinduism, forgiveness is not necessary because sin is an illusion. Nirvana comes through meditation and with time, and through a process of reincarnation humanity may ultimately escape the cycles of rebirth. Similarly, Buddhism, a reformed type of Hinduism, relies heavily on meditation as the solution to problems here and hereafter. For the Buddhist, through meditation, God is abandoned in favor of the gods of desire developed in oneself.

The Adventist Church is also confronted by how to witness to the two monotheistic world religions that are closely related to Christianity, namely, Judaism and Islam. Judaism teaches salvation by works as indicated by Christ’s list of rebukes to the Jewish leaders (Matt 23). In practice, there is also a mystical aspect of the use of some verses of the book of Psalms, the so-called sixth and seventh Books of Moses. Some believe in these verses as the source of magical secrets, of miracle working holy charms, and as powerful seals and talismans.

In Islam there is also an important element of belief in salvation by works, even though God (Allah) is often referred to as most Gracious, most Merciful, and All-forgiving. Yet on the day of judgment one’s deeds will be weighed in the balances against one’s misdeeds. Those whose deeds outweigh their misdeeds will go to paradise. But those whose misdeeds weigh more than their good deeds will be sent to hell (Al-Araf 7:8, 9). Mysticism in Islam, introduced by the Sufis, finds expression among the Javanese mystics of Indonesia, the dervishes of Turkey and India, and the Marabouts of North and West Africa. These Muslim mystics write special verses of the Qur’an on a slate, then sell them as charms or amulets. They wield considerable powers in the ummah or Muslim community.

Therefore, people consult witch doctors among the American tribes or visit one of the psychics among the middle- and upper-class residents of southern California, which one psychic called the “psychic capital of the world” (Bristol 1977:35). Others could meet with a “juju” or “voodoo” priest in West Africa.
or with an astrologist or a futurologist at the “psychic center” in north Lon-
don (Interest in the Occult Growing 1985:7). In our day people sell their con-
sciences to a false prophet, a false Christ, or a faith healer. Some play around
with those who mix mysticism with religion like the Marabout in Islam and
the enlightened New Agers. In all these instances the story of King Saul vividly
points out that the heart of the problem in witchcraft in any form is closely tied
to the perception of the victim. This may explain the scriptural assertion, “As
he thinks in his heart, so is he” (Prov 23:7, NKJV). This assertion is expanded
by Jesus in the first part of his Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5). Ellen G. White
further reveals that “sickness of the mind prevails everywhere” and that “nine
tenths of the diseases from which men suffer have their foundation here” (1897,
1898:149). The deceiver often identifies wrong perceptions held by misguided
individuals and is smart enough to exploit their misuse of the power of the
mind to his advantage.

Belief in these charlatans and support for them is on the increase as sur-
veys and polls reveal. For instance, a 1976 poll involving the interview of 1,536
adults in more than 300 localities in the United States indicated that more than
90 percent of people under the age of 30 could identify their astrological sign.
Sadly, the report concluded that “there was no significant difference between
churchgoers and non-churchgoers” (News Briefs 1976:48). More recent statis-
tics (1990) reported by Elder George Vandeman, the founder of the It Is Writ-
ten television program, reveal a worsening situation. Elder Vandeman, who
dismissed astrology as a “bad science” and “simple guess work,” wondered why
people still believed in it more than “at any time since the Renaissance.” The
veteran evangelist went on to reveal that 1,200 of the 1,700 newspapers in the
US carried horoscope columns and that 10,000 full-time and 175,000 part-time
astrologers conducted a thriving business (Vandeman 1990:18).

This reminds me of what a high government official from the Republic
of Benin in West Africa told a BBC reporter a few years back on why his gov-
ernment legalized the voodoo religion in the country. The official openly said
that the government’s move was to stop what he called “the public hypocrisy,”
because he claimed that the average Benin citizen stopped by a voodoo priest
on his or her way to or from church or the mosque. This is shameful, but it is
a fact of life all over Africa and in the so-called third world. Sadly, in both of
these unfortunate realities Adventists are not excluded. “Within the Adventist
Church, along with recent theological crises has come among some, a long-
ing for new evidence of supernatural intervention” (McDowell 1987:4). As a
church, Adventists must proffer solutions to this problem of relying on spiritual powers that originate with any source other than God.

**Windows of Approach**

Christians must present the truth as it is in the Scriptures, and falsehood will eventually fall away. As mentioned above, distorted perceptions are also found among members of the Christian churches. Christianity also needs to set her house in order first, because she cannot give what she does not have. Those who have an obsession for popular spiritual gifts like miracles should be reminded of Christ’s warning that his followers should not go to anyone claiming to be a wonder-working prophet or christ, since such miracles might look real enough “to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Matt 24:24 NKJV).

Our message to the Jews should come from the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Jewish people need to know that no amount of works can save them, for God looks down from heaven and finds no one doing anything good, not even one (Ps 14:2, 3). Then Ps 91 is one of the texts in the Bible that assure God’s people of his protection and care for them. Nowhere in the Scriptures is anyone told to have anything to do with charms. It should be made abundantly clear to both Jews and Christians that God is not in the business of producing spectacular displays. Elijah was given a vivid picture of this fact on Mount Horeb where God passed before him, not in the scary storm, earthquake, or the wild fire, but in “a still small voice” (1 Kgs 19:12 NKJV). This may explain how God operates, “‘Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,’ says the Lord Almighty” (Zech 4:6).

Similarly, there are key texts in the Qur’an that we could use to approach Muslims. Muslims also accept Jesus as the Messiah, even though they deny his divinity and his role as the Savior of humankind. The third area of common ground Christians share with Muslims is in the area of temperance. It is important to note that Islam is the largest non-Christian religion. Last year (2000), Islam claimed 1.2 billion followers, second only to Christianity with 1.9 billion (Religion in the News 2001:20).

Another excellent text in the Qur’an that we could use to persuade Muslims to free themselves from the fear of demons by relying on God’s protection, and which seems to agree with Ps 91:1-8, is Al-Falaq 113:1-5. It reads, “Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of Daybreak; From the evil of that which He created; From the evil of the darkness when it is intense, And from the evil of malignant
As for animists, let us invite them to simpler forms of worship without fear of either living or dead souls. In place of the innumerable intermediaries they appeal to by expensive sacrifices and other rituals, Christianity should attract them with the concept of accepting “one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men” (1 Tim 2:5). Jesus, the ultimate ransom will liberate animists from the countless spirits which they very much fear, and it will also free them from the expenses of buying animals, and in some cases, offering human sacrifices that may even include their own relatives.

Emphasis on meditation is a good launching pad for witnessing among Hindus and Buddhists. Christians could use Ps 55:17 or 1 Thess 5:17 which encourage continual prayer, morning, noon, and night. Hindus and Buddhists should be led to understand that instead of aiming at emptying themselves or self-abandonment, the goal of true meditation should be to become filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18), in order to ensure proper guidance.

The most difficult people to approach with the gospel, in my opinion, are the humanists and those who embrace conceptual syncretism such as New Agers. As a child of post modernism, New Age “denies history, time, the God of the universe, and the ultimate meaning of the Cross,” on the one hand, and on the other hand, it “offers a religious mystique in a charming garb: horoscopes, meditations, crystals, and Eastern mysticism,” and is rightly described as a “pseudo-religion (Fraga 1997:10-12). A thorough study of their beliefs may help us identify a friendly point that will assist us in reaching their hearts. Then we can, through the aid of Holy Spirit, lead them to realize the truth in the following admonition from Paul, “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: ‘I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.’ . . . For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength” (1 Cor 1:18, 19, 25).

The Fruit of the Spirit

Incidentally, both the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy say that there will soon be a repeat of Pentecost that will be preceded by a counterfeit revival. So we
must be sure to “test the spirits to see whether they are from God” (1 John 4:1). All claimants must pass the four major Bible tests of a genuine messenger of God. Normally, their prophecy must be fulfilled (Deut 18:22), their message must not contradict the Holy Scriptures (Isa 8:20), they should not deny the incarnation of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:2), and above all their lifestyle must comply with the teachings of the Holy Scriptures (Matt 7:20). Even though each one of the four tests is important and every claimant must pass all of them, yet the one that is the most crucial is the last one which states that the genuineness of true messengers shall be known “by their fruits.” Fruits here has a double meaning, namely, the messenger’s lifestyle (Matt 7:21-23), and the type of converts produced through them must also reflect true repentance (Matt 3:8). Thus, guesswork, oratory, and false declarations (the first three tests) can easily deceive human beings. But any attempt to deceive in the area of the forth test (one’s lifestyle) will not stand the test of time.

Therefore, in our direct and indirect witnessing, emphasis should not be on spiritual gifts, but on bearing the fruit of the Spirit. As it has been pointed out above, spiritual gifts can be easily faked by both demons and humans, but not so with the fruits of the Spirit, which include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22, 23).

Paul summarizes this whole subject by presenting striking contrasts between love, the first in the list of the fruits of the Spirit, and popular spiritual gifts, as follows: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing (1 Cor 13:1-3 NKJV).

A lifestyle, rich in love and the other spiritual ingredients, has enormous power to melt prejudices, build bridges, remove barriers, or break down walls between the witness and his or her prospect. In this way, we can make the gospel more attractive within the church and in the eyes of the outsider than through sound arguments or even signs and wonders.

**Notes**

1 All scriptural quotations are taken from the NIV unless otherwise noted.
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Chapter 13

* * *

SYNCRETISM

ERICH W. BAUMGARTNER

April 11-12, 2001

The Problem

Syncretism, the illegitimate mixing of non-Christian elements with Christian practices, is an old phenomenon predating the rise of Christianity. It has accompanied the history of the cross-cultural encounter of God’s kingdom with the cultures and religious practices of humanity ever since sin entered human reality. In the Old Testament we encounter syncretism in the frequently condemned phenomenon of idol worship in Israel (2 Kgs 17:41) that led to such repulsive practices as human sacrifice (2 Chr 33:2, 3, 6) and religious prostitution (1 Kgs 14:24). In the New Testament implied syncretism is present in the subtleness of religious practices that tended to misrepresent God’s true character, such as the treatment of the poor or terminally ill as punished by God (cf. John 9, and other passages). Jesus did not hesitate to confront these misconceptions even though he displayed a remarkable patience as the disciples continued to hold on to preconceived ideas (cf. Mk 10 and Jesus’ interaction on the essence of servanthood and discipleship). It is this obscuring of the truth
about God and his kingdom by religious ideas and practices of any culture that we call syncretism.

A review of the history of the mission of the Christian Church reveals that the church has always struggled to live faithfully to biblical truths in the cultural contexts she found herself in. Since God chose to share his love through the incarnation the gospel has been subject to a continuous process of translation and application in different cultural contexts. But this process of translation can allow the penetration of non-Christian elements into Christian practice and thinking which we call syncretism. To avoid this danger, conservative Protestant missionaries have tended to treat the cultural practices they often encountered as incompatible with the gospel and set out to replace them with new Christian practices. As time went on, however, it became clear that the wholesale rejection of cultural traditions had not really eradicated these traditions and practices; rejection had merely driven them underground. While openly adhering to the new standards set by those who had brought the good news, new converts practiced the old ways secretly and out of sight of church leadership.

Adventism is not exempt from this problem. Recently I visited a friend’s home. One of the visitors had recently returned from South America where she and her child, who was not yet one year old, had visited relatives. During her stay the toddler had gotten ill, but mysteriously so, with no specific symptoms that her Western mind could easily read and deal with. In contrast, her hosts seemed to recognize the problem. They all agreed that her son had a case of “evil eye.” The mother, who had grown up in the United States and had been educated to disregard such things as superstitious, did not know how to respond. So she took the child to a doctor to get a medical diagnosis and explanation of what was wrong. The doctor only confirmed what everybody else already knew. The child had no symptoms of a disease that could be cured with medicine. So what to do? In her distress she turned to local Adventist friends. Surely they would have an answer to this superstitious phenomenon of an evil eye. And they did, but it was not what she wanted to hear. They agreed with her and said, “We don’t believe in these things anymore,” but they counseled her not to dismiss the local remedy too quickly and maybe even give it a try, just to be sure. The ritualistic remedy consisted of taking a raw egg and rolling it over the back of the child to “absorb” the evil eye. That advice was too much for the mother who felt it was a non-Christian practice she did not want to participate in. In her distress she poured out her heart to God in prayer asking for his in-
tervention in her child’s “illness.” As she watched her child become better as a result of her prayers her heart calmed down again.

But the incident left some confusing questions in her heart. How do you deal with what the locals called “evil eye”? No Bible class in college had ever mentioned such a problem, much less given instruction in how to answer the challenge of such phenomena. And why did local Christians not have a more Adventist answer to “evil eye”? Surely using a pre-Christian ritual to fight a mysterious power was not the right way to deal with this problem. But what was? That was her question as she shared her story in my friend’s living room.

**The Significance of the Issue for Adventist Mission**

Missionaries know about these problems and so do local pastors and leaders around the world. Since the Adventist Church strives to be faithful to the Scriptures in its teachings and practices, the presence of obvious syncretistic practices raises a number of questions about the origin of the problem and its possible causes. Why are loyal Seventh-day Adventists willing to engage in religious or quasi-religious practices that are incompatible with the gospel, such as, secretly sacrificing at the shrine of a local deity or visiting the local healer or a priest in times of sickness? To be sure, syncretism does not necessarily involve the practice of occult or spiritualistic ceremonies, but often it does. How are Adventists to regard such local practices which range from the superstitious to the eminently powerful? How do we as Christians deal with demonic activity? Moreover, does the Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy story have to be broadened to include some of these phenomena to speak more concretely to situations that involve the encounter with power issues?

Another reason why our discussion about syncretism today is so relevant is the fact that in trying to experiment with new approaches to reach the resistant populations of our times, the Global Mission Study Centers are easily subjected by critics to the charge of potentially promoting some kind of syncretism. This committee has had to carefully consider some of these charges, at least indirectly, by carefully formulating a number of documents which specify guidelines and safeguards against the loss of Adventist identity.¹

The same criticism has been leveled against recent Evangelical contextualized approaches to Muslims by the father of contextualized Muslim evangelism, Phil Parshall. Parshall has served as a missionary among Muslims in Asia for thirty-six years, has written several books on Islam,² and is recognized as
a very responsible scholar on the subject of Muslim evangelism. His article entitled “Danger! New Directions in Contextualization” raises the question if some contextualized approaches to Muslims cross the line into syncretism (Parshall 1998). That question has surfaced also in our own work and must be taken seriously.³

This paper attempts to understand why the multifaceted phenomenon of syncretism⁴ is an ever-present challenge accompanying the process of the cross-cultural communication of the Adventist message. In addition syncretism needs to be treated as a problem not only in former mission countries, but also in the West where dominant cultural influences contradicting the gospel may have become accepted in the church, even while the church seeks to avoid syncretism in the so-called mission fields. This presentation includes some suggested guidelines for how to deal with the problem of syncretism in responsible ways.

**Syncretism as a Phenomenon**

What is syncretism? And how does syncretism manifests itself? The traditional use of the term “syncretism” has been used to denote the illegitimate mixing of diverse cultural and religious elements with the essential truths of the gospel.⁵ By illegitimate mixing we mean that the cultural elements distort the meaning of the gospel. You may think of the phenomenon of Christo-paganism in parts of South and Central America resulting from the wholesale baptism of local religious practices and local deities by Roman Catholic Christianity; or the African Independent Churches in Africa that blend Christian and non-Christian elements into a largely Christian framework; or more eclectic systems where certain aspects of Christianity are selected and grafted into other religious systems, such as some new religions in Japan that use Christian weddings.

The term syncretism has also been used to recognize the way all religious systems are culture-based and interact naturally with existing religious and cultural systems.⁶ While this approach acknowledges the dynamic nature of the relation between Christianity and its many environments, it tends to treat all interaction of religion and culture as a syncretistic process; thus, it seems to suggest that a critical evaluation of this interaction is impossible or even illegitimate. Therefore, the term syncretism becomes relativistic and value-neutral and looses its evaluative strength. As responsible shepherds of a world-wide...
church community we cannot afford to ignore the inherent dangers of mixing religious and cultural elements in a way that distort the truths of the eternal gospel. It is this potential distortion that concerns us here in this committee.

A more fruitful contribution has been the approach taken by Paul Hiebert and other evangelical scholars who point out that the hidden power of non-Christian traditions is rooted in the pervasiveness of holistic worldviews that control the dynamic interplay between cultural beliefs and practices. The staying power of these worldviews is often underestimated by missionaries steeped in a Western modern worldview who are unable to decipher the deep cultural assumptions about reality in folk religions. The result is a split-level Christianity where people embrace Christian practices for their outward religious life while continuing their old ways that give them the fundamental answers to every day life questions.\(^7\)

In the book *Understanding Folk Religion* Hiebert, Shaw, and Tiénou point out that the problem of syncretism persists because old religious practices condemned by the missionaries fulfill a vital role in the life of the people that often goes unnoticed by the Western missionary. They insist that traditional beliefs (e.g., the belief in the living dead or ancestors, or belief in local spirits) are not just “superstitions” to be laid aside when exposed to Western formal logic. Instead these folk religions have their own “logic” that helps people in at least four different ways. First, they bring meaning to explain life and the devastating impact of death. Second, they help define what a good life is and deal with the crises and misfortunes of life. Furthermore, they help people plan their lives and overcome the problem of the unknown. Finally, these beliefs provide a way to deal with people’s longing for justice and morality, while accounting for the presence of evil and oppression (Hiebert, et al. 1999:93-228).

These beliefs are deeply rooted in worldviews and expressed in and reinforced through behaviors, and in rituals and institutions through symbols. When this connection between worldview, beliefs, and practice is not understood by those who bring Christianity to people living within religious contexts influenced by folk religions (which includes most non-Christian religions at the street level as well as traditional religions) new Christians often turn to traditional practices in times of crisis, which is syncretism!
Dealing with Traditions

How then can the many beliefs, traditions, and practices encounter by the Christian witness be dealt with in a way to avoid syncretism? Traditionally, two common responses have been to either reject all old cultural customs as pagan, or embrace them uncritically and allow them in the church. The first approach has often been taken by conservative Christians who are eager to protect the integrity of the gospel. The second response has often been practiced by missionaries wishing to respect the local people and their cultural heritage. Thus, the two approaches start at opposite ends of the culture-gospel spectrum. Why then do both approaches seem to lead to the same problem of syncretism—secret syncretism through split-level Christianity in the first instance, and open syncretism in the second?

Improper Responses to Culture Cause Syncretism

| Wholesale rejection of old cultural ways | Syncretism through split-level Christianity |
| Uncritical acceptance of old cultural ways | Syncretism through blending of elements |

When the cultural ways of a people are condemned and stamped out, the gospel enters the culture as a foreign expression of faith to which the local people attach their own worldview assumptions. Missionaries bring in both the surface-level practices as well as the deeper meaning systems associated with the Christian practices. But what happens when the Adventist message and its accompanying practices are imported wholesale? The result is a foreign religion that exists without a meaningful engagement of the local culture. Worship in such situations follows foreign patterns. Christianity becomes isolated from the local culture and thus loses its power to meaningfully challenge the culture. Local people often have difficulties connecting what happens in church to their everyday concerns. Practices disapproved of by the Christian witnesses often move underground where they exist parallel to accepted practices; thus, Protestants have discovered that wholesale condemnation of local cultures generates the very thing that this approach sought to avoid—syncretism.

The second approach does not even pretend to avoid syncretism and therefore does not concern us here as much. It should be pointed out, however, that
while it is right to decry the resulting betrayal of the gospel, Protestant Christians often fail to see that this is the problem of Western Christians who have come to accept a modern rationalistic worldview with all its limitations and contradictions.

**The Way to Avoid Syncretism**

Since both a wholesale rejection of culture (non-contextualization) and an uncritical acceptance of traditional culture (uncritical contextualization), do lead to syncretism, we need to ask, what then can be done to prevent syncretism? The third alternative is “to deal with the old beliefs and practices consciously through a process of “critical contextualization (Hiebert, et al. 1999:21). This approach has been embraced by this committee in a document on contextualization (see chapter 5) that seeks to insure that communities stay faithful to the gospel while at the same time expressing their faith in culturally meaningful ways.

Critical contextualization includes a four-step process of (1) describing and analyzing the traditional beliefs and practices of a people, (2) developing a comprehensive understanding of the biblical principles involved in those practices, (3) critically evaluating the cultural manifestations and their meaning in the light of Scripture, and (4) developing transformative practices and ministries that help people to live as faithful followers of Christ. This approach upholds the truths and authority of the Bible, but acknowledges that God does not play favorites and shows a high respect for cultures.

This balance is backed up by Scripture itself. For instance, at Pentecost God orchestrated a remarkable communication event in a way that allowed each person to hear the gospel message in their heart language (Acts 2). God’s respect for culture is also present in the incarnation itself. Even the way biblical authors communicate the gospel show their concern to contextualize their message to their target audiences. Matthew writes for a Jewish audience and puts the emphasis on messianic prophecy, kingship, and divine titles (Hesselgrave and Rommen 1989:8). John addresses a Hellenistic audience and uses Greek concepts such as the *logos* that Greeks were familiar with (John 1). But in using the concept he imbued it with unique Christian meaning that actually opposed the Platonic misconception of the separation of the spiritual and physical worlds. “And the Word became flesh” (John 1:14) is John’s answer to
the Greek misconception of God. In other words, there is critical contextualization that avoids syncretism (Terry, Smith, and Anderson 1998: 319).

### The Process of Critical Contextualization

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step 1</th>
<th>Step 2</th>
<th>Step 3</th>
<th>Step 4</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The old beliefs, rituals, stories, songs, customs, art, traditions.</td>
<td>Gather information and seek to understand.</td>
<td>Study the Bible about the event or tradition.</td>
<td>Evaluate the cultural practice in the light of the biblical teachings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a new practice that helps believers to live faithfully.</td>
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### Evaluation Options

<table>
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<th>Step 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keep what is not unbiblical, such as clothes, transportation, local songs, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reject what is not becoming for a Christian. Let the locals be the judge about hidden meanings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modify to bring out a Christian meaning, e.g., using certain melodies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a functional substitute for important cultural customs: e.g., certain funeral practices.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Add new rituals to express the new faith, e.g., communion or baby dedication.</td>
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Describing the process of critical contextualization should also help us to avoid mislabeling practices as syncretistic that are not. Some church members are quick to point out that the date of Christmas or Easter, or the Christmas tree all have pagan origins. The same could be said for the practice of bridesmaids at North American weddings (the false brides are sent in to absorb the “evil
Syncretism is a complex problem that is compounded by many factors that cannot be tackled by missionaries alone. As the Adventist Church grows and develops in new areas it will discover that syncretism is an ever-present danger. Therefore, I would like to suggest that there are two additional factors that need to be strengthened in the Adventist Church to reinforce the church's response to syncretism. The first factor is our approach to evangelism and church growth, the second is the need for leaders that are trained in cross-cultural skills and awareness. Evangelism should be conducted in such a way that the gospel is translated adequately into culturally appropriate categories so that it can be understood, appropriated, and applied to the life context of the people and bring fruit.

Evangelism

Evangelism is the task of the whole church and rooted in the ministry of the local church. When evangelism is done under pressure for results there is a danger that the discipling process is short-cut, thereby increasing the danger of syncretism. For this reason I suggest the following guidelines:

1. One reason for the slow growth of Adventism in non-Christian contexts is a well-meant but in most cases fatal assumption that methods successful in the West can be easily adopted to fit non-Christian contexts. Most of these methods used by outsiders use a “rejection model of culture” and are therefore a recipe for syncretistic churches.

2. The top-down approach to goal setting has led to abuses in evangelistic and baptismal methodology that lack the comprehensiveness needed to safeguard the church against syncretism. The Church needs to avoid putting undue pressures on evangelists, pastors, lay ministers, or leaders to seek quick baptisms without proper post-baptismal care.
3. New believers from non-Christian backgrounds do not lose their worldview assumptions just because they are baptized (see Acts 8: the example of Simon the Sorcerer who was baptized by Peter but misunderstood how the Holy Spirit works). The conversion process needs to be seen as a growth process which has implications for the way we approach the evangelistic task.

4. Evangelism has to be done with discipleship in mind. Evangelists and leaders need to carefully consider the question, what does a mature believer look like in this cultural context? This process must be encouraged and promoted in order for it to take place. It is the responsibility of the local evangelist to initiate this process and not shortchange it by inappropriate shortcuts which tend to lead to syncretism.

5. Evangelism must communicate the gospel at the worldview level. It must meet people where they are and lead them to an encounter with the almighty God who demands our supreme allegiance. Seminaries should teach evangelism not only from a practice and belief perspective, but from a worldview transformation perspective.

6. Post-baptismal instruction is as important as bringing people into the church. Donald McGavran, in analyzing the phenomenal growth of the Adventist Church in Peru through people movements, comments that it was post-baptismal instruction that made the difference (McGavran 1980:163).

Leadership

The second factor to strengthen the Adventist response to the danger of syncretism is leadership with cross-cultural skills and sensitivity. The impressive growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to be under-girded by a growing base of leaders who understand the cross-cultural tensions within the church and who can give guidance to those working in different cultural contexts. I therefore affirm the practice of the General Conference to bring experienced international leaders into the top echelons of the church. In order to fully profit, however, from their cross-cultural perspective, they need to be properly prepared to use their experience in another culture to the benefit of the church. It is important to remember that:

1. Cross-cultural skills are acquired both by experience and by guided reflection and training.

2. Cross-culturally, skilled leaders can do much to help the church deal with the worldview roots of syncretistic practices around the world. They need
to be made aware of and taught sensible approaches to deal with the problem. If, however, we ignore the problem we will reap the harvest of a weak church susceptible to the overwhelming undercurrents of non-biblically shaped world-views flooding the church.

3. If the church is to benefit from the intercultural exchange of leadership experience and wisdom, it must provide leaders with intercultural training and times of intentional reflection. Besides helping leaders and their family personally cope with the multiple challenges of cross-cultural living, communicating, and leading, intentional training and reflection will also enable Adventist leaders to help the worldwide church in its struggle to understand and live out the meaning of obedience to the commandments of Christ, faithfulness to the gospel, justice and love for our neighbors, and all the many other areas of life that our generation in multiple contexts is called to serve.

4. As outsiders, General Conference international leaders can also help the Western Adventist Church deal with its blind spots towards Western culture. Cross-cultural leaders may also have the potential to help the Adventist Church escape some of the inherent limitation and confusions of the modern Western, and especially American culture which has remained normative for Seventh-day Adventist theology and practice. By providing an “outside” perspective non-Western leaders can provide a loving, yet critical voice to challenge us to greater faithfulness to the gospel in our own culture. At the same time they will also affirm the tremendous contributions of their own culture and help us listen to the questions and answers our brothers and sisters in other cultures are giving in their quest to appropriate the gospel in their generation.

5. Properly prepared bi-cultural leaders are possibly the most important component, not only to strengthen the visible bonds of unity in the church, but also to strengthen the conceptual structures that hold our church together as an international church.

These guidelines should provide a strong starting point in avoiding syncretism as the Global Mission study centers enable the Adventist Church to reach the remaining unreached peoples.

Notes

1 See the relevant documents of the Global Mission Issues Committee: “Contextualization as Part of the Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church,” voted by the 1998 Annual Council, see Annual Council Minutes 1998; also “Adventist Contextualized Communities” and “Transitional Adventist Structures.”
2 Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission

2 See especially *Beyond the Mosque* and *New Paths in Muslim Evangelism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.

3 More recently Eugene S. Heideman has suggested that the terms syncretism and contextualization have often been used as “power words” designed to discredit or legitimize innovative approaches to integrate faith and culture.


Reference List


Chapter 14

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CONNECTED TO CULTURE, CONFORMED TO CHRIST: EXPLORING ALTERNATE FORMS OF WORSHIP

G. T. NG

April 11-12, 2001

Human language is not static; it is subject to change from time to time. For example, no one sleeps in church anymore. He is just “rationing consciousness.” No one is tall anymore. She is said to be “vertically enhanced.” No one is short anymore, just “vertically challenged.” Worship isn’t dull anymore. It’s “liturgically challenged.”

The mode of worship is a pressing issue in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. Since the office of Global Mission was established, the Adventist Church has grown by leaps and bounds. The emphasis has been to reach the unreached, especially the people groups located at the 10/40 window. When the Global Mission office was established in 1990, there were 2,300 groups of one million people without an Adventist presence. In 2001, however, most of these people groups have been penetrated and only 460 groups remain in which there is no Seventh-day Adventist presence. In 1990, twenty-seven countries were yet unentered. In 2001, however, there are only nine unentered countries.
The exponential expansion of the church has brought about great rejoicing on one hand, and growing pains on the other. One major task has been the challenge of making the gospel meaningful to new converts. In many parts of the world, Christianity is still equated with Western culture because local cultural expressions of Christianity have often been rejected in favor of the more “enlightened” Western forms. Converts are often ostracized from their families or tribes. The newly planted churches have not had the know-how to adapt, modify, or replace the foreignness of the gospel. How should the Adventist Church respond to the fact that churches around the world are often copies of the churches that planted them? Since these churches are foreign within their own contexts, what can be done to reduce the discontinuity between culture and the gospel?

The purpose of this paper is to discuss issues pertaining to contextualization with special reference to corporate worship.

Facing the Challenge

The need to contextualize the gospel in each local culture has been a growing emphasis in the Christian churches during the past four decades. For example, the All Africa Conference of Churches in Ibadan in 1958 affirmed that “while the church cannot give Christian content to every African custom, we believe that the church throughout Africa has a very rich contribution to make to the life of the world church” (Ariarajah 1994:12). In other words, not all culture is bad. Cultural considerations should become part and parcel of the life and ministry of the church.

Scholars look at contextualization from different perspectives. Pobee examines it from an African point of view and appeals for the contextualization of the gospel in such African ritual forms as using drums, songs, and xylophones in liturgy. He believes that a contextual approach to worship that emphasizes not only the intellectual, but also the emotions and values will greatly enhance the effect of worship on worshippers (1996:39, 40).

Many agree to the need of contextualization, but not all agree on what constitutes the “right” approach. Issues relating to contextualization are complex. Discussions on such matters are likened to the opening of a “Pandora’s box” of vexed hermeneutical issues much debated today.

This paper will first discuss the three approaches to contextualization described by leading missiologist Paul Hiebert (1988:184), followed by a study...
on the process of critical contextualization. Attention will then be paid to the characteristics of biblical worship as informed by Scripture. The relationship between worship and contextualization is deliberated next, followed by practical suggestions on making worship more culturally relevant and biblically authentic.

**Rejection of Contextualization**

Hiebert describes a first approach which is often a rejection of any type of contextualization. Some missionaries tend to reject most of the old customs and label them as pagan. Funeral rites, modes of worship, dress, food, dances, and ceremonies are often condemned because they are related to traditional religions.

The wholesale rejection of the old creates serious theological and missiological problems. First, such rejection is based on the presupposition that the missionary’s culture is superior to that of the host culture. The assumption is that the imported Christian culture (Western) is the normative culture and should therefore serve as a yardstick by which other cultures are measured.

In many Asian countries, however, it is almost impossible to separate culture from traditional religions (Schreiter 1985 and Whiteman 1997:2-7). Giving up cultural practices means to live outside the culture. Hence, to become a Christian implies that one becomes an alien in one’s own culture and a stranger in one’s own homeland.

Second, the rejection of the old ways creates a cultural void which is often filled by foreign elements familiar to the missionaries. The outcome is that mats are thrown out in favor of pews, drums and cymbals are rejected in favor of piano and organ, and traditional customs and costumes are discarded and replaced by imported ones.

Third, attempts to abandon old traditions often fail. “Many missionaries have come to realize that an attempt to eradicate an undesirable custom may merely drive it underground or result in an undesirable reactionary behavior” (Paun 1975:208). The fact remains that traditional religions die hard. When suppressed, they merely go underground. Many times they are practiced alongside of Christianity, resulting in a syncretistic mix of Christian and non-Christian beliefs and practices. Believers see nothing wrong with attending church and seeking advice from fortune tellers. Many Latin Americans routinely combined the worship of the traditional African gods with the veneration of the saints.
Uncritical Contextualization

Hiebert describes a second approach as uncritical contextualization. Traditional practices are accepted into the church without prior examination. Such uncritical contextualization is based on the assumption that local cultures are good and desirable. Another assumption is that the Christian religion often comes in its foreign garb, and in order to minimize the dislocation and ostracism of new believers, local cultures should be retained and practiced.

Uncritical contextualization brings about two weaknesses. First, it overlooks the fact that not all cultural practices are biblically acceptable. Missionaries cannot turn a blind eye to such social ills as slavery and female circumcision. The gospel is an agent of change, but uncritical contextualization denies the prophetic function of the church.

Second, uncritical contextualization also leads to syncretism. Since local culture is not scrutinized under the spotlight of biblical truth, chances are that some of the practices are combined with Christian beliefs, thus forming a syncretistic religion.

Critical Contextualization

Hiebert’s recommended approach is critical contextualization. Old beliefs and customs are neither rejected nor accepted uncritically, but are to be objectively assessed against the norm of biblical truth.

How should critical contextualization be carried out? Hiebert suggests a four step process (1988:186, 187).

First, recognize the need to contextualize on the basis of biblical norms. The attitude should be one of impartiality, either to the host culture or the Christian culture.

Second, identify the areas of contextualization. These include rites relating to birth, death, and marriage and also include ceremonies, music, and songs. The purpose is to understand the deep meaning in the cultural element, not to pass value judgment on them or on any aspect of the cultural heritage (at this point in the process).

Third, conduct Bible studies on the areas under consideration. Sound hermeneutical principles should be employed to ensure an accurate rendition of biblical texts as they apply to present contexts.²

Fourth, make a decision to stop or continue certain practice after critical appraisal of the practice in the light of biblical texts.
This four-step process of critical contextualization should involve the people concerned. They have an intimate knowledge of their culture and under the guidance of trained missionaries, are in a position to critique their cultural practices. Local people are the ones who will make the decision and enforce the decision. Changes cannot take place without their approval. What happens when missionaries do not agree with the choices the people have made? Hiebert’s suggestion is that the people should be given the benefit of the doubt and the freedom to make mistakes since such freedom is really part of the process for growth and development of an indigenized church.

The ownership of local people in the process of contextualization is in line with the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. God’s people make up the church. Each is accessible to God and is accessible by God through the Holy Spirit. Norman Kraus argues that ultimately the task does not solely depend on the missionary or the people, but on the church as a “discerning community.” Hermeneutically the missionary is better trained, but culturally, the people have the edge. It is the joint venture between the two.

The outcome of the evaluation exercise may have different consequences. One possibility is to retain beliefs and practices not antithetical to the Scriptures (example: wearing Western attire). Other practices may be rejected as unchristian (example: prenuptial living together of the engaged couple). Still other practices may be modified to give Christian meaning (example: substituting secular lyrics with Christian ones in popular songs). Sometimes new rituals that are not biblically offensive may also be added.

**What Contextualization Is Not**

While contextualization is acutely needed in new churches, I-to Loh cautions that it can be misunderstood by those who do not fully understand its nature. For example, he maintains that contextualization is not revivalism (1990:293-301). Contextualization is not a revival of native culture without evaluation. It is not a flaunting of tradition and its value system. It is not a pretext to vent nationalistic sentiments. It is also not an attempt to force others to accept old traditions. Proper contextualization is retaining native culture agreeable with the Scriptures, capitalizing the elements relevant to its modern context, and identifying points of agreement for the communicating of the gospel message. Loh also maintains that contextualization is not exclusivism. Contextualization does not necessarily reject anything and everything “foreign.”
Rather, it is an effort to open one’s mind and heart to other cultures and appreciate other forms of Christian expression of faith and music in those cultures.

**Worship and Culture**

As a diverse church with many cultures, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has prided itself as an international church. People from different parts of the world worship in many different ways. The Indian style of worship music, for example, may sound strange to people from Latin America. The more flamboyant and upbeat form of Caribbean worship may make believers from a high-church tradition uncomfortable. The great diversity of worship styles elicits questions on the relationships between culture and worship. Is worship culturally conditioned in the first place? Is there such a thing as a biblical core in worship that transcends time? To answer these questions, one needs to examine the history of worship in the Old and New Testament eras.

**Characteristics of Biblical Worship**

A perusal of sacred history brings out four characteristics of worship: diversity, continuity, particularity, and liberty.

First, biblical worship was characterized by diversity. The notion of a uniform worship pattern in the Bible is a myth. The Old Testament worship, for example, was typified by the interplay of four institutions: the exodus, the temple, the synagogue, and the festivals (Webber 1982:24, 25). The exodus and the subsequent events in Sinai highlighted worship in which God entered into a covenant relationship with the Hebrew people (Exod 19-24). Temple worship called attention to the presence of God as well as the sacredness of time and ritual. Temple worship also signified a separation of the Jews from the surrounding nations and was a symbol of God’s relationship to his unique people. The synagogue was an intertestamental institution that became the center of religious, educational, and social life of the Jews. It had no sacred ritual but focused on prayers and the reading and understanding of God’s Word (Millgram 1971:89-120). The Jewish festivals provided assurance of God’s continued provisions and presence.

Second, biblical worship was characterized by continuity. The Jewish festivals provided a sense of continuity of God’s work from the past to the present. The New Testament worship was influenced by temple worship in that Christians continued to keep the temple hours of prayer (Acts 3:1) and to use the
temple as a place for preaching (Acts 3:11-26; 4:12-13, 19-26, 42). Christians also transferred the basic elements (Word, prayer, and sacraments) of synagogue worship to Christian worship, thus maintaining the legacy of synagogue worship.

Third, biblical worship was characterized by particularity. Though worship was diverse in nature while maintaining continuity from past history, it was nevertheless unique in each time period. The Old Testament worship was centered on Sinai, but the New Testament worship was rooted in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The New Testament worship was distinctive in the sense that Christ reinterpreted temple worship as pointing to himself. The cleansing of the temple, for example, signified the end of temple worship. The early Christians worshipped in continuity with the past until they were caught in the tension between being Jewish and Christian. Then changes gradually occurred (Martin 1974 and Werner 1970). The Hellenistic Christians in particular, were keen to abolish Jewish rituals in favor of a new emphasis on the fulfilled meanings of those rituals. For example, Jesus the Passover Lamb had been sacrificed (1 Cor 5:7), and the Temple was replaced by the Body of Christ (1 Cor 3:16, 17). In addition, house churches appeared, especially among Jewish Christians (1 Cor 16:19, Col 4:15), thus signifying a further break from the past (Cullmann 1973:9, 10).

Fourth, biblical worship was characterized by liberty. The Hellenistic Christians preferred the freedom of expression and brought worship to new heights by speaking in tongues. Paul had to caution them that freedom of worship should not become unbridled chaos to the derision of unbelievers. Rather, it should be balanced with the necessity of order (1 Cor 14) as well as content by way of exercising large varieties of spiritual gifts (1 Cor 12, 14).

These four characteristics of diversity, continuity, particularity, and liberty underscore the fact that the traditions of worship are historically and culturally conditioned. Worship did not evolve from a cultural vacuum, but was rooted in its respective context. Yet the contextual nature of worship should be recognized alongside with its transcendent quality. Authentic biblical worship transcends time and space. The challenge of contextualization is to determine which aspects of worship are transcendent and which are not.
Worship and Contextualization

Contextualization of worship appears to be a felt need in the Adventist Church today. For worship to be meaningful to believers, worship has to be relevant to the local culture. The challenge has been the localization of biblical worship. As noted above, biblical worship is not context-free. Biblical worship, as we understand it, comes with its own cultural baggage. Is it possible to separate this cultural baggage from the core of biblical worship? If it is possible to do this, is it desirable?

Normative biblical worship involves several essential features: content, structure, and context (Webber 1982:56). The content of biblical worship is the life, death, resurrection, and second coming of Jesus Christ. The structure of biblical worship includes the centrality of Scripture, prayer, and Lord’s Supper, and the context in which worship takes place is the church called by God to worship and to witness to the contemporary world.

The content of worship is the non-negotiable part of worship. Without that content Christian worship becomes just another religious ceremony.

The structure of worship is another imperative, but the form in which the structure is delivered may be different from culture to culture. Caution should be taken to ensure that the meaning of the structure of worship remains compatible to biblical norms. The medieval church, for example, retained much of the basic structure of worship, but the meaning of worship to both the clergy and laity underwent fundamental changes. Worship became a mystery through the separation of sacred and profane and the use of Latin as the language of the Mass. The forms of worship became paramount and worship became an end rather than a means.

The context of worship varies according to locality. For worship to be meaningful to believers, worship should be packaged in a contextual mode familiar to them. However, worship is not to be accommodated to cultural norms. A rock band is a usual part of the cultural landscape, but would the presence of a rock band in worship constitute accommodation to cultural norms? Many Buddhist temples have prayer wheels—drums with the text of prayers written on the outside. In Buddhist thought, a prayer is said to be made by the simple act of spinning a prayer wheel. Would the installation of a prayer wheel in an Adventist Church in Sri Lanka be considered an enhancement to prayer or an accommodation to prevailing culture?
Inasmuch as Christianity is often perceived as a Western religion, much can be done to contextualize the forms of Christian worship. For example, chanting is a way of life for the Buddhists. Chanting Qur’anic verses is also a daily occurrence for Muslims. Should Christian chanting be encouraged as a form of adoration in worship in place of the traditional Scripture reading?

Posture of worship is another concern. Believers with an Islamic background are more at home with sitting on prayer mats. Could prayer mats be used instead of pews and chairs? How about praying with uplifted hands like the Muslims or folded hands like the Buddhists?

How about musical instruments? Should local instruments be used? How about composition of hymns by indigenous artists? The Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) is one of the foremost organizations pioneering contextualization of church music in Asia. Through the years the CCA has published hymnals in the local vernacular and style. However, it has found that while Asian hymns exist, many believers enjoy singing English hymns more than their own. Singing foreign-sounding hymns is perceived to be more “fashionable” than singing native hymns. Perhaps this is due to a low regard for non-Western culture and a lack of respect for third-world cultures. Local hymns, however, are more effective in expressing ethnic character and communicating the gospel to local people.

How about the time of worship? Adventist worship is more structured, quite unlike the traditional pattern of Hindu or Buddhist spirituality. Adventists have membership rolls and times and days of worship. Aside from these stipulated times of worship, our worship centers remain closed, quite in contrast to the spontaneous pattern of worship typical in India or Myanmar. In this respect, the Roman Catholic Church has structured itself more closely to the local cultural pattern than the Adventist Church. First, worshipers may come and go, even on a Sunday morning. Second, Roman Catholic Church buildings are often kept open during the day and worshipers have easy access to worship. Third, besides church buildings, Roman Catholic worship services are routinely conducted in such places as shopping malls and airports where people congregate.

**Conclusion**

Contextualization as a felt need of the church should increasingly become part of the consciousness of Adventist mission. The remarkable growth of the
church in newly entered areas necessitates the formation of such a consciousness. Perhaps more importantly, the Body of Christ should translate that consciousness into a present reality. The process of contextualization in the area of worship should be painstakingly initiated and followed. To do so would require an intimate knowledge, not only of the meanings of the local cultural forms, but of the theological assumptions upon which they rest.

In the final analysis, God’s view of worship is more inclusive than we think. In fact, worship in God’s economy is all-encompassing, embracing all nationalities. “Twice the New Testament book of Revelation stresses that representatives of ‘every race, language and nation’ will be privileged to worship at the great and final gathering before the throne of God (Rev 5:9 and 7:9). In the searching light of this apocalyptic vision it is evident that God not only accepts but rejoices in the varieties of race, culture and language of the people that have committed themselves to him” (Wilson-Dickson 1992:13).

Notes

1Pobee suggests three preliminary guidelines for the discussion between the gospel and culture. First, it must be biblical. It must begin with the revelation of God, that he has revealed himself through Christ and through the Bible as the primary source for instruction and correction. Second, it must be apostolic. Seeking to contextualize the gospel does not mean a discontinuity with the apostles. Much can be learned from the disciples who have gone before us. Third, it must be catholic. It must be universally applicable throughout the globe. It must transcend time and culture (Pobee 1998:49-51).

2In seeking to develop a missional hermeneutic that is multicultural, Brownson argues that the presence of God is potentially available in any given culture. While the gospel calls all people to repentance, it does not obliterate the contours of specific cultures. Since categories derived from Hellenistic philosophy were used to express the essence of the gospel in its context, he concludes that “there is a powerful line of development within the canon of Scripture that sanctions and encourages diverse expressions of Christian faith while maintaining a sense of coherence surrounding certain core assumptions regarding the character and purpose of God” (Brownson 1996:2).

3Exod 24:1-8, in particular, outlines the characteristics of authentic worship. First, God initiated the call to worship. The people assembled before him. Second, worship was a participatory event in which God and people interacted. Third, worship was depicted by the proclamation of God’s Word. God spoke to his people and made his wishes known. Fourth, worship involved personal commitment.
The people accepted the covenant with all its conditions. They were committed to obedience. Fifth, worship was rectified by a blood sacrifice, pointing to the atoning sacrifice of Jesus. This rectification precipitated in the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament.


Reference List


Chapter 15

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADVENTISTS AND ADHERENTS OF ANIMISTIC RELIGIONS

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April 11-12, 2001

Introduction

Animistic religions\(^1\) are broadly similar in spite of the fact that each society has its own set of deities and spiritual beings. Perhaps the defining characteristic of animistic religions is their sacral worldview. In contradistinction to our Western mechanistic concepts of causality, it is believed that spirit forces pervade reality and control almost everything that happens. No clear boundaries are placed between spiritual and natural causes.

Animistic religions differ from world religions in several ways. They seldom have sacred writings or developed systems of belief and ethics or great spiritual founding fathers. The cycles of religious rites center about rituals of the life cycle, such as initiation into adulthood, marriage, induction into high office, funerals, and induction into the spirit world; the great rituals of the cosmic cycle such as rain-making, harvest, first fruit ceremonies, celebrations, and rituals of protection in times of calamity and danger.
Relationship between Adventism and Adherents of Animistic Religions

Conversations and relationships with animists follow a different pattern from those with representatives of the world religions for several reasons. Christianity has historically had its greatest successes among animists. To this proclivity must be added the fact that the radical change now taking place in many tribal societies is undermining the social/cultural systems that have supported animism. Apart from relatively rare renewal movements in animistic religions, transition is taking place along two axes: either toward one of the world religions or in the direction of secular materialism. This is thus an era of missionary opportunity among the animistic peoples of the world.

There is generally no developed theological system in animism which functions as a powerful contrary belief system dominating relationships with other religions. A tendency toward a tentative inclusivism rather than opposition has marked the attitude of animists toward the world religions. Animists generally experience little difficulty in adding new deities and doctrines to their panoply of powers and worldview.

The conversation with Christianity is inevitably colored by the very different *intentionalities* of the two religions. Christianity, in this case the *Great Tradition*, centers upon God and the life to come, whereas the animistic Folk Religions, usually called the *Little Tradition* in inter-religious conversations, have to do with life here and now—good health, productivity in family, the provision of food, protection from earthly ills, and shelter from malevolent spiritual beings and forces.

Some Points of Contact for Presentation Of the Adventist Message

There are concepts of a Creator God in most animistic traditions, however, the “otiose high God” of these religions is distant and rarely involved in daily life. These beliefs are inculcated in local myths of creation, in the separation of human beings from the Creator God and in the origin of death. In many societies there are also flood myths; thus, the first few chapters of Genesis fall upon somewhat familiar ground and may be used to awaken interest. The clarity of the Genesis accounts of the fall and portrayal of the great God in search
of Adam and Eve make a positive impression and prepares the way for the presentation of the gospel.

Sacrifices and libation offerings, which constitute a tangible means of establishing relationships with the spirit world, are a central feature of the major religious rituals of most animistic peoples. Thus the Old Testament sanctuary service with its system of sacrifices strikes a familiar cord and opens the way to an understanding of the vast significance of the death of Christ as the universal sacrifice, and of his priestly ministration in the heavenly sanctuary.

Animists live in a world that is constantly torn by tension between the forces that promote their good and well-being and those that are malevolent. And, for them, it is these spirit forces that largely control reality. This worldview constitutes a congenial mind-set for acceptance of the very much grander picture of the God of the Scriptures, of his immanence and availability to human beings as well as of his transcendence, and of his victory over evil at the cross. The Great Controversy theme may thus be introduced as an enlargement of their worldview.

**Summary and Conclusion**

To the surprise of some, discoveries arising from relationships with animists point in two directions: to the Christian as well as to the animist. Immersion in the sacral world serves to reveal the unconscious inclination of the average Western Christian toward a rational secularism and the convinced animist who detects this may come to regard the Christian as a kind of half-believer.

On the other hand the ease, without serious pangs of conscience, with which the convert to Christianity may slip into a dual relationship in which recourse is alternately had to the Great and Little traditions, depending on the needs of the moment, comes as a surprise to the Western Christian who thinks in terms of a mutually exclusive affiliation. The consciousness of animists of the availability of a revelatio continua via a diviner to resolve the difficulties of everyday life constitutes a well-nigh, irresistible attraction. When all is not going well recourse may be had to a diviner or shaman who can establish contact with the spirit world and reveal the spirit or forces that are the cause of a difficulty and advise regarding appropriate ritual. The failure of some Christian groups in animistic societies to understand and address such issues has not infrequently resulted in a dual allegiance in which the enthusiastic convert, while rejoicing...
in the hope of the gospel, reverts to the practice of the traditional religion in order to cope with religious fears and practical difficulties.

**Notes**

1Whereas a single name serves to designate each of the world religions, there appears to be no general consensus regarding the term which best defines animistic religions. “Animism,” which derives from the Latin *anima*, meaning spirit or soul and which seemed appropriately descriptive of the sacral spirit world of primal societies, was the term generally employed by early scholars of religion. This term has fallen into disfavor because it is an inadequate designation of the many deities and Creator Gods believed in by two-thirds of tribal societies. Other terms such as primal, sacral, tribal, primitive, traditional, and folk religion have come into use. Barrett employs the term “ethnoreligionists” which he defines as: “Followers of a non-Christian or pre-Christian religion tied closely to a specific ethnic group, with membership restricted to that group; usually animists, polytheists or shamanists” Barrett David B. et. al. 2001. *World Christian Encyclopedia*, 2d ed. New York: Oxford University Press 1:28. Barrett gives the number of ethnoreligionists as 228 million present in 142 of the world’s 238 countries and lists the major groups in table 7-5, 2: 11, 12. The Animistic worldview remains alive among the popular religions in the world. This is the case in Buddhism, Hinduism, and also in some forms of Islam and Christianity in the two-thirds world. The adjectival use of the term, “Animism” has regained favor and is used here as an assigned subject heading.
Chapter 16

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2001 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor’s Note: At the conclusion of each year’s Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 2001 five recommendations were prepared dealing with the centrality of Christian community to world mission, spiritual power confrontations, syncretism, alternate forms of worship, and the relationship between seventh-day Adventists and secular people.

Centrality of Christian Community to World Mission

Recommended 12 April 2001

Because of sin, humans are by nature separated not only from God but from each other. The human family has been fractured, and in this fractured state community does not occur naturally. It has to be intentionally cultivated and sustained.

One of the last prayers offered by Jesus before his crucifixion was that his followers might be one as he and the Father are one. He listed as the identifying mark of true believers that they would have love for one another. Christ’s model of Christianity involves not only a relationship with our heavenly Father but necessarily includes relationships that build an earthly community.
As the vehicle of God’s redemptive concern, the Christian community functions in two important and integrated forms. As the gathered community it meets for fellowship and nurture to sustain its internal life. As the scattered community it is sent into the world to witness to the transforming power of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The integrity and vitality of its witness depends on how well the community exemplifies Christ.

1. To fulfill God’s purpose, Christian community must be rooted in the unconditional love of God for everyone.
2. It must be inclusive and open to all.
3. It must provide an environment where people are free to acknowledge weakness and eager to listen to and encourage each other without incrimination.
4. It must provide accountability for Christian growth.
5. It must work to overcome all forms of prejudice, discrimination, and injustice inside and outside of the Church.
6. It must see itself as an experiment in grace, where God’s vision for humanity is being lived out now.
7. Its worship patterns, decision-making, structure, and programs must utilize the strengths and meet the needs of the diverse ethnic, racial, gender, age, and socioeconomic groups represented in the community.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we must view ourselves as part of the larger Christian community, recognizing our common spiritual heritage, and seeking to interact in a manner that shows respect despite theological differences.

Community is not an end in itself. Its purpose is to foster the whole mission of the church, which includes both outreach and nurture. We must avoid a spirit of superiority, recognizing that, as Jesus stated, God’s true followers can be found in many folds. Christian community will lead believers to stand in solidarity with all people with whom they interact, never losing sight of the oneness of all humanity.

*Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.*
Statement on Spiritual Power Confrontations

Recommended 12 April 2001

Seventh-day Adventists have long recognized the cosmic conflict between the powers of good and evil. Although Christ defeated Satan at Calvary, the great controversy between Christ and Satan continues every day in different ways in every part of the world. In the light of this very real battle, we affirm the following:

1. Satan and his evil angels (demons) exist. They are real personalities with supernatural power, “legion” in number, and organized for the purpose of degrading humanity and destroying God’s influence in the world.
2. God as Creator has greater power than his created beings.
3. Jesus and his angels have greater power than Satan and his angels.
4. Satan cannot force the human will, and demon possession is ultimately the result of choices the victim or others make.
5. Demonic harassment or possession reveals itself in different ways in different cultures.
6. The casting out of demons is part of the ministry of the gospel and has two essential elements: using Jesus’ name and exercising faith.
7. We need to follow the example of the apostles who, when confronted with demon possession, were ready to call on Jesus’ authority for deliverance.
8. Spiritual discernment is needed to identify genuine possession. Not all strange or bizarre behaviors indicate the direct operation of Satan and his demons. Those in gospel work need education in spiritual power confrontations.
9. Victims who are delivered of demon possession need continued support.
10. Casting out demons may not always be successful. Failure may indicate that the victim has psychological rather than spiritual problems or indicate other hidden issues. Failure may also be the result of a lack of faith.
11. Those who cast out demons need to seek the support of the community of believers. In all cases, they must surrender to the sovereign will of God and give him the glory for each deliverance.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.
As the Church enters more non-Christian areas the question of syncretism, the blending of religious truth and error, is a constant challenge and threat. It affects all parts of the world and we must take the issue seriously. For Adventists this topic is highlighted by our understanding of the Great Controversy which helps us understand Satan's mode of operation of distorting and compromising truth, not by denying it, but by mixing truth and error, thus robbing the gospel of its true impact and power.

In this current situation a spirit-led, critical contextualization of all aspects of religion is a necessity. Only this process can preserve the power and effectiveness of the gospel. The diversity of cultures around the world make it difficult to specify every practice or idea that needs to be addressed, but the key steps in a process of deciding where proper adaptation ends and fatal syncretism starts would include the following:

1. An examination of the specific issue in the light of all cultures and religions concerned. This would necessitate especially a careful analysis by cultural insiders of the significance of the particular practice or idea in question.

2. An examination of all that Scripture says about the issue or related issues by all cultures concerned. The implication of scriptural principles should also carefully thought through.

3. In the context of reflection and prayer the local community of believers applies the scriptural insights to their situation. The process could have at least one of the following possible results:
   a. The practice or idea is accepted, because it is compatible with scriptural principle.
   b. The practice or idea is modified to make it compatible with Christian principles.
   c. The practice or idea is rejected, because it contradicts the principles of scripture.
   d. The church develops a functional substitute for a cultural practice that fulfills an important need in that society.
   e. The church introduces a unique Christian practice that is required by Scripture, but has no correspondence in the culture (e.g.: baptism).

4. The idea and practice is implemented carefully.
5. After a period of trial it may be necessary to evaluate the idea or practice or the decision made.

Before reading this statement, the General Conference statement voted by the Annual Council on “Contextualization in the Seventh-day Adventist Church” should be carefully studied. The statement on syncretism was designed as a complement to the statement on contextualization.

**Contextualization and Syncretism**

*Statement as Approved by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists*  
*Administrative Committee and as Edited by the Biblical Research Institute*  
*June and July, 2003*

Contextualization is defined in this document as the intentional and discriminating attempt to communicate the gospel message in a culturally meaningful way. Seventh-day Adventist contextualization is motivated by the serious responsibility of fulfilling the gospel commission in a very diverse world. It is based on the authority of the Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit and aims at communicating biblical truth in a culturally-relevant way. In that task contextualization must be faithful to the Scripture and meaningful to the new host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged by the gospel.

Intentional contextualization of the way we communicate our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it the Church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, adaptation has taken place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the Three Angels’ Messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. This will continue to happen.

As the Church enters more non-Christian areas, the question of syncretism—the blending of religious truth and error—is a constant challenge and threat. It affects all parts of the world and must be taken seriously as we explore the practice of contextualization. This topic is highlighted by the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the Great Controversy between good and evil which explains Satan's mode of operation—distorting and compromising truth, not by denying it, but by mixing truth and error, thus robbing the gospel of its true impact and power. In this context of danger and potential distortion, critical contextualization is indispensable.
Since the effects of sin and the need for salvation are common to all humanity, there are eternal truths that all cultures need to know, which in some cases can be communicated and experienced in different and yet equivalent ways. Contextualization aims to uphold all of the Fundamental Beliefs and to make them truly understood in their fullness.

In the search for the best way to contextualize, while at the same time rejecting syncretism, certain guidelines must be followed.

a. Because uncritical contextualization is as dangerous as non-contextualization, it is not to be done at a distance, but within the specific cultural situation.

b. Contextualization is a process that should involve world church leaders, theologians, missiologists, local people, and ministers. These individuals should have a clear understanding of the core elements of the biblical worldview in order to be able to distinguish between truth and error.

c. The examination of the specific cultural element would necessitate an especially careful analysis by cultural insiders of the significance of the particular cultural element in question.

d. The examination of all the Scripture says about the issue or related issues is indispensable. The implications of scriptural teachings and principles should be carefully thought through and factored into proposed strategies.

e. In the context of reflection and prayer, scriptural insights are normative and must be applied to the specific cultural element in question. The analysis could lead to one of the following results:

1) The particular cultural element is accepted, because it is compatible with scriptural principles;

2) The particular cultural element is modified to make it compatible with Christian principles;

3) The particular cultural element is rejected, because it contradicts the principles of Scripture.

f. The particular cultural element that was accepted or modified is carefully implemented.

g. After a period of trial it may be necessary to evaluate the decision made and determine whether it should be discontinued, modified, or retained.

In the end, all true contextualization must be subject to biblical truth and bear results for God’s kingdom. The unity of the global church requires regular exposure to each other, each other’s culture, and each other’s insights that “to-
Alternative Forms of Worship

Recommended 12 April 2001

The General Conference Global Mission department has spearheaded the proclamation of the gospel in many unentered areas around the world. New congregations have been established. When these new congregations worship, however, they don’t always worship in the same manner as do traditional Adventists. What can we say about these new worship “initiatives”? What guidelines can be provided to help new believers ascertain if their form of worship is biblically authentic and yet culturally relevant?

Corporate worship is God’s people coming into his presence as the Body of Christ in reverence. They give honor and homage to him through adoration, confession, prayer, and thanksgiving. To evaluate worship, the following characteristics of biblical worship should be considered.

1. The content of worship should be similar to that of biblical worship as found in the Scripture. There should be continuity in terms of the basic ingredients of worship such as prayer, Scripture, songs of praise, sacraments.

2. Worship style can vary according to its cultural context. Diversity itself is not inherently evil. In fact, diversity may become a cultural necessity.

3. Worship must conform to biblical norms. Freedom in worship should be accompanied by order, beauty, and reverence.

4. Worship style should be contextualized to make it meaningful to the worshiper. Areas of considerations may include music, instruments, order of worship, place of worship, posture of worship, etc. The following steps may be taken in contextualizing worship:
   a. Identify the areas of worship needing contextualization.
   b. Engage in Bible study to ascertain if the proposed change conforms to biblical norms.
   c. Make a decision to stop or continue a certain practice after critical appraisal of the practice in the light of biblical evidence.
   d. Retain the practice if it is not antithetical to the Scripture, reject the practice if it is found to be unbiblical, or modify the practice to make it fully Christian. Sometimes new rituals that are not biblically offensive may be added.
As the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to come into contact with many different cultures in non-Christian countries, the topic of proper worship practices becomes very relevant. In those settings, deciding what is or is not acceptable in a Seventh-day Adventist worship service is important. Calling people to worship the only true God plays a significant role in the message and mission of the Church. In fact, in Adventist eschatology the central element in the closing controversy is the subject of worship and the true object of worship. We should be careful and prudent as we seek ways to contextualize Adventist worship around the world. In this task we should be constantly informed by the following aspects of Adventist worship.

a. God is at the very center of worship as its supreme object. When we approach God in adoration we come in contact with the very source of life, our Creator, and with the One who in an act of grace redeemed us through the sacrificial death of His beloved Son. No human being should usurp that divine right.

b. Corporate worship is God's people coming into His presence as the Body of Christ in reverence and humility to honor and give homage to Him through adoration, confession, prayer, thanksgiving, and singing. Believers come together to listen to the Word, for fellowship, for the celebration of the Lord's Supper, for service to all, and to be equipped for the proclamation of the gospel. Our faith invites wholehearted and highly participatory worship where the Word of God is central, prayer is fervent, music is heartfelt, and fellowship in faith is palpable. These elements of worship are indispensable in Adventist worship services around the world and should be part of any attempt to contextualize Adventist worship.

c. We are complex creatures in which reason and emotions play a significant role. True worship expresses itself through our body, mind, spirit, and emotions. The Adventist Church calls for a proper balance of the involvement of these aspects of our personality in worship. It is important to keep in mind that any element of the worship service that tends to place humans at its center must be rejected. The extent to which the body participates in worship will vary
from culture to culture, but whatever is done should be done under discipline and self-control, keeping in mind that the central aspect of the worship service is the proclamation of the Word and its call to serve God and others.

d. Adventist worship should draw on the treasure trove of Seventh-day Adventist theology to proclaim with exuberance and joy the communion and unity of believers in Christ and the grand theme of God’s infinite love as seen in creation, the plan of redemption, the life of Christ, His high priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary, and His soon return in glory.

e. Music should be used to praise Him and not as a means to over stimulate emotions that will simply make individuals “feel good” about themselves. Through it worshippers should express their deepest feelings of gratitude and joy to the Lord in a spirit of holiness and reverence. Adventist worship is to celebrate God’s creative and redemptive power.

If the need to contextualize the form of worship in a particular culture arises, the guidelines provided in the document entitled “Contextualization and Syncretism” should be followed.

**A Statement of Relationship between Seventh-day Adventists and Secular People**

*Recommended 12 April 2001*

Seventh day Adventists affirm the freedom of all people to believe as they choose. While Seventh-day Adventist Christians hold to a theistic worldview that provides hope and a sense of purpose, we respect the freedom of others to have alternative views and lifestyles.

In solidarity with secular people, we affirm the legitimacy of the human quest for fulfillment. We affirm our belief that the Christian gospel centers on what it means to be fulfilled as a human being. Jesus Christ came into the world to deliver us from dehumanizing behavior and tendencies, and to transform us into actualized persons fully able to experience all that it means to be human. We recognize the potential of each individual and believe that all have the privilege and responsibility to work toward realization of that potential.

Seventh-day Adventists affirm the need to be culturally attuned and sensitive to the diversity of the human family. We deplore all forms of prejudice such as racism and inappropriate expressions of ethnocentrism. We honor diversity while seeking to model unity within the colorful mosaic of humanity.
Seventh-day Adventists share in the struggles and disappointments of the human family. In this context we affirm the need for authenticity and integrity in human relationships. Such authenticity enables a sense of empathy and realism and provides a constructive basis for interaction with others.

We affirm that the Christian faith is not merely a system of beliefs, but that it is also practical. Following Jesus Christ as our example, Seventh-day Adventist Christians work together with those who, in a spirit of altruism, seek to honor the rights of others, to ensure justice for all, and to work in appropriate ways towards the relief of suffering and oppression.

We confess that in our interaction with secular people, we, along with other Christians have sometimes been too ready with answers before pausing to listen to the questions. We affirm that Seventh-day Adventists wish to place a high priority on listening to the deepest concerns of all peoples, being sensitive to their needs and problems, and working alongside them in an attitude of service and humility.

*Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.*
Chapter 17

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THE FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS AND GLOBALIZATION

BERTIL WIKLANDER

April 8-9, 2002

The aim of this paper is to provide a basis for discussing the challenge Adventist theology faces in our practical task of doing global mission.

Our Commitment to Mission

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to the mission of making disciples of all people, from every nation, tribe, tongue, and people group. This is a commitment to communicate God's truth in an efficient and intelligible way to people in various cultures and conceptual systems. There are reasons to believe that we are not as successful in doing this as we could be.

Truth in the Bible

In the Bible, the concept of “truth” is applied in various ways. The Hebrew and Greek words for “truth” are used to refer to such entities as the word of God, his teachings, wisdom, divine righteousness, the believers’ attitude of faith, the gospel of salvation, the nature of God, God as revealed in Jesus. (See
Thus, truth is not only cognitive, but relational, experiential, practical, aesthetic, and ethical. It relates to the life of human beings, wherever they live.

The ‘truth as it is in Jesus’ is both a biblical and Adventist concept which could serve as a practical guide to help us begin defining the essence of Adventism. Theoretically, this must begin with God, and the concept that in Christ is found ‘all the fullness of God’ (Eph 3:19). But in the practical task of bringing God to people, we may need to begin with Jesus as a human being, for ‘human being’ is a unique common denominator, or “universal,” that all people will understand and accept.

The Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs

A key element of our understanding of truth is the wording of how we as a church summarize the core teachings of the Bible, the so-called Fundamental Beliefs. What are the fundamental beliefs and what role should they play for us? It is vital to approach this question from the origin and development of the fundamental beliefs in our church. This can be studied in the relevant articles in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, so I will just refer to a couple of points here.

First, for many decades, Adventists were not happy with a statement of beliefs, because there was a strong conviction that the Bible is our only creed and that no statements should be added to it. This was a radical application of the Protestant view that the Bible alone is to be our authority for faith and life. This position was endorsed by Ellen White. And it is important that we still bear this principle in mind (see the introduction to Seventh-day Adventists Believe).

Second, at various times in our history, however, practical needs resulted in a summary of our beliefs and practices, in order to keep both Adventists and non-Adventists informed about where we stand. The twenty-two points published by Uriah Smith for some time in the Review in the 1870s had to be removed due to resistance from within the church.

Third, when another version of beliefs surfaced in the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook in the 1930s, it was to address a practical need, namely the situation in the mission fields, where our church was working alongside many other Christian denominations. Adventists needed to define their positions and legitimize themselves as Bible-believing Christians.
Fourth, for many years Adventists have had at least two different versions of their beliefs in the *Church Manual*, one summarizing how they understand the teachings of the Bible, and another one to be used as the baptismal vow. Again, the practical function seems to direct the content and wording. But difference in emphasis, selection of content, and wording does not seem to be a major issue.

Fifth, as late as 1980, the General Conference in session formally voted a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs for the first time. The introduction states that:

Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church's understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God's Holy Word (emphasis supplied).

Sixth, it seems that the statement of our beliefs is primarily a practical tool to summarize our understanding of the essential teachings of the Bible. This can then be used in different ways and for different purposes.

Seventh, the statement does not say anything about how the Fundamental Beliefs are to be used. Or how they are to be translated and applied. My experience is that a number of different re-applications of the Fundamental Beliefs already exist. Some examples:

When unions translate the English version into their own languages, a process of interpretation and recreation of new concepts is inevitable. I translated the 27 Fundamental Beliefs from English to Swedish in the early 1980s for the church and faced a variety of challenges in trying to find proper equivalents in modern Swedish for the North-American, Protestant-Evangelical theological language of the text. This task becomes even more complicated the further away from Christian (or Post-Christian) and Western cultures we go.

Many local churches like to present our beliefs in a handy way on the back of their printed Sabbath Service programs, usually for newcomers, but also to remind church members of what we stand for. And every version looks different. But if a theological issue would arise, the Bible itself, or the Fundamental Beliefs, would normally serve as a guide to settle a conflict.

Eighth, I suggest that making disciples is a spiritual and hermeneutic task, as exemplified in the story of Philip's meeting with the Ethiopian eunuch ac-
cording to Acts 8:26-40. This task presents itself with equal force in areas such as Bible translation (bringing the words of the Bible to readers in various cultures), evangelism (leading people to conversion), and Bible teaching (making disciples). The Fundamental Beliefs may be given different functions here: (a) in Bible translation, we go beyond the fundamental beliefs to their wider source, providing them with a wider context for sharing our faith, which allows for a variety of concepts to be used. In this connection, the role of fundamental beliefs is to help the translator both in the process of interpreting the original text and in transferring it into the new language; (b) in evangelism, we use what is practical from the 27 fundamental beliefs, and from the Bible, to guide a person to a decision, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; (c) in Bible teaching, the fundamental beliefs help teachers see the whole picture while focusing on details, or to see the essentials while focusing on peripheral elements.

The role of the fundamental beliefs may be to help us focus, on the whole, and on the essence. But they were not intended, I think, to hinder the Spirit from leading believing and committed people in the work of translation, evangelism, and teaching. And the Bible itself must ultimately be our authority. The Bible needs to be a necessary correction to the fundamental beliefs, for it stands above them by definition. This offers many possibilities for mission workers in the church to draw on biblical material to translate the Fundamental Beliefs into foreign cultures.

The Fundamental Beliefs As a Summary of the Bible

The fundamental beliefs do not describe themselves as a summary, but this is implied when it says that “certain fundamental beliefs (are) the teaching of the Holy Scriptures . . . [and] constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture.”

The fundamental beliefs obviously are to function as a general summary of the specifics found in the Bible. This concept is biblical. Jesus and Paul followed the Jewish rabbis in applying the same distinction: (1) Jesus says that the Law and the Prophets hang on the twofold commandment of love (Matt 22:40). This means that the summary brings together the essence of a wider material; (2) Paul says that the commandment to love your neighbor is the fulfillment of the Law (Rom 13:10). Here, the summary functions as a superior statement that
organically incorporates all the specific details of the Law. The same thing is true when Christ is seen as the essence of God, incorporating all his fullness.

Thus, the fundamental beliefs may be used as a summary which has a practical function. It focuses attention on the whole and its essence. In any translation of the biblical message to a foreign culture, these functions of the fundamental beliefs should be remembered.

**A Suggested Distinction**

The fundamental beliefs are expected to function in two quite different ways:

First, they have a role in our *Church Constitution*. As such, they fill an organizational role. The constitution of the church as an organization has to be done somewhere and in some kind of language. And the fundamental beliefs fill that role, defining the existence of the worldwide body that we are. In this context, it is enough for the fundamental beliefs to be a well-worded, theological, and theoretical statement. But maybe it could be revised now, after more than twenty years, to incorporate some of the growing knowledge about cultural differences that the global mission work is bringing, and make it a truly global statement. This would mean that missiological issues would drive the process of revision.

Second, the fundamental beliefs are sometimes expected to have a role in the *lives of human beings*. But even in English and in North America, this calls for a practical application to the individual lives of people and this cannot be done without dynamic interaction. For a person’s reception and appropriation of received truth depends on his or her capacity to understand, his or her needs, and situation, interests, and values. It is obvious that in this connection the letter may kill, but the Spirit will give life. It must be necessary for front line workers to act under the Spirit’s guidance and adapt the words of the Fundamental Beliefs, drawing on the Bible, as the Spirit leads, in order to assist people as they grow into an experience of conversion and then to continue discipling them. Experts on various religions could help us develop guidelines for work among various people groups, using the best possible points of entry.

**Hierarchical Concepts**

It would be interesting to rewrite the fundamental beliefs from the point of view that modern semantics has taught, namely, that every concept can be
hierarchically built into another superior concept until only one remains. Such structures could then vary, depending on where one is working.

Another interesting exercise would be to identify global, human, conceptual universals, which are very general and open concepts that are common to all people. And then build a statement of fundamental beliefs on those concepts, filling them with various relevant and proper material from the Bible.
ONE BRIEF CASE STUDY OF THE USE OR NON-USE OF THE 27 FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS AND THE BAPTISMAL VOW

JAMES COFFIN

April 8-9, 2002

The purpose of the following brief paper is to provide one case study in which the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and/or the Baptismal Vow are being adapted to make them more context-appropriate. Specifically, we will note what is being done in presenting Adventist doctrine to children and youth in preparation for baptism in one place in North America.

To glean information for this presentation, I contacted six youth pastors in the Orlando, Florida area, asking how they use or do not use both the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and the Vow in their baptismal preparation for both children and youth. I chose to look at the approaches being used with the youth for two main reasons: (1) this sub-group of American society might find difficulty in understanding the rather ponderous language of both documents; and (2) today’s youth pastors are tomorrow’s senior pastors, and the methods being employed with youth today may well be employed with adults in the future.
None of the youth pastors with whom I spoke use either the 27 Fundamental Beliefs document itself or the book that elaborates on those beliefs as they prepare youth for baptism. Nor did any of them use the traditional Baptismal Vow as a source in their teaching. Most used materials that have been written to teach the basics of Adventism specifically to children and youth. These include: “A Reason to Believe” by Chris Blake; “It’s My Choice” by Steve Case; “Come Alive; Stay Alive” by the Hart Research Group; and “Good News for Kids” (I was not able to ascertain who produces this material). However, even these materials are not followed slavishly but are deleted from and added to at the discretion of the youth pastor.

One youth pastor said that as he deals with high school and college students who are seeking baptism he sits down and talks to them extensively about their spiritual journey, seeking to “unwrap” the spiritual package they have acquired along the way. The viewpoints they hold have been influenced by parents, teachers at church schools, Sabbath School, pastors, and many more. The youth pastor said it is amazing to him how much misinformation the youth have acquired in their brief lifetime. So “at least half” of his time is spent just addressing the misconceptions they hold to dispel the “toxic” aspects of their faith. Then he moves on to introduce them to those other things he feels they should know.

Quite consistently, the aspects of our belief that receive the most attention from youth pastors are the relational issues of God and humans—salvation, the love of God, the friendship of Christ—as well as issues of Christian behavior and lifestyle, especially relating to our fellow humans. The more abstract and heavily theological aspects of our beliefs tend to be covered more superficially or not at all.

No youth pastor interviewed asks the youth to sign either the traditional Baptismal Vow or any modified form of it. And only one youth pastor has the youth make any kind of public commitment before the congregation. That commitment includes just three points: (1) Do you accept Jesus Christ as your personal Savior? (2) Do you believe in the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? (3) Do you wish to become a member of __________ church?

The other youth pastors use the Blake or Case adaptations of the Baptismal Vow, or an adaptation of their own creation. However, they use this more in the form of a review sheet, addressed personally and privately, and not in a public examination of the candidate.
In explaining their practice of not using the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and the Baptismal Vow as they are written, several youth pastors talked about the need to communicate. If the youth do not really understand what is being said, or if it is being packaged in a format that is foreign to them, what good is it to use that form, no matter how right and accurate it might be? In the same context they seriously question the advisability of Bible study guides that require the use of a particular translation, as in the case with most of the more commonly used lessons today. Not only does it seem to put an official stamp of approval on a given translation, but it may keep the student from using a translation that would be more readily understood and would speak more directly to the heart, without having to be explained.

There is much to be said in favor of teaching from standardized, officially approved documents of doctrinal belief. It maintains uniformity and it minimizes the risk of the teacher focusing on personal biases and riding hobby horses. On the other hand, if the official documents do not speak in a language that is readily understood by the baptismal candidate, or if they package the information in a format that is foreign to the baptismal candidate, then the documents are not achieving the mission that we would all want for them.

Understandably, the church is hesitant to create a great variety of official doctrinal statements. Similarly, it is hesitant to give carte blanche to pastors to adapt the statements as they see fit. But it is happening, by default, in places where youth pastors feel confident enough to break from tradition. And in the places where it is not happening, one wonders if it is to the detriment of the youth, and that the truths we hold are possibly not being communicated as effectively and as adequately as they should be.
Chapter 19

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THE URBAN CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS

BRUCE CAMPBELL MOYER

April 8-9, 2002

The Context of Cities

Cities are not new. They date back to the fourth chapter of Genesis and found their first full flowering in post-diluvial Babel in the land of Shinar. At the same time, they are a very recent phenomenon as our urban population exploded during the twentieth century and became infused with new and volatile political, economic, and social factors. At the beginning of the twentieth century 15 percent of the world’s population lived in cities. By 1950 that figure had grown to 28 percent and by 1975 it had become 41 percent.1 Today’s global urban population is well over 50 percent.

As a twenty-first century phenomenon, cities present us with a new type of social organization, contrasted with that of towns and villages. The following chart (somewhat imperfectly) illustrates this.
Redfield’s Rural-Urban Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RURAL LIFE</th>
<th>URBAN LIFE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>established, traditional</td>
<td>mobile, free</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>homogeneous</td>
<td>heterogeneous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>group-oriented</td>
<td>individualistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ascribed roles</td>
<td>achieved roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>community</td>
<td>intersecting communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harmonious</td>
<td>managed conflict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>status quo, little change</td>
<td>rapid change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>egalitarian</td>
<td>hierarchical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>holistic life</td>
<td>segmented life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human in scale</td>
<td>impersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sacred cosmos</td>
<td>secular cosmos</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While there are, however, grains of truth in all of this, the city is far more complex than this simple model or picture. The city does not exist in opposition to countryside, but the two are linked in webs of complex social, economic, and political systems. Cities often incorporate peasant, even tribal communities within their boundaries (examples can be cited in such diverse places as Portland, Bombay, Cairo, and Washington, DC). Toeffler’s three waves (the agricultural, industrial, and post-industrial information ages or revolutions) are frequently found side by side in many cities, particularly in the two-thirds World (1980). The chart also disregards large scale commuting back and forth, and the reality of telecommunications. Tom Wolfe suggests that the real difference between urban and rural is that urban equals connected or wired (2000). If this is true then there are few rural areas left in the Americas, Europe, and Southeast Asia.

There is a tendency, reflected in the above illustration, to create stereotypes in our minds: cities equal poverty, crime, danger, and secularism; while the countryside reflects family, safety, quietness, and spirituality.

In fact, cities differ from each other as much as neighborhoods differ within a city. Each has a specific history, personality, and rhythm. Many have spe-
cific functions. Some are political cities or cultural cities or commercial and economic cities, and, in the developing world there are primary cities that combine two or more of these functions.

The Nature of the Urban, Secular Mindset

Secularism grew out of the emerging cities of Europe, following the Renaissance, Reformation, and Industrial Revolution. Together and reinforcing each other, urbanism and secularism now constitute one of the great challenges to the growth of the Christian Church. This has often been compounded by the pervasive Christian reluctance to grow with and relate to what Christianity has frequently viewed as the urban/secular threat or enemy, a social anti-Christ.

As Western civilization has swept over the globe, it has brought this secularism to the other urban centers through media, business, and education. Globalization is the present capstone to this process.

George Hunter provides a list of ten characteristics of urban, secular people that may help us understand what we are up against (Hunter 1992).

1. Secular people are ignorant about basic Christianity. They are biblically illiterate and thus they sense an awkwardness and even embarrassment at entering a sacred building. As such they tend to approach religion as consumers, prepared to “buy” what they want, what meets their needs.

2. Secular people are seeking life before death, not after. They are life oriented rather than earlier generations who were more traditionally death oriented. They see sickness as an inconvenience, not as a crisis. They have no concept of heaven or hell, only extinction. This means that religion must be related to the moment of living, not dying.

3. Urban, secular people are more conscious of doubt than of guilt. A profound sense of personal guilt has almost disappeared. Doubt (cynicism) puts people in a resistant frame of mind.

4. Urban, secular people have a negative image of the church. The church has been relegated to antiquity. Its answers to serious questions have been inadequate at best. They have more confidence in science and common sense. They live in the “public world” and understand religion to belong to a “private world” of non-scientific, personal opinion. For those with a scientific orientation, religion is no longer needed to answer life’s major questions. For those with a postmodern orientation, all opinions are equal and yours may or may not be “interesting.”
5. Urban, secular people experience multiple alienations. They are alienated from nature, from neighbors, and from political and economic systems over which they have no power. Often they are alienated from their work, which provides no meaning to their lives.

6. Urban, secular people are untrusting; Christians thus, should view people as untrusting, fearful, and suspicious, rather than evil, depraved, or rebellious. Secular people’s model of “god,” if they bother to have one, is the grim reaper, Santa, a cop, or a duplicitous politician.

7. Urban, secular people may experience low self-esteem with the disappearance of a sense of personal meaning and dignity. They may wonder, if a person dies and no one notices, did that person ever really live?

8. Urban, secular people often experience forces in history as out of control. They may see history as an endless series of large-scale surprises with no one in charge.

9. In addition to this urban, secular people often experience forces in personality as being out of control; there are forces in their own personalities and their families that they cannot control. They experience widespread, self-destructive addictions.

10. The last common thread is that urban, secular people simply cannot find the door to God or to any other over-arching paradigm or meta-story.

Current Attempts at Contextualization

It is obvious to the concerned pastor or evangelist that while urban mission may not require trans-oceanic travel or the mastery of another language, it is just as much cross-cultural mission as any “foreign field,” and, as such, requires serious attention to the critical contextualization of our fundamental teachings.

In preparing this paper I chose to survey a brief number of urban pastors from cities around the world. I asked them for examples of how they have adapted or contextualized the Fundamental Beliefs of the Adventist Church to enable urban, secular people to understand, accept, and appreciate them. I share here a number of responses from these urban practitioners.

Among the pastors that I surveyed, one of the most common responses was a sense of the irrelevance of the original question. Urban outreach is not directed to people who are asking What is true or What is truth? Urban people are asking much more practical questions such as How can I cope? and, more
sub-consciously, Where can I find community? In the poorer sections of cities the question is more often How can I survive? How can I get through this week or even this day?

Friendship is often the first point of Christian contact. This is not one of the fundamental beliefs. Worship is often the first point of contextualization. Amazingly, worship is not one of the Fundamental Beliefs of our church. Yet it certainly requires contextualization. Because it is so much a part of us, we fail to realize that our Western-based worship style is very rural. It is formed by our Western individualistic, privatized culture. Even the time of the service is geared to the accomplishment of farm chores. How many of us have to milk cows and collect eggs and eat a large breakfast before leaving for Sabbath School?

*Urban worship* reflects the urban lifestyle. It is much more participatory, immediate, engaging, egalitarian, and enthusiastic. The word “charismatic” comes to mind, devoid of some of the extreme behaviors generally associated with “Pentecostalism.” Some of our “celebration” churches have led the way in exploring this urban style. Because urban people are more prone to sleep in on Sabbath mornings, urban worship may also break from the traditional 9:30 A.M. schedule. Millennium Ministries in Silver Spring, MD begin the day with a continental breakfast and get started with worship at about 12:00 noon.

And what of our more specific beliefs?

One response noted that, “I’m doing a brief history of the *development of the Bible* by looking at the development of the canon, ancient manuscripts, and translations—English, Filipino, Spanish—since each language group is represented. None of the Filipino people I talked to, including several pastors, knew who first translated the Bible into the Filipino dialects. I called Wycliffe Bible Translators who referred me to their Summer Linguistic Institute. All those I talked to knew the Wycliffe people who had done translations, but no one knew the pioneers. . . . One of the Wycliffe librarians called me from Dallas, TX and told me he had found a book that gave a brief history. The people (my church members) will learn some things they have not known before.” Note that urban congregations are inevitably ethnically diverse and all of that diversity must be recognized and celebrated. When the Bible has been related to my ethnic background, to *me*, it becomes more real and meaningful. There is also a naturalness about using web-based resources.

Another urban pastor responded to my survey, saying, “I’ve addressed the *Spirit of Prophecy issue*.” The view I present is that the technical word for proph-
et is one who speaks for another. I use the story of Moses and Aaron as support where God said to Moses that Aaron will be your mouth, your prophet. I’ve also brought in the aspect of someone who speaks with authority or on behalf of another. I’ve linked these statements to Ellen White by saying words to the effect that she was a woman who spoke with authority and was accepted by many in the Adventist Church as speaking for God. So far, no one has objected to these statements and the conclusion.” Ellen White and the Spirit of Prophecy thus becomes a self-authenticating, personal belief, using de-mystified jargon.

Marriage and the Family is certainly a significant belief, particularly in the urban setting where “serial polygamy” is often the rule. An urban pastor writes, “Song of Songs was my subject. I’d never preached a sermon from the Songs before. The book affirms human sexuality, and addresses in very open language the topic of human sexual desire. I made it clear to people that this is a love poem that affirms human sensuality. More people asked for tapes than of any sermon I’ve done in a long time.”

In an urban setting sex and sexuality is used commercially. It sells everything from tires to toothpaste. This approach stresses God’s intentions for sex while defusing the erotic commercial use of sexuality.

A respondent spoke of how he deals with the Sabbath in an urban setting. Rather than relate Sabbath to eschatology, judgment, and obedience, he spoke of the Sabbath as a positive response to the anti-Semitism of the early church, and of returning to the Jewish roots of Christianity, parts of which had been severed in the second and third centuries when the Jewish revolts made “Jewishness” very unpopular, causing Sunday to be adopted to provide a more politically correct image. Others have taught the benefits of the Sabbath in a stressful urban world. In urban society that is very short on meta-stories, or overarching stories that explain all of life, the Sabbath as a day to relieve stress is much more understandable.

Relative to Spiritual Gifts and Ministries, some urban churches are experimenting with new forms of gift-based leadership in which a “pastor” becomes a member-facilitator, rather than an authoritative voice based on ordination. Other urban churches, aware of the moral (and legal) implications of gender in ministry are ordaining, or at least commissioning, women for ministry. Recently a major controversy raged in the Adventist churches of one African country over the propriety of women preaching. Urban Adventist churches won out in a Union statement that asserted the right of women to exercise speaking gifts in all the churches.
In terms of the contextualizing process, *language* becomes an issue. It has been noted that growing urban churches “adapt to the language, music, and style of the target population’s culture” (Hunter 1992:32). This means far more than merely using the local dialect or the eradication of “stained-glass, god-talk,” it involves the style of speaking, and the use of appropriate technologies. For urban people dialogue will often replace preaching (one-to-one or to many). Ministry to urban people also takes into consideration that the music (certainly an important part of language) must be appropriate. Throughout most of my Adventist life (1958 to the present) Christian music has generally reflected a musical style that was popular on the radio twenty or more years previously. Somehow the passage of two decades has been understood to have sanctified or cleansed the style for church use. Urban churches will certainly close that time gap.

**Suggestions**

Contextualization, particularly in the Western, urban, secular setting, and now increasingly diffuse in the two-thirds world, involves working with the worldview of urban people. Contextualization must address their plausibility structure, or their sense of what is real and reasonable. Personal, daily experience is real. Struggling to keep a job is real. Trying to manage a mix of relationships or to understand teenagers is real. Dealing with the complexity of multiple urban systems and globalization is real. The majority of Western, urban people are not into theological reasoning, but rather they are into coping and survival. Occasionally urban people are conscious of moral issues or dilemmas, but for many truth is too relative and personal to be effectively addressed.

Urban people are more comfortable with a scientific method, although they may not totally understand it or its presuppositions. They are not familiar with or comfortable with myths or metastories.

The issue of Sabbath vs. Sunday lacks historical meaning to most urban people. Biblically and historically illiterate, they are not asking what is right or correct, but what is real? They are less interested in ancient historical conflicts than in the practical benefits of the subject. How will this “Sabbath” enable me to cope better? What is in it for me?

When one watches popular TV (and U.S. television is exported to the world), one realizes that one of the serious quests of urban people is a sense of community. From *Cheers* to *Friends* and beyond, people are seeking a commu-
nity to which they can belong. In extreme situations, youth gangs or al Qaeda satisfy this longing. In the city the church must be presented in this light, as a community where “everybody knows your name.” But the church must be more than the presented ideal, it must actually be that community in which people are accepted and affirmed.

While the Scriptures should and will remain ultimately determinative of life and practice, urban people are also conscious of other “spiritually authoritative voices” in the media, in politics, and even in other faiths. A wise urban pastor or missionary knows these voices and can quote them, as did the first-century urban missionary Paul (Acts 17:28).

There are other beliefs that may need to be elevated to fundamental status. In many parts of the urban world people are conscious of the need for power. People need power to help in answering questions, in making decisions, and for protection from evil spirits. In the city the Holy Spirit must be presented, not as a cold, factual doctrine, but as a real power, demonstrably at work in the lives of believers. This may also involve the question of spirits and ancestors.

Richard Rice has just published his new book, Believing, Behaving, Belonging (2002). The book discusses three levels of participating in a religious community. Traditionally Adventists have followed a process of becoming a church member by moving from believing to behaving to belonging. In urban settings the process is more likely to move from belonging to behaving to believing. Urban people will commit themselves to a community in which they find meaning, in order to find faith. Behavior and belief will follow naturally.

Notes

1 In 1940 four of the five largest cities were in the Western world: New York, London, Paris, and Berlin. Today four of the five largest are in the two-thirds world: Tokyo-Yokohama (29 million), Mexico City (23 million), Sao Paulo (19 million) and Shanghai (18 million). There are 3,450 cities over 100,000 population, 330 mega-cities of over a million, 45 super cities of four million plus, and 12 super giants of over 10 million.


3 Cf. a line from the musical Rent, “there is no future, there is no past. I live each moment as my last.”

4 Personal reading of local church organization records in rural Michigan.
Reference List


Chapter 20

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SHARING THE 27 FUNDAMENTAL BELIEFS OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS WITH THE JEWISH PEOPLE

RICHARD ELOFER

April 8-9, 2002

Working among the Jewish people is a privilege, because we are working among the people of the Bible, the very people of Jesus and the apostles. Jesus was born among Jews and started his ministry among the Jews.

Because the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists are biblically based and were authenticated by Jesus and his disciples through the Hebrew Scriptures (the Tanach which was the whole Bible of their time) we can teach all of them to Jewish people today.

If as missiologists we think that we have to reformulate the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs, it is not because we want to change them. They are from the Bible and from God, but we should contextualize them in a way that enables them to be understood by the people we want to reach.

It is important to understand that the difficulty in sharing our beliefs with Jews is not in our beliefs themselves, but with the historical attitude of Chris-
tians toward the Jews. A further difficulty is the many statements in Adventist literature which can be understood by Jews in a very negative way.

It would be better for the Adventist Church to change her vocabulary and to distance herself from the deeds of the “Church” during the many centuries since the time of Christ. I am very confident that such a change is possible, because from time to time Adventist leaders come out with powerful and positive statements in this direction. The latest example was published in a recent editorial in the *Adventist Review*. William G. Johnsson in his editorial entitled “Please No More ‘Crusades’” recognized that the “Church” killed thousands of Jews and Muslims during those infamous crusades so it would be better to avoid such a emotional word in the future. Notice the tone of that article: “A motley, disorganized host of about 600,000 men, besides women and children, embarked on the First Crusade. Freed from moral obligations, they wrought devastation everywhere. Many died of pestilence and hunger; some 40,000 reached the Holy Land and captured Jerusalem in 1099 in a bloody slaughter that left not one Muslim or Jew alive in the city” (Johnsson 2002:5).

I remember studying the Bible with a couple of Jews in France several years ago. They were very happy to know more about the Seventh-day Adventist Church because of their beliefs in Jesus as the Messiah. At that time the Adventist Church had just issued the new book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . Biblical Exposition of Twenty-seven fundamental Doctrines* in a French edition. After studying for some time I offered them this book. After two weeks of reading they gave me back the book and broke off all connection with our church. They could not understand how the Adventist Church, even after Auschwitz and the holocaust could make such strong statements against Israel, neither could they accept some statements which could be understood as affirmation of “replacement theology” statements.

On another occasion, I received an email from Jeff Zaremski, a pastor in Florida who was working among Jewish people. Jeff wanted to get in contact with the Messianic pastor in his area of the state, but that pastor did not want any contact with Adventists because of the Adventist stance on “replacement theology.”

I can give several other examples of experiences I have had in Israel. Many people are interested in our church because we have had the courage to come back to the full truth of the Bible, including the validity of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Ten Commandments, the Sabbath, clean and unclean foods, etc., but
many cannot understand what we are saying about the rejection of the Jewish people.

**Use of the Hebrew Scriptures by Jesus and the Apostles**

Since Jesus, the apostles, and the early Christians, who were predominantly Jews, were preaching the gospel among Jews, we should follow their example.

The Bible of the Early Church was the Hebrew Scriptures

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16, 17). “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of the Scripture” (1 Tim 4:13).

Jesus and the apostles spoke a lot with the Jews of their time. They let them know that all that happened was written in the Hebrew Scriptures. Notice the many references and quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures in the New Testament:

“As the Scripture has said” is found thirty-three times in the New Testament. In this way Jesus and his disciples clearly indicated that they were Jews and carefully followed the Jewish Scriptures.

“It is written” is used ninety-two times in the New Testament. Perhaps the most significant usage is found in Luke 24:44-47 when Jesus himself explained what had happened just a few days before. “He said to them, ‘This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.’ Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. He told them, ‘This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.’”

“The Lord had said through the prophet” appears twenty-eight times in the New Testament. The words of the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures—Elijah, David, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Daniel, Micah, Jonah, Joel, and especially Moses—were quoted with this type of introduction. Also used were the phrases, “was said through the prophet” or “was spoken through the prophet.”
“As it is written in the Law” is another phrase used to refer to the Hebrew Scripture in the New Testament. The term “Law” was used in the broad sense of the word and referred to the entire body of writings. An example would be when Jesus said that he did not come to abolish the law. The term “Law” is often used with the same meaning as Scripture or the Bible. For example, “have you not read in the Law” or “as it is written in the Law” is used forty-eight times just in the gospels and Acts. In the Pauline writing these phrases refer 142 times to the Torah or the Bible, seven (perfect number) times in the letter of James the concept is referred to as the “Perfect Law” or the “Royal Law,” and in his first letter, John explains that the definition of sin is to break the Law, another reference to the Hebrew Scriptures.

Case Studies from the Bible

The best case studies available on how to present the truths of the Scriptures to Jewish people are found in the New Testament examples of how the disciples worked with Jews. The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit and were very successful in presenting biblical truth. Notice three case studies: (1) in Acts 2, Peter’s speech to a large group of people, (2) in Acts 7, Stephen’s speech to the small group in the Sanhedrin, and (3) in Acts 8, Philip’s speech to an individual, the Ethiopian eunuch.

Peter’s Speech in Acts 2:22-41

In this narrative Peter was preaching to a very large crowd. The story takes place in Jerusalem during the feast of Shavuot, or Pentecost. The people in the audience had come from many countries (Acts 2:5-11). At the end of the passage we are told that three thousand people were baptized (Acts 2:41), a number that was apparently only a part of the audience who heard Peter’s speech.

Peter began his sermon by asserting that Jesus was “a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs.” Peter was prudent and took care at the beginning of his sermon not to say that Jesus was the Messiah. He affirmed that even though Jesus was put to death, “God raised him from the dead . . . because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” And then Peter began to quote from the Hebrew Scriptures. Acts 2:26-28 is a quotation of Ps 16:8-11.

This is an important quotation for Peter. He was speaking with the Jews who were in Jerusalem. The Jewish people were waiting for the Messiah, and
according to their understanding, the Messiah was the one who was to sit on the throne of David. Peter argues his case by only quoting from Psalms and speaking about King David.

After quoting the Psalms, Peter closely identifies himself with his audience for they were Jews, just as he was. He speaks to their hearts by saying, “Brothers, I can tell you confidently” (Acts 2:29). Peter, as well as all Jews, considered David not only a king of Israel but also a prophet (Acts 2:30-31), so by quoting David he uses a source that bolsters his case.

Then comes the affirmation and the fulfillment of the prophecies referred to. “God has raised this Jesus to life,” and they can produce witnesses. The law requires two or three witnesses (Deut 19:15), but Peter can produce many more than just two or three. Jesus appeared to the twelve, and then the 120 disciples who were in the upper room, and then “he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time” (1 Cor 15:6). Then Peter said, “We are all witnesses of the fact” (Acts 2:31).

Peter again quotes from the Hebrew Scriptures (Acts 2:34, 35; cf. Ps 110:1) to prove that what was said concerning David was not for himself but for one of his descendants.

The end of this account closes with two appeals and the response from the audience (Acts 2:36-41) that results in 3,000 people being baptized.

**Stephen’s Speech in Acts 7**

Stephen’s speech is more of a defense than a speech to convince people about Jesus. There are no baptisms at the end of his speech and Stephen was stoned by the angry leaders.

But, this speech presents an interesting case study because Stephen was preaching before a small group of priests and members of the Sanhedrin (Acts 6:15). Stephen had been falsely accused by some foreign Jews (Acts 6:9-11), so wanting to defend himself he explained that he was not willing to change anything in the religion of his fathers. In order to emphasize his commitment to the religion of the nation he started his speech at the very beginning of Jewish history with the story of Abraham (Acts 7:2-8), Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and his brothers (Acts 7:8-16), and of the Hebrews in Egypt and their slavery (Acts 7:17-19). Stephen then refers to the story of Moses, Aaron, and the Hebrews in the desert (Acts 7:20-46). Then he reminds them of the temple and Solomon who built it (Acts 7:47-48).
Only after all this history of the Jewish people does Stephen quote specifically some texts from the Hebrew Scriptures (Acts 7:49-50; cf. Isa 66:1, 2). Then he reminds the priests and members of the Sanhedrin of the sins of Israel. As a result his hearers became furious, and in the end stoned Stephen with Saul assenting and looking on (Acts 8:1).

This report from the book of Acts is very dramatic and has a tragic end for Stephen, but it offers insight into how present-day Adventists can present the gospel and Jesus to the Jewish people. Stephen’s approach included a telling of Jewish history and pointing out to them how good God was during those 2,000 years.

While there were no baptisms as a direct result of Stephen’s speech, the narrative does mention that Saul (Paul) was there. I am sure the speech of Stephen touched his heart, and even though officially he went to Damascus to persecute the Christians who were living there, is it possible that his trip was a pretext to flee Jerusalem and to think more about all the events that had taken place there in the preceding months. I believe that Saul, after hearing Stephen, was open and ready to accept Jesus when he received his vision on the road to Damascus.

Philip’s Bible Study in Acts 8

This case study is very interesting because Philip gives an individual Bible study to a Jew. I believe that there is strong support for the fact that this Ethiopian was a Jew, living in Ethiopia like thousands of other Ethiopian Jews (today we know them as the Falasha). The Ethiopian had come to Jerusalem to worship God and as he returned home he was reading from the book of the prophet Isaiah.

The first verse in the story clearly indicates that teaching biblical truths is not our work, but is God’s work, and the great need is for people to be open and available for the Holy Spirit to use (Acts 8:26).

Philip is led by the Spirit to an encounter with a fellow who is reading the Bible. The Ethiopian was already open to spiritual things and was willing to listen and learn. When Philip met him he started by asking a question, “Do you understand” (Acts 8:30)?

Philip’s attitude is interesting because Philip began to teach from the very text that the eunuch was reading. The text was a very well-known text for a Jew, coming from the Hebrew Scriptures (Isa 53:7, 8). The response of the Ethiopian was very positive, and as he heard the story of Jesus, the Ethiopian was

**Recent Case Studies**

Recently in Israel, Adventist members have had many experiences in sharing the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs with ordinary Jews and even rabbis. Following are two examples:

**Sharing the Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs with an Individual**

Initial contact with an observant Jew led to a discussion of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs. The contact was surprised to learn of Adventist beliefs and that they were consistently Bible-based. A request for more information on Seventh-day Adventists was made and pamphlets describing who Adventists are, how the denomination was formed, and Adventist beliefs were given. After studying the information, the recipient described the experience as ‘an epiphany’.

Although follow-up was not continued, the contact had a positive attitude towards Seventh-day Adventist beliefs and the basis was laid for acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah and his certain return.

**Sharing the Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs with a Small Group**

One of the church members in Israel regularly attends a class that studies a portion of the Torah each week. During the discussion of the passages, the member often has the opportunity to show how Adventists are consistent with Scripture and conservative Judaism’s understanding of biblical truths. Some of the class members and even the rabbi leading the class were initially surprised to hear how much Jews and Adventist shared in common. The class members had not been aware that Seventh-day Adventists followed the biblical teaching on creation, lifestyle, and the Sabbath. When the topic of tithing was being discussed, the church member was asked what the Seventh-day Adventist position was. When appropriate, our member refers to Jesus as fulfilling the criteria of the Messiah. These references are always met with respect. The interaction
has led to a genuine interest in Seventh-day Adventists in general and in our teachings in particular.

**Lessons from These Case Studies**

1. Jews should teach Jews. This principle is also supported from the Spirit of Prophecy.
2. Jews, their culture, and history should be respected.
3. Jews need Jesus, just like any other people.
4. Jews can be converted and baptized.
5. The New Testament and Jesus must be presented in the light of the Hebrew Scriptures. “Souls will be saved, from the Jewish nation, as the doors of the New Testament are unlocked with the key of the Old Testament. Christ will be recognized as the Savior of the world, as it is seen how clearly the New Testament explains the Old. Many of the Jewish people will by faith receive Christ as their Redeemer” (White 1946:579).
6. The presentation of biblical truth should begin with and affirm what is already known or can be read in the Hebrew Scriptures, or from traditional Jewish literature and history reference books.
7. Contacts should be reassured that their Jewish identity and culture are not diminished by their recognition of Jesus as the Messiah.

**Example of a Good Bible Study**

**For Jewish People**

The Jewish Adventist Friendship Centre works closely with *Shabbat Shalom*, which is the main publication for English-speaking Jewish people. Dr. Jacques Doukhan, editor of *Shabbat Shalom*, recently published a new set of Bible lessons called “Shema Israel,” comprised of fifteen Bible studies. Each lesson includes a document or an article from *Shabbat Shalom* for background reading. This series of Bible studies is very effective in reaching Jews, because only Hebrew Scriptures and traditional Hebrew references are used. The study “The Nature of Man” is included in the appendix to illustrate the approach that is used.
Conclusions

It is vitally important to be sensitive to the particular interests of those to whom we are witnessing. We should listen to their questions and comments and respond to what they are interested in initially, rather than merely following our own agenda.

Whether the times we are living in really are “a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation” or if it only seems that way, people are distressed and perplexed, anxious and even fearful about what is going to happen. Through sharing our fundamental beliefs with Jewish people, Jews can be reassured of God’s control of history, can be brought to an appreciation of his love and care for them personally, and given confidence in the soon coming of the longed for Messiah, our Lord Jesus.
The Nature of Man

By Dr. Jacques Doukhan

1. How did humans originate?
   
   Texts: “And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Gen 1:27, cf. Gen 4:9, 10).

   Note: “For this reason man (Adam) was created only one person, for the sake of peace between mankind, so that one man should not say to his fellow: ‘My father was greater than yours.” (Sanhedrin 88b).

2. What is the human person made of?
   
   Text: “The LORD God formed man from the dust of the earth. He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being (Gen 2:7, cf. Gen 3:19).

3. What does the “soul” mean in Hebrew?
   
   Text: “In the towns of the latter peoples, however, which the LORD your God is giving you as a heritage, you shall not let a soul remain alive” (Deut 20:16).

   Note: The expressions such as “my soul,” “his soul,” etc. are idiomatic expressions for the personal pronoun I, his, etc. (See Lev 11:43; Ps 3:2; Jer 37:9).

   The term nefesh means the neck of the throat (Ps 69:2) or the breath that passes through the throat (Job 41:13) or the life-blood (Lev 17:10, 11). The term neshamah also means breath (1 Kgs 17:17).

4. What are the functions of the soul?
   
   Text: “When the LORD enlarges your territory, as He has promised you, and you say, ‘I shall eat some meat,’ for you have the urge to eat meat, you may eat meat whenever you wish” (Deut 12:20, cf. Prov 3:22).

   Note: The nefesh can be hungry (Ps 107:9), be thirsty (Ps 143:6), enjoy good food (Isa 55:2); it can also love (Gen 34:3), be troubled (Ps 31:9), know (Ps 139:14), be wise (Prov 3:22), worship God...
5. What are the functions of the flesh or the body?
   Texts: “Spoilers have come, Upon all the bare heights of the wilderness. For a sword of the LORD devours From one end of the land to the other; No flesh is safe” (Jer 12:12).
   Note: The words for soul and body are often interchangeable (Num 31:35; Ps 145:21).

6. How did God create man?
   Text: “And God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.’ And God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him: male and female He created them” (Gen 1:26, 27).
   Note: “The love of God for humans is manifested in the act that God created them in His image, and especially, that He revealed this to them” (Avot 3:15).

7. Why is it forbidden to kill men?
   Text: “Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in His image did God make man” (Gen 9:6).
   Note: “He who destroys one soul in Israel is as if he had destroyed the whole world” (Mishnah, Sanhedrin, 37).

8. What does the fact that God created man in His image imply for men in their lives?
   Texts: “Speak to the whole Israelite community and say to them: You shall be holy, for I, the LORD your God, am holy” (Lev 19:2; cf. Gen 9:6; Exod 20:8-11).
   Note: “Walk in the ways of God; as God is merciful and gracious, so you will be; as God is righteous and just, so you will be; as God is holy, so you will be” (Sifre, Ekeb 85a).

9. What is the relation between the physical (body) and the spiritual (soul) dimensions of the human person?
   Texts: “Please test your servants for ten days, giving us legumes to eat and water to drink. Whenever the king put a question to them requiring wisdom and understanding, he found them to be ten times better than all the magicians and exorcists throughout his realm” (Dan 1:12, 20).
Note: “The body cannot survive without the soul, nor soul without the body” (Tanh Va-Yikza 11). “I will tell you a parable. To what is the matter likened? To a king who has a beautiful orchard . . . and he placed two guardians over it, one a cripple and the other blind. Said the cripple to the blind man, ‘I see beautiful ripe fruit in the orchard. Come on, carry me and we will bring and eat them.’ The cripple rode on the back of the blind man and they brought and ate them. After a while the owner of the orchard came and said to them, ‘Where is my lovely fruit?’ The cripple answered, ‘Do I have legs to go?’ Answered the blind man, ‘Do I have eyes to see?’ What did he do? He placed the cripple on the back of the blind man and judged them as one—so also the Holy Blessed One brings the soul and throws it into the body and judges them as one” (Sanhedrin 91 a-b).

10. How do the spiritual dimensions affect the physical ones?
   Text: “Let fidelity and steadfastness not leave you; bind them about your throat, write them on the tablet of your mind, and you will find favor and approbation in the eyes of God and man” (Prov 3:3-4).

11. How do the physical dimensions affect the spiritual ones?
   Texts: “My son, do not lose sight of them; hold on to resourcefulness and foresight” (Prov 3:21; cf. Ps 31:11).

12. Why is health a spiritual issue?
   Texts: “They are life to him who finds them, healing for his whole body” (Prov 4:22; cf. 1 Cor 3:16).
   Note: “The preservation of the health of the body is one of the godly ways.”

13. What is the connection between being alive and being spiritual?
   Texts: “Send back Your breath, they are created, and You renew the face of the earth” (Ps 104:30; cf. Num 27:18).
   Note: The first implication we may infer from the story of this creative act is that man’s life is directly dependent on his relationship with God. God breathes into man’s nostrils and man becomes alive. Life is then a dimension of the “encounter” between God and man.
   The notion of “air” or “breath” (ruah) (Job 15:30; Isa 26:18) which refers to the Hebrew principle of life (Gen 6:17; 7:15; cf. Gen 1:2; Job 33:4; Isa 38:16), refers also to the Hebrew principle of spirituality (Num 27:18; Isa 63:10, 11). There is no distinction between
the *ruah* of God and that of man (Ps 104:30). The lesson of this identification is double. First it means that man owes his life to God. God gave him the *ruah*, the breath. God is the Creator. It also implies a philosophy of existence. Man exists only in relationship with God. Man is religious, or he does not exist. The religious dimension is not simply an answer to spiritual needs, it is a biological necessity (Gen 2:17; cf. 3:17, 19). The Israelite of the Bible does not envisage life without that dimension. This would be an absurdity (Ps 14:1). Religion is not a choice, it is simply the observation of a fact. We cannot omit the spiritual life as we cannot omit breathing. On the other hand, if a man stops breathing, he stops having a spiritual life; the dead cannot worship (Ps 115:17).

14. Can man survive apart from his fellow human beings?
   Text: “The LORD God said, ‘It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him’” (Gen 2:18).

15. How does the nature of man affect his destiny?
   Text: “By the sweat of your brow Shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground–For from it you were taken. For dust you are, And to dust you shall return” (Gen 3:19).
   Note: A reading document from *Shabbat Shalom*, December 1996, 18-20 and a questionnaire follow.

**Reference List**


While serving as a pastor in Northeast Thailand, I was invited to give Bible studies to a group of village elders in a small village several kilometers out in the country. Though I had been working in Thailand for several years already, my experience to date had been primarily that of nurturing those who had already made a basic commitment to Christianity and Adventism. I had virtually no experience working directly with Buddhists. So, after agreeing to go, I was faced with the question of what I would present to these men. I knew very little about them except that they were Buddhists, literate (probably at the fourth grade level), and wanting to study about Christianity.

I searched through everything in my library—from *Bible Readings for the Home Circle, Daniel and Revelation*, and other books on the fundamental beliefs of Adventists to various Bible study outlines and courses I had collected
through the years. There was nothing in my background or studies (an undergraduate minor in religion and an M.A. in religion with a concentration in missions) that had prepared me to know how to give Bible studies to a Buddhist. What approach should I use? Where should I begin? What subjects or doctrines would make sense to them?

As I looked over all the materials in my library, it became clear that the standard starting point for our Western model of Bible studies was usually something that would help establish the certainty of the Bible as the Word of God by either using a series of Bible texts proving that point or by focusing on prophecy. I rejected the first of these approaches since it seemed pointless to try to use a series of Bible texts to prove the inspiration of the Bible with people who had no previous knowledge or experience with the Bible and had no more reason to believe it than they did the local newspaper. So, I settled on prophecy, Dan 2, to be exact. It seemed like a valid choice for several reasons:

1. Daniel and the Buddha were contemporaries, thus giving me both historic and geographic points of contact. (I had already learned that it is important for Christianity to show its Asian roots, since it is frequently dismissed of no consequence as only a Western religion.)

2. Dan 2 seemed like a good choice because meaningful dreams are significant to many people in this part of the world.

3. Dan 2 provides a panoramic view of history from very early times, culminating in the second coming which is a very significant Adventist belief.

4. Lastly, I had some graphics (a picture chart) that would help me with the presentation.

When I actually arrived in the village, however, I gradually began to realize that there were some serious problems with my proposed presentation. The most obvious challenge was going to be the lack of previous knowledge the villagers would have of world (European) history. I knew intuitively that these men seated before me knew nothing of Babylon or Medo-Persia, and probably had very little, if any, knowledge even of Greece and Rome. What, I wondered, is the message and significance of Dan 2 for these men? What should I say? The moment of truth arrived, and with a prayer for guidance, I dove in. You may decide that what happened in the next half hour was not guided by the Lord. I can live with that, and I have wondered about that myself.

I started with an introduction to the historic and geographic framework for the book of Daniel, thus linking Daniel and the Buddha. I also focused on the importance of the king's dream, and his confidence in the supernatural. I
then opened the chart to the image of Dan 2 and began. At that point I decided against mentioning Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome by name or any of the well-known dates we generally use. Instead I felt impressed to present it somewhat as follows: “This statue that the king saw in his dream depicted the history of the world from earliest times when this world was more perfect (the head of gold) down through various eras of history as the world and the nations of the world became less and less perfect. Today we are living down at the end of history, depicted by the feet. The iron and clay shows that the nations and peoples of the world cannot get along and that there is strife and war everywhere.”

At this, my audience nodded in agreement. “But,” and at this I turned the page to show the great stone coming, “the Creator God who made the world originally, is going to return and destroy all the evil in the world and recreate a perfect world once again where the people who choose to trust the Creator will live in peace and harmony.” When I finished, there was a polite silence followed by fifteen to twenty minutes of animated discussion as these men discussed all that I had presented, looking at it from various angles, struggling to understand the concepts, struggling to find something in their previous experience and understanding that would help it make sense.

“How did this (or that) compare with such and such a teaching of the Buddha?” I heard them say over and over. What had seemed simplified and straightforward to me was totally baffling and beyond their understanding. They had no cognitive or experiential hooks to hang anything on. Even the linear view of time my story implied was a worldview shift that was beyond their immediate comprehension because of their own cyclical view of time.

You may rightfully question my biblical interpretation. I know it would not stand the tests of exegesis. And I never gave that Bible study in the same way again. However, looking back, I realize that my problems were more and greater than just bad exegesis. They were multiple. Most significantly, I had chosen a topic that was inappropriate as a starting point for Bible studies for these people. But, where should I have begun?

Case Study Number 2

During my years at the Chiang Mai Educational Center where my work was primarily one of nurturing young people who had already made a basic commitment to Christianity, I saw over and over again the need to address
worldview issues that, if not addressed, would create basic and long-lasting challenges to Christian growth and maturity. But to do this, I had to go outside the bounds of the 27 Fundamental Beliefs and create my own emphasis. Because much of Buddhism, as practiced by the common people, is really folk Buddhism, we had to deal regularly with issues related to the spirit world, spirit possession of people and objects, amulets, and charms which led to power confrontations at times. During one incident of spirit possession I was called up to the dorm to pray with a spirit-possessed girl only to find that her roommates had gone all over the dorm and collected all the Bibles they could find and she was completely covered with Bibles. One of her friends sat by her side holding a picture of Jesus inches above her tightly closed eyes, shouting at her, “Look at the picture. Look at the picture!”

At that point I realized that in the minds of these students “Christian amulets” were simply replacing the Buddhist amulets they knew so well. I was watching syncretism at work not because we had “baptized” previous beliefs and practices as we frequently accuse other churches of having done in the past, but because we had simply not addressed the serious issues in their lives.

Over the next few years I sought to better understand some of the basics of Buddhism, especially the beliefs and practices of the average person. Later, and after both of the above events while working in Bangkok I was asked to hold several series of evangelistic meetings for Buddhists. But though I had studied and knew considerably more about Buddhism by then, I still struggled to know how to present American Adventism in a way that would be meaningful to my listeners. Though I have a strong belief in and commitment to all 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I eventually concluded that for Adventism to be significant to my Buddhist friends, it must offer answers to their questions about life, not answers to my questions.

Eventually I developed studies on the topics most significant to a Buddhist—suffering—its cause and cure (the core teaching of the Buddha), karma, making merit, and even prayer from a Buddhist viewpoint. And since Buddhism in Thailand is definitely folk Buddhism with many beliefs about, and a great deal of focus on the spirit world, it was important to address all aspects of their beliefs, concerns, and fears in regard to the spirit world, including not only the power of the spirits, but such things as amulets, charms, and fortune tellers.

My experience of frustration in seeking to bring Buddhists in Thailand to a meaningful and life-changing encounter with Seventh-day Adventist Chris-
Christianity caused me to wonder if our lack of success among Buddhists in general can be traced to our failure to address their belief system and their questions about life. Adventists have traditionally presented a standard series of doctrinal studies that have been developed and honed in the West, growing out of 2,000 years of Christian discussion, tradition, and culture. But those doctrinal studies are not addressing the burning issues that trouble the Eastern mind. If the Bible is a book for all people, it must answer their questions and address their issues as well as ours.

In addition, I have wondered if it is possible that what at times appears to be a somewhat superficial experience among some Adventists from Buddhist backgrounds is not growing out of the same root. Many members wholeheartedly accept and genuinely believe in the tenets of Adventism they have been taught, and yet, because their undying beliefs and Buddhist worldview issues have never been addressed, some seem to practice a type of split-level Christianity. Would such converts from Buddhism be stronger and better Adventists in the long run if we addressed more than the 27 fundamentals? My experience leads me to believe that they would.
Introduction

Any belief system is imbedded in a particular worldview. As we discuss the communication of Adventist beliefs in the Muslim context it may be helpful before we examine the details to take a view of the broad picture—the worldview as it is related to the belief system. In brief I am using worldview to refer to the fundamental assumptions about reality. It orders our culture and various fields of knowledge from mission, to theology, to science.
The Religious Worldviews of Adventism
And Islam Compared

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<th>ADVENTIST WORLDVIEW</th>
<th>MUSLIM WORLDVIEW</th>
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<td>God has revealed himself in creation and created works, in Scripture through the prophets, in Jesus, and through the Holy Spirit.</td>
<td>God the Creator has sent messages of guidance through his messengers who wrote in the Torah, Zaboor, and Injil. The final revelation was given to Muhammad in the Qur’an.</td>
<td>We agree on the basic concept of the Creator God sending messages through the prophets for the guidance of his people. We need to move the Muslim to the more personal concept of God revealing himself. While respecting Muhammad as a reformer and the Qur’an as containing some truth we must move the basis of faith to the Scriptures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is “Superintendent” of history, and is working out his eternal purposes in the “Great Controversy” between good and evil.</td>
<td>God, in his transcendence, does as he wills in history. There is a battle between God and Iblis (Satan), and Satan is seeking to deceive as many as possible, but God provides protection and guidance to the faithful.</td>
<td>The key concepts are similar including the God—Satan controversy. We can build on this to introduce the “expanded” understandings of the issues in the Great Controversy and how God is working through a demonstration of his character rather than force.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God is the Creator of all things, his creation of the earth was perfect, but was defiled by the fall of man.</td>
<td>God is the Creator of all things, a perfect world that was lost in the mistake of Adam and Eve.</td>
<td>God as Creator is the same. The fall of man is similar but the nature and consequence of the fall is not as severe in Islam. Again we build on the similarity to lead to an understanding of the seriousness of sin leading to a state of brokenness.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
God’s work in solving the sin problem in the universe, refuting the accusations of the evil one, becoming one with us, sacrificing himself in human form, reconciling us to himself. Thus ensuring the security of the universe from sin through eternity, securing full loyalty and trust of his creation while respecting the individual freedom to either give or withhold that loyalty.

God solves the problem of “misguidance” in his universe by (1) forgiving the repentant and submissive believer; and (2) judging between one’s good and bad works on the day of judgment. His judgment is transcendent and final and results in the faithful in paradise and the unbelievers in hell fire.

This entire proposition contains perhaps the largest degree of difference. The general concept of forgiveness and a day of judgment are similar. However, the way of forgiveness through God reconciling man to himself by incarnating and then sacrificing himself must be gradually taught. God’s respect for the individual’s freedom of choice is news to the Muslim.

The creation of a new heaven and earth at the end of time and the beginning of an eternity of righteousness.

God will establish a rule of righteousness and cleanse the earth from unbelief, ushering in an eternity of righteousness.

The general concepts are quite similar. The details of the millennium and the final end of sin vary.

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**Statement of the Issue**

The question of how we move “the message” across cultural differences, worldview differences, and socialization differences takes on unique relevance to Seventh-day Adventists. Our eschatology sees a unique role for Adventists in the last days, a worldwide prophetic movement with the mission of preparing a people to meet Jesus. This is the Kingdom of God in people’s hearts in contrast to the common Christian motif of the “reign of Christ” or the earthly establishment of the Kingdom of God through the “Christian kingdom” gaining in superiority over other religions and religious nations. Since the Adventist objective is a certain quality of faith exhibited in all people groups so that the issues in the Great Controversy over the character and government of God are demonstrated and proclaimed accurately to all people, it is even more imperative that this faith development take place in context. This results in similar parameters of trust in God among peoples of diverse worldviews and ways of thinking and expressing those “faith parameters.” It requires that the faith be uniquely theirs, rather than a foreign import which often simply overlays the old worldview, values, and beliefs resulting in syncretism. As John Kent, Adventist Frontier Missions missionary, related to me his dilemma after helping
to establish a church among an “unreached” remote tribe in New Guinea, he noted: “I realized I had forty Adventists on the outside, and forty animists on the inside.” And so began a journey, a struggle to do Adventist theology in context so that it would become truly theirs, an accurate internalization of the principles of the message in that time and place, resulting in a demonstration of that faith in the lives of those Adventists in all situations.

Reframe Beliefs in the Muslim Way of Thinking

In the Muslim setting the need is similar to the animist setting, but the path is slightly different. Western Christianity (Western and Christian are nearly synonymous in the Muslim’s mind) is outright rejected and even hated as an inferior, immoral, barbaric, and fanatic faith system (we may question this view for its accuracy or reasonableness, but it is the reality in the Muslim world that we must deal with). Therefore, to even get a hearing in the Muslim world, we must not only “package” the message in Muslim friendly terms, but we must also “reframe” the contents of the package so that it speaks truth accurately to the Muslim mind. If the Muslim must adopt a Western frame of thinking in order to understand the message, the message will be rejected from the start.

Prioritizing Beliefs for Faith Development in Context

Present Truth Is Time and Place Specific

Within the Adventist heritage, “present truth” is a familiar phrase. It carried the notion that at a particular time in earth’s history there was a unique focus and emphasis on certain truths from the larger universal body of truth that were of supreme importance. I suggest that for a Muslim at any given time and place there is also “present truth” for that person. To try to force belief by focusing on other points of belief that the presenter may think are most important is to fail in mission. There is a “constellation” of beliefs that we espouse, but we must focus first on the star that will captivate the heart of the Muslim. Only later will the person be able to appreciate the other stars in the constellation and then the constellation as a whole. If those working with Muslims fail to realize this, they only raise walls and alienate. This requires understanding of what the heart need of the Muslim is, rather than stressing our understanding of his truth need. Nicodemus’ truth need was to discuss Christ’s divinity,
his identity as Messiah. His heart need was to understand and experience the new heart that only God could create within. Present truth for Nicodemus at that time was heart conversion, not knowing of Christ's divinity. Knowing the character and mission of Christ would come later.

The Need Is for a New Heart

This reality requires not only knowledge of and spiritual sensitivity to the Muslim, but also a comprehension of essential truth for spiritual growth at that point in time, versus what is supportive and enhancing of that essential truth. It follows then that our understanding of “essential truth” plus our understanding of the Muslim heart need at the time, both contribute to what is the priority focus at that point.1 Again, this does not alter the larger body of truth. However, certain contexts, in addition to affecting what is essential at the time, may also add faith issues that are not addressed in our present statement of beliefs.

Basic Moral Principles Are the First Priority

In our prioritizing there are certain universal, moral, and spiritual principles that must take precedence. Jesus summarized the entire duty of man as love to God and love to man (Matt 22:37-40). Paul focuses it even more as one command, love is the fulfilling of the law (Rom 13:10). We are not referring to some naïve love for everyone, no you're OK I’m OK mentality. There are certain specific principles that must be exemplified in our relations with Muslims and which we must endeavor to instill in them as we challenge them to deeper faith.

Tolerance, Respect, and Affirmation of Spirituality

First, because of the history of intolerance and use of force in the relations between Christians and Muslims, Christians must be champions of tolerance. Respect for the Muslim's faith is a given. They are not heathen or pagan. They orient their lives around God much more than most Christians. I have listened to sermons in the mosque that, with little or no alteration, could have been delivered from an Adventist pulpit. Too often we reflect the understanding of the disciples when they said, “Master, we saw a man driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop, because he doesn't belong to our group” (Luke 9:49 TEV). We must move to the Muslim with an attitude of respect, tolerance,
and even further of appreciation and affirmation for the spirituality they exhibit. We must encourage that same respect and affirmation within them. It is present in the Qur'an and can be appealed to in our work with them.

_Taqwah (Righteousness)_

Beyond respect, tolerance, and affirmation I can summarize the priority issues under the subject of holiness. Holiness is a gift from God as one experiences the new heart from him and renews his commitment of faith. This is not an unbalanced emphasis on perfectionism. Perfectionism emphasizes behavior; holiness focuses on a quality of the inner man, a _wholeness_ for God. The Muslim must be challenged to holiness not through form and ritual, but through the new heart from God. This is done by using biblical principles, but expressed in Muslim language and in terms familiar to them. This requires an understanding and usage of the Qur'an. We build on the Islamic concepts of submission to God, and _taqwah_, inner righteousness, as a gift from God. It is important to guide the Muslim to this new heart experience first. We have reached a significant milestone when a Muslim responds and says, “Please pray for me that God will give me that new heart.” Such a heart is a heart of obedience, a heart that is open to God's voice, a heart that is willing to listen, a heart that asks, “What must I do to be saved?” The heart that says, “How can I be sure of my standing in the day of judgment?” Initially this takes priority over doctrinal details. This is foundational to an understanding of all subsequently considered beliefs. Before acceptance of a certain set of abstract beliefs and even before adoption of a new way of religious practice must come this new heart experience. The set of beliefs and practices will follow as a result of this new heart, this gift of holiness. Doctrines will then be facilitators of this deeper faith experience rather than mere ritual.

_Sensitivity to Absorptive Capacity_

Another priority in our spiritual work with Muslims is sensitivity to their spiritual absorptive capacity, the speed at which the Muslim can incorporate new understanding of spiritual matters. I marvel at Jesus’ patience with his disciples. Even as he was giving them last minute instructions on his way to the place of his ascension, they still didn't get it. “When will you restore the kingdom to Israel”? they asked. It was only as they were seemingly left to their own resources that the greatest resource was sent to them, the Holy Spirit, which
was then able to guide their understanding of the vital truths of Jesus’ divinity and his true mission (White 1940:506, 507). This degree of patience in leading them from a restricted monotheistic position, and away from a political agenda, to a more complete understanding, is directly instructive for us in working with Muslims.

The Divinity of Christ

A particularly instructive example of this prioritizing and gradual sequencing of truth in our work with Muslims is Jesus’ handling of the question of his own divinity. He essentially does not make it a matter for discussion until late in his ministry in his confrontation with the religious leaders in the temple (John 10) and during his trial. After asking his disciples, Whom do you say the Son of Man is? and clarifying that Peter’s answer did not come from human understanding or teaching but directly by inspiration from God, he “ordered His disciples not to tell anyone that He was the Messiah” (Matt 16:20 TEV). I have never heard this text referred to as instructive for classes in personal or public evangelism, but I think it bears tremendous import for us in working with Muslims. This command and others like it were given to his disciples who would first work in Jewish areas or to those healed in Jewish territory. When in Samaria, where the issue of the divinity of Christ was not inflammatory as it was in Jewish areas, he openly spoke of his Messiahship, “I am He” (John 4:26). The divinity of Christ is not a subject to force on the Muslim. It is not to become a point of controversy or a stumbling block. It is our job to pile up the evidence for his divinity without directly referring to it, and then the Holy Spirit will bring that evidence to bear on the mind of the seeker in due time and lead them to that “aha” experience, “He must be. . . . He is my Lord.” Christ’s example informs us on this matter as well as Paul’s assertion in 1 Cor 12:3, “No one can confess ‘Jesus is Lord,’ unless he is guided by the Holy Spirit” (TEV). This experience has been repeated over and over again in our work with Muslims. Several weeks after a series of studies was conducted on the Hanif, one of the Muslim persons who was baptized communicated: “I was shocked when it dawned upon me what you were trying to tell us regarding Jesus. Now I truly believe. He is God.” By the way, when Muslims come to this realization they see in Jesus, God, not Son of God, because of the background of revulsion at the least implication that God had a physical son. Brennan Manning summarizes it well in the following statement. “The possibility of anyone’s recognizing in
the fragile humanity of Jesus the plentitude of God's power to save comes only from a miraculous intervention of God. 'Radical faith is not an achievement, for if it were we would will it and be done. Rather, it is a gift, and we are left to react respectively, to watch and to pray’” (1992:24).

We present the evidence in a way that the Muslim can understand, and the Holy Spirit works to bring the conviction. We have found this is the way that we can effectively lead the Muslim with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, to the full belief in his divinity. Also, we have Christ’s example as noted above. The follower of Adventist beliefs from a Muslim background will always use monotheistic terms to describe the Godhead, in contrast to the Adventist from a Trinitarian background who will use terms that will make the Muslim background believer think he is a polytheist.

**Examples of Faith Development in Context**

As we proceed in this task of moving the gospel into the Muslim context, the practical question arises: How much local theologizing do we allow? Are we in danger of developing a diversity of theologies that will result in a theological pluralism, a relativization of Adventism? Will we lose the essential unity of the movement?

**Importance of Local Theologizing**

As we move into diverse cultures and specifically Islamic cultures, how do we chart our course? For the most part, I think we agree that there must be some adaptation to local situations. But the reformulation of the set of theological statements needed to make those statements relevant to the people in various cultural settings has been largely neglected. However, the priesthood of all believers implies a responsibility to make the gospel and the theology that carries that gospel relevant to the local situation. Doing theology should not be confined to the missionary and the sending body. It must extend to the local believers in the Muslim context. The theological formulations must be made relevant in the local culture, and then lifted off the page into the reality of everyday life in that context. The practice of exporting our Western theological statements and explanations unchanged has simply not been effective in the Muslim setting.
This lack of meaningful theological statements is what has pushed us to look for foundation stones within the Muslim culture and belief system, for there are many basic values, beliefs, and concepts, upon which we can build biblical truth. These have been called by some missiologists redemptive analogies, and are cultural phenomena which have been preserved by divine purpose and which can be used to illustrate and make clear certain biblical truths. In our work with Muslims we find many of these. The rescue of Abraham's son by a “tremendous sacrifice” is one example (Surah 37:107). Another more specific example would be the belief among some Shiites that if you stray from belief, you need a *tuba ghusl*, a body washing, to reinstate your status as a believer. This then assists in the explanation of baptism. There also is a verse in the Qur'an that refers to the “coloring of God” or “*sibghat Allah*” (Surah 7:26). The word *sibghat* means “to color” as “to dye cloth.” It also carries the idea of “innate nature” as translated by Khatib. In other words, this “coloring” is the recreation of a godly nature in man (the “new heart” of Ezek 36:26) which has been lost because of sin. The parallel to *baptizo* is helpful in our discussion of baptism.

**Redemptive Windows**

But in addition to these redemptive analogies we have gone a step further and utilized what we are calling a *redemptive window*. The redemptive analogy assists in explaining certain ideas or concepts in the biblical belief system. A redemptive window, however, is much more. It is a window into the very heart of the culture which, when the gospel shines through that window, has a powerful impact at the very heart of the Muslim. It impacts the key spiritual motivators in a culture and belief system. The concept of the *Hanif* seems to provide just such a window. It has been lost by many Muslims because it has seemed unattainable. To be totally submitted and loyal to God, to follow completely the faith of Abraham, has been beyond reach. So the devil has played havoc in the Muslim world with folk beliefs, spiritism, fear of evil forces, seeking for *barakah* or blessing from power objects, places, or people to protect from these forces. But the concept of being God's *Hanif* is present in the Qur'an, in history, both pre-Islamic and at the time of Muhammad. The following description by
an Islamic scholar seems to fit the Adventist understanding of true believers hiding in the wilderness to preserve biblical faith.

They [Arab Christians] took their Christianity farther east to Persia and India, to Egypt and Abyssinia, north into the Caucasus and wherever around the Mediterranean their ancestors had planted colonies for trade or settlement. As we have seen, the ascendency of the Church of Rome backed by the Byzantine Empire had alienated these semitically oriented Christians. When they were hereticated by the Church of Rome, and persecuted by the Byzantine Empire or its puppets on the scene, they took refuge in the desert. . . . Both Jews and Christian immigrants to the desert found a ready welcome among those Arabs who upheld the Mesopotamian-Abrahamic tradition. Together they consolidated that tradition in Peninsular Arabia which came to be known as Hanifiyyah. Its adherents, the hanif(s), resisted every association of other gods with God, refused to participate in pagan rituals, and maintained a life of ethical purity above reproach. It is common knowledge that the hanif was a strict monotheist who paid no tribute to tribal religion, that he was of impeccable ethical character, and that he kept aloof from the cynicism and moral lasciviousness of other Arabs. The hanifs always stood above tribal disputes and hostilities. Everybody knew of their presence since they belonged to nearly all tribes (al Faruqi and al Faruqi 1986:61).

Ellen White applies this understanding to Rev 12 and specifically identifies the Waldenses in Europe, Armenians in Central Asia, and believers in Central Africa (White 1950:63, 64). It seems fitting to also include those faithful monotheists in the Arabian desert known as Hanif. Therefore, we are using this window, appealing to the spiritual conscience of the Muslim but providing the means, the Way, the Power to be truly Hanif.

Coupled closely with the concept of the Hanif is the theme of taqwah (inner righteousness). Since this is a prominent theme in the Qur'an, we begin with a discussion of righteousness from the Qur'an, then move to a deeper biblical understanding of righteousness by faith in God's grace and his sacrifice of himself in Jesus for reconciliation, forgiveness of sin, removal of our shame, and the granting of eternal life.

What we are involved in is a process of re-forming Adventist and biblical theology in context rather than simply exporting a given set of formulations and applying them unchanged to the Muslim world. This process is making theology relevant in the Muslim context and bringing it home to the heart of the Muslim. It is important that we grasp this concept as we evaluate what is happening in the Adventist mission to Islam. We must also remember that we are involved in an ongoing process in which there is continual growth and refinement.
Describing the Atonement in the Muslim Context

One of the most difficult areas for the Muslim is the atonement. How do you explain why Jesus had to die? What is this “payment of a price?” To whom is it paid? Is not God the supreme judge and will he not simply decide whom he will save and who will go to the fire?

Key Cultural Dynamics

As a result of sin all cultural worldviews have developed around three dynamics: First, the dynamic of guilt versus innocence which is common to Western and many cultures where Christianity predominates. Second, the dynamic of shame versus honor which is common to Eastern and group cultures including cultures where Islam and other Eastern religions predominate. Third, the dynamic of fear versus power which is common among animistic peoples. It is possible to find elements of all three in any one culture; however, most cultures will exhibit predominantly one of the three.

By way of illustration, in the West, in the spiritual realm, guilt plays an important role. If a person experiences fear and anxiety, it is often from a sense of guilt or its close ally, inadequacy or not measuring up. Guilt revolves around the breaking of law or not achieving a standard, either human or divine. Western people then use this concept as the basis for explaining a sinful nature, that people are inherently sinful and guilty. In summary then, in the West we are guilt and performance oriented. Our theological statements reflect this (see belief statement number seven concerning the nature of man under the “definition of sin” and “sin and guilt” (Ministerial Association 1988:89).

Shame and Fear

Because of the wide prominence of folk Islam which includes many animistic elements, Islam shares two dynamics, shame and fear, with shame being predominant. These constitute the two most powerful spiritual motivators: shame—the ultimate motivator of knowing one will stand alone, ashamed, and naked before Allah in the day of judgment; and fear—of evil forces which drives one to seek Baraka (blessing) in various ways to gain power to protect from evil forces and assuage the fear. It is these two spiritual motivators in the Muslim’s life that influence our presentation of the subject of how God deals with sin.

Of the two, the most pervasive and powerful dynamic is shame. In contrast to the guilt and performance orientation of the West, which is very in-
individualistic, Islam is shame and being oriented, which is being in a state of defilement or shame in relation to the group. An additional contrast of the two indicates guilt as being a feeling or a condition occurring when one has broken or not kept a divine or human law. Shame, by comparison, is a feeling or condition stemming from a shortcoming in one’s state of being, either before God or peers. Shame, similar to guilt, can result in a subjective feeling or condition, but also an objective condition of brokenness, alienation, and even death. It would seem possible, therefore, to use the concept of shame similarly as we have traditionally used the concept of guilt.

It is interesting to note that the concept of shame is much more prevalent in Scripture than is guilt. The English translation “shame” appears in ninety-nine verses in the Old and New Testaments while “guilt” appears twice, and “guilty” twenty-six times. Many of these verses containing the word “shame” use it in reference to the result of sin or wrong acts. There are several Hebrew words for shame (some translated reproach, disgrace, or dishonor). One of these, bosheth, is described in Strong’s Bible Dictionary as “shame (the feeling and the condition, as well as its cause).” Ezek 16:51, 52 provides an example of the usage of “shame” as the consequence of sin. “Samaria did not sin half as much as you have. You have acted more disgustingly than she ever did. Your corruption makes your sisters look innocent by comparison. And now you will have to endure your disgrace [shame]. Your sins are so much worse than those of your sisters that they look innocent beside you. Now blush and bear your shame, because you make your sisters look pure” (TEV). See additional examples in the endnote.5

Use Simple, Descriptive Terms
Thus, in our translation of the understanding of the atonement effected by Jesus’ life, death, and continued ministry as our high priest, we have used the shame-honor paradigm instead of the traditional guilt-innocence framework. Also, in our discussion of this belief, we have avoided the use of vague or complicated words that require considerable explanation in English, let alone trying to translate them simply and accurately into the Muslim mindset (examples of these would include: propitiation, expiation or expiatory, atonement—in its common usage of “to atone for,” sanctification, justification). In working from the English we prefer to use simple, easily understood terms such as: to reconcile, to bring together (at-one-ment), to set right (with God), to cover (sin or shame), and to receive the new heart (from God).
Muslim View on the Nature of Man

Foundational to the consideration of the doctrine of salvation is the doctrine of the nature of man. The Muslim position is in contrast to the Adventist and biblical position on this point. These concepts are covered in beliefs seven through nine in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe* (Ministerial Association 1988: chaps 7-9). Kateregga summarizes the contrasting Muslim position well:

Islam does not identify with the Christian conviction that man needs to be redeemed. The Christian belief in the redemptive sacrificial death of Christ does not fit the Islamic view that man has always been fundamentally good, and that God loves and forgives those who obey his will. Islam is the way of peace. The Muslim view, which is in total contrast to the Christian experience, is that man experiences peace through total submission to God’s guidance and mercy. Jesus Christ (PBUH), like many prophets before him, and Muhammad (PBUH), the Seal of Prophets, were both examples of God’s mercy to humanity (Kateregga and Shenk 1997).

Begin with an Accurate Diagnosis of the Problem

Obviously, the remedy can only be understood to make sense if the disease is properly diagnosed. If sin is, in fact, only a mistake to be forgiven by a merciful God with no inherent consequences, to speak of the need for a sacrifice to redeem man is like prescribing surgery for the common cold. The advice to go home, drink lots of water, rest, eat more fruits and fewer sweets, i.e., “live right” is sufficient. If, however, sin is a deadly cancer, then major surgery is required. The Muslim would generally agree with the sentence in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, “The antidote for guilt is forgiveness (Matt 6:12) which results in a clear conscience and peace of mind” (Ministerial Association 1988:89). But the Muslim would then be puzzled by the need for payment of a price, the need for a substitutionary death, and satisfaction of justice. To the Muslim these seem to be unnecessary additions. How do we move through these objections?

Even though Kateregga has clarified the “official” view of Islam, it is of interest to note that the Qur’an, in fact, does describe the nature of man, or the result of sin in man, in terms close to the biblical view of a sinful nature.

Of the people there are some who say: “We believe in God and the Last Day;” but they do not (really) believe. Fain would they deceive God and those who believe, but they only deceive themselves, and realize (it) not! In their hearts is a disease; and God has increased their disease: and grievous is the penalty they (incur), because they are false (to themselves) (Surah 2:8-10).
Nor do I absolve my own self (of blame): the (human) soul is certainly prone to evil, unless my Lord do bestow His mercy: but surely my Lord is oft-forgiving, most merciful (Surah 12:53).

**Sin Results in a Broken Condition and Alienation from God**

We use these texts to move the Muslim’s consideration of sin to a more serious level. Sin is a serious disease that requires serious treatment. God has given help through *fitra*, the nature that God has placed in man to worship him (Surat Al Rum, 30:30), *ilm* (knowledge), and guidance. However, *Iblis* (Satan) has vowed to bring under his control “all but a few.” There is only one way that we can avoid being under his control, if we allow God to create a new heart within us (here we use the biblical references in Ezek 11:19, 20; 36:26, 27; Jer 31:33, 34).

**Comparing Guilt and Shame**

There is an additional consequence of sin in the Muslim setting—shame or dishonor. Just as in the Western explanation of the biblical teaching that sin, rebellious actions, or thoughts result in a state of guilt that leads to the consequence of death, it is equally strong in the shame and honor culture of Islam that sin results in a *condition* of shame, both objective and subjective, which can only be remedied by death or removal of the shame object. In the shame and honor culture, serious shame or dishonor on the family requires death of the person bringing the shame. The family cannot survive or maintain its position of honor in the community unless honor is restored by removing the shame person. The fact that shame and honor cultures are group cultures provides the context for this reality.

**Abraham’s Example**

When people consider the story of Abraham sacrificing his son from within the shame and honor context, it takes on new meaning. It was common for a father to kill his own son if he (the son) had shamed the family sufficiently; however, in this case the son had not shamed the family. Rather he “submitted” himself to his father. In that case, if Abraham had proceeded with the sacrifice of his son, it would have brought shame on him for sacrificing an honorable son. But “when they had both submitted their wills (to God)” (Surah 37:103), a
way out was provided. The honor of both was preserved through the provision by God of a lamb to sacrifice in the place of the son (Surah 37:107). This lamb points forward to what God would do for man. It symbolizes the way out of our condition of shame which is deserving of death.

Therefore, critical to this discussion is the description of what God would do for man’s shame. In the Qur’an, associated with the concept of God providing the first sacrifice to fashion clothes for Adam and Eve to “cover their shame,” is the provision of the best covering, the “covering of taqwah,” or righteousness. “O ye children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness, that is the best” (Surah 7:26). This is consistent with Rom 3:25 where the word “propitiation” (KJV) is the translation of the Greek word for the mercy seat (hilasterion). In Hebrew the word for mercy seat (kapparoth from kapher) means “to cover.” We could then justifiably translate the verse, “God offered him (Christ) so that by his sacrificial death he should become the means by which people’s sins are covered through their faith in him” (adapting the TEV translation and emphasis mine).

God’s Way of Restoring Honor As Depicted In the Story of the Prodigal Son

With these components we then have the elements to begin impressing on the heart of the Muslim God’s way of solving the problem of sin and God’s way of restoring honor to those who have so dishonored his name. God has not disowned us. God has not abandoned us, nor has he killed us. God’s way of “restoring honor” in his universe that has been “shamed” by sin and rebellion is not man’s way of seeking revenge. The story of the lost son in Luke 15 epitomizes the way God handles rebellion. The son is never disowned by the father, which is the expected response in Middle Eastern society to such shame, but rather he is continually grieved over and prayed for as “my son.” This father would do no less than David weeping over his rebellious son Absalom: “O my son! My son Absalom! Absalom, my son! If only I had died in your place, my son! Absalom my son!” (2 Sam 18:33). Notice also God’s grieving over having to let Israel go (Hos 11:8, 9).

Now, back to the story in Luke 15. When other villagers threaten to do away with “that boy” so as to preserve the honor not only of the family but of the village, the father orders them to not touch “my son.” The father suffers the shame alone. He is now isolated and misunderstood by the village and seen as a
weak and impotent head of his house. When the son is seen in the distance, this elderly father does not worry about the shameful scene of him running to meet the filthy, rag-draped remnant of humanity. Rather, he meets him more than halfway, covers him with the symbol of goodness, “the best robe,” restores him by placing the ring of his own authority on the finger of the boy, and commands a celebration. The only cure for the human cycle of revenge in the shame and honor society is to understand and accept for ourselves this way of restoring us to honor and then mediating such a picture of God to those sinking into the enemy’s way of dealing with shame. The role that God has assigned to his people in these last days is that of proclaiming his way of restoring honor in face of the ultimate insults from the evil one.

It is of interest to note that the older brother in the story was still operating on the shame, honor, and revenge paradigm. He had long before disowned his brother. He would in no way associate with or acknowledge such a shame and dishonor on the family. He was so concerned about preserving his own honor with justice and revenge that he missed the party.

**Paul’s Summary**

Paul summarizes the saving acts of God in Rom 5:9, 10: “By his sacrificial death we are now put right with God; how much more, then will we be saved by him from God’s anger! We were God’s enemies, but he made us his friends through the death of his Son. Now that we are God’s friends, how much more will we be saved by Christ’s life?” (TEV). This is consistent with the notion that by sacrificing himself (in Christ) he absorbs the shame, covers us with his own righteousness, thus restoring us to honor (setting us right). This is the reconciliation that Christ’s sacrificial death accomplishes. The broken condition of man (condition of deep shame) which has alienated man from God is removed and the relationship restored. (Note the use of shame in the message to Laodicea in Rev 3:18.) In the shame honor paradigm the focus is on the *restoration* of the person’s shameful *condition* to a state of honor, full reconciliation, and reinstatement in the family. At the same time God’s honor before the universe is vindicated in the face of the accusations of the evil one that he is “arbitrary, unforgiving and severe” (White 1890).

If this great work of reconciliation was accomplished through Christ’s death, how much more will he be able, through his life, to continue to keep us, empower us, and grant us eternal life!
Summary

This paper has addressed several important issues regarding the communication of the biblical message in the Muslim context.
1. The need to re-frame principles of belief for the Muslim setting.
2. The importance of prioritizing what is important (“present truth”) for a person at a particular time and place, according to the spiritual heart need of the person. With this priority personal piety and spirituality are the focus.
3. The need to respect the absorptive capacity of the Muslim.
4. The indirect approach to the understanding of the divinity of Christ through accumulating evidence and letting the Holy Spirit impress this truth on the heart.
5. The utilizing of elements of truth within Islam as foundational stones upon which to build more complete truth as we re-form Adventist beliefs in context. In doing so we use “redemptive windows” into the spiritual heart of the Muslim.
6. Use of the shame-honor paradigm to describe the atonement in terms that more accurately convey the truth of the gospel than the Western guilt-innocence framework.
7. Use of the concept of shame to communicate more effectively the seriousness of sin and our broken condition with its consequences of death.

This approach has resulted in believers in Jesus as Lord and Savior and in the Adventist message who (1) experience a close relationship with God, (2) consider the Bible their primary source of faith and apply basic exegetical principles in their study of the Scriptures, (3) have a clear sense of their “remnant identity” in the Muslim community, and (4) trust in Jesus for salvation, forgiveness of sin, eternal life, and acknowledge his divinity.7

Notes

1I was led into this line of thought early in my ministry during the few weeks prior to leaving Libya, in which I and my associate were the last Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) workers in the country in 1970. Over several weeks I knew it was only a matter of time until immigration would insist I leave. With my leaving, the official SDA presence in Libya would end. What had thirteen years of SDA presence accomplished? Only one baptism performed in secret in Italy (we had agreed not to proselyte as a condition of our entry into the country). Yet we had impacted numerous lives and not the least of which were the Libyan workers in the hospital, some of whom had been with us for
nearly the entire time of the hospital's existence. As I evaluated the situation, knowing I had only a few weeks left, I realized that almost all of the Libyan workers in the hospital, with a few exceptions, had never had a personal visit in their home by a SDA worker. The spiritual contact had ended with knowing that we had devotional time in the morning and on Saturdays (no Libyans dared attend these very Christian services) and occasional arguments over certain points of disagreement between certain zealous SDA workers and the Libyan staff. I realized that doctrinal knowledge was not the most important thing to focus on in this context. More important was a certain quality of trust and faith in God and a certain openness to spiritual things. I set a goal to visit every home of a Libyan worker. I was touched by the reception I received. I prayed with them that their faith in Allah would be strong and that they would remain submitted to Allah in their lives and be ready for the Day of Judgment and the coming of Isa el Masih. I talked with them about the falling away from faith that would increase as time went on, but that God would have a faithful few who would continue in their devotion to him. I shared with them certain key events that would happen to force people's religious practice in the end time (such as Sunday observance) and that they should be aware that this was a plan of the evil one to deceive as many as possible. I shared with them that we believed the Sabbath would become a sign of those faithful to Allah. We discussed what it meant to be an “Adventist,” one who anticipates the coming of the Messiah. It was no time to launch into a presentation on issues that would only generate argument or points too hard for them to accept. I think I felt somewhat like Jesus must have felt those last few hours with his disciples, “There are many things I would like to tell you but you cannot bear them.” It was a time for a spiritual appeal within their realm of understanding to be ready to face their Creator in the day of judgment, to appeal to them that we may never meet again on this earth but we could, if faithful, meet in paradise, to leave them a few pointers which they would remember as final day events began to unfold, and then to commit them into the hands of the Almighty. This whole experience has shaped my subsequent ministry to Muslims. We have simply wasted too many opportunities and too much time by concentrating on doctrinal differences instead of focusing on the heart readiness to meet their Lord. We must put first things first and place as priority certain eternal heart spirituality issues before we consider the more difficult doctrinal points.

2The growth steps in understanding Christ’s divinity are summarized as follows: (1) Isa (Jesus) is referred to as a prophet, (2) Isa is the prophet with special power over evil forces, (3) Isa is the “healing prophet,” (4) because of this power that Allah has mediated through Isa, he is the channel of special barakah (blessing) from Allah, (5) in healings of disease that were a direct result of sinful lifestyle (or believed to be), Isa exhibited the power to forgive those sins as well, (6) Isa is the one designated by Allah to stand with us (mediator) on the Day of Judgment, (7) Isa mediates the forgiveness, acceptance, and empowerment of Allah into our lives, (8) Allah provides, through the
will of Isa, his very presence in the hearts of the believers, (9) Isa is the great sacrifice that Allah provides to cover our sin and to restore Allah's honor and the honor of the family of believers from the shame of sin, (10) Allah “cleared him [Isa] of the faults of others;” he had no sin of his own, (11) Isa, as the great sacrifice, gave his life, no one took it from him, (12) Isa was the victor over death, (13) “God [Allah] made manifest in Christ.” “Angels could not fully portray the character of God, but Christ, who was a living impersonation of God, could not fail to accomplish the work.” (ST, Jan 20, 1890), (14) “My Lord and My God.”


5Jer 3:25 “We should lie down in shame and let our disgrace cover us. We and our ancestors have always sinned against the Lord our God; we have never obeyed his commands” (TEV). Ezek 34:29 “And I will raise up for them a plant for renown, and they shall be no more consumed with hunger in the land, neither bear the shame of the heathen any more” (KJV). Ezek 44:13 “And they shall not come near unto me, to do the office of a priest unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy place: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed” (KJV). Hos 4:7 “As they were increased, so they sinned against me: therefore will I change their glory [honour] into shame” (KJV). Obad 1:10 “For thy violence against thy brother shame shall cover thee, and thou shalt be cut off forever” (KJV). Rev 3:18 “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see” (KJV).

The cities of refuge were instituted to prevent the indiscriminate revenge killing that took place when one's family was shamed. Even then, if the person who had killed someone accidentally wandered out of the city of refuge, he could be killed by any member of the dead man's family who found him and “this act of revenge is not murder” (Num 35:27 TEV).

The virginity of a bride was crucial to the honor of her family (and her new husband). It was critical that they (the girl's family) keep the evidence of her virginity (blood on the bed sheet from the wedding night) or she would be liable to be stoned for bringing shame on a family of Israel (Deut 22:13-21).

Lepke, Wolfgang. 2001. *An Evaluation of a Contextual Witnessing Project within a Resistant People Group.* Ph.D diss., Andrews University, 307, 308. The following is a summary description from Lepke's doctoral dissertation on a ministry that is a prime example of “faith development in context.” For security reasons it is referred to as the “R-movement.” “From all the descriptions above, the R-movement definitely changed the belief system of its members in many ways that contrasts starkly from what a ‘traditional’ Muslim believes. There are four areas especially that deserve mention.

**Relationship to God**

“Traditional Muslims (with the most notable exception of the Sufi sect) do not live in a father-child relationship with God. Their faith demands a master-slave relationship by which the master, God, is so aloof and distant that there is no sense of closeness and love in it (see Geisler & Saleeb, 1993, p. 27). R-movement believers are different. They have expressed that they are the recipients of God’s love, and that they experience a closeness to God, especially when reading the Bible.

**Authority of the Bible**

“Considering that nearly all Muslims are trained to believe that the Christian Bible is a totally corrupted version of the original, it is one of the greatest achievements of the R-movement to instill the strong belief that the Bible is not corrupted and that to understand all truth a believer has to study the Bible and believe everything it says. As could be seen above, this is not something imposed on the believers, but reflects their own desire, as they especially love the gospels. To enhance this attitude, there is a definite move away from the reliance on traditional interpretation toward a study method that puts one’s own struggle to understand (*ijtihad*) guided by the Holy Spirit at the center of interpretation.

**Remnant Identity**

“A significant part of the self-understanding of the R-movement members is that they are part of a remnant that follows all of God’s truth, especially that which had been forgotten by other Muslims, i.e., the truths that are taught in the Bible. This reflects, of course, the identity of SDAs who see themselves as part of the remnant who in the last days restore and proclaim the forgotten truths of the Bible (Sabbath, condition of the dead, etc.).

**The Salvific Identity and Acts of Jesus Christ**

“All of the above would be of little value if the believers had not gained an understanding of Jesus Christ that reflects the Christian understanding of his identity and his ministry. The believers in the R-movement have clearly transcended the typical Muslim notion about Jesus as just being a prophet like others. He is the one with supreme power who can protect them from evil forces and also the Mediator in the judgment. The believers have gained an understanding of the severity of sin, and that only through the cross as a sign of God’s mercy can they experience the forgiveness of
these. Ultimately they have understood that Jesus Christ is more than a human being, but has a divine nature as the spiritual (as opposed to physical) son of God.”

**Reference List**


The Seventh-day Adventist Church is rapidly expanding numerically and will soon pass the 15 million mark. The growth is most remarkable south of the Tropic of Cancer in the developing and mostly non-Christian world.

Initially Seventh-day Adventists, in their prophetic interpretation and understanding, envisioned that their call and main task was to call other Christians to come out of their “fallen” Christian denominations and join “those who obey God’s commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus” (Rev 12:17). For that reason, the summary of the most important Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs was geared toward people belonging to other Christian churches. The worldview and vocabulary in the summaries were expressed in such a way that it was assumed that the readers and new followers had a Christian background and were literate. In this way, the Fundamental Beliefs were
developed to explain to Protestant Christians where the Adventist beliefs were in agreement with their beliefs and where they were different. The Fundamental Beliefs stressed belief in God and the Bible more than guidelines on how to live out these convictions in one’s daily life. It was taken for granted that true ideas about God would naturally result in Christian actions and lifestyles that need not be stated (Ministerial Association 1988).

**Are the Fundamentals Meaningful for All Religions?**

In the late eighteenth century, people of non-Christian religions also became the focus for evangelistic outreach. Mission activities of various kinds, often with good results, took place in areas where non-Christian religions were dominant and where illiteracy was prevalent. Global Mission increased the Adventist emphasis on reaching the two-thirds world with the Three Angels’ Messages. Among the non-Christian people in the world, various Christian mission agencies, including the Seventh-day Adventists, have had and still have their greatest successes among people belonging to so-called tribal religions. There are approximately 270 million people in this category.

**Definitions and Geography**

For practical reasons, a distinction is made between a world religion and a tribal religion. A world, or universal, religion is of a missionary nature. This means that it is not only open to people of all races, nationalities, and cultures, but it also wants all people to embrace its beliefs and practices. These religions generally have sacred writings, a common language, and a kind of priesthood. World religions living up to these definitions include Christianity and Islam, while Hinduism, Buddhism, and Judaism are also world religions, but ones that are not so active in their missionary endeavors.

Tribal religions are of various kinds and have many labels. They are termed as traditional, ethno, primitive, preliterate, pagan, heathen, animistic, or fetish religions. Those types of descriptive names were to some extent determined by a variety of circumstances and probably given to them by the first anthropologists and missionaries who met them, researched them, and experienced them. The terms, pagan, heathen, animistic, and fetish for these religions are somewhat derogatory terms and should not be used. For our purpose in this chapter, we will use the terms “traditional religion” and “tribal religion.”
Traditional religion is generally confined to a single tribe. For that reason, the terms “tribal religion” or “ethnic religion” could also be justified. Traditional religions are, as a rule, not universal. Each tribe has its own religion with concepts of divinity, humanity, and nature. In their worship, they are dependent on their ancestors and, as tribes, revere only their own ancestors. It is obvious that it is not possible for a member of one tribal group to be an adherent member of another tribal group in worship forms and rituals as their ancestors are not the same. For that reason, there are no attempts by one group of traditional religionists to win another group to their faith and traditions.

The traditionalists are found in African tribes, Indians of the Americas, Eskimos in Canada and Greenland, mountain people in Southern Asia, fringe people in China, Aborigines in Australia, Pacific Islanders, and Siberian clans. The ethno-religionists represent more than 3,000 cultures, each with its own special brand of traditional religion with a combined population of a little under 300 millions adherents.

**People from Traditional Religions Proved To Be Most Winnable for Christianity**

Around the beginning of the nineteenth century, Christian missions began to focus on the adherents of non-Christian religions, and Christian churches and missions were established. However, the missionaries found that when they encountered the so-called world religions (Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam), the results in soul winning were very meager, even negligible. The major successes were among the many smaller and isolated ethnic groups of adherents to traditional religions intermingled with a predominantly world religion. In this way, reports to the home churches that told about baptisms in a Hindu or Muslim country gave the impression that Hindus and Muslims had been reached. In reality the new Christians were from the tribal groups living as a minority in those areas.

**Main Beliefs and Practices in Traditional Religions**

Although traditional religions exist in many cultures, anthropologists, assisted many times by missionaries, have done more research and have written more extensively on the many African brands of traditional religions than other parts of the world. On the African continent there are diversities and
variations from one tribal group to another, making it impossible to do justice with a brief sweeping outline of their beliefs and practices. However, it can generally be stated that a traditional religion is a religious system of relations-
ships between man's visible and invisible world. Traditional religionists believe that this world is ruled by a Creator and various other powers, all of which are manifestations of the High God. These powers are accessible through specialists and rituals meaningful to daily life. There are many common traits among traditional religions, but I will touch upon the six most prominent ones.

Belief in a High God

The High God is above all other powers in the universe and is regarded as universal and the god for all people. He is viewed as creator, but is withdrawn and mysterious. There are no temples where the High God is worshipped, no priesthood or organized worship to serve him, and no holy books to describe him. The concept of the High God is somewhat arbitrary, as he is sometimes understood to be interested in people's morals and at other times to be aloof from life in this world. Communication with humans takes place through lesser gods, the spirits, and the ancestors. Most traditionalists share the belief in a High God although generally they do not know or say much about him.

The Spirit World

The Polynesian concept of “mana,” which is a belief in an impersonal supernatural force inherent in a person, god, or sacred object, is also present in traditional religion. The spirits can be ancestors (living dead) who passed away in the distant past and are distinguished from other spirits. These spirits and ancestors can be good or evil, friendly or unfriendly, helpful or tricky. Spirits are present everywhere, dwelling in material and even immaterial things. Offerings and prayers brought to the spirits can be accepted or rejected.

The Living Dead

The traditionalists believe that after physical death, people continue to exist in the spirit world and can be promoted to a status a little less than that of the gods or god. It is possible to have direct communication between the living and the ancestors. Ancestral spirits are generally honored, are recognized by surviving relatives and friends, and serve as intermediaries for the higher
spirit powers. They can protect and guide, but they can also do harm. The ancestors, especially those who have reached the status of being a lesser god, are worshipped. For a few generations after their death ancestors are honored and remembered as humans. Some traditionalists believe in partial reincarnations of an ancestor reborn as a child of the same family. Up to five generations later, some see characteristics that remind them of the ancestor.

Death does not mean the end to life, and the bonds between the living and the dead are not severed when a person passes away. Death is really an occasion for the family to seek more benefit and greater help in life for the departed person can bring messages, health, and children to barren women. Death affects the whole tribal community in a positive way, as the rituals in connection with the departed person draw the community together.

**Importance of Myths**

In traditional religions, there are generally neither scriptures nor creeds. Myths related from generation to generation are the important guardians of traditions and teachers of morals. Myths tell how resources and skills are obtained from spirit powers and how spirit powers operate. Through these myths, commands, counsels, warnings, and rewards from the unseen powers are communicated to the people. Communication takes place through dreams, visions, and even ecstasy.

**Rituals**

The traditionalist belief in two worlds (the world of the living and the world of the “living dead”) employs rituals as important in communication from one world to the other. Rituals are based on ancient myths imparted from generation to generation. The rituals are complex, detailed, and an important part of all acts of worship. Stories from myths are acted out from time to time, thereby helping people feel that they share in the power of gods and that they can renew life from their origins. Many traditional religions believe that the first man in the tribe originated from the High God, and some even believe that the High God was the first man.
Magic, Sorcery, Witchcraft, and Medicine

The most disturbing elements in traditional societies are black magic, sorcery, and witchcraft. When things go wrong for a person, family, or community, the cause must be found. Common enemies of society include disease, accidents, barrenness, suffering, and attacks by insects and animals. Misfortunes can also have their source in nature such as drought, earthquakes, famines, and locusts. A physical explanation is, however, not sufficient to satisfy the sufferer for they question which powers or persons caused such things to happen. The source might be the spirits or individuals who have used witchcraft, magic, or sorcery.

The cure can then be found through the use of a specialist, a “medicine man.” He or she can be a medium, diviner, prophet, magician, healer, or rainmaker. There is also a belief that sacrifices can be performed for various purposes, such as to chase off evil, to secure ancestors’ support, to pacify supernatural beings, or to express gratitude for favors from the spirit world.

Positive Aspects of Traditional Religions

Religion is the strongest element for people in traditional societies and it permeates all facets of life. There is no formal distinction between the secular and the sacred, between the spiritual and material, for all is integrated. Over centuries, tribal societies have been kept in balance by their religions, which have provided them with a worldview and helped to cultivate the whole person. Their religions have given answers to questions about suffering, pain, death, and life after death, and have also explained fortune, good harvests, and birth of healthy children.

Traditional religion also serves as a means of education for tribal people and as a means of social control, for the religious elements of the culture check anti-social behavior. Through the many rituals, initiation rites, and taboos, people are taught the means of horizontal and vertical communication with divinities, elders in society, other members of their own society, and with people of other tribes. At times of confrontations with other tribes, religion gives unity through a common foe, which can create an opportune occasion for finding a scapegoat for local problems.

Traditional religions grant rights and power to the powerless and identities to the deviants. Rites of passages ensure that attention is paid to the important various stages in life.
The traditions of the religion such as respect for nature, sexual morality, and dietary laws are also instilled subconsciously over the years. Rituals provide moral and ethical values to live by, instill respect for the authorities, and show people their limitations. The religions are storehouses for the history and cultural values of the traditionalists, and are viewed as celebrations of life. Culture takes the form of poetry, music, dance, carvings, and pottery.

Religions, as integrated systems, have for centuries kept many societies and cultures in reasonable balance and have made sense to the people living in the traditional cultures. Christian missionaries must show understanding, tact, and care when introducing a new religion with another worldview and code of conduct.

**Negative Aspects of Traditional Religions**

One of the primary negative aspects of traditional religions is that the people live in constant fear. There are multiple reasons for being afraid. Natural forces, such as earthquakes, epidemics, famines, calamities, and locust invasions can be destructive. As mentioned previously, the people do not question *why* these negative things happen as much as they question *who* caused them. Natural explanations are not adequate for tribal people. They fear the influence and acts of wicked ancestors. Witchcraft and evil spirits can have a variety of harmful results, including disease and death. People may feel threatened by an attack of witches or, even worse, may fear that they may themselves be possessed by evil powers that will turn them into witches. Their fear will bring them under suspicion, and tribal people will assume that they could be responsible for any misfortune or death within the tribal community. These premonitions and fears can cause them to reduce spiritual practices, avoid responsibilities in local matters, and be reluctant to take part in social activities. Continuous mistrust will eventually lead to ostracism, even torture and death. Women face special challenges if there are problems such as the birth of twins which can cause fear within a tribal society. Then there is the cruel female circumcision that is practiced by some of the tribes in Africa.

Fear will generally result in a preoccupation with and search for all kinds of protections that are available through charms, magic, anti-witchcraft medicines, and sorcery. Fear can even lead to various cruel practices; even human sacrifices to appease nature. There is also fear of others using negative African medicines. To further complicate the fear, there is also the fact that consulta-
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tions with the specialists who can “protect” from all the dangers of society are generally extremely expensive, causing financial ruin for the family unit and thus, creating a sense of powerlessness. Experiences over generations have left a deep-rooted belief that, generally, even the application of all the most expensive means and measures prescribed by the specialists are not able to provide the needed help and self-protection. This results in an ultimate feeling of hopelessness and misery. Traditional religion is, in this way, an enemy of society and people.

The people in traditional religions are like other people in their search for God and truth. However, some of them live in a terrible state of depravity that encourages the practice of cannibalism, patricide, infanticide, body-mutilation, human sacrifices, and intertribal warfare—all practices and customs that are approved of and even directed by their religion.

Role and Status of Women in Tribal Societies

In missionary outreach to adherents of traditional religions, it is important to have an understanding of the role and status of the women. Measured by Western standards, women have an inferior position, and their lives are controlled by many taboos. Almost all tribal religions practice polygamy, where the women share the husbands with other wives. In tribal societies, it is usually women who are under suspicion of being witches and of using witchcraft. On the positive side, it is found that in some tribes women serve as queen mothers and hold important political positions, thereby wielding authority. Some tribes even have women priests, women mediums, and women who practice medicine. Still, in most tribal societies, it is observed that, although women engage in about the same amount or even more physical work than men, they do not have the same rights. They have no voice in the councils, and are generally excluded from the many secret societies dominated by men even though they can attend similar societies for women.

This inferior position has, in many instances, made women more ready to accept the change and position in life that Christianity offers. The opportunities for getting an education and participating in religious rituals as they are found in Christian churches are very attractive to women. This is especially true among the many independent Christian churches in Africa that give women a chance to express their religious sentiments and be much more self-assertive. However, it has been observed that after conversion to either Christianity or
Islam, women from traditional societies are also the most persistent retainers of the old beliefs and rituals and thereby the ones most likely to engage in syncretistic religious experiences.

**Why Are Traditionalists Winnable for Christianity?**

Christian missions have had their greatest successes among ethno-religious people. The oldest and best example is, interestingly, best illustrated by Christianity in Europe. The pre-Christian, non-literate, tribal, and pagan European religions were among the first, outside of the Middle East, to discard their religions and accept Christianity. Subsequently, similar successes were achieved in Africa, Latin America, on the islands of the Pacific, and in some parts of Asia. Seventh-day Adventist missionaries have also been successful among these peoples for, in addition to the success of reaching other Christians with the Three Angels’ Messages, Adventists have seen their greatest increases in membership in Africa south of the Sahara among traditional religionists. However, Christian missionaries are not the only ones who have become active and successful in winning tribal people in Africa, for Muslims have been able to lead many of these traditionalists to pray in the direction of Mecca and take on a form of Islam.

There are multiple reasons why these tribal people are winnable and convert to organized, historical, and scriptural religions. Various explanations, some negative and some positive, could be listed. In evaluating the special situations, all basic motivations, including the more materialistic, must be studied. The presence of a Christian mission that offers modern medicine and education, no doubt, can be a heavy argument for inviting missionaries and accepting their preaching. Also, the powerful methods used by some Western evangelists, with visual aids, well-organized sessions, and other convincing features, will draw people into churches.

On the more spiritual and positive side, there is, in traditional religions, a lack of developed philosophy and thought compared with what Christianity has to offer. Tribal religions are generally isolated and local, not universal. Traditional religions generally have no ethical systems adequate for life in the modern world and are not organized with holy books, a priesthood or even a common language. Therefore, the gospel and other biblical messages are quite easily accepted and if rightly perceived, will meet the people's demanding and
deep-felt needs, releasing the people from their fear of local spirits and evil practices in their old religions.

**What Kind of Christians Do They Become?**

Western scholars have for centuries not taken the traditional religions seriously, and only recently have they received much attention. Tribal people, in small pockets scattered among the adherents of the world religions, were regarded as “primitive,” and their religion was termed “natural” and pagan. The major reasons for this neglect were that there were no written histories, no sacred writings, and no records of prophets and founders.

Even most missionaries had similar attitudes toward these people. Early missionaries especially despised and ridiculed these religions and regarded them as being of the devil because of the human sacrifices and cruel customs. Still, it was among these people that Christianity was usually most successful in establishing the first churches in newly-entered areas.

However, it is especially difficult for tribal people to leave behind the comprehensive and often complex beliefs concerning the causes of harm, death, and its aftermath, and the existence of ancestors and the spirit world. Even after conversion to either Christianity or Islam, the presuppositions of traditional religions continue to influence life and thought of the former traditionalists. The customary ways continue to shape people's actions and innermost thoughts. When people face real problems, and when it appears that Christianity is not giving them fast and definite solutions, traditionalists tend to seek answers and remedies from their old religions. Muslims estimate that more than 90 percent of their converts to Islam from the various tribal religions still live in a kind of “Islamic folk religion,” and a Roman Catholic priest in an African country stated that it takes at least three generations to transform someone from a tribal religion into a true Roman Catholic believer.

**Where Did Missionaries Fail?**

The traditionalists need the biblical message of the Christian gospel to bring them a true picture and understanding of deity. The Bible, when rightly understood, will show them a sense of justice, ethics, and morals as they are revealed in the Word of God. As the life of Jesus Christ is explained, it will have a great influence on them as they grasp his nature, love, justice, and righteousness. The Ten Commandments and other precepts from the Bible will replace
the often-cruel tribal morality and rituals and will give them an incentive for a better life. Christianity, with its understanding of prayer and God’s intervention through his messengers, will liberate tribal men and women from the various fears of the spirit world. The rules for diet and healthful living, based on the Old and New Testament, will give them better health and physical welfare. To all these great spiritual blessings must be added the fact that Christianity will bring tribal people into the modern world by helping them over the often-painful transition from illiteracy to education and from village life to city dwelling.

In many cases, however, missionaries who worked among traditionalists, witnessing and teaching about the Christian faith, wanted to have fast and impressive reports for the home-fields. Frequent baptisms of traditionalists could, therefore, supply accounts of “successful” activities. Too often, Adventist missionaries accepted new converts into church fellowship, baptizing them based more on a visible change in lifestyle rather than a deep understanding of spiritual matters. The questions asked and conditions for baptism and fellowship in the church often focused on church attendance, Sabbath-keeping, health principles (especially the non-use of alcohol, tobacco, and various native drugs), tithe-paying, accepting church organization, and other beliefs that revealed an outward, visible lifestyle more than an inward experience with God and Jesus Christ.

In dealing with people steeped in traditional religions, the most important biblical truth Seventh-day Adventists have to bring to them is the extremely important biblical eschatology with conditional immortality. Most of the tribal people’s traditional beliefs and rituals are completely inconsistent and contrasting with these comforting realities and biblical truths. Their concepts of a High God, lesser gods, spirit world, ancestors, rituals, magic, and medicine are focused on death and what happens after death. The biblical messages that God alone is immortal, that death is an unconscious condition for all people, and that at the Second Coming of Christ there will be a resurrection for all the righteous while the unrighteous will be annihilated—these are the most important Fundamental Beliefs for traditionalists.

Therefore, the important Adventist biblical eschatological beliefs should be taught in detail. In accepting these biblical messages, a person from an animistic background, with various practices and rituals, has his whole worldview completely torn apart and condemned. The main essentials of traditional religion, including the overwhelming role supernatural beings play, are re-
nounced. Because satanic forces will still attempt to haunt the new convert, the new Christian faith should offer biblical alternatives that can fill the great and decisive vacuum created when the old supernatural world experience is completely renounced. Generally, in our evangelistic approaches to Western Christians, we do not meet this challenge, and, for that reason, no doubt, we have not put much emphasis on it in our Fundamental Beliefs. For most people in non-Christian religions, however, an understanding and grasp of the ministry of both loyal and fallen angels would be of extreme significance.

**Towards a Meaningful, Practical Angelology**

God’s people in both the Old and New Testament times at various occasions in their dealings with the surrounding nations met cultures that had somewhat similar beliefs and practices as tribal religionists have today. Therefore, the stories of the personalities and events in the Old Testament make good sense to people who live in a society and culture close to the biblical narratives. Fertility cults, heathen sacrifices (sometimes including infanticide), necromancy, sorcery, and worship of stones and trees are all mentioned in the biblical stories.

In working with persons from traditional religions, many experiences and incidents from the Bible, when detailed and rightly explained, will help the people understand the biblical message. The positive role that God’s angels played in helping, warning, and delivering God’s people who depended on and prayed for their assistance will be of tremendous help in working with traditionalists. The biblical narratives will fill the vacuum in their worldview and, when convincingly taught, will make it clear that spirits, ancestors, and other supernatural creatures in their former world were demonic and do not have the right and power to be part of their new lives in Christ.

In the Word of God, we learn of various roles played by angels. Angels are revealed as messengers of divine truth to mankind, as conveyers and heralds of special events, on assignment to protect God’s faithful people, both individually and collectively, and even sent to execute punishment on adversaries. Angels effectuated divine judgment on the sinners in the Israel of Old, and in some cases, served as suppliers of special aid by bringing food and water. They even assisted in setting jailed prisoners free.

The Bible also outlines the rebellion in heaven where Lucifer became Satan and seduced many angels (Rev 12:4) to be part of his revolt against God’s dominion. The role and activities of the fallen angels against God’s govern-
ment and plan of salvation are adequate to explain the deception behind the supernatural happenings in the traditionalist’s former religious worship and experience. This teaching will explain that Satan and the fallen angels are the deceivers in all false religions and can take upon themselves many forms and imitations to lead people astray.

Such teaching also unveils the deceitfulness, futility, and ineffectiveness of their former worship of gods, demigods, ancestors, and spirits that do not in reality exist but are a part of the deceptions caused by fallen angels.

Good biblical teaching concerning Satan and his angels will also reveal the danger and even counterproductive use that medicine, magic, and witchcraft can cause.

Angels have a very significant role to play in God’s plan, and we have perhaps neglected this important aspect of the plan of salvation. Angels were witnesses to creation, were associated with the giving of the Law, and will have an important role in the final judgment. In the Bible there are about 300 references to angels (see Appendix).

The Fundamental Beliefs and the Traditionalists

All the biblical truths, which are so well expressed in the Seventh-day Adventist Fundamental Beliefs, should be stressed and strongly emphasized in evangelism among ethno-religionists. They are needed not only to bring traditional religionists into a meaningful relationship with Christ and his church, but they also serve to help the new converts face the issues in their daily lives. The all-important teaching in Adventism that Jesus triumphed over and subjugated all demonic powers should be convincingly emphasized in detail. To this must be added that some of the Fundamental Beliefs inevitably have more relevance than others in these cross-cultural and cross-religious situations. When tribal religionists fully accept Christianity their world is completely torn apart as the dependence on, belief in, and fear of the spirit world is condemned and declared to be unbiblical and of the devil.

A few observations from a missiological viewpoint on the Fundamental Beliefs will be appropriate at this point. In evangelistic approaches to people in traditional religions, as well as to adherents of the world religions, all Fundamental Beliefs are needed. They must, however, be carefully adapted to local cultures, beliefs, and situations. As mentioned earlier, present wordings are too often based on a “Western” theological understanding.
Fundamental Belief number 7 (Nature of Man) and number 26 (Death and Resurrection) should be furthered developed and extended. Even in outreach endeavors to Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, ethno-religionists, and the majority of non-Adventist Christians, the biblical teachings on conditional immortality and the state of the dead are the greatest challenges for Adventist evangelists.

Fundamental Belief number 18 (Gift of Prophecy) is a point in our proclamation that will be readily accepted by people in traditional religions because they believe in prophets. Fundamental Beliefs number 15 (Baptism) and number 16 (The Lord’s Supper) are of significant importance. Rituals and ceremonies are extremely significant, not only for living out faith in traditional societies, but also for transmitting biblical truth from one generation to another in a preliterate society. Pastors in these situations should also be prepared to make child dedications, weddings, ordination of church officers, church dedications, and funeral services into meaningful “rites of passage.”

**A Long Overdue Need for an Additional Fundamental Belief on Angels**

Seventh-day Adventists need to develop a more detailed biblical angelology. In our concepts of the celestial world, we believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, but we also believe in loyal angels. “Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation” (Heb 1:14)?

Opposing forces consist of the fallen angels created by God who rebelled against him and were cast out of heaven. These rebellious angels serve Satan. Their power is limited, and judgment awaits them in the future. In the Bible, there is no real distinction between fallen angels and demons. In accepting and understanding the active existence of angels, both good and evil, there are all the possible components needed to fill the great vacuum created when Christian preaching condemns and insists on a removal of the many-sided supernatural and spirit world that surrounds the traditionalists and in which they believe.

Angels are already mentioned in the Fundamental Beliefs under number 8 dealing with “The Great Controversy” which reads: “To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.” Here loyal angels are mentioned.
In Fundamental Belief number 27 on “The Millennium and the End of Sin,” there is the following statement concerning fallen angels: “The unrighteous dead will then be resurrected and, with Satan and his angels, will surround the city, but fire from God will consume them and cleanse the earth.”

These two short, general statements on the loyal and fallen angels may satisfy and fill the vacuum created by the biblical demand to make Christ the only master, when they are explained, supported by other biblical texts, and accompanied by practical examples. However, a doctrine on Christ’s victory must be followed by practical teachings on who is assisting Christ in the victory.

Traditionalists, and for that matter, the majority of people in the world religions of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Shintoism, have for generations had their lives focused on and controlled by a complexity of supernatural creatures whom they feared and by whom they were both persecuted and helped. These people will experience a tremendous vacuum when these dominating factors are removed without being replaced. It will never be sufficient to use well-expressed doctrines in a Western way. There should be practical references explaining not only who is causing the trouble, but also who will assist in the spiritual warfare between good and evil. Nothing can be more meaningful and helpful to the non-Christian converts than explanations and examples of the work of loyal angels and their counterparts, the fallen angels, as narrated in Bible history.

Conclusion

As stated above, as a church Adventists need to develop a thorough and sound biblical angelology in order to help missionaries in facing the complex spirit world of the various world religions as well as the millions still in the traditional religions. Such a doctrine will assist such people in understanding the plan of salvation.

Adventist theologians should develop detailed discourses on the many aspects of angelology in the framework of an Adventist eschatology and understanding of the Scriptures. A serious and thorough study of the role, ministry, and importance of the angels in God’s overall plan of salvation should be a meaningful addition in the church program. The negative role of fallen angels should also be an important section of these studies. Several other Christian denominations are presently involved in developing a detailed angelology. They feel that there is a need to study this important aspect of Christian faith.
and theology. In Islam, the second point in their Articles of Faith, next to the article on Allah, deals with angels.

Church members should have access to literature on the subject of angelology, and the subject should be part of the ministerial training in Adventist seminaries. Angelology definitely is a “must” in educating ministers and missionaries who are attempting to win converts from non-Christian religions, whether they are Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or traditionalist religionists.

Appendix

The Ministry of Angels in the Bible

Old Testament Examples

Abraham and Isaac: Angels restrained Abraham (Gen 22:11)
Jacob and Laban: Angels restrained Laban’s cheating (Gen 31:11)
Angel appeared to Moses at the burning bush (Exod 3:2)
Angel gave message on birth of Ishmael and Samson (Gen 16:11; Judg 13:3-5)
Angel escorted Israel through the wilderness (Exod 23:20-23)
Put a cloud between Israel and the Egyptians (Exod 14:19)
Invoked a curse against a village that refused to help Jews (Judg 5:23)
Fed Elijah in the desert (1 Kgs 19:5)
Inflicted disasters on invaders of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 19:35)
Angels appeared in human form (Gen 18)
Angels are beautiful (1 Sam 29:9)
Angels know everything that happens on earth (2 Sam 14:20)
Angels eat special food (Ps 78:24-25)

New Testament Examples

Angels gave message on birth of John the Baptist and Jesus (Luke 1:11-20)
 Warned Joseph to flee to Egypt with Mary and Jesus (Matt 2:13)
 Encouraged Jesus on way to Mount of Olives (Luke 22:43)
 Rolled away the stone from Jesus tomb (Matt 28:2-3)
 Released Peter from prison (Acts 12:7-10)
 Active in evangelism and in the early church (Acts 8:26; 10:1-7)

Special Orders of Angels

Seven spirits (archangels) connected to God’s throne (Rev 1:4; 4:5)
Four angels at four corners of the earth (Rev 7:1)
Cherubims (Gen 3:4; Ezek 28:14, 16)
Seraphims (Isa 6:2-6)
Hostile Angels
Satan and many angels rebelled against God (Rev 12:7-9)
They work against God by seduction (Rev 12:4)
Characterized as murderers and liars (John 8:44)
Incite whole human race to sin (John 13:2)
Brought death and judgment for all (Rom 5:12)
Accuse men and women before God (Zech 3:1-4; Rev 12:10)
Work under guise (Gen 3:1-6)
Satan appears as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14)

Reference List


Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission


Introduction

Adventist mission is expanding rapidly. This expansion is *numerical*. Many of us can remember what a milestone it was when we reached our first million members. The Adventist family now officially numbers over 12 million, and the rapid increase continues. The largest portion of this growth is in the two-thirds world.

This expansion is also *strategic*. For most of our history we have geared our mission primarily to other Christians. In recent years under the impact of the Global Mission initiative and a growing vision of our work and our world, we have begun to deliberately reach out to non-Christian religions. Our mission
priority has become the 10/40 window where the majority of Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindus live.

The time has come for us to ask the question, What are the implications of this God-given mission expansion for the church? One area that has not been carefully considered is the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs. How does expanding mission impact the form, content, propagation, and teaching of our basic beliefs? Since church unity is related to common belief, the question becomes how can we pursue our expanding mission and at the same time maintain our essential beliefs and church unity? This paper is a beginning attempt to speak to this question and open dialogue on the issue.

**Fundamental Beliefs**

In 1980 by a vote of the world Seventh-day Adventist Church in general session, Adventists adopted a statement of fundamental beliefs consisting of twenty-seven points. This list has served as an official statement of Adventist doctrine, appearing yearly in a prominent place in the annual *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. The statement has also served as a standard of orthodoxy and theological truth. Teaching that differs from these fundamental beliefs would be deemed questionable or heretical. These fundamental beliefs continue to be widely discussed, in part because the prologue to the document specifically states that “revision of these statements may be expected.” This statement is often referred to in Adventist circles as “The 27.” All of these things make this statement of fundamental beliefs a key unifying factor in the Adventist Church.

Two other facts also contribute to the importance of the statement and its power to draw the Seventh-day Adventist Church together. First, many Christian churches have more than one reference point for belief. A large number espouse a creed and/or confession as well as a belief statement of their particular denomination. Adventists from their beginning have not adopted a creed or confession, and thus the fundamental belief statement has no official creed to compete with for attention. Second, Adventists have a world-wide connectional organization. Many other churches in non-Western lands are independent or semi-independent of international denominational ties and have their own statements of faith. Mission related churches may have accepted a basic international Christian creed in addition to a local complementary list of beliefs. The Adventist statement of faith is understood to be the one worldwide
standard and is perceived by most as an international declaration that is above culture and thus applicable to all cultures. All of this means that the belief statement is viewed by church leadership as normative in Adventist churches from Kinshasa to Kanakakee, from Thailand to Trinidad, and has no official alternatives.

Recent public discussion of these fundamental beliefs in North America and the West has centered on theological issues. This paper’s thrust has a different focus—a missiological one. This missiological concern drives the content of the material which follows.

Ignorance of the Fundamental Beliefs

There is widespread ignorance about the fundamental beliefs statement in the local church and among regular members. Worldwide in the evangelistic setting and in the encounter between Adventism and the world religions, there is a lack of knowledge. This ignorance takes at least three forms.

Ignorance of the Content of the Belief Statement

Some Adventists do not even know that a formal statement exists. Others may have heard that one exists, but have no knowledge of the content. Often those who are proclaiming the message, such as lay evangelists or Global Mission Pioneers, may themselves know little or nothing of the statement. Even those who do know about the belief statement may have decided it is too detailed, complex, and theologically abstract for their hearers to comprehend.

The Bible lessons or sermons used by the evangelist may not cover all of the fundamental beliefs. When people are ready for baptism, the examiner is most interested in their response to the baptismal vows. Although thirteen baptismal vows are stipulated by the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (*Church Manual* 2000:32, 33), the use of these vows differs from place to place even in a first world setting. I personally have seen places where the vows were not even used at all. These thirteen baptismal vows, of course, do not violate the twenty-seven fundamental beliefs, but do not attempt to mirror them in order or specific content.

While in some parts of the world Bible studies and sermons used in evangelism are standardized, in North America and some other places, a wide choice is available. I counted fifteen different sets of Bible studies available at my local Adventist Book Center. It appears that in many parts of our church a certain
series of Bible studies and/or the baptismal vows have by default, become the statement of belief that is the standard for believers.

Some are ignorant of at least parts of the twenty-seven fundamentals because those teaching them know that the details and complexity of certain issues cannot be grasped by their hearers. I recall my own experience as a young missionary in the mountains of Thailand. I was teaching six young men with a fourth-grade education to be teachers for their people. I remember my decision to teach the 2300 day prophecy to them. What an experience! The procedure was complicated because I forgot how many assumptions played a role in understanding the prophecy. I also did not really think about how their different system of yearly dating would challenge us. Eight teaching hours and two days later I realized that if these young men were struggling to understand this prophecy, the ideas would never be comprehended in the villages. I was saved by a student’s question, “What is the reason you are teaching this to us?” I reflected a moment and said, “I’m telling you that all the Bible prophetic time periods are finished, and that Jesus can come any time. I’m also telling you that Jesus is working as high priest for you now.” Faces lighted up and one said, “We can understand that. Why didn’t you just tell us that to begin with?” Wise counsel! Similar things happen all over the world in the mission context.

Ignorance of the History of the Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs

Speaking for early Adventists, Richard Hutchinson, preacher and leader in Canada for the Millerite movement, wrote in the Advent Herald that the only major difference he saw between Adventists and other evangelical Christians was the millennium (Fortin 1998:51). Other denominations were post-millennialists, expecting the millennial kingdom of Christ to come through preaching the gospel, restoring the Jews, and converting the world. Adventists, on the other hand, were pre-millennialists and believed that the literal second coming of Jesus and the resurrection of the righteous began the millennium. Hutchinson thus saw only one Adventist fundamental belief that separated Adventists from other Protestants.

By 1872, a Seventh-day Adventist editor (probably Uriah Smith) produced a statement containing twenty-five articles. This statement was never adopted by an administrative session of the church, but was printed by the Review in pamphlet form. It was also published twice by the Signs of the Times, and after
two revisions was incorporated into the first church manual in 1883 (Fortin 1998:54).

In 1931 a new statement of belief was voted and for the first time appeared in the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Part of the reason for the statement being included was an appeal from Africa to explain church beliefs to colonial (Christian) government officials. This twenty-two article statement first appeared in the back part of the *Yearbook*, but in a short time had been moved to the front of the book where such statements remain until today. This was the official statement until the revised twenty-seven point list used today replaced it in 1980.

This brief retelling reminds us of two things. First, there is nothing sacred about the number twenty-seven. The statement contained twenty-two points for more years than it has had twenty-seven. The prologue to the statement itself reminds us we should expect change.

Second, the belief statement idea itself began in an attempt to explain Adventist beliefs to other Christians. The statements are best understood as an attempt to give the Adventist position in the Christian context. Adventists are endeavoring to tell other Christians where they have similar beliefs to them and where they differ in doctrine. Understanding Adventist history and the interaction between Adventists and other Christians forms the background and setting of the statement.

Adventists certainly do not object to non-Christians studying their beliefs, but should not be surprised if secularists, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims are confused or mystified by the belief statement. What this means is that the statement, as it now is written, has very little value in helping missionaries to non-Christians do their work or explain their beliefs.

**Ignorance of Worldview Assumptions Which Lie Behind the Fundamental Beliefs Statement**

All writers make certain assumptions in their work. Some of these assumptions are known and deliberately made while others are unknown. Others are partially understood but never reflected on. The following assumptions, which I think are largely unrecognized, need to be carefully considered as we pursue our mission among non-Christians.

*First, the statement assumes literacy.* The length, complexity, and listing of biblical references which characterize the statement assume the audience is lit-
erate. According to United Nations figures, there are approximately one billion non-literate adults or about 26 percent of the world’s adult population (www.sil.org/literacy/LitFacts.html). All parts of the world are affected. While illiteracy rates for Africa are over 40 percent, North America has its own problems. According to Alvin Toffler, 70 million Americans are functionally illiterate, and 44 percent don’t read even one book per year (www.efnoody.com/miscedearians/illiteracy.html). Recent United Nations research suggests the rate of illiteracy is growing, not decreasing (www.globalpolicy.org/socecon/global/unicef98.html). The framers of the statement were probably correct in writing it for the majority of the world who are literate, but did they think about the implications? If the statement is to be widely understood and universally accepted, its form must be adapted to fit this sizable number of illiterates who are important to the church and its mission.

Second, the statement assumes a definition of religion which is heavily cognitive. The statements talk of what we believe or think or understand to be true about God, man, and the world. Behaviors such as Sabbath-keeping, observance of the Ten Commandments, tithing, amusement, dress, and health principles are mentioned, but even here the call is primarily how to believe about these issues. The kind of life, the kind of response, the kind of experience expected to arise from this belief, is, by and large, not clearly spelled out.

I agree with the fundamental beliefs, but the way they are stated follows a long line of Western Protestantism that assumes thinking true ideas about God is crucial and that results in action will follow naturally and need not be stated.

Our emphasis on the cognitive doctrines becomes more evident when we compare ourselves with other religions. Islam has five pillars: (1) The creed (“There is no God but Allah and Mohammed is his prophet”), (2) Prayer (five times a day), (3) Almsgiving, (4) Fasting (Ramadan), and (5) Pilgrimage (if possible to Mecca). Only the first of the five pillars is a theological cognitive belief statement. Even that statement is understood as a call to recite the belief or witness to it, not simply think it.

Buddhists have four noble truths as well as an eight-fold path of action for life. The four noble truths talk about suffering and its cure and could be called theology. The fourth truth says that the way to live and escape suffering is to follow the eight-fold path. In other words, theology is a prologue to life which is tied directly to the theological beliefs and naturally flows from it.
Most of the world, especially non-Westerners, thinks more in line with the life-oriented practice statements of the Muslims or Buddhists than they do our more cognitive one. In fact, when most of our Adventist evangelists proclaim our message in these areas, they preach a life to be lived. Action in life is tied to teaching about God.

To illustrate my point consider fundamental belief number one. It talks about the inspiration of the Bible and the fact that Scripture tells us what is necessary for salvation and that it reveals God’s will. Nothing is said about the necessity to study, read, or follow it! In other words, we are to accept its inspiration, but nowhere are we told of the need to use it daily in our life. Why not spell it out or mention it? Do we believe people need to study, memorize, internalize, and follow scripture? This whole emphasis on the cognitive has led to a neglect of devotional theology.

If we go strictly by the belief statement, you can be an Adventist in good and regular standing and never pray. Most Adventists believe prayer is important, but they do not receive that belief from their fundamental beliefs statement. Statement number two on the trinity tells us God is “forever worthy of worship,” but nowhere are we called to worship or told its meaning. Thus the whole area of Christian devotional practice in study, prayer, and worship is neglected.

Third, the statement assumes a Western first world cultural context and neglects certain issues crucial to other areas of the world. Many of the things I have mentioned earlier could fit into this section also—the literacy issues, the cognitive definition of religion, the complexity of the statement, and its use of Western dating. There are, however, additional important issues that fit only here that need to be mentioned.

The first is the issue of wealth and poverty. While fundamental belief number twenty does deal with the giving of tithes and offerings, the issue for the two-thirds world is, however, a much broader one. Wealth and poverty is a question of their very existence. Many struggle just to find enough to eat, and the material wealth and consumerism of the West are, for them, a moral issue. The Bible says many things about rich and poor and concern for the hungry and homeless. All major world religions attempt in some way to relate this issue to the core of their religion. For them it is not simply a political or economic issue like it is for many Westerners, but a moral and religious one which is not addressed in our basic statement of doctrine.
Perhaps even more crucial is the issue of the spirits and the demonic. While our fundamental statement of belief in article eight affirms the existence of Satan and cosmic conflict between God and evil, it stops short of any statement about demonic activity in everyday life or the Adventist way of dealing with it. For a large part of the world, activity in the spiritual realm is a daily, real occurrence which affects their lives in many ways. They live much closer to the world of the New Testament than we do. If we fail to speak to this area, reversion to cultural norms of visits to healers or shamans and the use of amulets and spells is almost inevitable. This problem of dual allegiance is widespread in many parts of the world. Many attend church on Sabbath and on Tuesday take a sick child to an animist spirit healer.

At a recent meeting in Africa the issue of the spirits came up and the discussion exploded. Someone from America asked, “Have you never discussed this before?” The answer was, “Of course, we discuss it privately, but were told that since it was not part of the twenty-seven fundamentals, we were to say nothing about it in public.” Certainly the New Testament gospels never heard of this approach.

Simply because these two issues were (are) not burning issues for Western Christians in their context, the fundamental statement of beliefs has not addressed them.

The above issues and examples are just a few of the observations and questions that have occurred to Adventist missionaries, evangelists, and Global Mission Pioneers as they have reached out to non-Christians, especially in the 10/40 window. They believe in the Adventist message, but struggle to communicate the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people in a way that connects with people's needs.

**Suggestions**

We cannot leave this simply as an open question. I would like to tentatively suggest some steps that might be taken so that the unifying role of the fundamental beliefs might continue ever stronger in our active evangelism among non-Christian peoples. I hope I can stimulate your thinking so we can come up with even more ideas as to how to address this issue.
De-Emphasize the Number of the Fundamentals

Do not call them “the twenty-seven.” Earlier there have been twenty-five and twenty-two, and in the future there may be twenty-nine or thirty. We may want to summarize their themes and state them in different ways so numbers will change. They are the fundamental beliefs, not the Ten Commandments and are meant to be adapted and changed.

We Must Find Ways to State Our Fundamental Beliefs In the Context of the World Religions

Perhaps we could develop introductory or pre-fundamental belief statements for the major world religions. Another idea would be to take the major themes of the current statement and couch them in terms the world religions would relate to. We could make clear that the present statement relates to the Christian context and should be used cautiously in non-Christian contexts.

Belief Statements and Baptismal Vows Should Be Coordinated

I am also tempted to suggest that Bible studies, meant to lead to baptism, should also be coordinated, but that may be asking too much. Obviously some adaptation is needed. There are currently twenty-seven fundamental beliefs and thirteen baptismal vows. It would seem, however, that the order and themes could be thought through and brought together. Both would be strengthened and that would enhance unity.

The Twenty-Seven Fundamental Beliefs Should Be Grouped or Summarized by Organizing Them around Major Themes

Recently in print and in scholarly meetings some have been suggesting that we should theologically organize the twenty-seven fundamentals by seeing some as core and others as more peripheral. What I am suggesting is different. Simply take major themes like God, the revelation of God, salvation, man, second coming (eschatology), church, law and Sabbath, and Christian life, and group the fundamentals into these categories. Make sure evangelists and Bible studies that prepare people for church missions.
membership cover these themes and that baptismal vows teach key ideas in each category. Presentation of these belief categories could be adapted to each religion and culture, but key issues would be covered by all. This would allow for a unified basic message that could be adapted to fit any situation.

Develop Simplified, Shortened Statements of Our Beliefs, Perhaps in Catechism Form

For instruction of children, illiterates, and new converts, develop teaching tools that make beliefs simple, straightforward, and easy to memorize. One of the best ways to do this is by a question and answer format used by some catechisms. Ask questions like, How do we find out about God and truth? What is God like? How does Jesus help us? What does God ask of us? And then answer them with our basic beliefs. The catechism should be related to the baptismal vows and the fundamental beliefs. We did something like this, unofficially, of course, for our early Hmong believers in Thailand. Attached to the end of this paper is the result of our efforts.

Work on Correcting Omissions in the Belief Statement That Are Particularly Crucial

We must deal with issues that reflect global concerns relevant to an international church. These additions do not necessarily need to be new statements that change the number of paragraphs in the fundamental statement, but in many cases can be added to existing points. I think there are at least four areas that should be spoken to: (1) spirits, evil angels, and Jesus’ power over them, as well as the church’s ministry to afflicted people; (2) the Christian devotional life of prayer, Bible study, and worship; (3) the imperative to love one another and avoid racism, tribalism, gender bias, and perhaps Christian family life could be a part of this; and (4) the issue of wealth, poverty, economic justice, and sharing among Christians and the world.

In my opinion, at least the first three should be included in baptismal vows, i.e., people should at baptism renounce all dependence on power from evil spirits, the use of amulets, and visits to shamans, etc., should state their desire to spend time daily in communion with God, and should commit to love those not of their own social group. Certainly these are crucial to living as an Adventist Christian.
Expanding Mission’s Implication for Fundamental Beliefs and Church Unity

My suggestions are not to be taken as the final answer. What I really want to do is issue a challenge—a challenge to honestly face the issue of what it means to declare our message to the non-Christian world in a way they can understand and so our fundamental beliefs can be maintained and our unity may grow.

I look forward to vigorous dialogue as we try together, under the Spirit’s guidance, to facilitate this happening in our midst. This will stretch us all and will help fulfill God’s missionary commission to our church.

Notes

1. Published yearly by the Review and Herald Publishing Association under the auspices of the Office of Archives and Statistics of the General Conference of S.D.A. in Silver Spring, Maryland.

2. See for example (Knight 2001:5-7). A recent three-day meeting of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies produced a number of papers on theological issues related to the 27 fundamental beliefs. One did deal with missiological issues.

3. Interestingly, only one of the fifteen was directly based on the 27 fundamental beliefs, but that fact was not even mentioned in the study guide!

4. The Thai dating of years starts with the year of Buddha’s enlightenment. So 2002 A.D. is 2544 in Thailand.

5. See note 1 above. The recent Adventist Society for Religious Studies meeting in Denver, November 2001, had this core vs. peripheral idea as its main theme.

Reference List


Editor’s Note: At the conclusion of each year’s Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 2002 five recommendations were prepared dealing with love and unity, Israel and Jewish people, spiritual life, spiritual powers, and wealth, poverty, economic justice, and sharing.

**Love and Unity**

*Recommended 9 April 9 2002*

Inasmuch as

1. The church is seen increasingly as irrelevant to the real struggles of the people of the world torn by terror, violence, tribalism, nationalism, racism, and interpersonal abuse and bias of many kinds, including gender bias, and

2. We have seen in the church examples of tragic discord, strife, bias, and violence, and

3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a global church encompassing every nation, tribe, language, and people, and
4. The living practice of understanding and love does not come naturally to believers, and
5. The Bible emphasizes the preeminence of love and Christ taught us that the demonstration of love is the most convincing argument for the truth of the gospel;

It is recommended that the General Conference Administrative Committee give consideration to a statement in the Fundamental Beliefs which addresses the following issues:

1. That Christians are called to love all people regardless of tribal, ethnic or national origin and to treat them as equals;
2. That the Christian’s first loyalty to the Lord Jesus and his kingdom transcends all other loyalties;
3. That Christians are called to avoid violence toward people, interpersonal abuse, racism, and gender bias;
4. That while the church affirms the personal and group identity of its members it needs to ask its members for a commitment against prejudice, violence, and bias.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Israel and Jewish People

Recommended 9 April 2002

Inasmuch as

1. Many Jews in the New Testament times had a positive attitude towards Jesus, and
2. There is a growing Messianic movement, in which Jesus is worshipped according to the Jewish culture, that already numbers about 300,000 worldwide.
3. There is a growth of Jewish Adventist communities and
4. We have been given by the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy the responsibility to preach the Three Angels’ Messages to the Jewish people, and
5. We realize that according to the writing of E. G. White a large number of Jews will unite with us in proclaiming the Three Angels’ Messages,
That we recommend that the Administrative Committee adopt a policy that

1. In all our literature and public statements nothing will be published or spoken that will be a stumbling block or offense that would prevent Jews from accepting our message.
2. We avoid making negative generalizations (e.g., Jews are responsible for the death of Jesus, God has rejected the Jewish people),
3. And that the Biblical Research Institute be asked to prepare a document refuting the theology of supercessionism.

*Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.*

**Spiritual Life**

*Recommended 9 April 2002*

Inasmuch as

1. The current Adventist Fundamental Beliefs inadequately address spiritual disciplines such as Bible study, prayer, meditation, worship, and the resulting gospel outreach, and
2. Major world religions have a strong belief in and respect for these spiritual disciplines,

It is recommended that the General Conference Administrative Committee set in motion the process to add to the Fundamental Beliefs a statement that includes the following crucial elements of spiritual life:

Maintaining a connection with divine power through: (1) prayer, (2) Bible study, (3) meditation (reflection), (4) individual and corporate worship, (5) service, and (6) outreach.

(Careful consideration should be given to avoiding communicating a salvation by works idea when forming this statement.)

*Editor’s Note: This recommendation was combined with the recommendation on spiritual powers and approved at the 2005 General Conference session (see chapter 32).*
Inasmuch as
1. The 27 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists were written in a Western context where belief in spirits is not a major issue, and
2. For the majority of the world, including traditional religionists, folk Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims, and New Age believers, the issue of spiritual powers and ancestors is an important day to day experience, and
3. The New Testament deals extensively with the issue of angels, spirits, demons, and Jesus’ power over them;

It is recommended that the General Conference Administrative Committee give study to the addition of a statement to the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists covering spiritual powers which should include the following issues:
1. The victory of Jesus and his authority over all evil spiritual powers;
2. The role of good and evil angels (spirits) in the life of people;
3. The responsibility of the Church to follow Jesus model of ministry in bringing deliverance and healing to afflicted people;
4. The role of the Holy Spirit and the Bible in giving guidance, victory, and indwelling power to believers in the day-to-day life.

*Editor's Note: This recommendation was combined with the recommendation on spiritual powers and approved at the 2005 General Conference session.*

### Wealth, Poverty, Economic Justice, and Sharing

Recommended 9 April 2002

Inasmuch as
1. A major proportion of the world’s population lives in poverty, while in Christian countries many live in affluence.
2. The Bible in both the Old and New Testaments has, as a general principle, the notion that God’s people not selfishly keep his blessings to themselves, but are commanded to receive blessing by caring and sharing.
3. The Second Coming of Christ is a central doctrine of the Adventist Church. For this reason, we should not overlook the fact that Christ, in Matt
25:31-40 illustrated that social concern has a decisive role to play in the final judgment when he says to those who enter the kingdom: “I was hungry and you gave me something to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink. I was a stranger and you invited me in. I needed clothes and you clothed me. I was sick and you looked after me. I was in prison and you came to visit me.”

It is recommended that the General Conference Administrative Committee give study to the addition to, or the expansion of a statement in the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists that addresses the issue of wealth, poverty, economic justice, and sharing.

1. We as Adventist Christians, in our programs as well as individually, should be involved in combating economic injustice in the world.

2. We as Adventist Christians are to be actively involved in making this world a better place in which to live for the millions who are suffering, one way or another, for lack of wealth and economic justice.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.
In a world of underground churches, para-church structures, political and religious restrictions, burgeoning membership among illiterate and semi-literate people, and isolated converts whose only contact with the world Adventist Church is listening to Adventist World Radio, the foregoing question becomes increasingly significant and urgent.

Communion

When Jesus was eating his final Passover with his disciples before his crucifixion, he “took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, ‘Take and eat; this is my body.’ Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying, ‘Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink...
it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.’ When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matt 26:26-30).\footnote{1}

The setting was simple. Jesus and his disciples were participating in a feast that the Hebrews had celebrated since the exodus—the Passover. Taking the elements of the Passover which were on the table before him, Jesus invested them with new meaning and promise. He took something familiar and added to it something that, at that moment, was not fully comprehended. Jesus wanted his disciples, both those present that night and the millions upon millions who would follow him through the centuries, to have a tangible reminder of what he had done for them by dying, and what he would do for them when he came again. As God had set his rainbow in the sky to remind that there would never again be a universal flood, Jesus gave an equally tangible and ever-present reminder of the salvation he came to give, symbolized through the bread and the wine.

In fact, in the book *The Desire of Ages*, Ellen White extends the symbolism of the Last Supper far beyond the occasional ritual of the formal communion service. She states: “The bread we eat (talking about our daily bread) is the purchase of his broken body. The water we drink is bought by his spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of his great sacrifice. The light shining from that communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament” (1940:660).

Jesus’ actions at the Last Supper appear to have been spontaneous. The event was not something for which he had primed the disciples in detail. He had not given them prior instruction about what was going to happen that night and the great significance it would have for centuries to come. Rather he took something ordinary that lay before him and, without undue ritual or fanfare, gave it extraordinary significance.

Although the Bible provides rules concerning how the Passover should be celebrated (see Exod 12), Jesus did not issue any procedural edicts about how this new ritual should be transacted. In fact, Luke presents a somewhat different sequence from Matthew and Mark. In Luke’s portrayal of what happened, the wine was blessed and divided among the disciples before the meal and then drunk after the bread was consumed (see Luke 22:14-20). Also, the promise about not partaking again until we do it together in God’s kingdom, accord-
ing to Luke’s rendition, is a prelude to the communion service rather than a postlude. The promise pertains first to the bread, and then to the wine. “For I tell you, *I will not eat* [emphasis mine] it again until it finds fulfillment in the kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16). Then later: “For I tell you I will not drink again from this fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes (Luke 22:18).

Christ’s command “Do this in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19) implies that the celebration of communion would be an ongoing ritual. And the apostle Paul implies the same: “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). But Jesus did not say whether this beautiful reminder should be celebrated daily, weekly, quarterly, or yearly. Rather, “whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup,” however often that might be we are reminded of both the past and the future.

Similarly, Jesus did not state nor did Paul or any other New Testament writer who should lead out in such a celebration, how many need to be present, or what preparatory rituals need to be followed. So over the centuries protocols simply emerged in what became the Catholic Church. These were later adjusted by the various denominations that have come about since the Reformation. While the prescriptions for the Passover give insight into what happened at the Last Supper, there is no directive that says we must mimic the exact procedure followed then. Nor is there any directive that we should alter anything. The Bible presents a simple story of a celebration and suggests that we should continue to celebrate.

Now let’s turn our attention from communion to baptism, another of the rituals that Christ enjoined us to follow.

**Baptism**

When John the Baptist came as the forerunner of Jesus, a major component of his ministry was baptizing as his name suggests. Baptism was a symbol of cleansing. And John preached a message concerning the need to clean up human behavior. Baptism was the tangible ritual that people went through to indicate their decision and desire to lead a changed life. Jesus placed his stamp of approval on this ritual by going through it himself.

In Matt 3:13-15, we read: “Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. But John tried to deter him, saying, ‘I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?’ Jesus replied, ‘Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness,’ then John consented.” The fact that
Jesus went through this ritual, and the fact that he explained why he was going through it, clearly suggest that it was an experience he desired for all those who would become his followers.

The great commission that Jesus gave to his disciples before returning to heaven affirms the significance of baptism. “Therefore,” Jesus said, “go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt 28:19, 20).

The great commission contains four parts:

1. We are to go. This may not in every case necessitate abandonment of one’s home to traverse the globe, preaching to faraway people. But the expression does imply an intentional and deliberate action. Our witnessing is not just happenstance.

2. We are to make disciples. Those who accept the message that we are privileged to carry are to be made part of the Body of Christ. They are to become Christ’s followers and play significant roles in the building up of his body.

3. We are to ensure that they follow Christ’s example of being baptized. Baptism is the initiation and induction into discipleship.

4. Spiritual growth is ongoing. It never stops in this world. Therefore, we are to ensure that those we bring to Christ are instructed and assisted in this ongoing process of becoming all that God has in mind for us to be.

**Inconsistency**

Interestingly, Seventh-day Adventists (like most other denominations) have applied the entire great commission except for the baptizing to all members of the Church. We believe we all, laity and clergy alike, have been commissioned to go forth and share with others the good news of salvation. We believe that we all, laity and clergy alike, play a vital role in helping others to become Christ’s disciples. We believe that we all, laity and clergy alike, should be involved in fostering the ongoing process of spiritual growth described here. But when it comes to baptizing, we believe that only the clergy should have power to act. Why?

On what basis have we decided that three of the four aspects of the gospel commission apply to everyone, but that one of the four applies only to the clergy? A more telling question: Where did we come up with the idea that such
a category as “clergy” is mandated by Scripture? And how does the concept of clergy fit in with the doctrine of the priesthood of every believer?

Certainly, the Bible talks about the members who make up Christ’s body having varying spiritual gifts and functions (1 Cor 12). Some are administrators, some are teachers, some are evangelists, some are pastors, and some may have a wide range of other gifts. Some may even be endowed with many or most of these gifts. But on what biblical basis do we elevate some gifts over others and give to the possessors of those gifts certain sole prerogatives such as leading out in communion or baptizing? Or have we been unwittingly influenced by longstanding religious traditions that, without biblical justification, introduced these distinctions?

The Bible does lay down a principle that “everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way” (1 Cor 14:40). In the same way that it wreaked havoc with church services when everyone was talking at once, particularly if they were speaking in a language that others could not understand, it could create chaos if all Christians initiated others into the body of Christ through baptism. It may be advantageous, from an organizational perspective, to have designated baptizers. And, as long as we understand that we are doing it for the sake of organizational expediency rather than because of a qualitative difference in the members of the body of Christ, fine. It is not that others could not baptize or lead out in communion. Rather, for the sake of order and to avoid chaos and confusion, we choose to restrict these functions. But we need to be extremely clear on why we have restricted them.

Because of the administrative and organizational impact, we have a stronger argument for restricting who baptizes than we do for restricting who leads out in communion. For example, why shouldn’t any Christian family who happens to be together for the holidays celebrate communion, if they wish, as a family, without the presence of ministers, elders or deacons? Or why shouldn’t a group of church members who are involved in some special endeavor celebrate communion together, even though there may be no minister, elders or deacons present? Is communion limited to the confines of a church’s four walls, with the participation of the church hierarchy? The Bible does not seem to say so.
Current Adventist Mandates

The *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (1995 edition) states that, “the communion service is to be conducted by an ordained minister or a church elder. Deacons, although ordained, cannot conduct the service, but they can assist by passing out the bread and wine to the members” (74).

This restriction on who can lead out in communion also appears under the section “Conduct of Church Services.” “The communion services must always be conducted by an ordained minister or by the elder. Only ordained ministers or ordained elders holding office are qualified to do this” (48).

Also, “During the interim between election and ordination, the elected elder may function as church leader but not administer the ordinances of the church (46).

The manual also says “there should be great reluctance to introduce alternative symbols and means (except under truly emergency conditions) lest the original significance of the service be lost. Likewise in the order of service and the traditional roles played by ministers, elders, deacons and deaconesses in the communion service, there should be caution lest substitution and innovation contribute to a tendency to make common that which is sacred” (69).

Interestingly, the tradition of pastors being the sole officiants at baptisms is so strongly established that the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* (1995) does not even reiterate this commonly held understanding. It has considerably less to say about who can baptize than about who can administer communion. The manual states that “a local church elder should not officiate in the baptismal service without first obtaining permission from the conference/mission president” (48), implying that there may be circumstances in which a pastor may not be available to officiate. However, I could find no definitive statement that baptism is, except by special permission, limited to credentialed or licensed clergy. It is simply understood universally, I would suggest, within the Adventist Church.

Challenge of the Atypical

One does not have to spend much time reading the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* to realize that it presupposes a fairly visible and defined organizational structure. And, to date, the church has maintained an amazing uniformity as it has entered various regions around the globe. Certainly, the *Church Manual* has played a significant role in maintaining such cohesion.
Increasingly, however, the church is encountering circumstances that make it difficult to follow many of the manual’s provision.

Adventist World Radio has carried the gospel and the unique emphasis of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to areas that have never been visited by official church personnel. Many have listened to the broadcasts and have accepted the messages they have heard. Individuals, families, or small groups may be joining together regularly to listen to the broadcasts. They may, in essence, have formed a congregation, yet they have none of the structures that are outlined in *Church Manual*. In many cases they are not baptized, nor are they celebrating communion because they have not been given instruction in how to proceed, nor have they received the green light to proceed. Such believers are too often missing out on the joy and blessing of these two sacraments.

Variations of this situation exist in a variety of places around the globe. In some cases, political and religious prohibitions make it all but impossible for representatives from the Adventist Church to travel to see isolated believers or groups. Further, such a visit can place the isolated believers or groups at great risk, not to mention the one who does the visiting.

In some countries with repressive regimes, the Church may have existed for years. However, government restrictions have made it nearly impossible for the official church to evangelize and grow. So a parallel church, not recognized by or known to the government, has emerged. In some cases these underground, loose-knit movements are growing at a rapid rate. But the infrastructure presupposed by the *Church Manual* does not exist. Since there are no guidelines for such non-traditional structures, church leaders, from those regions where the Adventist Church only has traditional structures, do not know how to advise when they interact with members from the alternative structures. Thus they may give no advice or give conflicting advice.

Global Mission has had remarkable success in reaching out to people groups who heretofore have been totally unreached or barely touched. Many of these people are illiterate or semi-literate. They certainly do not have the benefit of the support materials and personnel that traditionally have been part of the Church’s slower and more systematic expansion. What is going on in some of these Global Mission situations is more synonymous with wildfire. So a church with a different face is emerging. And the organizational presuppositions of the *Church Manual* often do not meet the needs of these people. Some of the fastest growth in the Adventist Church is taking place in this context.
So, in these atypical situations, who baptizes? Who leads out in communion? From a biblical perspective, there appears to be no obstacle to our breaking with tradition and the provisions of the Church Manual to accommodate these special needs. Our traditional restriction on the administering of the sacraments is an organizational expediency, not a biblical mandate about qualitative differences between members of the body of Christ. Thus we need to provide clear and unambiguous guidelines for administering the sacraments under conditions that scarcely qualify as the “truly emergency conditions” alluded to in the Church Manual because these situations, in all probability, will be long-term, if not permanent, and they definitely call for a different approach.

Failure to provide for alternative approaches does not mean that departures from the norm will not happen. It simply means that the departures will be more haphazard and random. It also means that those who know about the provisions of the Church Manual but see no way to comply will feel guilty when they feel forced to forge their own path. Such guilt is not necessary if the Church Manual can appropriately recognize and allow broader latitude than it currently does for the atypical situations that the Church faces with increasing frequency.

**Notes**

1 All biblical references are from the New International Bible.

**Reference List**


My first exposure to the question as to whether or not the communion service could be contextualized was raised in a college class when a Korean student admitted that, in an emergency situation, during the Korean police action, they had used grape-flavored Kool-Aid. A lengthy, sympathetic, and incomplete discussion of this seemingly heretical action occupied our young, inexperienced, and somewhat rigid minds.

Two factors grow out of the minimal case study just presented. The first is the present ready, availability of almost all products in all parts of the world, thanks to globalization and the global marketplace. The second is the theological factor.

The theological factor must ask the question as to what Jesus intended to do at that last meal with his disciples. Did he intend to institute a “rite,” to be exactly reproduced at all times and in all places, perhaps even carrying sac-
ramental power? If so, then what happens when concern for exactitude outweighs the meaning of the symbol? Or did Jesus intend to provide an easily reproducible, symbolic activity that was meant to carry over into daily life?

It may be useful for us to remember that Jesus actually contextualized a Jewish seder (Passover supper) which itself has been contextualized over time to the point that Christians today no longer stand as in the original Passover setting, and no longer recline as during the Roman era, but sit during the service. During the Cold War, a fifth cup was frequently added to remember the persecuted Jews behind the Iron Curtain. How long the original practices lasted as a common meal (such as the seder) is not known. We can surmise that the communion meal probably became shortened to simply bread and wine at least during times of Roman persecution, before it was formalized later still as a sacramental ritual in the Roman Church.

One of the most significant statements on the topic of the communion is found in *The Desire of Ages*. I have italicized several phrases that we will examine.

The Communion service points to Christ’s second coming. It was designed to keep this hope vivid in the minds of the disciples. Whenever they met together to commemorate His death, they recounted how “He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom.” In their tribulation they found comfort in the hope of their Lord’s return. Unspeakably precious to them was the thought, “As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till He come.” 1 Cor 11:26.

These are the things we are never to forget. The love of Jesus, with its constraining power, is to be kept fresh in our memory. Christ has instituted this service that it may speak to our senses of the love of God that has been expressed in our behalf. There can be no union between our souls and God except through Christ. The union and love between brother and brother must be cemented and rendered eternal by the love of Jesus. And nothing less than the death of Christ could make His love efficacious for us. It is only because of His death that we can look with joy to His second coming. His sacrifice is the center of our hope. Upon this we must fix our faith.

The ordinances that point to our Lord’s humiliation and suffering are regarded too much as a form. They were instituted for a purpose. Our senses need to be quickened to lay hold of the mystery of godliness. It is the privilege of all to comprehend, far more than we do, the expiatory sufferings of Christ. “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness,” even so has the Son of man been lifted up, “that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.” John 3:14, 15. To the cross of Calvary, bearing a dying Saviour, we must look. Our eternal interests demand that we show faith in Christ.
Our Lord has said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you. . . . For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed" John 6:53-55. This is true of our physical nature. To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of His great sacrifice. The light shining from that Communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament.

And how much more are Christ's words true of our spiritual nature. He declares, "Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life." It is by receiving the life for us poured out on Calvary's cross, that we can live the life of holiness. And this life we receive by receiving His word, by doing those things which He has commanded. Thus we become one with Him. "He that eateth My flesh," He says, "and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me" John 6:54, 56, 57. To the holy Communion this scripture in a special sense applies. As faith contemplates our Lord's great sacrifice, the soul assimilates the spiritual life of Christ. That soul will receive spiritual strength from every Communion. The service forms a living connection by which the believer is bound up with Christ, and thus bound up with the Father. In a special sense it forms a connection between dependent human beings and God.

As we receive the bread and wine symbolizing Christ's broken body and spilled blood, we in imagination join in the scene of Communion in the upper chamber. We seem to be passing through the garden consecrated by the agony of Him who bore the sins of the world. We witness the struggle by which our reconciliation with God was obtained. Christ is set forth crucified among us (White 1940:659-661).

Let us focus on the italicized phrases:

*Designed to keep this hope vivid in the minds of the disciples.* The practical intent of Jesus' action cannot be over emphasized. This symbolic “meal” was intended to be transferable. Jesus took the common food of the *seder* (Passover supper) which was common of virtually every meal, and used the bread and wine to remind people of what he was doing for the salvation of the world.

*That it may speak to our senses of the love of God.* To the degree that “our senses” are culturally conditioned this will require adaptation. Form and meaning are not universal. They are very cultural. While bread (in a variety of forms and ingredients) is the common food in much of the West, it is tortillas or chapattis or rice or cassava or plantains or *sadza* in other cultures.

*The ordinances that point to our Lord's humiliation and suffering are regarded too much as a form.* We should take this phrase very seriously in this discus-
Formalism is a very natural human organizational tendency and can lead easily to sacramentalism in cultures that tend to be more concrete and literal in their thinking.

The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of His great sacrifice. The light shining from that Communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament. At the very least this suggests that the meaning and the sanctity of the communion service is to be easily transferable to ordinary meals. While I doubt that Ellen White used the term “sacrament” in a strict theological or Roman Catholic sense, I do not doubt that she intends us to be thus regularly reminded, two to three times a day, that all of life is sacred. Many family meals in our hectic times could be transformed by this reminder.

It was at the conclusion of a four-week intensive during my graduate studies, during which our very culturally and ecumenically diverse small group had experienced numerous Spirit-infused hours together that one member of our group had brought an apple-for-the-teacher, and handed it to her. The facilitator studied the apple reflectively and then took a small bite and handed it to the student to her right. That student took a small bite and passed it to his right and the apple made its diminishing way around the circle. In that Spirit-charged moment all of us sensed what was happening. We were sharing “communion,” celebrating our oneness with each other and with the Lord Jesus. And the Lord Jesus was very present. There was no bread, there was no wine. There was only our group and an apple, all refugees from Eden, redeemed, together in the Lord Jesus.

If the table of the Lord is an event that must be correctly and carefully duplicated in each detail then we must consider the specific words to be used and the adequacy of translations, the form of the bread, and the nature of the wine. But, even such carefulness is troubling when we look at the history of communion. For “red wine was normally used, though this was not a rule in the time of Jesus. . . . Up to the 3rd century water was used by the church instead of wine in some areas” (Bromily 1985:155).

Looking back at history could open the door to theological discussion of the frequency of the event, for history suggests behavior that would lead us a step closer to the sacramentalism of the liturgical churches, which we have rather carefully avoided. Historical accuracy would also signal a lack of concern
for the transference of meaning (contextualization) by replacing a concern for meaning with a concern for behavioral orthodoxy.

An alternative is to view the act of Jesus as the institution of a frequently occurring event that easily carried over into daily life. The use of bread and wine were the adaptation of common foods to symbolize his sacrificial death. These “common” foods would thus be locally adapted and understood and the meaning of the event thus transferred to locally normal meals, quickly reminding people that “the cross of Christ is stamped on every meal, reflected in each drink.” The spiritual impact of such an understanding could be truly amazing and beneficial as each meal becomes a sacrament: a “religious ceremony or act regarded as outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace” (Fowler and Fowler 1964).

Another alternative, a middle way, suggests itself. Since “bread” and “wine” have become so identified with the communion service over the centuries, they have become a form of sanctified “comfort-food.” The traditional form of communion has been spread around the world and is almost immediately recognizable. At the same time, there are occasions, due to isolation or to social and political disruptions, when these “elements” are not readily available. These occasions may become even more frequent as we approach the eschaton.

In these situations people should understand that it is perfectly acceptable to substitute other local “elements” that the local congregation considers appropriate. Apparently, this has already been done and authorized by some levels of church authority.¹

The benefits of such an understanding would allow for some local adaptation when grape juice and bread are not available, but would preserve the unity of the church through maintaining the present practice of strongly suggesting the use of the traditional elements.

Questions Raised

1. Will we address this issue on the level of availability vs. non-availability or on the theological level? The context of our discussion suggests the latter.
2. Is the form more important than the meaning?
3. Can the meaning be effectively communicated by other forms?
4. Is the “middle way” actually creeping compromise?
5. Is the “middle way” in reality a denial of the New Testament practice?
6. To what degree can the church tolerate diversity on this issue?
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Notes

1 In an e-mail dated 12 February 2003 from Barry Oliver, General Secretary, South Pacific Division
   Dear Paul,
   A few years ago (probably 5-8 years ago) the Biblical Research Committee of the South Pacific Division took an action recommending that in those areas of the South Pacific where grape juice was not available for supply or economic reasons, churches may use pure fresh coconut milk as a substitute for grape juice. This should only be done if every effort had been made to obtain grape juice. In some places, communion was not being celebrated year after year because grape juice was not available.
   Would you please research this action in the minutes of the Biblical Research Committee and send a copy of the action to Bruce.
   I know of no other action or activity in the South Pacific with respect to the question.
   Thank you
   Barry

Reference List


Chapter 28

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EVANGELISM AMONG RESISTANT PEOPLES WITH DEEPLY ENTRENCHED POLYGAMY

RUSSELL L. STAPLES

April 6-7, 2003

Introduction

This paper has to do with the problem of polygamy in the evangelization of peoples in societies which are resistant to the gospel. Examples of these are some Muslim societies in the Middle East, Africa, and Indonesia, and some ethno-religionist societies such as the Southern Nilo-Hamites (including the Maasai) of East Africa. While the focus is on polygamy in a few select societies, an introductory overview is given of some aspects of the dealings of the churches and mission societies with polygamous families over the years. This is followed by a review of the trajectory of the Adventist experience and of the biblical/theological foundations of the issue in order to provide a background for discussion regarding an appropriate course of action.
The way missionaries respond to the polygamy problem has always been, and remains, a particularly sensitive issue for two main reasons: first, because of the deeply entrenched views in the Christian West regarding the theology and forms of marriage, and second, because of the fear that an accommodating position will undercut the Christian standard of monogamy in the church, and consequently impact the security of women who are concerned about any threat to their monogamous status.

**A Cursory View of the Road Traveled**

**General Missions History**

The problem of how to accommodate converts coming to Christianity with polygamous families in a manner that is both faithful to the gospel and sensitive to human needs has been a recurring item on the agenda of missionary and church conferences for a century and a half. Change in the general attitude toward polygamy, at first slow, seems to have accelerated rapidly during the past thirty years. Until about that time most of the major churches and mission societies had adhered, at least in theory, to a firm refusal to accommodate polygamy in any form. The position defined at the Anglican Lambeth Conference of 1888, and subsequently repeatedly reaffirmed, was adhered to by most of the English-speaking missionary bodies. In general practice was as follows:

Polygamous men were not baptized or accorded church membership. Further, inasmuch as polygamy was generally regarded as a form of institutionalized adultery rather than marriage, the separation of wives was not regarded as divorce. Polygamous families and wives were dealt with in two major ways: (1) separation of families was encouraged in which case the husband was required to keep the first and only true wife, or was allowed to choose the wife he wished to retain, or (2) families were held together and in some societies converting wives were baptized but not the husband.

Recently missionaries and church leaders have gained greater insight into the forms and functions of marriage in traditional societies, of the wide differences in patterns of polygamy, and of the social dislocation and dire consequences for women and children caused by the separation of families in some societies. The general attitude is changing. Many missionaries have either observed or experienced some of the following consequences of rigid insistence upon monogamy.
1. The recognition that polygamy is marriage, and stable marriage at that, has led to increasing unease about being the agents of divorce.

2. Many have experienced the serious problems involved in separating families, such as the separation of young children from their mothers and the dereliction and isolation of divorced wives.

3. Many have experienced or observed serious untoward results, such as splits or offshoots in their churches by leaders accepting polygamous families, or in some cases some of the most exemplary men attending their churches, including unofficial leaders, have been unbaptized polygamists. Leaders have not known how to deal with this situation short of admitting them to membership. Church leaders have failed to disciple chiefs and other leaders of society who wished to become Christians because the chiefs and societal leaders felt they could not alienate their wives without creating serious friction between clan groups and severely disrupting the society. Church leaders have become aware that some of their prominent and wealthy church members have secretly maintained secondary wives. Church leaders have also come to recognize that acceptance of polygamy has been a significant factor in the growth of independent movements, including loss of their own members. Many have come to recognize that acceptance of polygamy has also been a significant factor in the rapid spread of Islam in some countries. Then, many have experienced tension between mission societies regarding different practices in dealing with polygamists. One missionary told me, “There is literally a Babel regarding polygamy among missionaries.”

Other changes are also taking place. Erstwhile colonial countries have become sovereign, independent nations and many of the young churches, including mainline ones, are gaining greater freedom and adopting a more accommodating stance toward polygamy. Already in 1969 Donald McGavran, director of the Institute of Church Growth at Fuller Theological Seminary, dedicated a whole issue of the *Church Growth Bulletin* (vol. V, no. 4) to “Polygamy and Church Growth” in which insistence on monogamy was recognized as a major obstacle to church growth. An accommodating stance is boldly advocated by such leading lights as McGavran; Alan Tippett, leading anthropologist of the movement; Ralph Winter, who in due course established the U.S. Center of World Mission; Kenneth Taylor, translator of *Living Letters*; and Lesslie Newbigin, then secretary of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism in Geneva, shortly before his return to India as the Bishop of the Church of South India.
The famous Lambeth Conference Resolution of 1888 has dominated the polygamy issue for over a century, but here too change is underway. A resolution was adopted by the Synod of the Church of the Province of Kenya in 1982 approving the baptism and confirmation of polygamists (Minute 22/82). This was presented to the 1988 “Centennial” Lambeth Conference with the support of the bishops of many provinces in Africa and elsewhere. The resultant Resolution 26 of 1988, like its predecessor a century earlier, constitutes a major landmark.

This Conference upholds monogamy as God’s plan, and as the ideal relationship of love between husband and wife; nevertheless recommends that a polygamist who responds to the Gospel and wishes to join the Anglican Church may be baptized and confirmed with his believing wives and children on the following conditions:

1. that the polygamist shall promise not to marry again as long any of his wives at the time of his conversion are alive;
2. that the receiving of such a polygamist has the consent of the local Anglican community;
3. that such a polygamist shall not be compelled to put away any of his wives on account of the social deprivation they would suffer;
4. and recommends that Provinces where the Churches face problems of polygamy are encouraged to share information of their pastoral approach to Christians who become polygamists so that the most appropriate way of disciplining and pastoring them can be found, and that the Anglican Consultative Council be requested to facilitate the sharing of that information (The Lambeth Conference 1988:220-221).

One can only wonder what the experience of missions in polygamous societies would have been if this position had been adopted a hundred years earlier. What would the result have been if leaders who balked at becoming Christians because of the social dislocation resulting from the alienation of wives had enthusiastically joined the church and supported the evangelization of their people? The history of missions among some peoples might have been strikingly different.

Because of the radical social change now taking place in most traditional societies, this resolution seems more appropriate to pioneering movements among largely unevangelized peoples, such as those which are the focus of this paper, than to the general outreach work of the church in contemporary society.

While no one is loudly trumpeting the victory of an accommodating stance, the general attitude toward polygamy seems to have changed from an
unbending prohibition to a gracious and selective extension of church fellowship to polygamists under some circumstances. Many, if not most, churches in societies with inflexible forms of polygamy have quietly begun to baptize husbands and wives who contracted plural marriages before coming to Christianity on condition that they do not marry additional wives. At the same time there is great concern to promote the Christian ideal of a loving and congenial monogamy and to protect the church and its youth from the incursion of an incipient polygamy. Much attention is now being given to concerns such as the following: (1) education regarding the meaning, mutual responsibilities, and beauty of a Christian monogamous family relationship, (2) promotion of the adoption of civic marriage laws that protect monogamy and the rights of women, (3) education of members regarding the above, and of how a woman can protect herself in the event that a husband wishes to bring another wife into the marriage.

We thus approach the central concerns of this paper in the context of a broadly different general attitude toward polygamy than that obtaining even two decades ago.

Trajectory of the Adventist Experience

Adventist missionaries entered the field a century after the beginnings of the great Protestant thrust without any pre-established policy regarding the marriage situation. They immediately found themselves face to face with extremely complex issues, which varied widely from society to society. They also found themselves in contact with the established practice of other societies, and these too varied from rejection of every trace of polygamy to selective accommodation. Many Adventist missionaries were thus confronted with a two-sided dilemma: their conception of the Christian/biblical solution, and the accepted missionary practice in the area. In places what seemed to them to be the appropriate course of action ran counter to current mission practice.

Missionary Round Table Sessions

In search of a solution to this and other issues a Missionary Round Table session, presided over by W. A. Spicer, was convened in conjunction with the General Conference Session at Takoma Park, Maryland in June 1913. The report of the discussions reveals the perplexity of the missionaries regarding the
complex marital issues they faced, and the diversity of their thought and practice. This is reflected in the following comment by W. C. White:

I do think we will lose something if you fail to make an effort to come to an agreement regarding a moderate, well-balanced standard to work to. It is not law, and you can say how it shall be placed before the public. I cannot but feel that it will tend to the unity and strength of your work to have such a moderate, well-balanced standard as has been presented, recognized. Then each man is free to make exceptions as his judgment demands; and when he finds that he has made mistakes in his exceptions, and that he has to retrace his steps and make different standards, then such a resolution will help him a lot (Missionary Round Table 1913:13).

A “Recommendation” was drafted (appendix A). W. A. Spicer described the status of the recommendation by saying, “In putting this on record it is not a legislative action as though passed by the General Conference, as an order in force, but it is the consensus of the counsel of the missionaries. We may still learn more, and we may possibly unlearn some things (Missionary Round Table 1913:1).

Thirteen years later, in May-June, 1926, a second Missions Round Table was convened in connection with the sixth General Conference Session at Milwaukee. The difficulty missionaries faced in breaking apart polygamous families in some societies was discussed more specifically than at the earlier conference, and it became immediately clear that many missionaries had indeed followed the course of flexibility. In some fields, polygamous families were baptized; in others a rigid monogamy was upheld. Judging by the conversations, one gets the impression that most of the missionaries were in favor of flexibility given the different social circumstances of the marriage institutions with which they had to deal. Discussion also included the problem of what to do with defacto, but not legally married families in some countries in South America in which it was not possible to obtain divorce. A committee was appointed to make recommendations to the General Conference Committee.

General Conference Resolutions and Policies

The first formal General Conference Resolution on “Polygamy and Marriage Relationships” was adopted on 13 June 1926 (appendix B). It represented a brief, but stern, endeavor to correct errant excess and precluded the baptism of polygamous men. The status of plural wives was not defined. The simplicity of the resolution seems to belie the complexity of the reality the missionaries
faced. In somewhat strange juxtaposition in this same policy, grace was extended to the unmarried Latin *defacto* family allowing them to be admitted to church fellowship (Recommendations 2 and 3), but grace is strictly denied the African polygamous family.

The brethren from Africa returned to their mission fields perplexed as to how they could respond to this resolution. W. H. Branson, president of the Africa Division, took the matter under investigation and came to a realization of the absolute intransigence of the large Southern Bantu patrilineal patrilocal societies regarding the dissolution of polygamous families. Tribal leaders maintained stoutly that marriage was an agreement between clan groups in which men incurred responsibilities for women and children from which they were not entitled to withdraw because they became Christians. Branson and some of his co-workers came to a full realization of the grave injustices perpetrated in the breaking apart of families which, in some of these societies, involved the separation of children from their mothers, and the dereliction of divorced women. In addition, they learned of the harshly critical judgment of the tribesmen on a religion that would inflict such suffering and injustice upon women and children in the name of a God of love. They discovered that missionary insistence upon monogamy had engendered such hostility to the gospel among some tribesmen that it countermanded the missionary message of a benevolent God. They began to ask themselves whether becoming a monogamist was a *sine qua non* of becoming a Christian. To add to the difficulty of the situation, converts who had learned to read began to come to missionaries with Bible texts in their hands asking why, if so many of the great men of the Bible practiced polygamy, it could not now be accommodated in a more considerate manner? There was a strong feeling on the part of Elder Branson and his group that the 1926 resolution was inadequate to the situation they faced.

Branson brought the matter to the attention of the fifth biennial council of the African Division at Solusi Mission in June 1929. A decision was made to request the General Conference to reconsider the resolution. J. I. Robison, secretary of the Division, drafted an excellent fourteen page paper on polygamy in the Bible, including a brief survey of the practices of some of the churches in the area, and made a strong case for a more accommodating stance. Branson sent this to Elder Spicer along with the formal request of the Division.

The African Division was successful in getting a committee appointed at the 1930 Annual Council, which recommended major revision of the 1926 Resolution. A radically changed policy was adopted on 3 November 1930, which was
adequately flexible and opened the way for the baptism of polygamous families under certain circumstances (appendix C).

This policy remained in force until 1941. Acceptance of the new policy in Tanganyika brought protests from the British missionaries in neighboring Kenya where the hard line of the 1888 Lambeth policy had been adhered to. They did not see how they could go back on their earlier rigorous insistence on monogamy without engendering much confusion in the minds of their members, or invoking the severe criticism of their neighboring mission societies.

An appeal for a firmer stance on monogamy as prerequisite for church membership was made to the General Conference by the Northern European Division. In response a subcommittee of the Home and Foreign Officers was appointed to give further study to the matter and make recommendations that would lead to a united worldwide standard. The General Conference in session at San Francisco in 1941 adopted a policy which countermanded the 1930 position (appendix D). This policy, re-edited in 1977 but substantially unchanged, remains the official position of the church (appendix E). It is of more than passing interest that very few missionary representatives were able to attend the session because of the severe travel restrictions imposed by World War II. One wonders whether a broader less restrictive policy would have been maintained had a larger number of those directly involved with the complexity of the polygamy situation been present. According to this policy a polygamous man is “required to change his status by putting away all his wives save one” before baptism. It allows, however, that under certain circumstances the wives in a polygamous marriage may be baptized.

A More Recent Initiative

In 1980, under the leadership of General Conference President Neal Wilson, a decision was made to reorganize the divisional structure of the church in Africa. This restructuring joined together segments of three former Divisions, forming the Africa-Indian Ocean Division. In one of the Divisions the attempt to separate families had been largely abandoned and converting wives, but not the husband, were baptized. Greater pressure in the direction of monogamy had been maintained in the other two Divisions, but there were differences regarding which wife should be retained. Some insisted that it should be the first and only legal wife, others permitted the husband free choice of which wife to maintain.
Neal Wilson, who had previously worked for a number of years in the Middle East, was much concerned to promote an effective evangelistic program among Muslims. However, Islam permits polygamy and it is widely recognized that Muslims with young families who respond to the gospel will generally enter the church *en famille* or not at all. He sought to promote consensus regarding the polygamy-related concerns in the new Division, and while the matter was under consideration, open the way for a revival of evangelism among Muslims. Wilson requested a study paper on the forms of, and dealings of the Adventist Church with polygamy in Africa, and brought the matter to discussion at a meeting of the General Conference and Division officers in October 1981. A study conference was convened in 1983 and the concerns and hopes raised there were introduced to the Annual Council in October of that year (Coffin 1983:9).

Study papers soliciting a response were subsequently circulated throughout the world field. At a broadly representative study conference convened in March 1986, a tentative alternate and more accommodating policy was drafted (appendix F). The editor of the *Adventist Review* reported on the process and the issues discussed (see appendix G).

Wilson shared a “Progress Report” of the “Plural Families” study with church leaders at the Annual Council in Rio de Janeiro on 6 October 1986. Finally, the proposed policy, which was intended to replace the 1977 C85 policy, was presented to the Annual Council in Washington in October 1987. The following action was taken.

**Plural Marriages (Polygamy)**

For several years there have been discussions and study as to whether the guidelines on plural families as outlined in the *General Conference Working Policy* should be changed, or remain as they have been for approximately fifty years. Recently the divisions were asked to carefully explore this matter and comment on whether they felt a change should be made. The majority are clearly opposed to any change at this time. It seems obvious that there is no Biblical authority for plural marriages. Although some patriarchs were involved in plural marriages, it was outside the Lord’s will. It is felt best to set this matter to rest for the present until the Holy Spirit, in His own time, shows the church a better solution (Annual Council 1987:31).

And there the matter remains. What then can be learned from those eight years of serious, careful, and broadly considered endeavor to overcome the enormous difficulty confronting polygamous men who give their hearts to the
Lord and wish to become active members of the church, but who cannot in free conscience bring themselves to wreck havoc upon the wives and children they love?

First, it would seem that efforts to gain approval of an accommodating stance would be more likely to gain consent if application is restricted to a few select societies in which deeply entrenched polygamy is a major obstacle to conversion and church membership, as is the case among the Maasai and some Muslim societies. Details of these situations will be considered later in this paper.

Second, a program sharing information on three fronts could be helpful in preparing the way for change.

a. A description of present missionary programs in which an altered stance regarding polygamy is indicated and why insistence upon monogamy at the outset is a major obstacle in a particular society would be helpful. This could include a description of the ordering of the priorities of mission: acceptance of Christ as Savior, the biblical basis of Adventist belief and hope, the gathering of members into the witnessing community of the church, progress toward monogamy as an ideal to be achieved as members mature in faith rather than as an essential initial requirement.

b. The preparation and publication of a detailed and balanced study of polygamy in the Scriptures by respected biblical scholars should be undertaken. This could include information regarding the position now taken by most churches.

c. An explanation of the missionary problems and resistance to the message that results from rigid insistence upon monogamy at entry into the church should be documented. An explanation of personal problems resulting from the separation of families should be illustrated by a few case studies.

### Biblical Evidence

#### The Old Testament

There have been numerous attempts to either minimize or explain away the biblical evidence indicating that polygamy was an accepted pattern of marriage in Israel, much of which amounts to special pleading of one kind or another. Monogamy is the ideal form of marriage established in Eden and this ideal has been staunchly upheld by the Christian Church from its early beginnings. And
this is the form of marriage which has been taught and upheld by the Adventist Church throughout its history and strongly affirmed here.

The patriarchs departed from this ideal surprisingly early, and there is abundant evidence that polygamy came to be an accepted practice in Israel. Two major forms of evidence testify to this. First, there are the biblical records of the practice of polygamy in the Old Testament. Second, there are the historical records regarding polygamy in the Talmud and Mishnah, and also in the works of Jewish and Christian historians and the early Church Fathers. Much has been written about the matter. It is beyond the scope of this paper to conduct even a cursory survey of the evidence; however, a few of the highlights from the biblical record are outlined below. This consists largely of two patterns of evidence: first, records of the practice of polygamy by patriarchs, kings, and ordinary citizens; and second, the regulations controlling the practice of polygamous marriage.

As regards the first pattern of evidence, the records of two events are of significance inasmuch as it can be argued that they confer an imprimatur on the practice:

The word of God to David from the mouth of Nathan: “This is the word of the Lord . . . to you. . . . I gave you your master’s daughter and his wives to be your own, I gave you the daughters of Israel and Judah; and had this not been enough, I would have added other favors as great” (2 Sam 12:7, 8 NEB).

The action of Jehoida the priest on behalf of Joash whom he and his wife had sheltered and reared: “Jehoida got two wives for him (Joash), and he became the father of sons and daughters” (2 Chr 24:3 NRSV).

Of even greater weight in indicating that polygamy was an accepted practice in Israel are the many recorded instances in the Levitical laws regulating the practice:

“You shall not take a woman who is your wife’s sister to make her a rival-wife” (Lev 18:18 NEB).

“If a man takes a wife and her mother also, it is depravity” (Lev 20:14 NRSV).

“If he takes another wife to himself he shall not diminish the food, clothing or marital rights of the first wife” (Exod 21:10 NRSV).

“And he (the king) must not acquire many wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away” (Deut 17:17 NRSV).
“When a man has two wives, one loved and the other unloved, . . . and the son of the unloved wife is the elder, then when the day comes for him to divide his property . . . he shall recognize the rights of the firstborn, the son of the unloved wife” (Deut 21:15-17 NEB).

Weight is added to the above passages by the law of the levirate which is defined as follows: “When brothers live together and one of them dies without leaving a son, his widow shall not marry outside the family. Her husband’s brother . . . shall take her in marriage and do his duty by her as her husband’s brother. The first son she shall bear shall perpetuate the dead brother’s name” (Deut 25:5-10 NEB).

The levirate ensures continuity of the family name and in addition defines the inheritance and transmission of family property from firstborn to firstborn son. Leviratic marriage in Israel was not a matter of choice, it was a defined responsibility. Today, wherever the levirate is strictly practiced, polygamy is an inevitable consequence.

It is inconceivable that this considerable body of law regulating both the practice of polygamy and leviratic marriage, and expanded upon in the Talmud and Mishnah, would exist in a society in which polygamy was not recognized as an acceptable form of marriage. And when one adds the fact that there is not a single forthright prohibition of polygamy in the Old Testament to the textual evidence for the incidence of polygamy and the regulatory system controlling it, it becomes impossible to deny that polygamy was an accepted practice in Israel.

The New Testament

While the incidence of polygamy declined after the exile, and was not commonly practiced by the Jews of the diaspora, there is considerable evidence that polygamy was practiced by some Jews, especially the aristocracy including those of the priestly caste in Judea in Jesus’ time, and was protested against by the Essenes of the Qumran community (Jeremias 1969:93-94, 369-370). The laws governing the transmission of name and property (the levirate was a part of this system) remained a part of the Jewish heritage. Polygamy was not officially condemned in Judaism until the Middle Ages, and some Jewish communities have continued the practice until modern times.

Jesus certainly points to the depth, intimacy, and binding nature of marriage in “the two shall become one flesh” statement (Matt 19:5). This descrip-
tion of marriage is much more appropriate to monogamy than to polygamy, but is not necessarily exclusive of the latter. It is of more than passing interest that when the case of the woman who had had seven husbands was put to Jesus by the Sadducees he made no comment regarding the polygamous implications of the leviratic law (Matt 22:33-33). Jesus specifically and strongly countermanded divorce (Matt 19:8, 9), but nowhere did he condemn polygamy even though he must have known that it was still practiced by some. This should perhaps give cause for thought regarding the insistence on separation (divorce is really the proper term) of families coming into the church.

Among the most commonly used New Testament pericopes in missionary discussions regarding the place and role of polygamous men in the church is the Pauline rule. “Our leader, therefore, or bishop, must be above reproach, faithful to his one wife” (1 Tim 3:2, 12; Titus 1:5, 6). While this phrase is open to several interpretations, it was employed by noted leaders in the early centuries of the church as a rubric for the treatment of polygamous husbands. For instance the biblical scholar Jerome (circa 400 A.D.) wrote the following on the “One Wife” rule of the church:

The apostle came of the Jews and the primitive Christian church was gathered out of the remnants of Israel. Paul knew that the Law allowed men to have children by several wives. . . . Even the very priests might . . . enjoy the same license. He gave commandment therefore that the priests of the church should not claim this liberty, and that they should not take two wives or three together, but that they should each have but one wife at a time (1890-1900:114).

Chrysostom, Bishop of Constantinople (circa 400), and Theodoret of Cyrus, a decade or so later, gave similar interpretations of the text. Because of the stature of these men and their closeness to the days of the early church, considerable weight should be given to their interpretation of this Pauline prohibition. There is, however, little direct historical evidence of the existence of polygamy in the early church; therefore, many New Testament scholars suggest that this rubric could have served a dual purpose; i.e., as a prohibition against the election to leadership of men who had been divorced as well as defining the status accorded polygamists in the church.

There has been considerable discussion regarding the relevance to the issue of polygamy of Paul’s directions concerning marriage (1 Cor 7) to the church at Corinth. Here we see Paul the realist who recognizes that the ideal is not always attainable, even by the redeemed.
First, Paul addresses the difficulty of the Christian woman in Corinth (1 Cor 7:11) who wished to terminate a tension-laden marriage with an unbelieving husband. Paul's fundamental advice is that the Christian should remain in the marriage contracted before she became a Christian and endeavor to win the husband. Several reasons are given for this (1 Cor 7:12-14). Then, having quoted the “command of the Lord” (1 Cor 7:10) to the effect that the wife should not divorce her husband, he invokes his apostolic authority, “To the rest I say—I and not the Lord” (1 Cor 7:12) to grant permission for divorce, as a last resort, in the event that it is the unbeloving spouse who withdraws. And in that event “he or she is not bound” (1 Cor 7:15). There is ongoing debate about the meaning of this clause. However, it is widely interpreted to signify that in this circumstance the divorced spouse is free to marry.

Second, having advised Christians to earnestly strive to remain in the marriage in which they came to the gospel Paul gives similar advice in three parallel circumstances. Whether circumcised or uncircumcised (1 Cor 7:19), whether free or a slave (1 Cor 7:24), whether celibate or a widow (1 Cor 7:26), “Let each of you remain in the condition in which you were called” (1 Cor 7:20). Paul concludes his admonition with a resounding affirmation of the binding nature of the marriage contract, “A wife is bound to her husband as long as he lives” (1 Cor 7:39).

Even though there is no specific reference to polygamy in this chapter-long pattern of advice to the Corinthians, and it thus gives no exactly corresponding model to follow, it has been frequently utilized in discussions regarding polygamy in the following ways: First, Paul affirms the binding quality of a marriage, even though it is contracted with an unbelieving spouse before one becomes a Christian. The implication is that pre-Christian marriages are to be regarded as marriages, and that dissolution is divorce against which there is a divine interdiction. Second, Paul's basic advice is that Christians should remain in the condition in which they are called; i.e., it is better in missionary practice to keep polygamous families together if possible, and this may possibly mean bringing them into the church as a whole rather than enforcing monogamy. Third, divorce is possible under some circumstances, but should be reserved for extreme cases. Missionaries should not be in the business of teaching divorce, least of all in societies where it is barely recognized as a possibility. Fourth, Paul realizes that rather than simply following inflexible principles in these practical matters, it is important to take cognizance of the situation and adapt even firm principles in a realistic and constructive approach.
In light of the above, the question is asked: “Would Paul have required a converting Jewish polygamist to divorce his wives, the mothers of his own children, as a condition of entry into the church? The answer is generally “No.”

Thus, while it is recognized that no specific mandate is given here regarding the status to be granted polygamous families entering the church, it is also held to be the case that the apostle’s instructions to the Corinthian Church are more in harmony with a compassionate and accommodating stance which keeps families together and admits them to church fellowship, than with a rigorous enforcement of monogamy that tears the family apart.

**A Suggestion Regarding Interpretation**

I have heard it suggested on several occasions, particularly in connection with American Presbyterian missions in India during the 1880s and 1890s, that the resistance missionaries encountered in gaining board approval for an accommodating stance in dealing with polygamous converts was due, at least in part, to societal abhorrence of the Mormon practice. This is not surprising since missionaries and mission board leaders are invariably conservative and staunch advocates of high Christian values and ethics, and would be expected to react even more negatively toward the aberrant Mormon behavior than members of society at large, and would not want to perpetuate this in the young churches overseas.

If there is validity to this thesis, then its applicability to Adventists would be vastly greater than to any of the mainline mission societies. This is so because, from the early days of the Millerite Movement until the first decades of the twentieth century, the general public persistently confused Mormons and Adventists. There are several reasons for this: Mormonism and Millerism arose at about the same time, and in the same socio-geographical area, both were millennial sects and, more importantly, both laid claim to special revelation. As a result, each was constantly involved in disassociating itself from the other. David Rowe writes:

The public associated Millerites with other religious rebels of the day. . . . Unfavorable comparisons with the Mormons were particularly numerous. True, both prophets were from upstate New York, transplanted New Englanders, and both were millenialists, though in quite different ways. But neither Mormons nor Millerites approved of the comparison. Adventists were shocked when they heard people claim “our doctrine is as bad as Jo Smiths” and that the people should “put them down immediately, as it
might be more easily done now than when it was deeper rooted.” Smith’s revelation that Christ would not return in 1843 was almost certainly his attempt to dissociate himself from the Millerites, and the Millerites tried equally hard to distance themselves from him. “One day the world represents Mormonism as twin brothers. The next, they hear that ‘Joe Smith’ has wiped all the stain from his pure skirts which a belief in Christ’s near coming would attach to him, and they seem disposed to fondle their favorite pet (Rowe 1985:105).

This confusion remained. James White described the reception they received in Iowa in 1860: “Just before we reached Knoxville, the cry of ‘Mormons’ was raised against us, and a strange enthusiasm seemed to seize some of the people in the place, as if inspired by Satan. . . . We can excuse the people who are deceived and imposed upon, but not those ministers who raise the cry ‘Mormons’ to keep the people from hearing us” (White 1985:415-416).

Ellen White points to the most significant basis, or source, of this confusion: “As the cry of Mormonism is often raised, especially in the west, at the introduction of the Bible argument of the perpetuity of spiritual gifts, I have felt anxious that my brethren should know what my experience has been and where it has been” (1980:iv).

Adventists were categorized as Mormons and accused of polygamy in some of the Sunday Law trials of the 1880s and 1890s. I counted thirteen articles containing significant reference to polygamy in the Review and Herald between 1870 and 1894 (four were reprints from major papers) many of which relate to the Mormon/Adventist confusion in one way or another.

The confusion was not confined to this country. Early Millerite Adventists in Great Britain repeatedly felt called upon to explain that they were not Mormons (Dunton 1984:218). This association continued for many years in Europe. Ellen White wrote in 1886 concerning the fact that greater effort was needed in Europe: “As soon as the truth is brought to the place the ministers of the different churches become alarmed and send at once for ministers to come in and commence revival meetings. . . . Warnings and threatenings will be poured out from the churches against the seventh-day people, who are classed with Mormons, and who they say are breaking up churches and causing divisions” (White 1946:410).

Adventists were thus continually at pains to disassociate themselves from any connection with Mormonism. Any attitude which was perceived as being soft on polygamy would have served to undercut the distance they were at
pains to maintain. Even in a recent Gallup Poll a few who said they had some knowledge of Adventism connected it with Mormonism.

Given this background, Adventist writers of the period, including the Whites, would naturally take a hard line against polygamy, even in commentary on the Old Testament patriarchs. Anything that could be interpreted as favoring polygamy could have been easily construed as a pro-Mormon stance. Further, the general public concept of polygamy was that of a loose woman entering the family circle and alienating the affections of the husband, or of wives competing for love and favors, and of resultant dysfunctional families. All of which is considerably removed from the concept of polygamy as fulfilling important functions in organized social systems that appear in the ethnographical studies a generation later. And there seems to have been but little literature during the period that cast the polygamy of the Old Testament in a favorable light.

Ellen White would hardly have been a normal woman of the period had she remained totally uninfluenced by the general social abhorrence of Mormon polygamy. In addition, she would have been acutely aware of the jeopardy a sympathetic stance could constitute to the young Adventist Church seeking to establish its identity as the faithful bearer of God’s last message to humankind. A fundamental principle of biblical interpretation is that the events and messages of the prophets are best understood, in the first instance, in the time and social circumstance in which they take place. After establishing as clearly as possible the meaning of the message and the intentionality of the messenger in the perspective of its particular context the interpreter is equipped to explicate its contemporary meaning and significance. This applies also to the interpretation of the writings of Ellen White. She too was a faithful servant of the Lord at a particular time wrestling with some issues and public opinions which have ceased to be of pressing concern to us. She is consistently negative about polygamy in commentary about the Old Testament patriarchs, and much concerned about its effect on family life. Given the ambience and concerns of her writings, this should come as no surprise. However, she passed from the scene of action before the reality and enormity of the missionary challenge vis-à-vis polygamy had broken through upon the Adventist consciousness. As far as I have been able to discover, she does not directly or clearly address the missionary issue of polygamy as it came to light, probably for the first time in Adventist circles at the 1913 Conference. However, in her general letters to workers overseas she consistently advised them to be sensitive to cultural and social differences lest penultimate issues obstruct acceptance of the message.
It remains to us to carefully and prayerfully weigh her words and ask how she would have responded to the not unusual, but extreme case scenario in which the missionary functions as an agent of divorce consigning alienated wives to lives of abandon, and separating mothers from their young children. Ellen White had a heart filled with the love and goodness of her Lord, and I am convinced that had she herself seen and experienced the reality that confronted the next generation of missionaries in some societies, she would have advocated a course of love and compassion, lest in the overthrowing of one evil a greater is precipitated. Of course the Church and its workers are committed to upholding the Christian ideal of marriage, but in some circumstances this may be most effectually realized *gradatim*, by stages which proceed from one expression of love and kindness to the next until the ideal is brought to fulfillment.

**Practical Application**

The problem of how best to deal with polygamous families has always been, and remains, one of the most complex and difficult issues with which missionaries have had to deal. The history of both missionary conviction and vacillation regarding polygamy, of failure to understand the depths of the problem, of harsh social disruption, and of consequent opportunities lost is not entirely edifying. More than any other it has been the source of much personal bewilderment and of intense disagreement between missionaries. It is, of course, easy to be critical from a distance, but the problem is still there and it remains to be seen whether we can be more faithful to the missionary imperative of rightly communicating the gospel message and inculcating Christian standards of living while at the same time being more sensitive to local needs than some of those who have gone before. We have the great advantage of hindsight, of examining the issues in historical perspective, and with more developed sociological and hermeneutical understanding than was available to our forebears. And in addition, there is now much broader ecclesiastical precedent for an accommodating stance.

The foregoing brief survey of some of the major issues and turning points in the convoluted history of the general missionary and Adventist approaches to this problem has been presented for this purpose. So also have some aspects regarding the interpretation of the applicable biblical and revelatory evidence. There is strong evidence in justification of, and compelling need for, a more sensitive and accommodating approach to polygamous families in some so-
sieties than that defined by contemporary Adventist polity. The mandate assigned to us therefore is to decide whether present Adventist Church practice is adequate to the situation in those select societies, and if not, to outline a better way.

The section following this broad introduction to the polygamy challenge serves to bring the issue to concrete expression—to help us see it in terms of the practical realities of both family and church life. Stefan Hoeschele, theology lecturer at the Adventist College at Arusha in Tanzania provides the study on the Maasai.

If there is general agreement that the cause of the gospel in some designated societies would be better served by a more accommodating approach than that mandated by the present policy, then an alternate plan, to be employed on a tentative basis, should probably be drafted and submitted for study to the front line workers involved and appropriate church administrative officers.

The obvious starting point for a revised approach would seem to be the suggested policy drafted by the ad hoc polygamy committee in March of 1986 (appendix F). Amendments regarding the following issues should perhaps be considered: (1) restriction of applicability to designated societies, and subject to periodic re-evaluation; (2) the polygamous baptismal candidate should be required to solemnly promise (before the congregation?) that he will not contract a further marriage while any of his spouses are alive; and (3) discipline of church members who subsequently contract a polygamous marriage should be dealt with.

**The Maasai, Polygamy, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church: Reflections on a Missionary Problem in Tanzania**

Stefan Höschele

Adventist Mission among the Maasai

The Historical Background

Seventh-day Adventists in Tanzania have been aware of the existence of the Maasai since the denomination’s inception, for some of them lived near the first Adventist mission field in the Pare Mountains.1 However, first attempts to reach out to this semi-nomadic people were made only between 1937 and 1939 that resulted in two Maasai joining a hearers’ class temporarily, but apparently did
not lead to any baptisms. In neighboring Kenya, the first three believers were reported in 1948 (Hyde 1948:2, 3) but in Tanzania, it was only in the 1960s that the first Maasai individuals were baptized. From 1969 to 1971 17 baptisms were reported, and in 1982, the number had increased to 126. It is only in the late 1980s and 1990s that conversion numbers became more significant; by the year 2000, total Maasai Adventists in Tanzania counted some 800 to 900 out of a total of 500,000 Maasai. In Kenya, Adventist numerical success has been much more significant; there are probably about 5,000 Maasai Adventists there today out of the 500,000 Kenyan Maasai.

Polygamy and Divorce among the Maasai
Anthropological Background

For a long time, polygamy among the Maasai has been recognized not only as a hindrance for successful missionary work but also as a deep-rooted custom that, unlike in other ethnic groups, does not seem to be a matter that can be eliminated in a single generation. The practice has several functions in traditional society which are closely related to central Maasai values. First, as among so many cattle-keeping peoples, is economic. A man with one wife can never acquire the wealth and status associated with hundreds of cows, for it is the wives and children who take care of the cattle. Second, also connected with the first, is social, i.e., gaining respect in society. Any elder (a man who has “graduated” from the Moran warrior stage of life in his 30s), wants to be respected, and this usually includes a sizeable household. Third, (and there may be more, less obvious functions) is the women’s security. An unmarried woman does not have any status in society, and it can therefore even happen that a woman who has no husband approaches a wealthy polygamist in order to be added to his group of wives, which the rich man would at times gladly accept.

It is a misconception that it is the men alone who make the decision to marry more than one wife. Interestingly, especially first wives commonly suggest that their husbands marry a second wife for they often feel, Why should I do all the work alone? and Why should you not become a man whose honor is visible in society?

Divorce, on the other hand, is a most difficult action almost unheard of among the Maasai. It is a very shameful thing to both the divorced wife and her father; the latter will do all he can to ensure that the wife remains with her husband. Thus, even in cases of adultery by the wife, there is usually no divorce;
rather, some fine will be imposed on the guilty person, or the wife’s father may bring a cow and implore the husband to keep the wife in order to avert the great shame if she is divorced. Thus, full restoration is made instead of breaking up the family unit. Divorce is so uncommon that it requires a meeting of elders to settle the issue, and because divorce implies the return of bridewealth, it may be an almost impossible thing for a not so well off father-in-law since the bridewealth cows may not be available anymore. Following the divorce things become even more difficult since the re-marriage of a divorced lady is very unlikely, and it is common that she lives almost like a prostitute, for there is no husband to honor and who can defend her.

**Ecclesiastical Attitudes towards a Dilemma**

**The Missiological Background**

The main Christian denominations that have been working among the Tanzanian Maasai with significant success, mainly in the last thirty years, have been Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Catholics have theoretically rejected polygamy but in practice have tolerated it to a very large degree. It is characteristic that one of the most well-known missiological books on polygamy, Eugene Hillmann’s *Polygamy Reconsidered* (1975) was written by a Catholic missionary to the Maasai.

Lutherans have worked with a policy specifically designed for the Maasai that allows polygamists to be baptized, but they have to promise not to marry any more wives after baptism. This policy had never been applied to other ethnic groups (Mtaita 1998:211-231, especially 226). However, it has also been argued that this method was not always necessarily effective because the marriage process can start when the girl is still a small child, and thus there have been a good number of cases where Lutheran polygamists added even more wives after baptism, which would lead to church discipline (1998:227 and Keil 1996:319-326). Still more notable is the fact that even today most Lutheran Maasai churches consist of 80 percent or more of the members being women because men understand the church’s insistence upon monogamy even if there are “loopholes” to get around it. On the other hand, the Lutheran policy has been helpful in many cases when men sincerely wish to become Christians together with their wives.

Some Pentecostal denominations apparently also tolerate polygamy and insist on monogamous life only for their church leaders and pastors, but Pen-
Adventism and Polygamy among the Maasai Today

The Tanzanian Maasai live in a very large area, scattered over almost one-quarter of the country. The Adventist presence among the Maasai is concentrated in four areas: Kwedihalawe near the Usambara Mountains, where there are now more than 700 members, and three other areas with more than fifty members each (Mwakikonge near Tanga, Ruvu near the Pare Mountains, and Simanjiro District on the Maasai Steppe). The work in these four areas is not connected geographically and historically, and other smaller groups of members live in several other areas which are also far removed from the mentioned places.

I have been in Tanzania for six years, and since late 1997, I have been involved with a church planting project among the Maasai which has led to the establishment of four congregations, two of them in the Simanjiro District. It has been my privilege to meet all the Maasai workers in our church, five pastors and several lay evangelists, and to closely cooperate with several of them.

It is a striking fact that so far the most significant growth has taken place in one location, Kwedihalawe, which is the district where the oldest Maasai pastor, Matthew Njake, has been working since 1980. Njake is now close to retirement. His missionary approach is interesting in several respects. First, unlike his younger colleagues, he rejects all adornment, which is a rather extreme stand among the Maasai who traditionally wear a lot of adornment, some of it being considered necessary items that show a lady’s respect for her husband. Second, he has been silently tolerating polygamy among his members. It appears that only a few conference leaders knew this, but they did not oppose this practice openly. In fact, Njake has a very strong character (he is a typical Maasai!), and any attempt to oppose his methods would inevitably lead to strong conflicts. Third, Njake has been working among his people for more than twenty years now, and the growth and success of the church in that area can largely be attributed to his dedicated work.

In the areas that we have been involved with in our project, polygamists have not been officially baptized for fear that this might cause problems for both the conference leadership and the members. Adhering to policy was a necessity in spite of the fact that this barred the way into the church for a sig-
A significant number of elders who were willing to be baptized but could not be admitted. On the other hand, the lay evangelists we cooperated with and with whom we discussed the polygamy issue quite a number of times, never advised such persons to divorce their wives because of the tragic consequences of such an action.

Three Case Studies

There are, however, several cases that have occurred that show the impact of an actual insistence upon divorcing all wives except one. Three conspicuous examples come from Mwakikonge near Tanga.4

Mepong’ori Lebabu

Lebabu, the first Adventist in the area, had two wives when he asked for baptism in 1986. The Seventh-day Adventist pastor at Tanga, Imani Yohana, a Pare, suggested that he separate from one of them. Lebabu then stated that he had divorced the elder wife and was baptized with one other monogamous man. Many others had been interested in the Adventist message, but when it came to the conditions of baptism, no one except Lebabu accepted this step. Even Lebabu was not able to fully divorce his elder wife, because the common feeling among the people was that “Adventists have good teachings but they destroy family unity.” This stumbling block of evangelization has remained until the present.

Lendakuya Lairumbe

Lairumbe had four wives in the late 1990s when he asked for baptism. Upon being advised to divorce all but one, he used a traditional way of geographical separation (but not divorce) to satisfy these demands. When a wife has a grown son, the son can be instructed to take care of his mother in his kraal, although the old man will still visit his wife. This is what Lairumbe did for his elder wives, but the reaction of society was still rather negative. They felt that if Adventism insisted upon such procedures, it was not a denomination to join.

Abraham Ladaru

Ladaru is a rich man who owns more than 800 cows. He was converted at the first Maasai camp meeting in 1999 and was baptized the same year in spite of the fact that he had five wives. Apparently the district pastor ignored the
church’s policy. In 2002, church elders (originating from the Pare Mountains) advised him that he had to divorce four of his wives in order to be a “perfect Christian.” He was told that a polygamist is not allowed to do any activity in the church, “not even sweeping the floor.” Ladaru is a serious committed man who recently gave eighty cattle as tithe. Before his baptism, he built a Lutheran church which, however, became a Seventh-day Adventist Church upon his conversion. Because of his seriousness, he informed his wives that he wanted to divorce all but one. They did not accept the proposition, instead they argued and said, Can four of us wives live in shame and grief and one remain and live in self-gratification? Even the wives’ parents were not willing to leave one wife with him while all the others were divorced. In the end, all five wives went away. This caused such a stir in the area that it became a common opinion that “the Sabbath [religion] kills the kraal” [that is, the family]. Out of the previous fifty Adventist members at Mwakikonge, only twenty remained after this event.

Adventist Positions

Maasai polygamy has been a rather difficult issue to deal with for Adventists. A contributing factor is that several ethnic groups among whom the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been strongly established—the Pare, Jita, Nyakyusa, and Ha—have not experienced major difficulties with polygamy, at least not in the last four decades. Among others, however, such as the cattle-keeping Sukuma and Kuria who also practice polygamy much more than the other groups mentioned, the issue was much harder, but church policies have been strictly applied. At the same time, there is another Nilotic tribe, the Datooga, who are related to the Maasai but who are their traditional archenemies, among whom the church has just recently made a beginning of church work. There are fewer than 50 members among the Datooga who number around 200,000. Less than 10 percent of the Datooga are Christians of any denomination. Among the Datooga polygamy is as strongly entrenched as among the Maasai, so we are wondering how the work will proceed in view of this obstacle.5

Among Tanzanian Adventist leaders, hardly any voice can be heard that would advocate a change of the present position. The problem is too far from their thoughts; most leaders are involved in city evangelism, institutional development, and different church departments, and only a few see the challenge lying in what they consider a “primitive” group such as the Maasai. An exception is, however, the first Tanzania Adventist to receive a doctorate in the field
of theology, John Kisaka, a Pare who had been an Adventist pioneer missionary to the Maasai in the 1960s. He wrote his doctoral dissertation on “The Adventist Church’s Position and Response to Socio-Cultural Issues in Africa,” one of issues being polygamy. He advocated a policy much like the Lutherans’ position (Kisaka 1979:23-32, 90). The majority of the leading Maasai in the church whom I know and with whom I have discussed the issue—pastors and lay evangelists—would agree with his position, including the former Global Mission Director of North-East Tanzania Conference, Godwin Lekundayo, who is now pursuing a M.A. at Newbold College and with whom I worked together in the Maasai church planting project.

Summary and Interpretation

The above can be summarized and interpreted as follows:

1. Polygamy is a deeply entrenched custom among the Maasai.
2. Divorce is perceived by the Maasai as shameful and unacceptable and leads to most pathetic situations.
3. Adventism grew among Maasai who were accepted in their polygamous state (against the policies) in spite of the fact that the pastor was strict on adornment issues.
4. In areas where no separation was demanded but where no polygamists were baptized, growth was inhibited to some extent.
5. In areas where separations occurred growth was stifled and actual decline took place.
6. The issue was never brought up for discussion among church leaders because it was not an issue among the ethnic groups dominating the church. Furthermore, present policies are unequivocal.
7. An alternative way of dealing with the issue may be the Lutheran practice which, however, also has to be administered with care.

Appendix A

The Recommendation of the Committee on the Question of Polygamy

As Amended by the Missionary Round Table, “Informal Discussion On Dealing with Converts from Polygamous Families,” Takoma Park, MD, June, 1913.
WHEREAS, In heathen and Mohammedan lands polygamy is large practiced.--

We Recommend, That, when a man practicing this custom becomes a Christian, he be accepted into the church on condition that he support all his wives and children, but that he live only with his first lawful wife as husband and wife. It be further understood that such a convert be not eligible to any office in the church.

In the case of a plural wife accepting Christianity, she be required, as a condition of church membership, to separate from her husband, and if possible to obtain his consent, or if the separation can be effected by legal process, that she be privileged to marry again.

Appendix B

The 1926 Resolutions on Polygamy and Marriage Relationships
General Conference Committee Minutes, Vol. XIII, Book 1, 6th Meeting, June 13, 1926

WHEREAS, the practice of polygamy on the part of many races for whom we are laboring is in itself a challenge to Christian principles, and constitutes a ground of compromise if permitted in the Christian church; therefore,

WE RECOMMEND, 1. That great care be used in the examination of peoples in heathen lands for entrance into the church, and as this examination relates to this practice, we would advise the following:

(a) That in no case should a man living in polygamy be admitted into the fellowship of the church.

(b) That preceding his entrance into the church a sufficient time of probation be given him to test out his sincerity in separating himself from this practice.

WHEREAS, the marriage ordinance is instituted by God for the good of society and for the protection of the home; therefore,

WE RECOMMEND, 2. That where parties are living together as husband and wife, that they be not baptized nor received into church fellowship until they have been legally married; however,

Inasmuch as we find many parties whose matrimonial alliances became badly tangled before they accepted the truth, and as the laws of some of our
countries are such that it is impossible for them to become legally married; and as some of these desire to obey the truth when it comes to them, to be baptized and unite with the church; and in many cases, after careful investigation, we cannot advise them to separate and thus break up their home and present relationship, for this would only make conditions worse, and knowing that the gospel truth does not come to people to make their conditions worse, but better, and that God receives a sinner where he is found and saves him when he repents and turns to Him; therefore,

WE RECOMMEND, 3. That in countries where the laws are such as to make impossible legal marriage of certain persons whose matrimonial alliances have become badly tangled on account of these laws; and when such persons have given real evidence that they are truly converted and are in harmony with the truth and desire to unite with us, all such cases shall be presented to the conference or mission committee of the field in which they reside; and if, after careful investigation, this committee is clear in the case, then the parties may be recommended to church fellowship; with the understanding, however, that if the time ever comes when such persons can be legally married, they do so, and that until so married, they be not eligible to hold any office in the church which requires ordination.

Appendix C

The 1930 Resolution on Polygamous Marriages in Heathen Lands

“Actions of the Autumn Council of the General Conference Committee,”
Vol. XIV, Book 1, Fifty-Ninth Meeting,
November 3, 1930

WHEREAS, the message finds people in certain heathen lands living in a state of polygamy, and where tribal customs subject a cast-off wife to lifelong shame and disgrace, even to the point of becoming common property, her children also becoming disgraced thereby, it is,

RESOLVED, that in such sections, persons found living in a state of polygamy at the time the gospel light comes to them, and who have entered into plural marriage before knowing it to be a custom condemned by the Word of God, may upon recommendation of responsible field committees be admitted to baptism and the ordinances of the church, and may be recognized as probationary members. They shall not, however be admitted to full membership
unless or until circumstances shall change so as to leave them with only one companion.

This action merely contemplates the recognition of a condition which in some places cannot be changed without resulting in great injustice to innocent persons and is not to be construed as endorsing polygamy in any way. Anyone entering into a plural marriage relation after receiving a knowledge of the truth should be regarded as living in adultery, and dealt with by the church accordingly. A man who has apostatized from the truth, and who during the time he is in apostasy, enters into plural marriage may not be received again into any church relationship until he puts away the wives taken during his apostasy and in every way brings forth fruits meet for repentance.

In countries where separation of families can be arranged without injustice being done to innocent parties only one wife should be retained, but we recognize the right of the man to choose the one to be retained.

Appendix D

General Conference Policy, as voted June 4, 1941

WHEREAS, It is clearly God's plan that man should live in a state of monogamy, that is, that a man should have only one living wife; and

WHEREAS, Any contravention of this plan results in confusion and the lowering of the moral standards that should govern human society, and especially the church of Christ; and,

WHEREAS, The practice of polygamy on the part of many non-Christian peoples for whom we are laboring is in itself a challenge to Christian principles, and constitutes a ground of compromise if permitted in the Christian Church;

WE RECOMMEND,

1. That a man found living in a state of polygamy when the gospel reaches him, shall upon conversion be required to change his status by putting away all his wives save one, before he shall be considered eligible for baptism and church membership.

2. That men thus putting away their wives shall be expected to make proper provision for their future support, and that of their children, just as far as it is within their power to do so.

WHEREAS, The message finds people in certain countries living in a state of polygamy, where tribal customs subject a wife who has been put away to
lifelong shame and disgrace, even to the point of becoming common property, her children also becoming disgraced thereby;

WE RECOMMEND,

3. That in all such cases the church cooperate with the former husband in making such provision for these wives and children as will provide for their care and protect them from disgrace and undue suffering.

4. That we recognize the right of a wife who has been put away by a polygamous husband to marry again.

5. That wives of a polygamist, who have entered into marriage in their heathen state, and who upon accepting Christianity are still not permitted to leave their husbands because of tribal custom, may upon approval of the local and union committees become baptized members of the church. However should a woman who is a member of the church enter into marriage as a secondary wife, she shall be disfellowshipped and shall not be readmitted to the church unless or until she separates from her polygamous husband.

6. That it is understood that the above policy supersedes all previous policies on polygamy.

Appendix E

General Conference Working Policy on Polygamy

It is clearly God's plan that man should live in a state of monogamy, that a man should have only one living wife. Any contravention of this plan results in confusion and the lowering of the moral standards that should govern human society, and especially the church of Christ. The practice of polygamy on the part of many non-Christian peoples for whom we are laboring is in itself a challenge to Christian principles, and constitutes a ground of compromise if permitted in the Christian church. The denomination has therefore adopted the following policy:

1. A man found living in a state of polygamy when the gospel reaches him shall upon conversion be required to change his status by putting away all his wives save one before he shall be considered eligible for baptism and church membership.
2. Men thus putting away their wives shall be expected to make proper provision for their future support, and that of their children, as far as it is within their power to do so.

3. We recognize that the message finds people in certain countries living in a state of polygamy, where tribal customs subject a wife who has been put away to lifelong shame and disgrace, even to the point of becoming common property, her children also becoming disgraced thereby. In all such cases the church is to cooperate with the former husband in making such provision for these wives and children as will provide for their care and protect them from disgrace and undue suffering.

4. We recognize the right of a wife who has been put away by a polygamous husband to marry again.

5. Wives of a polygamist, who have entered into the marriage in their heathen state, and who upon accepting Christianity are still not permitted to leave their husbands because of tribal custom, may upon approval of the local and union conferences become baptized members of the church. However, should a woman who is a member of the church enter into a marriage as a secondary wife, she shall be disfellowshipped and shall not be readmitted to the church unless she separates from her polygamous husband.

**APPENDIX F**

**Suggested Resolution of March 1986**

It is clearly God’s plan that marriage should be monogamous, one husband living with one wife in the “one flesh” model established in the beginning and reestablished by Jesus Christ while on earth. Any other form of marriage contravenes this plan and results in the lowering of the standards that should govern human society, and especially the church of Christ.

The family also had its beginning in Eden with divine approval and blessing. The New Testament repeatedly asserts the significance of the family as the basic unit of society and seeks to protect it from disruption through the application of Christian principles of human relationships and standards of behavior.

The practice of polygamy among non-Christian peoples challenges the ideal of monogamy and the human values set in place by Scripture. As an aberration of the original biblical family unit, it represents something less than the
ideal even though practiced in biblical times. Every effort should be made to encourage prospective adherents living in a polygamous state to so order their lives that the monogamous ideal is achieved.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has always required its members to accept monogamy as the Christian norm for marriage. It does not and cannot accept polygamy as a suitable Christian model. However polygamous persons not already committed to Christianity may be restricted from monogamy owing to legal, tribal and cultural practices that they cannot modify. The breaking up of such families may bring lifelong shame and disgrace tragically affecting the spouses and their children. In such situations it may be advisable to preserve the polygamous family unit as individuals accept Christianity, while at the same time urging monogamy and requiring it in every possible instance.

RECOMMENDED

1. That we affirm that the biblical account portrays and urges monogamy as God’s best plan for mankind; and that the sacredness and inviolability of the family unit is an integral part of biblical teaching.

2. That we instruct members and adherents on the Christian values and relationships sustaining monogamy, and on the legal position in their societies that may protect them from polygamous relationships.

3. That we continue to witness by example and proclamation that the Christian marriage is monogamous, and that we uphold monogamy as the norm for marriage.

4. That every effort be made for monogamy to replace polygamy as individuals and families enter the church.

5. That we maintain a rigorous standard of monogamy for those who are entering into marriage after receiving the gospel.

6. That in cases where the Adventist message reaches persons living in a state of polygamy and where legal, tribal, and cultural strictures cannot be modified without causing severe damage to individuals sharing in the polygamous unit, church membership may be made available to such persons provided:

   a. Thorough pastoral investigation and counseling have preceded the offer of membership.

   b. A screening committee at local field level makes such a recommendation after satisfying itself that the polygamous marriage is true and stable; that tribal, legal, and cultural strictures exist that warrant consideration of admission into membership without dissolving the polygamous

Evangelism Among Resistant Peoples With Deeply Entrenched Polygamy  387
status; that the polygamous status is not a guise for what would otherwise be an adulterous relationship; and that the parties concerned are genuine in their desire for membership and are otherwise worthy of acceptance into church fellowship.

c. Such cautious admission into membership shall not make the persons concerned eligible for holding any church leadership position.

Appendix G

Between the Ideal and the Actual

William G. Johnsson


As followers of Jesus we live between the ideal and the actual. The Master summons men and women to wholeness—but His invitation reaches us in relationships so broken by sin that they sometimes can never be restored to the model. We see this especially in marriage.

Jesus made quite clear His ideal for marriage: a lifelong commitment between a man and a woman (Matt. 19:4-6). The church, for her own and society’s good, must reinforce this goal by every means at her command.

But Jesus also calls us to minister—to help men and women mired in sin. As we take the good news to them, we find that many have already married and divorced, perhaps several times over. The actual stands in stark disparity from the ideal.

What then should we do? Tell them to return to their first spouse before they can be baptized? Instruct them to separate from their current spouse?

No, we accept the situation as it is. We do not break up an existing home; we will not disenfranchise the children. The church seeks the best good in an imperfect world, and that means we have to live between the ideal and the actual.

Jesus, of course, took that approach. Strong as He stood for the marriage ideal, He recognized how human frailties caused the marring of God’s plan. “From the beginning it was not so,” He said (verse 8).

Likewise in Adventist history, Ellen White, counselor supreme who upheld the tenets of Scripture, dealt pragmatically with men and women in broken hu-
man relations. In no instance did she advocate dissolution of the existing marriage when faced with the cases of people who had divorced and remarried.

**Plural Marriages**

Adventists in the Western countries understand this tension between the ideal and the actual in marriages in our society. Most, however, don’t know about a parallel problem that confronts the church in some Third World countries. The situation? Plural marriages, usually in the form of polygamy.

Current church policy, adopted in 1941, permits believing wives of a polygamous family unit to be baptized but withholds baptism from the man unless he puts away all wives except one. (The logic is that wives in a polygamous relationship have only one husband, whereas the husband has multiple wives.) As the church in these areas strives to follow the Master, she wrestles with questions of conscience and compassion:

**The Good of the Church at Large Versus The Good of the Individual**

The church seeks to do nothing that will weaken the marriage institution; she also wants to preserve her own reputation.

But she has to deal with men and women—and children. Society and law—tribal, religious, and civil—recognize the polygamous family unit: will she call for its breakup? What will happen to the wives who are put away? To the children?

**The Evil of Polygamy Versus the Evil of Divorce**

Polygamy is a far cry from the biblical pattern of marriage; nonetheless, it is a form that Scripture recognizes although not approves. The Bible nowhere endorses polygamy; however, nowhere does it specifically condemn it. Stalwarts such as Abraham, Jacob, and David practiced it.

Adventists do not mention polygamy in the fundamental beliefs. Nor have we regarded a polygamous relationship as adulterous.

Divorce also is evil. Unlike polygamy, it was specifically condemned by Jesus. If we grant a polygamous family unit validity (although acknowledging its imperfection), the requirement to dissolve a polygamous relationship before baptism is tantamount to the church’s calling for divorce.
As Adventists we see our mission in terms of Revelation 14:6, 7—the evangelization of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. So far, however, we have almost no penetration among one of the largest religions worldwide—Islam, with more than 500 million adherents. Since Islam permits a man to marry as many as four wives, the biblical commission to take the good news of the kingdom to all the world finds itself in tension with the biblical ideal of monogamy.

The church also has to consider the worldwide impact of her decisions. If, for instance, she should make some concession to new believers who are bound by a polygamous relationship, would this weaken her moral force in other societies?

The Biblical Ideal of Family Versus
The Biblical Doctrine of Baptism

Not infrequently all members of a polygamous family unit seek baptism. The husband, while desiring to join the church, cannot bring himself to break up the family. Some have suggested that he be accepted into quasi-membership: he can attend church services but not be baptized and received as a full member.

Such a course of action preserves the biblical ideal of marriage and the church’s reputation but runs directly counter to the Lord’s command to go and baptize (Matt. 28:18-20). And baptism is one of the 27 fundamental beliefs of SDAs.

Polygamy and Evangelism

The church’s stance toward people already bound by polygamous relations who become believers has changed over the years. Although present policy excludes polygamous husbands from baptism, between 1930 and 1941 policy cautiously included them.

Our church today enjoys unparalleled growth. Especially under the impact of the 1,000 Days of Reaping and Harvest 90, Adventism is reaching out to the unreached on a global scale. Not surprisingly, the problems raised by evangelization of polygamous societies have come into renewed focus.
For the past six years leaders in Washington, in conjunction with those from the world divisions, have pondered this issue, considering whether the church should make adjustments to its current policy (for example, see the report of the 1983 Annual Council, *Adventist Review*, 10 November 1983).

Recently I participated in a study committee that included representatives from the world division of the church where the problem is acute and weighed the pros and cons of the matter. After two days of discussion the issue boiled down to this: the imperatives of evangelism and baptism versus the ideal of marriage and concern for the church’s reputation.

By a strong majority the committee favored an uncompromising standard for people who enter upon marriage after baptism but a modification of policy to allow for the retention of the polygamous family unit in special circumstances. The committee, of course, had no power to change policy. Thus, the 1941 policy is still in effect.

Adventists are idealists; may we ever remain so! But the world isn’t ideal: men and women have been broken by sin. Faced with the situation, we could opt for one of two extremes–make the church the exclusive province of those who measure up to the ideal, or capitulate to the norms of the world.

But the Master calls us to a different course. It is more difficult than either of these, because it lacks the simplistic approach of “either-or” and is fraught with dangers. He challenges us to uphold the ideal but also to minister to people in their brokenness. If we would do His work, through compassion, courage, and conviction we must act to draw all people in all circumstances into His kingdom.

Notes


Kaskazini Mashariki ya Tanzania [NET Field President’s Report]. Tanzania Union Constituency Meeting, SM, file 81.

These have been narrated to me by Pastor Loitopuaki Lebabu who is a student at Tanzania Adventist College at the moment. Before his studies, he was a district pastor and then the producer of Maasai language broadcasts for Adventist World Radio. The three stories come from his home area, and the first person mentioned is his father.

I am personally involved with a church planting project among this people group since the year 2000. We have been supporting the work of two lay evangelists, built a small church, and we are now training one young Datooga man on the secondary school level and one Datooga lady for ministry.

Reference List


Evangelism Among Resistant Peoples With Deeply Entrenched Polygamy


Missionary Round Table. 1913. *Informal Discussion on Dealing with Converts from Polygamous Families*. Takoma Park, MD.


As a lay person and somewhat of an “outsider” in church manual issues, my thoughts and reactions as presented in this paper may not reflect the views of all. However, my reactions may not be completely irrelevant since I am looking at the Church Manual from a world perspective to consider the question of whether or not it is necessary to make adaptations of the manual to meet the current needs of a world church.

The Purpose of the Church Manual

Perhaps the best place to begin this discussion is by asking ourselves the question, what is the purpose of the Church Manual? In the introduction to the present version I read that in the early years of the church, “Actions were taken on various matters of church order in an endeavor to spell out the proper rules for different situations in church life. The 1882 General Conference Session
voted to have prepared ‘instructions to church officers, to be printed in the *Review and Herald* or in tract form’” (*Church Manual* 2000:xix-xx).

The first actual book that was used much as today’s *Church Manual* is used, was a personal undertaking published by J. N. Loughborough in 1907 entitled *The Church, Its Organization, Order and Discipline*. The first *Church Manual* actually published by the General Conference committee was in 1932 with a stated purpose to deal with church government, to set forth our denominational practices and policies, and to preserve our denominational practices and policies.

In simplest terms, the goal of a document such as the *Church Manual* is to give guidance for the “daily operation” of the church, to maintain order, promote growth, and encourage unity. A church manual has a significant place in the life of the church. It is therefore important that its contents be such that it will be viable and meaningful to churches around the world. If, for whatever reasons, the *Church Manual* is irrelevant and not meaningful or applicable in a certain area or for a certain group, the tendency will be to ignore it altogether. The result would then be that with no guidance in regard to church life, groups would tend to create patterns of church life, worship, and governance that might not be acceptable to the world church.

There are several reasons this could happen: (1) if the book is not culturally relevant, (2) if it is unavailable to church leaders, and (3) if it is written in such a way that it is too cumbersome to serve many cultures, languages, and specific situations. We will look at each of these separately.

So why have a church manual? Who uses it? What purpose does it fulfill in the church? Is it an apologetic document meant to support every detail of Seventh-day Adventist Church organization and life, or is it meant to be a practical manual that a local church leader could actually use? Are we considering a change in the present *Church Manual* or a practical document designed for general lay use? These are basic questions we must consider as we look at the question of adapting the *Church Manual*.

Is the *Church Manual* “Adaptable” to a World Church?

Our church today has been planted in hundreds of cultures, languages, and religions, both Christian and non-Christian. Included in this variety of backgrounds are a number of different social and economic structures and types and levels of education. We have not always been a world church; however, de-
Adapting the Church Manual  397

spite the global reach of the denomination today, our church was planted and grew in its early years in the soil of North America. In a multitude of ways it still reflects those early roots, probably much more so than most North Americans realize. As I read various parts of the Church Manual I realized how North American our church is in organization, in structure, in governance, and style. The Church Manual reflects this.

My overall impression is that it is a good document for North America and maybe a few other parts of the world with cultures somewhat similar to the North American culture. It expresses ideas, addresses issues of organization, and gives detailed answers to questions and issues that interested church members, in these parts of the world, might legitimately ask.

However, the very things that make it a good document for a particular part of the church may, in fact, be its greatest handicap for a world church. The Adventist Church of the twenty-first century is increasingly non-North American. Today the vast majority of our membership (over 90 percent) is now in parts of the world that is culturally as well as geographically distant from the church’s North American base and its North American roots. In addition, the growth of the church in previously unentered areas is the mission challenge we face today. For these reasons, I believe there needs to be consideration given to making adaptations to the Church Manual to enable it to deal with church life and organization in those places. For the church to function in a relevant way and be meaningful in varied situations there must be provision to take all of the differences in language, culture, social, economic, and literacy levels into consideration and allow for variations in how the church operates based on local situations.

My understanding is that each of the world divisions has prepared some supplemental material to deal with some of these unique conditions that exist in their particular areas. This is as it should be, and as the world church continues to expand into areas more and more culturally different from North America, this will be ever more important. It is also important that these variations should not be considered either temporary or inferior or second class. If our church is to effectively serve a world of great diversity, there must be recognition that different ways of dealing with the same situation are not to be judged as superior or inferior, but simply different. For instance, a church in one part of the world that worships God from week to week with a tabla and a harmonium should never feel that their form of worship is in any way inferior
to a church that chooses to worship God with an organ or a piano. Regional variations in all aspects of church life need to be recognized and validated.

My conclusion is that the present *Church Manual* is not readily adaptable to the needs of a world church.

**Is the Present *Church Manual* “Usable” by a World Church?**

For the *Church Manual* to be usable by a world church it must not only make room for variations due to cultural and language differences, but it must be in a form that is actually usable by those who need it. I have several specific areas of concern about the present form.

First, the present *Church Manual* is too detailed, too long, and too wordy to be of practical use to many local church leaders. It appears that in an effort to answer every possible question a North American member might ask, plus some more recent additions to answer a few questions from other parts of the world, the document is much too verbose. There is too much general commentary and too many details. Today, the Adventist Church is primarily being planted in the previously unentered areas of our world by lay people, by Global Mission pioneers, and other volunteer workers. These church planters and missionaries need a document that not only recognizes and validates their specific situations and needs, but is also practical and concise. The *Church Manual* must be user friendly. Paul’s advice to the new churches he established is extremely concise. Primarily, he stated general principles, such as doing things decently and in order, giving basic guidelines for choosing leaders, and making general suggestions for proper worship. It would appear that the details of how each church would follow these principles were apparently left to the local leaders. The original decision in 1882 was that the instructions to church officers “be printed in the *Review and Herald* or in tract form.” The present book is obviously much too lengthy for either of these forums. Perhaps getting back to that original goal would be worth our consideration.

Second, the present *Church Manual* has too many lengthy quotations. Though it is obviously necessary and helpful to have supportive material from both the Bible (primarily) and the Spirit of Prophecy (secondarily), it seems that in almost all cases, there is an overabundance in both types of quotations. In a document such as this that is meant to be used in a multitude of cultures and translated into dozens of languages, the principles need to be stated clearly and the supporting quotations carefully and sparingly chosen.
When thinking in “world terms” we face an additional challenge in the area of choosing texts and quotations. Inevitably, we choose, read, and interpret everything, including the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy, through the lenses of our own culture. We therefore naturally tend to emphasize those texts or quotations that resonate with and reflect our own behaviors, cultural beliefs, values, and worldview. We may thus, inadvertently, ignore other equally powerful texts or statements that present other views of an issue. Since the Church Manual definitely mirrors its North American roots, the texts and quotations used often represent ways of thinking and acting that are very North American.

An example of this is found in the section on “Church Discipline” (2000:175-190). The Spirit of Prophecy quotations and the Bible texts listed on these pages reflect a very Western way of dealing with problems, misunderstandings, and conflict. In both of these authoritative sources, Bible and Spirit of Prophecy, there are many other quotations and texts on this subject that reflect other styles of dealing with conflict and discipline in other cultural contexts. We in North America depend almost 100 percent on Matt 18 to define how all matters of differences should be dealt with. This fits well with our cultural mode of dealing with things in a very individualistic and direct way. But Scripture is full of other beautiful ways of dealing with differences in societies where the type of directness, which is both appropriate and successful in North America, is neither appropriate nor successful. A few examples would include: (1) the use of parables to bring a point across without causing the listener to “lose face,” such as Nathan with David and Jesus with Simon the Pharisee; (2) the indirect approach used by Jesus with the accusers of the woman taken in adultery, and with Judas. These are equally valid and biblical ways of dealing with problems requiring conflict management or discipline in a church, and when used in cultures where indirect, non-confrontational approaches are culturally appropriate, they can be used in the church to bring resolution to difficult situations and maintain unity to the glory of God. None of these is recognized or recommended in the quotations in the present Church Manual.

Third, we need to make allowance for cultural diversity in the actual operation of the Adventist Church. There are vast cultural differences in how groups operate, how decisions are made, how leaders are chosen, and how groups worship. There must be room within the Church Manual for different groups to apply the general principles of church life and governance within their own cultural and social situation. For example, the principle of showing reverence in
worship and praising God as a part of worship are basic principles that should be followed in every Seventh-day Adventist Church around the world. But the details of how reverence and worship are expressed are culturally determined. Does one take one’s shoes off or wear highly-polished shoes? Does one kneel, stand reverently, or prostrate oneself in prayer? Does one worship God with a tabla, a harp, a pan pipe, tambourine, a marimba, or an organ? Such questions are simply related to cultural differences, and yet, in the current *Church Manual* one of these very cultural worship items is validated, the others ignored. There are frequent references to having a pianist or an organist in a church (see pages 96, 98, 103, 105, 145, 146). This organizational detail of worship clearly relates to a very limited part of the world church. Such details should not be a part of a document meant to serve the world church.

Fourth, there will always be a need for supplemental materials with details for those needing or desiring to study in depth the background and rationale for various areas of church life and practice. Such detail will include rationale, the necessary commentary, and as many Bible and Spirit of Prophecy quotations as needed. These should be available in a separate volume. I believe the present *Church Manual* could work well for this purpose if it were edited and expanded in some areas to reflect more fully the realities of a world church.

**Need for a Core Document**

To better serve a world church there needs to be a core document that lists basic principles of church life, practice, and governance, a shorter, more succinct document with very few details, a supra-cultural document. In a document created to guide the world church in matters of structure and organization, a shorter, more concise statement of the basic principles is needed. A basic document for lay use should therefore include the following:

1. The core principles in each area with a few basics in organization and governance that would apply to the church in any culture, language, socio-economic, and literacy background.

2. A simple format that is not so “word-dense.” An outline format using bullets would be much easier to read, translate, and actually use.

3. There should still be room for local unions and divisions to apply the principles and add essential details showing application to local cultures and situations, making adaptations, amplifications, and even variations as needed. There are responsible, committed, mature leaders in all the areas of the world
who can be trusted to “put meat on the bones” of a basic core “skeleton” outline, suggesting details that would be more appropriate for the local setting and better suited to helping new churches grow within their own cultural style, while at the same time adhering to a basic core.

What about the Present Church Manual?

For churches located in areas where North American styles of organization are the cultural and social norms, and where the membership comes primarily from Christian urban backgrounds similar to North America and Europe, the present organizational details may be valuable. In addition, as stated above, there will still be a need for a document similar to the one we currently have, one with lengthy, detailed information about each area of church life. Included in this document would be much of the information I previously described as “too detailed, too wordy, and with too many quotations.” When an issue is originally introduced to become a part of the Church Manual, there is undoubtedly a need for a lengthy presentation of the “case” including both detailed commentary and rationale, as well as scriptural and Spirit of Prophecy support. This type of material is very important for church leaders and pastors to help them better understand the historical and theological background for how our church operates.

The First Global Mission Issues Committee

In conclusion I would ask you to think back to the first Global Mission Issues Committee. It did not meet in Silver Spring, Maryland, four years ago, but rather in Jerusalem around the middle of the first century. The Christian Church had been planted in the soil of Judaism with its thousands of years of tradition, beliefs, and religious practice. All of the early Christians were Jews and brought their Jewish heritage with them into the Christian Church. Only after Paul and Barnabas encountered Gentiles who wanted to become Christians did questions of church life and practice become an issue. The issues grew out of mission.

In Acts 15 that “Issues Committee” met to consider whether or not the “Church Manual” of Judaism and the Jewish-Christian Church must be applied in its entirety to Gentile Christians. The guidelines by which these Jewish Christians functioned went back throughout their history to Moses and Abraham. Many of their practices were given and ordained by God to the patri-
archs and written in the Levitical laws. But Paul and Barnabas knew that just as there was no need for a Jewish Christian to give up his Jewishness to become a Christian, there was also no need for a Gentile to become a Jewish Christian in order to be an authentic Christian. People could become authentic Christians as Gentiles.

The decisions of the Jerusalem Council were radical. In essence they determined that within a very short time there would be more than one type of Christian church. These new churches would look, think, and worship very differently. Inevitably, Jewish Christian churches and Gentile Christian churches located in various locations would not be uniform in many details of church life. But knowing that, they still were guided by the Holy Spirit to make the revolutionary decisions found in Acts 15. Consider their words.

James states: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19).

In the letter sent with Paul and Barnabas to the new converts the leaders in Jerusalem stated: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things” (Acts 15:28). With this statement they cut through 2,000 years of Jewish religious customs and practices—customs and practices that had often been ordained and commanded by God. They reduced all that tradition and practice into a brief summary of four major points.

In summary, I would recommend that to meet the practical needs of a world church, we must have a new version of the Church Manual that deals with principles, not details. It must be concise and simple. It must leave room for individual cultures to express their worship and organize their churches in ways that are more appropriate and meaningful within their context, their culture, while also relating to their level of literacy and economic level. A Seventh-day Adventist church in a village or small town in Cambodia or Cameroon or Colorado should look different and function somewhat differently from each other or from one in Nairobi or New York or Newcastle. There can still be unity around principles even though there may be great variation in the details of how those principles are expressed.

As Paul and other early church leaders continued to plant the church all over the Roman Empire and later wrote letters of instruction and encouragement to them, they enunciated general principles of church life and practice,
allowing each church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, to work out the details. Can we improve on this model?

Reference List

Over the past decades the Seventh-day Adventist Church has had a tendency to centralize the responsibility for mission, witness, and world evangelization. This centralization of the mission task has resulted in widespread disengagement by local membership from their personal responsibility for witness. This short paper will look at some of the factors that have impacted in this area and will suggest how a more decentralized approach to mission would have far-reaching impact on the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the twenty-first century.

Who is Responsible for Witness and Mission?

Who is responsible for mission, witness, and world evangelization? Some will tell you that the General Conference (GC) is, others will say that local fields hold that responsibility, while still others will say that public evangelists
and pastors are responsible. Let’s begin by looking at three myths concerning responsibility for world evangelization and witness in our world.

**Myth #1: The General Conference is Responsible**

Over the decades the General Conference took responsibility for calling the Adventist Church to mission and world evangelization. The magnetic personalities of Daniels and Spicer galvanized the church to action, to growth, and to the task of planting the Church in every country of the world. However, when the Daniels and Spicer era ended in the early 1930s, the vision for mission began to fade. Subsequent General Conference leaders had agendas and priorities other than mission.

One of the flaws of the reorganization of 1901-1903 was the lack of a mission board or mission department that would spearhead Adventist mission. As long as the General Conference prioritized mission, Adventist mission flourished; but without strong GC leadership mission from the 1960s on began to take a back seat. Notice the decline in Seventh-day Adventist supported missionaries.

### SDA Supported Missionaries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Rank &amp; Denomination</th>
<th>Total Sent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td>#1 Southern Baptist (SB)</td>
<td>2,507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#4 Seventh-day Adventist (SDA)</td>
<td>1,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979</td>
<td>#1 SB</td>
<td>2,906</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#5 SDA</td>
<td>996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1986</td>
<td>#1 SB</td>
<td>3,346</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#6 SDA</td>
<td>1,052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>#1 SB</td>
<td>3,839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#10 SDA</td>
<td>842</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>#1 SB</td>
<td>3,660</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#10 SDA</td>
<td>676</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>#1 SB</td>
<td>3,482</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>#13 SDA</td>
<td>617</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Mission Handbook, 10th –17th Editions
This decline in SDA supported missionaries took place during the time when unreached people group thinking was impacting Christian mission, and most other groups were gearing up for a greater emphasis on sending missionaries to unreached people groups. At the very time when other evangelical groups were doing more, we started doing a lot less. Notice what was also happening to Adventist mission giving patterns.

### Tithe and Mission Giving

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total World Mission Giving</td>
<td>29,046,380</td>
<td>42,631,642</td>
<td>48,574,082</td>
<td>50,254,923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD Mission Giving</td>
<td>20,020,123</td>
<td>25,257,684</td>
<td>23,577,783</td>
<td>22,677,113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD Mission Giving per capita</td>
<td>46.54</td>
<td>42.73</td>
<td>31.52</td>
<td>24.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD Mission Giving as % of Tithe</td>
<td>19.53%</td>
<td>9.47%</td>
<td>5.50%</td>
<td>3.31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD Tithe</td>
<td>101,859,859</td>
<td>266,483,542</td>
<td>428,185,701</td>
<td>685,051,304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Tithe per capita</td>
<td>69.54</td>
<td>125.54</td>
<td>116.25</td>
<td>102.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAD Tithe per capita</td>
<td>236.79</td>
<td>450.79</td>
<td>572.47</td>
<td>742.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistical Report of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

What has resulted is a looking to the GC to lead in the area of mission, but when the GC becomes occupied with other pressing issues, the sense of urgency for sacrifice and sending of personnel and monetary resources to reach the unreached begins to diminish. A centralized approach to mission tends to give people the security of allowing the GC to lead in mission without much sense of personal responsibility on the part of the unions, local fields, and individuals. Today, few in our church sense any real personal responsibility to reach the unreached in our world. In many parts of the world only a few have a compelling desire to be active witnesses. Most Adventists spend little if any time pleading with God for breakthroughs in the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese worlds.

Divisions, unions and conferences are often too busy responding to the needs of their constituents (those who are already Adventists) to have much energy, personnel, or monetary resources with which to minister to the unreached in their territories or to commit resources to work in the 10/40 Window. Fortunately, the Global Mission initiative changed this to some degree, but there is still a sense within Adventism that mission is the responsibility of the GC. And if the General Conference does not act, does not mobilize the
church, and does not call the church to responsible witness, then too many at
the various levels of our organization seem to think that they are not respon-
sible and that they have no personal responsibility to witness or to evangelize.

Myth #2: Public Evangelists Are Responsible

The emphasis on public evangelism has also eroded the personal sense of
responsibility for witnessing. Too much honor and glory is attached to the per-
sona of the evangelist. They often arrive after months and months of hard, dili-
gent work by lay members, but in the write up in church papers we see pictures
of mass baptisms and mention is made of the evangelist, but too often little is
said about the vital work of the many who studied and prepared the hundreds
for a reaping series of meetings. Too often our church publications make it very
clear that a large public campaign by high-powered professionals is the hon-
ored way to do evangelism. Again, this practice has impacted and diminished
a personal sense of responsibility for witness. What is needed is not less public
evangelism but more appreciation of the role of the many who make public
evangelism successful.

Myth #3: My Pastor Is Responsible

Even at the pastoral level in many areas of the world we have long-estab-
lished practices that have undermined the individual member’s sense of respon-
sibility for personal witnessing. The paid clergy preach and teach while
the membership lives a life without much sense that they are to be active in
witnessing to neighbors and friends. In the book Seventh-day Adventists Be-
lieve a strong statement says that “the minister who does not have the gift of
training, does not belong to the pastoral ministry” (Ministerial Association
1988:211), yet the majority of our pastors in many parts of the world spend
little time training the membership concerning effective witness and personal
evangelism.

Factors Leading to Disengagement
From the Mission Task

The three myths listed above have contributed to the problem. By placing
responsibility for mission, witness, and world evangelization on the General
Conference, the public evangelists and the pastor, many Adventist members
have completely disengaged from any sense that they are personally responsible for completing the task of world evangelization. But there are other factors that have also contributed to the lack of a sense of personal responsibility for witness and outreach.

#1 A Lukewarm, Laodacian Condition

Many factors seem to combine to keep people from personal witness. There is no doubt that the conditions of the Laodacian Church infect Adventism in many parts of the world. Members are not hot for their faith, are not a shining light to those around them, and are not salty enough to flavor their neighborhoods.

#2 Influence of Post-Modernism

Even more dangerous is the degree to which many Western Adventists have partaken of post-modern philosophy when it comes to feeling that faith is personal, that one should not try to convince another of the rightness or wrongness of any one course of action, that one should just respect people's religious views and not feel that any one faith system is the right one. In a post-modern climate, witness, evangelism, and sharing one's faith has become suspect and viewed as inappropriate and anti-establishment.

#3 Materialism, Wealth, and the Desire for the Good Life

Another factor that mitigates against widespread involvement in witness is the grip of materialism on large portions of the Adventist membership. The disease of wanting a little bit more has driven many families to such hectic lifestyles that even the thought of spending one night a week at a Bible study is more than most can imagine. But busyness is only part of the dilemma. Wealth creates a softness and a desire for an even more pampered way of living. Fewer and fewer are even willing to consider that God may be calling them to work in some inconvenient part of the world in order to share the Good News with those who have never heard. Materialism and wealth seem to create attitudes where people are less willing to risk much for God and his kingdom. People seem to live almost entirely for self, for family, and not much for God.
#4 A Poorly Defined Theology of Witness

Perhaps another contributing factor is the weak theology of witness taught and believed by many Adventists. In the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, there is a three-sentence section entitled “Witnessing—the Purpose for Gifts” that says: “Believers receive a diversity of gifts, an indication that each has an individualized ministry. Yet every believer should be able to witness about his faith, sharing beliefs and telling others what God has done in his life. The purpose for which God gives each gift, no matter what it may be, is to enable its possessor to witness” (Ministerial Association 1988:212). That’s all it says about witness in the whole book. Membership in the church is not conditioned on sharing the faith. Many pastors and most administrators have not led a person to Christ in years. It’s almost as if witnessing were an option that few take seriously.

#5 No Cultural Model

When you couple this weak concept of the Christian’s responsibility to witness with the fact that in many parts of the 10/40 Window where Adventism has struggled to grow there are no cultural models of witnessing in Hinduism or Buddhism. With no cultural models the church has struggled to become a witnessing community. In much of the Buddhist world a concept that one should witness to one’s faith is completely foreign. Buddhism has always been a cultural religion with most equating being a Buddhist with being a Japanese, Thai, or Korean. All the years I lived in Buddhist countries no one ever witnessed to me concerning the tenets of Buddhism; I was never approached and invited to study about Buddhist teachings. The same can largely be said about the Hindu world: Christians living in a Hindu culture see no cultural examples of witness. Perhaps we have taken too much for granted, believing that once a person became a follower of Jesus Christ they would automatically begin to witness concerning their faith. But in reality, in much of the Buddhist and Hindu world only paid workers and global mission workers on a stipend are active in witness.

#6 Incomplete Instruction by Missionaries

Another factor that is part of the equation is the failure on the part of early missionaries to thoroughly teach the people they were winning to Christ that
they now shared the responsibility to take the Good News to unreached and unentered regions. Too many Christians in too many parts of the world today do not sense any responsibility to engage in mission in the 10/40 Window. They still cling to the outdated notion that mission is a Western enterprise. The vital and dynamic Adventist Church in the southern hemisphere with several million from Central and South America and from the three African Divisions sends few to the task of world evangelization. Few from those parts of the world go, few give, and few pray for the unreached. How is it that the two-thirds world church has been able to mature with no sense of responsibility for reaching the unreached? How have we failed to adequately inform and teach concerning the responsibility of each follower of Jesus Christ to take personal responsibility for world evangelization?

#7 No Mission Structure that Easily Allows for Engaging in the Mission Task

One more factor that impacts the will to witness is the makeup of the denominational structure. Present Seventh-day Adventist practices and policies in many parts of the world (especially the Central and South American Divisions and the three African Divisions) actually discourage their membership from going as missionaries to the 10/40 Window. Where are the structures and policies that would encourage the recruiting, training, funding, and sending of hundreds of young couples from those five divisions to the Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese worlds of unreached peoples? How long will we allow policies to exist that can more easily discourage and deny permission to the youth of the world divisions to engage in mission than to actively recruit and promote missions?

Recommendations

So what is needed? How do we move the church forward and out of this dilemma where members in the West are too busy, too wealthy, too lukewarm, or too preoccupied with the good life to witness? How do we encourage the church members in the Buddhist and Hindu world who presently are not witnessing and who do not have a cultural background or model for witnessing to begin to engage in outreach? What needs to be done in order to allow for easy accessibility for missionaries from the Inter American, South American,
and the three African Divisions to shoulder their responsibility for mission, witness, and world evangelization? I’d like to suggest four areas where improvement can be made and where action should be taken.

#1 Develop a Comprehensive Theology of Witness

The Seventh-day Adventist Church must develop a comprehensive theology of witness. This is not an option. Witness is vital if our church is to be faithful to its calling and prophetic purpose. Witness is vital if our members are to be drawn into an ever closer relationship with Jesus Christ. Witness is vital if we are to touch the lives of hurting, afflicted, suffering humanity in our communities. Witness is vital if we are going to make a difference in the Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and Chinese worlds.

An Adventist theology of witness must begin to dismantle the many myths that have developed as to who is responsible for witness. An Adventist theology of witness must do away with the tendencies to centralize responsibility for witness and must teach clearly and biblically that each person, as they join the family of God, inherits a personal responsibility to witness both locally and globally (Acts 1:8).

An Adventist theology of witness cannot tolerate a situation where the various divisions could have many hundreds of thousands of members but no sense of responsibility for the unreached in the 10/40 Window. A theology of witness must stress the personal and individual responsibility for every member to witness and to engage in mission and world evangelization, even if presently the structure and policies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church do not encourage such participation. What would have happened to the members in Antioch if they had waited for policies and words of encouragement from the headquarters in Jerusalem before embarking on that first missionary journey (see Acts 13:1-4)?

Decentralization of the mission task will facilitate more effective mission in our church. Therefore, I would like to suggest that the Global Mission Issues Committee vote an official recommendation that a committee be formed to work on an Adventist Theology of Witness. I further recommend that within the next year that Global Mission organize a conference dealing with the issues raised by such a theology of witness.
#2 Hold Leadership Accountable for Personal Witness

Witnessing within Adventism suffers from the disease of everyone thinking that someone else should do it. One of the shocking things I observed after returning from working in Japan and Micronesia was that few pastors actually personally witnessed. Many pastors in the West often go for weeks and months without teaching a Bible class to unbelievers or without personally witnessing. The same could be said for administrators, teachers, and seminary professors. Too many of us are not in the habit of taking any personal responsibility for personal witness.

In a recent book by Thom Rainer entitled *Surprising Insights from the Unchurched and Proven Ways to Reach Them*, it was found that 43 percent of the pastors of churches that were effective at reaching the unchurched had entered into an accountability relationship where they were asked weekly if they had been faithful in personal witness versus only 2 percent of the pastors of churches that had stagnated. Is it possible that one of the keys to lighting the fire of witness under our lay members might just be leadership, by example by pastors and administrators, teachers, and other denominational leaders? How can we expect widespread involvement in witness by the laity of this church if we as leaders never witness?

According to Thom Rainer the pastor of one of the fastest growing churches in Pennsylvania starts his Monday morning staff meeting with a time where all of the administrative staff can share about their personal witnessing during the previous week. Those who have been too busy to witness then have an opportunity during the prayer time to repent. Perhaps some of us need the encouragement of a similar accountability system in order to get us out front in the area of personal witness.

#3 Adjust the Structure and Policies of the Church To Allow for Easy Accessibility

We used to refer to parts of the world field as sending divisions, and I suppose that the rest would have been perceived as receiving divisions. Decentralization of the mission task means that we must do away with such thinking and utilize the resources in all the divisions to support Adventist mission. The Secretariat of the General Conference should be encouraged to work with each of the world divisions to develop a set of policies that encourage and give permis-
sion to the members of each division and union to engage easily in the global aspects of witness. Today, in many parts of the world, if a dedicated couple went to the leaders in the union and told them that God was calling them to service in a part of the 10/40 Window, the union leaders would have no easy way to help the couple become involved. Present policies do not easily give permission or provide a mechanism or structure for many to engage in witness outside of their local territories.

If the various divisions of the world church do not act to provide easy access I believe that we can expect to see many more supporting ministries established in order to provide those opportunities to serve. Supporting ministries are not an evil to be suppressed, but they do represent duplication of personnel and structure that divert funding from front line mission.

Divisions should realize that one of the marks of a mature church is the recruiting, funding, training, and sending of their sons and daughters to share the Good News with those who have never heard. Adventist mission must begin to practice what we have been saying for the past forty years that missionaries are not just from the West, but from everywhere to everywhere.

Again, I think that a recommendation from this committee requesting that the General Conference Secretariat work with each of the world divisions to write policies that will enable people from each division to easily engage in the task remaining would be very appropriate.

#4 Call the Church to Mission, Witness, And World Evangelization

Present practices, denominational structure, and the policies of the Seventh-day Adventist Church have shaped and formed the habits and ways that Adventists around the world view their responsibility for mission, witness, and world evangelization. Nothing short of a call from the highest levels of the church will bring about change in the way Adventists approach mission. The millions of members in the Inter American, South American and in the three African divisions will not engage in witness and mission at the global level in the unentered areas of the 10/40 Window until and unless there is a challenge and a call from none other than the General Conference president to send their own missionaries to that region of the world.

If Dr. Paulsen would challenge the world membership of our church and would call for at least 1,000 new missionary couples to enter the unentered and
unreached areas of our world over the next few years, I firmly believe that both the money to send them and the people to go would be readily available.

**Conclusion**

Decentralization of the mission task will take effort to overcome the mind set and policies of the past, but the promise of full engagement by all unions and divisions of the Church will be well worth the struggle. When every division and every union takes seriously the Gospel Commission and sees that commission as also applying to territory outside its local boundaries, then this church will be moving in the right direction. When individuals take personal responsibility not only for witness in their local areas, but also at the global level, then our church will begin to see more and more unreached and unentered areas in our world evangelized. When we as pastors, administrators, and teachers realize that we too are personally responsible for witness, then just perhaps our role modeling will become a source of encouragement and help to our members. When every individual has an adequate theology of witness that teaches clearly the personal responsibility for mission, witness, and world evangelization, then the positive effects of decentralization of mission will be realized.

**Reference List**


Editor's Note: At the conclusion of each year’s Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 2003 five recommendations were prepared dealing with baptism, the communion service, polygamy, the Church Manual, and mobilizing the Church for mission.

**Baptism**

*Recommended 8 April 2003*

In a world of underground churches, para-church structures, political and religious restrictions, burgeoning membership among illiterate and semiliterate people and isolated converts whose only contact with the world church is listening to Adventist World Radio, the question of who can baptize becomes increasingly significant and urgent.

Where the situation requires, we suggest that the appropriate church body recommend the ordination of pioneer workers as church elders in the conference or mission church. Such ordained elders can then be authorized to baptize in accordance with *Church Manual* guidelines.
Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

**Contextualization of the Communion Service**

*Recommended 8 April 2003*

Recommended Addition to the *Church Manual*

2000 *Church Manual* p. 73, last paragraph: Since the Lord himself selected the deeply meaningful symbols of the unleavened bread and unfermented fruit of the vine and used the simplest of means for washing the disciples’ feet, there should be great reluctance to introduce alternative symbols and means (except under truly emergency conditions or hardships) lest the original significance of the service be lost.

**Commentary for Conference/Mission/Field Officers**

*Who Will Provide Counsel in Regard to Making Substitutions in the Communion Service*

*Church Manual* p. 73: Except in truly emergency conditions or hardships, i.e., distance, economics, security, etc.

*Church Manual* p. 75: The symbols of bread and wine are full of deep meaning and are tied to the historic and biblical practice of communion. We want to encourage their practice. There are places and times where poverty, warfare, etc. cause there to be limited access to bread and grape juice. In such cases, churches should be allowed to adopt culturally appropriate, functional substitutes that fully capture communion’s meaning.

Because the communion service is a sacred service, any substitutions made must maintain the meaning and symbolism of the emblems and lend themselves to the understanding of the spiritual significance.

Grape juice is meaningful because its color represents Christ’s blood; its creation through the crushing of the grapes reminds us of the bruising and brokenness of Christ; and its sweetness ties us to the joy of salvation. Therefore, if any substitution is required through emergency or hardship, a substitute should be chosen that best represents blood, bruising or brokenness, and sweetness. See Luke 22:20.
The bread is meaningful because it was the staple of the diet and was broken when eaten, representing Christ's broken body as essential to our spiritual salvation and daily life. Therefore, if any substitution is required through emergency or hardships, it is best to use the staple food of daily life. See John 6:48.

*Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.*

**Polygamy**

*Recommended 8 April 2003*

This recommendation is based on a 1986 recommendation. See chapter 28, appendix F.

**Introduction**

It is clearly God's plan that marriage should be monogamous, one husband living with one wife (Gen 2:22-24; Matt 19:5, 6). Any other form of marriage lowers this standard that should govern human society and especially the church of Christ.

We affirm:

1. That the biblical account portrays and urges monogamy as God's best plan for mankind; and that the sacredness and inviolability of the family unit is an integral part of biblical teaching.

2. That we instruct members and adherents on the Christian values and relationships sustaining monogamy, and on the legal position in their societies that may protect them from polygamous relationships.

3. That we continue to witness by example and proclamation that the Christian marriage is monogamous, and that we uphold monogamy as the norm for marriage.

4. That every effort be made for monogamy to replace polygamy as individuals and families enter the church.

5. That we maintain a rigorous standard of monogamy for those who are entering into marriage after receiving the gospel.

6. Out of a deep concern for mission to: (1) specific people groups, tribes, or religious groups where there is an openness to the gospel for a relatively brief window of time, or (2) where there is resistance to the gospel, and (3) where
there is deeply entrenched legal polygamy including legal, tribal, and cultural strictures which cannot be modified without causing severe damage to individuals sharing in the polygamous unit;

It is recommended that divisions give careful study to the appropriate and sensitive salvific relationship that can be extended to such persons.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Adapting the Church Manual

Recommended 8 April 2003

RECOMMENDED, To refer to the Church Manual Committee a recommendation: that in its work of preparing amendments for the next revision of the Church Manual, that due consideration be given to making the material in the Church Manual more culturally sensitive so that its universal acceptability and applicability will be enhanced.

RECOMMENDED, To ask the Global Mission Issues Committee to take the initiative to arrange for the preparation of a Handbook for Global Mission Pioneers which will outline the necessary steps that must be followed in establishing and operating a newly established church. The procedures outlined in this handbook must be in full harmony with the Church Manual but stated simply and generalized so that it can be easily contextualized.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.

Mobilizing the Church for Mission

Recommended 8 April 2003

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been called to be a witnessing community taking the eternal gospel to every nation, language, tribe, and people (Rev 14:6, 7). For this reason the Adventist Church has made the reaching of the billions not yet reached by the gospel its top priority.

We recommend:
1. That a task force be established to evaluate current policies and practices that impact on the ability of each division to engage in mission to the billions yet unreached and work out a process to facilitate:
   a. identifying unreached targets
   b. recruiting and selecting missionary teams
   c. training missionary teams
   d. Sending missionary teams
   e. caring for missionary teams
   f. funding and resourcing missionary teams
   g. coordinating and partnering
   h. linking missionary teams to local churches and conferences

A possible list of personnel for this task force might consist of Matthew Bediako (Secretariat), Mike Ryan (Global Mission), Ismael Castillo, G. T. Ng, Peter Roennfeldt, Barry Oliver, Pardon Mwansa, Don Schneider, and Bruce Bauer, with Lowell Cooper as Chair.

The committee is requested to prepare a comprehensive report with recommendations to the Global Mission Issues Committee of 2004.

2. To undergird the mission of the church at this critical juncture of its history, it is recommended that the chairman appoint a small committee of missiologists and theologians to formulate a theology of witness.

Editor’s Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.
Chapter 32

* * *

2004 RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPROVED STATEMENTS

Editor’s Note: At the 2004 Global Mission Issues Committee the entire time was spent on reviewing the recommendation for an additional fundamental belief entitled “Growing In Christ.” The new statement had been reviewed by the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) and by the Biblical Research Institute in preparation for its recommendation to the General Conference in session in 2005. The lengthy document contained history and the rationale for the new fundamental belief.

The Fundamental Beliefs and “Growing in Christ:” Proposal for a New Fundamental Belief

Recommended 6 April 2004

Introduction

The purpose of this document is to bring before you an invitation to initiate a formal dialogue that will hopefully reveal whether or not the Spirit is leading the church in the direction suggested here. In Adventist praxis the formulation of a fundamental belief is not something that happens in a particular office under the leadership of a group of individuals, but rather something that is the result of a consensus created by the Holy Spirit in the community of believers.
We should see ourselves as facilitators, as channels through which the Spirit can work in the expression of that consensus.

Consequently, what we are initiating cannot be pushed on the church, but must be a clear expression of where the church itself stands today. What we bring before you carries a disclaimer: We do not own it, neither do you. It should belong to the church; it should be, as already indicated, an expression of the thinking of the Spirit through the church. We bring this document to you to listen to your counsel as we seek to determine whether the perceived need of a new fundamental belief is real or not. After the discussion you may conclude that there is no need for a new fundamental belief or that it seems pleasing to all of us and to the Spirit to seek his guidance through the consensus of believers. At the present time some of us feel that this is pleasing to the Spirit, but this perception needs the external witness of the Spirit through the church.

This document contains four parts. The first is a summary of the process that brought us here today; the second is a discussion of the nature of the Fundamental Beliefs; the third is an analysis of our existing Fundamental Beliefs in order to see whether a new article is needed; and, finally there is a sample of what the new fundamental belief could look like. If it is concluded that a new statement is needed, then the sample will help in the formulation of the final draft.

**Summary of the Process**

Seventh-day Adventists have always had a well-defined biblical theology describing God's greatness and power. Bible study and prayer have always been fundamental Seventh-day Adventist values which facilitate having a relationship with Jesus. These beliefs are not new.

Adventism originated from a Western culture with deep roots anchored in the reformation. Bible study and prayer as a way of understanding God's greatness and accessing his power were so fundamental that much has been assumed through a verbal understanding.

Since the beginning of the church, mission has been seen as a primary responsibility. This message quickly spread across America. By the late 1800s the church's concept of mission extended to all the world. Over the past 120 years the Three Angels' Messages have spread to almost every country in the world and certainly to most major people groups. The pioneers met the challenge of
establishing a beginning and an infrastructure from which a much larger work could be carried forward.

Today, national workers largely carry forward the mission of the church. This resource cannot be overestimated. In most places the church has been able to operate within the culture of the people and appeal to a much wider population. This movement is spreading to the 10/40 Window.

Over the past ten years a wide gospel appeal has been made by national workers in many of the 10/40 Window countries. The big view of finishing the work and the conversion of animists, Buddhists, Communists, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews has challenged traditional methods of evangelism. National workers having an innate sense for effective methodology have struck the core values of not only the religion but the culture. Here we confront two main areas of great concern for us among non-Christian religions, namely transcendental meditation and the power of demons.

Transcendental meditation is a search for contact with spiritual powers in order to enrich the individual. In place of that spiritualistic practice we offer them contact with God through prayer, Bible study, service, and meditation on the Word of God and his providential leadings. These subjects, as will be demonstrated later on, are hardly addressed in the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. This deficiency has been pointed out by church members from different parts of the world.

All major world religions have borrowed from and have been affected by animism. More than 70 percent of the world’s population lives in fear of evil powers and regards evil powers as the answer of choice when considering the metaphysical and epistemological question. Often, the first question asked front line workers is, How does your religion deal with the evil spirits in my life?

While Seventh-day Adventists have a strong biblical theology on good and evil spirits, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs does not compile the biblical evidence but rather relies heavily on an Adventist cultural understanding. Cultural understandings, when at some distance from the process used to establish a biblical truth or practice, can take on dimensions that extend well beyond the Adventist garden of theology.

Occasionally, when Global Mission Pioneers are asked by interested people how the new religion they proclaim would affect the evil spirits that controlled their lives, the answer has not been what would have been expected. We hear expressions like, “We must be cautious not to offend the evil spirits,” or “We must not anger the evil spirits.”
The Global Mission Issues Committee has discussed the issues surrounding good and evil powers. The Adventist external look says we have 70 percent of the world's population testifying of visible and physical evil spirit evidence in the context of our mission for a lost world. The Adventist internal look says that God will gather a huge harvest from all nations victoriously leading his people through the great end-time deceptions which will include a seemingly miraculous display of evil powers. Spiritualism will take control of the world in a way never seen before. We must do all we can now to prepare the world for that final deception.

While prayer, Bible study, service, meditation, and God's great power over evil are not new truths, a large growing church amid people traditionally controlled by evil powers is a growing reality for which we have long prayed. What brings us to this agenda? Mission—that every person might come to know Jesus and claim his victory over sin and evil.

The Fundamental Beliefs

The Fundamental Beliefs play a vital role in the life and mission of the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church. We are a rapidly growing movement with a presence in more than 200 countries, and the Fundamental Beliefs describe what Seventh-day Adventists believe. Thus they establish our doctrinal identity and help to keep us united.

As currently stated, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs dates from the 1980 General Conference Session held in Dallas, Texas. However, the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs voted on that occasion was not intended to necessarily be the last word on the matter. The Fundamental Beliefs are a living document, not a creed.

The Fundamental Beliefs: A Living Document

The preamble to the 1980 Fundamental Beliefs states: “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed and hold certain fundamental beliefs to be the teaching of the Holy Scriptures.

These beliefs, as set forth here, constitute the church’s understanding and expression of the teaching of Scripture. Revision of these statements may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.”
This view of the living character of the Fundamental Beliefs really stems from the conviction of the pioneers that we are a people of “present truth” (2 Pet 1:12) who seek always to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit into deeper understanding of truth. Ellen White encouraged us to guard against the tendency to fossilize our beliefs into a creed. Among her many counsels calling upon us to be receptive to new insights, while maintaining the foundations, we find the following:

Whenever the people of God are growing in grace, they will be constantly obtaining a clearer understanding of His word. They will discern new light and beauty in its sacred truths. This has been true in the history of the church in all ages, and thus it will continue to the end. But as real spiritual life declines, it has ever been the tendency to cease to advance in the knowledge of the truth. Men rest satisfied with the light already received from God’s word, and discourage any further investigation of Scriptures. They become conservative, and seek to avoid discussion (Gospel Workers, pp. 297, 298).

New light will ever be revealed on the word of God to him who is in living connection with the Sun of Righteousness. Let no one come to the conclusion that there is no more truth to be revealed. The diligent, prayerful seeker for truth will find precious rays of light yet to shine forth from the word of God. Many gems are yet scattered that are to be gathered together to become the property of the remnant people of God” (Counsels on Sabbath School Work, p. 34).

The history of development of doctrine in the Seventh-day Adventist Church shows growth in understanding and formulation.

1. The earliest list of doctrines appeared in the masthead of the Sabbath Review and Advent Herald in five successive issues, August 15-December 19, 1854. The “leading doctrines” were just five: The Bible alone, the law of God, the Second Coming, the new earth, and immortality alone through Christ.

2. In 1872 Uriah Smith wrote “A Declaration of the Fundamental Principles Taught and Practiced by the Seventh-day Adventists.” The list had 25 doctrines.

3. In 1889 the Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook for the first time published a list of “Fundamental Principles of Seventh-day Adventists.” This list, based on Uriah Smith’s list from 1872, contained 28 articles.

4. In 1894 the 1,521-member Battle Creek Church issued its own statement of faith. It had 31 elements.

5. The statement of faith that first appeared in the 1889 Yearbook was also included in the yearbooks for 1905, and from 1907 to 1914. According to Leroy
Edwin Froom, the statement was not included in the yearbooks 1890-1904, 1906, and 1915-1930 because of conflicting views over the Trinity and the Atonement (*Movement of Destiny*, pp. 412, 413).

6. In 1931 F. M. Wilcox prepared a statement of faith on behalf of a committee of four authorized by action of the General Conference Committee. This statement, titled “Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists,” had 22 articles. Although it was never formally adopted, it appeared in the 1931 *Yearbook* and in all subsequent yearbooks. In 1932 it was printed in tract form. This was the statement that remained in place (with slight changes) up until the new formulation in Dallas in 1980.

7. The 1941 Annual Council approved a uniform “Baptismal Vow” and “Baptismal Covenant” based on the 1931 statement.

8. The General Conference Session of 1946 voted that no revision of the Fundamental Beliefs shall be made at any time except by approval of a General Conference Session.

9. In 1980 the General Conference Session made major revisions of the Fundamental Beliefs. Completely new articles were added on Creation; The Great Controversy; The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ; The Church; Unity in the Body of Christ; The Lord’s Supper; The Gift of Prophecy; and Marriage and the Family. Some existing articles were rephrased.

**Observations Concerning the Fundamental Beliefs**

Seventh-day Adventists throughout our history have formulated our doctrines without giving emphasis to a particular number. The number has varied greatly: from 5 to 31. We have simply designated our doctrines as “Fundamental Beliefs,” never as the “22 Fundamental Beliefs” or “25 Fundamental Beliefs,” and so on. This is still the case: the *Yearbook* simply lists our doctrines as “Fundamental Beliefs.” Only in more recent years has the tendency arisen to attach a number, as in the book *Seventh-day Adventists Believe... : A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines* (General Conference Ministerial Association, 1988).

In considering the new articles added in 1980, not one represented a new departure in doctrine. Each simply articulated beliefs already held and practiced by Seventh-day Adventists. It was felt that the time had come to incorporate these beliefs into the statement of Fundamental Beliefs.
The needs of mission have played a role in formulating our Fundamental Beliefs. We see this clearly as a factor driving the statement of Fundamental Beliefs that emerged in 1931. The General Conference Committee minutes of December 29, 1930, record the following action:

“STATEMENT OF OUR FAITH FOR YEAR BOOK”

A request was presented from the African Division that a statement of what Seventh-day Adventists believe should be printed in the Year Book, since they feel that such a statement would help government officials and others to a better understanding of our work.

VOTED: That the chair appoint a committee of which he shall be a member, to prepare such a statement for publication in the Yearbook.”

Conclusion

Perhaps the time has come again when the needs of our global mission should cause us to revisit the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs. This is not to alter what we already have in place since 1980, and which continues to serve us well, but to add an article that will enable us better to fulfill the mission. Billions of people live their lives in daily awareness, fear, and apprehension of spiritual powers. Large numbers view the religious life in quietistic terms, with transcendental meditation playing a key role. The Fundamental Beliefs in their present formulation do not seem to address these ideas.

Although the demands of Global Mission point to a possible addition to our Fundamental Beliefs, it seems likely that the entire church might benefit from the addition. Many people today, even in “developed” societies, feel threatened by evil which seems all pervasive and all powerful. For many, life is essentially meaningless.

At various times since 1980 some members have expressed surprise that the Fundamental Beliefs contain no reference to prayer, devotional life, and service. It may be possible to formulate a new article on Christian growth that meets the needs which have arisen from Global Mission and also to address the above lack. Significantly, the 1941 summary of Fundamental Beliefs did have a statement that highlighted the study of the Word, prayer, and the development of Christian character.

Any new article will not introduce new theology. As in the formulation of the Fundamental Beliefs voted in 1980, the new material will be merely an ar-
articulation of what we already believe as Seventh-day Adventists. Any addition to the Fundamental Beliefs will require widespread input, with dissemination well in advance of the 2005 General Conference Session. The whole church must “own” the Fundamental Beliefs.

Given the obvious need driven by mission, the question now becomes: Do the Fundamental Beliefs as currently formulated already address this need, so that we do not need a new article?

Back of that question is a more important one: Is the Holy Spirit leading his people today to revisit the Fundamental Beliefs formulated in Dallas, 1980?

**Content of the Proposed New Fundamental Belief and the Statement of Fundamental Beliefs**

The proposed new fundamental belief has two main purposes. First, it explicitly addresses Christian growth in order to exclude eastern transcendental meditation as a spiritual exercise that is incompatible with the gospel of salvation through Christ. Second, it proclaims freedom through Christ from demonic powers to demonstrate that seeking help and guidance from them in our spiritual growth is not only unnecessary but totally incompatible with the work of Jesus on our behalf.

The present Statement of Fundamental Beliefs does not explicitly address those doctrinal concerns. Some of the basic theological elements presupposed in the proposed new statement are briefly touched in some of the doctrinal statements, thus providing a link between this one and the rest of the body of beliefs. We will briefly look at the fundamental beliefs in which this link is found.

**Statements Addressing Demonic Power**

We read in Statement number 8, (“The Great Controversy”): “To assist His people in this controversy, Christ sends the Holy Spirit and the loyal angels to guide, protect, and sustain them in the way of salvation.” The new proposed statement will reaffirm the content of this sentence but will go beyond it by developing its thought in the context of a call to Christian growth in freedom from the controlling power of demons. In Statement number 9 (“The Life, Death and Resurrection of Christ”) we find a sentence that comes very close to one of the main thoughts of the proposed new statement: “The resurrection of
Christ proclaims God’s triumph over the forces of evil, and for those who accept the atonement assures their final victory over sin and death.

However, it does not clearly state the present freedom Christians enjoy from the enslaving power of demons and neither does it set God’s triumph over the forces of evil within the context of a constant Christian growth in Christ.

**Statements Addressing Character Development**

The Statement on “The Holy Spirit” establishes that, “He [the Holy Spirit] draws and convicts human beings; and those who respond He renews and transforms into the image of God.” The sentence describes a fundamental biblical truth but it does not develop the thought. In any case, it is not the purpose of that specific fundamental belief to deal with the phenomenon of Christian growth but to describe in a general way the work of the Holy Spirit not only in our sanctification but also in several other areas.

Concerning the “Experience of Salvation” we read, “Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God’s law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature.” The sentence deals very briefly with Christian renewal and spiritual growth but it does not address the indispensable elements in that growth. That is not the primary purpose of that fundamental belief.

We read in the Statement on “Christian Behavior,” “For the Spirit to recreate in us the character of our Lord we involve ourselves only in those things which will produce Christ-like purity, health, and joy in our lives.” This sentence, like the previous ones, is quite general and does not include the importance of prayer, the study of the Word, meditation, and involvement in mission as God’s instruments for character development. Neither this fundamental belief nor any of the others can be edited to include the concerns of the proposed new one without distracting from their primary purpose and making them excessively large and cumbersome. Our Fundamental Beliefs are usually short, dealing with a particular issue in a very concise form, summarizing a significant biblical teaching in a clear way. We should preserve that format.

**Conclusion**

We may need a new statement that will bring together the main ideas expressed in the statements we quoted and that at the same time will put the
emphasis on a daily walk with the Lord characterized by freedom from evil powers and on a devotional life characterized by prayer, Bible study, meditation on God’s Word and his providence in our lives, and participation in the gospel commission. This new statement will sharpen the Adventist understanding of the nature of a constant growth in Christ. This is indispensable at a time when some church members are more interested in theological discussion than in the spiritual impact of those doctrines in their daily lives.

Possible Content of the Proposed New Fundamental Belief Growing in Christ

By his cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during his earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus’ victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with him in peace, joy, and assurance of his love. Instead of evil forces, the Holy Spirit now dwells within us and empowers us. Committed to Jesus as our Savior and Lord, we are set free from the burden of past deeds and our former life with its darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of his character, as we commune with him daily in prayer, feeding on his Word, meditating on it and on his providence, singing his praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to his salvation, his constant presence with us sanctifies every moment and every task (Ps 1:1-2; 23:4; Col 1:13-14; 2:6, 14-15; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:18, 2 Cor 3:17, 18; Phil 3:7-14; 1 Thess 5:16-18; Matt 20:25-28; John 20:21; Gal 5:22-25; 1 John 4:4).

Comments on the Statement

1. The proposed statement combines two inseparables facts of the Christian experience, namely, freedom from demonic powers through the death of Jesus, followed by empowerment through the Holy Spirit to grow in Christ. The reality of the first one leads into the other.

2. The first two sentences establish the fact that throughout his ministry Christ was constantly confronting and subjugating evil spirits, but that it was at the cross that he defeated them once and for all. The second sentence rec-
ognizes the reality of the existence of evil powers by referring to them as “evil spirits.” That designation includes any of its particular expressions though occultism, spiritism, animism, and the spiritualism of the New Age.

3. The third sentence addresses our victory over those forces by grounding it in the previous victory of Jesus. The sentence implies that such victory is not limited to our personal struggles with sin but that it also includes the casting out of demons through the power of Jesus. Besides, the sentence expresses the thought that Christians can be victorious over evil powers in spite of the fact that the spirits constantly attempt to control or influence them. The implication is that we live in a world in which demons are still active.

4. The fourth sentence states that when the enslaving power of evil spirits is broken, the Holy Spirit comes and fills that spiritual vacuum enabling us to overcome them whenever they attempt to regain control over us. The indwelling of the Holy Spirit excludes the need for the role of the internal voice of spiritual guides in human experience, as taught for instance in the New Age Movement.

5. Sentence number 5 prepares the way for the second main element in the statement. Once we enter into a covenant with Jesus we are free from the “burden of past deeds.” These include freedom from karma, from our sense of guilt, meaninglessness and emptiness of life, and from the painful stigma of the past. This freedom brings true knowledge of salvation and dispels darkness and the ignorance that often led to superstitious beliefs.

6. Freedom from leads to freedom to. The sixth sentence attempts to define the indispensable elements in Christian growth. Instead of submission to demons and transcendental meditation, the Bible offers prayer, Bible study, and a meditation whose content is the Scripture and God’s providential leadings in our lives. Besides, praising the Lord through singing and involvement in the mission of the church are considered indispensable in Christian growth. Participation in the mission of the church is not optional for those who are growing in Christ.

7. The Christian life is dynamic and does not require a constant withdrawal from the world and our daily activities. This is emphasized in the last sentence. Our loving service to others takes place in the working place, the school, the street, the shopping centers, etc., as we take our Christian experience with us everywhere we go. Our awareness of the fact that God is always with us contributes and makes possible the sanctification of all we do according to his will. We should be constantly growing in Christ.
Growing in Christ

By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus’ victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience (Ps 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Col 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; Luke 10:17-20; Eph 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Pet 2:9; 3:18; 2 Cor 3:17, 18; Phil 3:7-14; 1 Thess 5:16-18; Matt 20:25-28; John 20:21; Gal 5:22-25; Rom 8:38, 39; 1 John 4:4; Heb 10:25).
The year is A.D. 49, eighteen years after the cross and fourteen years after Paul’s conversion on the Damascus road. Paul’s first missionary journey is over and he is back in Antioch of Syria.

This is the place where the followers of Jesus Christ were first called “Christians.” At Antioch Christians had taken the momentous and risky step of entrusting the cherished name of their Savior, the Hebrew Meshia, to the ambivalent Greek word Kurios, Lord, with all of its baggage. Here at Antioch the Christians had commissioned Barnabas and Paul as missionaries, sending them off on their first missionary circuit.

And now Paul and Barnabas are back in Antioch where they would spend what is for them a long time in one place, perhaps as much as two years. Imagine how the believers felt when they heard of the signs and wonders and conversions from the first missionary journey. No doubt they heard much more
than is recorded for us in Acts 13 and 14. How the Christians of Antioch must have reveled in the joy and delight of the expansion of the Christian church.

But this idyllic picture of preaching, teaching, and mission stories did not last for long because a delegation arrived from Judea, the birthplace of the church. The brethren from Jerusalem had a message: You folks who came in under Paul's preaching are not good Christians. In fact, you may not even be saved. You are not even circumcised. Ever since Father Abraham's time, true worshippers of God have been circumcised. You must obey all of the laws of Moses.

Now, let's not come down too hard on the visiting brethren from Jerusalem. Let us give them the benefit of the doubt and assume that they are deeply converted Christians who live good moral lives and have no ulterior motives. They have good reasons to be concerned as they look out at the pagan world with its grossly immoral lifestyle. Pagan temples blend idolatry and immorality into a fearful brew. When Simon Peter extended membership to Cornelius and his household, apparently without circumcision, a lot of eyebrows went up. But that was only the beginning because now churches are being planted by Paul and Barnabas all over the place.

In the words of famed New Testament scholar, F. F. Bruce, “For many of them the church was the righteous remnant of Judaism, embodying the ancestral hope which all Israel ought to have welcomed, preparing itself for the impending day of the Lord: to countenance any relaxation in the terms of the covenant with Abraham, sealed in the flesh by circumcision, would be to forfeit all claim to remnant righteousness, all titles to salvation on the last day” (Bruce 1988:287).

F. F. Bruce identifies two main issues at the Jerusalem Council. The first issue was to define what were “the terms on which Gentile believers might be admitted to church membership” (282). What made this a difficult question was that the gospel was crossing cultural boundaries. Christianity always wears cultural robes, just as Jesus Christ was born into human flesh and human culture. Even Jesus Christ's perfect life was molded by his Jewish culture. His lifestyle would have been somewhat different had he been incarnated into another culture. God's eternal, universal law applies to people in all cultures, but culture molds both human obedience and disobedience to God's law.

When missionaries carry the gospel into another culture they translate the gospel not merely into another language but into another whole culture. On their missionary journeys, Paul and his colleagues proclaimed the gospel in
Greek (a language they already knew), but the larger part of translation remained to be done—translating the gospel into Gentile culture.

Cross-cultural missionaries must perform two tasks: first, they must exegete their own way of being a Christian to differentiate between God’s absolutes and matters of cultural style in their own experience. This is not an easy task because religion and culture are fused in a person’s understanding. Second, missionaries must exegete the other culture to discern its good, neutral, and bad elements and to facilitate the birth of authentic Christianity within a new culture. From the very start new believers have to participate in the exegesis of their own culture and they must be expected to gradually take over the leading role in that translation process.

Although cross-cultural diffusion of the gospel has been challenging and difficult from Apostolic times down to the present, what a blessing it has been. “It is in the moments of transition, the process of diffusion across cultural boundaries, the points at which cultural specificities change, that the distinctive nature of the Christian faith becomes manifest in its developing dialogue with culture. . . . As Paul and his fellow missionaries explain and translate the significance of the Christ in a world that is Gentile and Hellenistic, that significance is seen to be greater than anyone had realized before. It is as if Christ himself actually grows through the work of mission. . . . As he enters new areas of thought and life, he fills the picture” (Walls 1996:xvi-xvii).

The Jerusalem Council was to set a direction that persists to the present day—complete cultural translation. Paul Hiebert calls this process critical contextualization. As the Early Church grew beyond its Jewish cultural roots and imbedded itself within the hearts and minds of Gentile converts, it was performing the task of translation or contextualization. Some believers did not want to do any contextualization at all. They wanted to simply export Jewish Christianity, including circumcision and the ceremonial law, to the Gentiles. Other Early Church Christians were antinomians who favored an uncritical, anything-goes contextualization. The Jerusalem Council pointed the church toward full cultural translation or critical contextualization.

The second issue the Jerusalem Council struggled with was how social interaction “and especially table fellowship, might be promoted between Jewish and Gentile believers” (Bruce 1988:282). Fellowship between believers is a primary Christian doctrine. The church is called the body of Christ, and fellowship within that body is part of God’s plan of salvation. Thus, we will see that the decisions of the Jerusalem Council take into account the feelings and
convictions of both Jewish and Gentile Christians. Christianity is a relational religion that seeks peace and harmony, even as it seeks truth.

Let’s come back to this gripping mission story. The Antioch Church has been having praise sessions, but some visiting brethren have come in with bad news. “You folk aren’t real Christians. You probably won’t even be saved.” Very quickly fellowship has deteriorated into debate. “Yes we are! No you aren’t!” “What shall we do next? Let’s send Paul and Barnabas with some of our elders to Jerusalem for guidance.”

On the way to Jerusalem those early Christians stopped at some other churches, and pretty soon those churches were full of rejoicing over the work God was doing among the pagans. God was visibly at work in his world, doing things that seemed utterly impossible causing the believers to be drawn to join the action.

In Jerusalem the apostles and elders welcomed the Antioch delegation warmly and listened to their reports. The Jerusalem Church was filled with joy, but the Pharisees had problems with the report. Extending membership to so-called Gentile converts who were uncircumcised was unthinkable. Furthermore, the Eucharist and other meetings were difficult because you never knew when certain so-called Christians might show up who would be ritually unclean.

After lengthy and heated debate, Peter stands up and signals for quiet. “Brethren, you know that God chose me to start work among the Gentiles. You know about the strange dream I had with the wild beasts. Then Cornelius came and was baptized and filled with the Holy Spirit. I was there and I saw it. Those Gentiles were filled with the Holy Spirit just like we were. And now God treats us all alike because we are all saved by grace. Now, why are you trying to lay a heavy yoke on Gentile believers that even you cannot bear? Don’t you remember what Jesus said: ‘Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light’” (Matt 11:29-30).

After hearing Peter, “The whole assembly kept silent, and listened to Barnabas and Paul as they told of all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles” (Acts 15:12). Direct witness of God’s powerful deeds had a profound effect. Then James stood to speak: “My brothers, listen to me. You know that what Simon Peter and Paul and Barnabas have said is right. Furthermore, the prophets predicted in advance the very things we are seeing. Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those
Gentiles who are turning to God, but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood” (Acts 15:12-14, 19, 20) (emphasis supplied).

Although circumcision is not mentioned directly, it is omitted from the list of requirements. Gentile converts should abstain from things polluted by idols, fornication, whatever has been strangled, and blood. I have found three interpretations of these requirements (Gallagher and Hertig 2004:196ff).

The first interpretation is that Gentile Christians should abstain from three cardinal sins, i.e., idolatry, sexual immorality, and murder. Things polluted by idols in this interpretation, refers to idolatry. Some manuscripts omit “strangled,” leaving only “blood” and add the negative Golden Rule. Thus, abstaining from blood is interpreted as not committing murder.

Textual scholars say that the manuscripts used in this interpretation are later ones, and not authoritative. The problem with this view is that it seems to over-simplify the Jerusalem Council discussion. Something more was happening than simply saying, you don’t need to be circumcised but remember the second, third, sixth, and seventh commandments.

A second interpretation says to abstain from all aspects of paganism—abstain from idolatry. Animal sacrifices, sacred meals, drinking blood, and temple prostitution were all elements of pagan worship. Like the previous view, this one seems to leave out an important part of the Jerusalem Council discussion.

A third view is that the required abstentions amounted to diplomatic concessions for the sake of Jewish Christians to facilitate fellowship. This view interprets “fornication” as referring to certain laws of Lev 17-18 that refer to marriage between relatives and to gender relationships, things that fall short of the seventh commandment. Once again, we have an interpretation that seems incomplete.

Following is an interpretation that uses the Seventh-day Adventist distinction between moral law and ceremonial law along with principles we have already discussed. First, circumcision is the hot issue mentioned by the Jewish Christians and is a code word for the whole ceremonial law. The apostles’ word is short and pointed—don’t trouble Gentile converts with this yoke. Circumcision and the other ceremonial requirements of Judaism do not apply to Gentiles. Jewish Christians could continue their ceremonial observances as cultural features of their Christianity, but those cultural specificities need not cross over the cultural bridge to the Gentiles.
The magnitude of this judgment in the eyes of Jewish Christians may be hard for us to grasp. To detach the meaning of being in covenant relationship with God from the symbol of circumcision was difficult. Although the Judaizers apparently did not offer a rebuttal to Peter and James at the Council, some continued to push for circumcision and the ceremonial law.

Second, fornication is part of the apostolic judgment that is absolute. Sexual immorality was part of the fabric of Gentile society, not just a matter of personal failure. By living a pure moral life, Gentile Christians were being counter-cultural. Gentile Christians already knew about biblical morality, but the apostles were giving a pastoral reminder in the hearing of Jewish Christians who feared for the moral purity of the church.

Third, idolatry is another part of the apostolic judgment that is absolute. No doubt some new Gentile converts were continuing to feel the attractions of pagan worship and some were yielding to temptation. Gentile Christians already knew about biblical worship, but the apostles were giving another pastoral reminder.

Fourth, there were diplomatic concessions for Christian fellowship. Even if Gentile Christians had been set free from the idolatry and immorality associated with pagan worship, they should put aside the symbols of pagan worship for the sake of good fellowship with Jewish Christians. This interpretation would fit with Paul’s counsel that “food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. Only take care lest this liberty of yours somehow becomes a stumbling block to the weak. For if any one sees you, a man of knowledge, at a table in an idol’s temple, might he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak man is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brethren and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ (1 Cor 8:8-12).

Could Christians from Jerusalem, the birthplace of the church, be considered “weak”? Yes! New believers in newly entered societies have things to teach the churches that brought them the gospel. There is just a little more to the story. The Jerusalem Church accepted the apostolic decision, although the issues did not cease to be disputed by some Judaizers. A written statement was prepared and Judas and Silas, witnesses from the Jerusalem Church, were sent back to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas.

“When its members read [the letter], they rejoiced at the exhortation. Judas and Silas, who were themselves prophets, said much to encourage and
strengthen the believers. After they had been there for some time, they were sent off in peace by the believers to those who had sent them” (Acts 15:31-34).

What a good ending to a great story. In the history of our beloved church, this story describes a landmark, epoch-making, paradigm-setting event that has shaped and must shape the way we relate to gospel and culture.

In conclusion, notice the main features of this wonderful story: God was powerfully at work in the Gentile world in the person of the Holy Spirit and through missionaries chosen and sent by the Antioch Church. Gentile converts discovered the happiness and joy of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. As the Spirit confronted Gentiles with the demands of God’s eternal law, they repented of their sins, received forgiveness, were empowered by the Spirit, and commenced the pilgrimage of faithfulness. The expansion of the church was spontaneous and could be attributed only to the power of the Spirit. However gifted Paul and Barnabas may have been as missionaries, the fruits of their ministry far exceeded their personal qualities. The living Christ allowed his Body (the church) to take on the innocent cultural contours that made the church a place where Gentile Christians could feel at home. Established Christians in Judea were happy about the Gentile conversions but doubted their authenticity because the new churches did not adopt the innocent cultural contours of Jewish Christianity. When the Gentile Christians were confronted by the Judeans, they were upset and appealed to the church leadership. In this story, at least, all parties submitted themselves to the decisions of the apostles. The apostles were, themselves, Jewish Christians but they were guided by the Spirit to a deeper understanding than the Judaizers. The apostolic decisions were absolutely faithful to God’s eternal, universal law and made room for innocent cultural elements. Although Jewish Christians thought that circumcision was at the very core of Christianity, the apostles saw that it was in fact a feature of cultural identity. Gentile Christians were given freedom in Christ.

What a wonderful pattern the Jerusalem Council gives us as we seek to emulate the faithfulness of the Apostolic Church.

Reference List


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Chapter 34

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VARIATIONS IN ADMINISTRATIVE RELATIONSHIP FOR SPECIAL SITUATIONS WITH “EMERGING SPIRITUAL MOVEMENTS IN ‘CREATIVE ACCESS’ ENVIRONMENTS”

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The Setting

Emerging spiritual movements within “creative access” contexts are a present reality, not a distant possibility. They exist within Faith Development in Context (FDIC) ministries in the Muslim world and in Buddhist areas such as Vietnam and China. They have been referred to in various ways: Insider Believer Movements, Insider Cell Group Movements, Underground Movements, or Parallel Structures. Each of these titles seems to have raised its own set of misunderstandings. Therefore, for purposes of this paper I will refer to them with the descriptive phrase, “emerging spiritual movements within ‘creative access’
environments.” While providing evidence of God’s broader mission activity and a reminder of the need to recognize that the primary purpose of structure is to support mission, these movements do pose certain challenges to the Adventist Church. Questions regarding unity of faith and mission, doctrinal orthodoxy, quality of leadership, fiscal responsibility, and their role in a world movement, have been expressed. At the same time, if the church does not creatively lead on this critical issue, then it risks sharing responsibility in future failures in the area of orthodoxy, leadership selection, training, and accountability.

It is important to note at the outset that it is the desire of all of us to protect and foster the right of every person to hear the gospel. With this objective clearly in mind, this paper aims to provide suggested alternative relationships for discussion that would both meet the concerns of the church and provide for the distance and flexibility needs of the emerging spiritual movements.

**Definition of Terms**

*Emerging Spiritual Movements*: a descriptive phrase referring to the movements of increasingly large numbers of seekers in the non-Christian and even post-modern worlds which are moving to a biblically-based saving faith in God and salvation through Jesus Christ. These movements, for various reasons, are emerging within their respective contexts and are choosing or are required, because of the hostile environment to growth in faith, to remain within their contexts.

*Creative Access*: environments where traditional, open evangelism is not allowed or is severely constrained. Missionaries are not allowed access. Therefore, other ways of entry need to be devised to allow for the entry of the gospel. “Tent-making” is a common example of “creative access” into a limited access environment.

*Direct Access*: situations in which the gospel faces relatively few or no obstacles that would hinder its spread. The typical obstacles of religious prejudice, political obstructions, lack of religious freedom, cultural biases, and limited legal status are not present.

*Insider Movements*: in relatively closed religious or cultural contexts, spiritual movements towards saving faith in Jesus occurring with some degree “spontaneously” within a people group, are often referred to in this manner. Insider movements have been criticized by some as referring to movements that are too nebulous and undefined to merit serious consideration.
FDIC (Faith Development in Context): a descriptive phrase Adventist ministries are using to describe a strategy of working that uses critical contextualization to both communicate the gospel into a people group or faith system, and to work with the group to develop an expression of biblical faith as part of the end-time Adventist prophetic movement that demonstrates and communicates the biblical life of faith accurately within that context. FDIC ministries rely on strong biblical teaching and study, small group accountability, and sensitive interaction with “outsiders” (outsiders from the movement inside the culture in question) of the Adventist faith to develop an expression of Adventist faith that they truly “own” and yet is true to an Adventist understanding of biblical faith.

Muslim Background Believer (MBB): a Muslim who, after coming to a biblically-based saving faith in Jesus Christ, chooses or is required to leave his cultural context and to some degree abandon his religious-cultural heritage. MBBs are often referred to as having been extracted.

Muslim Believer (MB): a Muslim, who, after coming to a biblically-based saving faith in Jesus Christ, chooses to remain within his religious and cultural context as a witness to his faith.

Insider Believer Movements: adding to the “Insider Movement” term with a clarification that these are, in fact, believers in a biblical saving faith.

Insider Cell Group Movements: again, building on the “Insider Movement” term with an emphasis on small unit accountability.

Underground Movements: used of spiritual movements which are to some degree secret and operate unofficially (in relation to government legal recognition) where the ability to function in a traditional church organizational manner is impossible or severely limited.

Parallel Structures: has been used, perhaps inaccurately, to refer to spiritual movements or ministries that have developed some viable, internal structure, to describe their relation to the organized Adventist Church. This term has some drawbacks in its symbolism of implying an equal parallel church, and of never converging or coming to organic unity, even though parallel also implies that the two will remain parallel and not diverge from each other.

For purposes of discussion, this paper will use the descriptive term “Emerging Spiritual Movements in ‘creative access’ environments (or contexts).”
The Question

What process or mechanism is possible to meet the concerns of the denomination for accountability, unity, and quality of spiritual life, in relation to these new ministries and yet provide the distance and flexibility necessary to prepare God’s people for his coming in areas where traditional structures are not possible or not conducive to mission?

Specific Needs

For the Unity of the Church

While not exhaustive these new emerging spiritual movements would need at least the following to maintain unity with the denomination: (1) guidelines for conduct of work which are approved by some church recognized body; (2) regular reporting of activities, use of finances, to a recognized church entity; (3) assurance of quality control in selection of leadership; (4) knowledge that at least the leaders of the movement are aware of their relation to the larger body of the Seventh-day Adventist movement; (5) assurance of theological orthodoxy with sensitivity to the spiritual growth process being evidenced in the movement; and (6) a plan to, at some point and in some way, be united with the larger church family.

For the Emerging Movements in “Creative Access” Contexts

Again, while not exhaustive the new emerging spiritual movements would need at least the following to allow growth and stability: (1) in most cases, no visible linkage with a Western or Christian organization, (2) local “ownership,” (3) flexibility to develop organizational structures to fit the local situation, (4) guidelines that allow local “inside” leaders to arrive at Spirit-led solutions to local issues, and (5) assistance with training for spiritual leadership.

For Commitments Expected From the Emerging Ministries

Although the purpose of this paper is to discuss possible administrative relationships, it would seem appropriate to also note the main points of faith
and mission commitment that can be expected from the emerging movements. Such commitments would include at least:

1. A commitment to worship the One God.

2. A commitment to the primacy of the Bible in faith and practice with reference to truth in other sources being subject to the biblical understanding.

3. A commitment to the biblical understanding of salvation by faith, the death of Jesus, his divinity, his mediatory ministry, and his soon return.

4. A commitment to regular Bible teaching and study under the guidance of the Holy Spirit for growth in faith and spiritual life, and as a “self-corrective” for avoiding error.

5. A commitment to regular fellowship with other believers wherever possible, for mutual encouragement and accountability in the life of faith.

6. A commitment to the larger mission of God’s last day spiritual movement, to prepare a people for Jesus’ soon return. This would imply an understanding by leaders of the movement of their relation to and role along with the larger global body of God’s true believers, and an understanding that we are all of one remnant people, one in faith and mission.

7. A commitment to the messages of the three angels of Rev 14 as guidance for God’s end-time people including the sign of the seventh-day Sabbath and the Day of Judgment.

Existing Policies and Guidelines Which Are Relevant To Relating with Emerging Movements

1. *General Conference Working Policy, 2003—2004,* provides a beginning reference point for a discussion of possible ways of relating with emerging spiritual movements in “creative access” contexts.

B 05 35 Variations in Administrative Relationships

1. For the purpose of fulfilling the mission of the church, division administrations are authorized to recommend modified organizational structures and/or administrative relationships in situations which do not involve the resizing of unions, as outlined below in paragraphs a. through c., or to experiment with further modifications in territories where unusual economic, political, geographic, religious, or demographic circumstances, or strategic purposes make normal church organizational and administrative structures impractical or inefficient. In all cases where alternative arrangements are implemented, the four constituent levels of church organization shall be maintained, and the following fundamental principles for Seventh-day Adventist organizational structure and relationships shall be preserved:
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a. All basic administrative units shall have a constituency voice (regular constituency sessions).
b. All administrative relationships shall be clearly defined (responsibility is ultimately held by an elected/appointed officer[s] who is accountable to an executive committee).
c. Constitutions and bylaws may be amended to provide for alternative administrative arrangements and the process by which such arrangements are continued or suspended.

2. Innovations in organizational structure and administrative relationships must be approved by the respective division committees and the General Conference Executive Committee and will be reviewed periodically by division administrations to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each arrangement. Division committees may grant constituencies the option to continue or discontinue the alternative administrative arrangement (*General Conference Working Policy 2003-2004* 48, 49, emphasis mine).

It would seem that the phrase “Variations in Administrative Relationships” would be the key phrase relevant to this discussion. The use of the term “parallel structures” has led to some misunderstanding that the church is being asked to initiate a separate, parallel, organizational structure. This is not the case. Rather, we are exploring what administrative relationships would best fulfill the mission of the church in these unique environments.

I have included in appendix A copies of five other General Conference Policies that are relevant for reference in the discussion. They include B 35 05 General Conference Constitution Expresses Unity of the Church, B 35 10 Representative Character of Church Organization, B 35 65 Attached Unions and Conferences, B 35 70 Attached Local Fields, and C 40 Conference or Field Church.

*Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission* is a document that resulted from the work of the Global Mission Issues Committee and has been approved by the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) as guidelines for engaging in Global Mission (see appendix B).

2. *Transitional Organizational Structures.* According to Matt 28:18-20, the mission of the Church has three major inseparable components: (1) the mission should lead people to Jesus as their Savior and Lord through conversion and baptism; (2) the mission is to incorporate a community of believers, the church, into an environment where they can grow in faith, knowledge, and the enjoyment of a universal fellowship of believers; and (3) the mission is to nurture and train members as active disciples who recognize and utilize their spiritual gifts to assist in sharing the gospel. The Seventh-day Adventist Church
has been founded and organized by the Lord to fulfill that gospel commission. The universal nature of the Church requires the existence of a basic and common organizational structure throughout the world that will facilitate the fulfillment of its mission.

Political and religious conditions in some countries could make it difficult or even impossible for the Church to function within its traditional organizational structure. A transitional organizational structure may be needed. In such cases the following guidelines should be employed to deal with the situation:

a. The transitional organizational structure would be justifiable under one of the following conditions:
   1) When new initiatives need to be tested in the mission of reaching resistant or previously unreached peoples;
   2) When regular church work and organization is not permitted due to local religious or political circumstances.

b. Church leaders at the division/union/local field where the transitional organizational structures are being set up should determine the nature of the transitional organization and whether it is appropriate to choose local leadership. They should also define the management of tithe and offerings within the transitional organization.

c. Workers who are providing leadership in the transitional organization should be personally committed to the doctrinal unity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to its worldwide ecclesiastical organization.

d. New converts should, as soon as possible, be made aware of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and that it has a particular message and mission to the world.

e. As soon as it is feasible, the transitional organizational structure should be replaced by the regular church organizational system.

Existing Examples of Dealing with Emerging Movements In “Creative Access” Environments

It can be noted that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has had “special arrangements” for years in situations where regular church organizational structure was not allowed or was severely constrained due to political realities or religious oppression. The present discussion deals with situations where both political and socio-religious constraints and biases prevent the church from working effectively through its traditional organization structure. Notice the following examples.
China

The China Union Mission, being responsible from the church administrative position for the work in China, has issued a position statement to clarify its special relationship with the Adventist Church(s) in China. Points 5-7 are included here.

5. The Chinese Union Mission is a regional church organization, one function of which is to exchange and share resources with Chinese Adventists worldwide in order to promote healthy growth. Such an approach is consistent with the Three Self principles of self-government, self-support, and self-propagation.

6. Our church respects the value system, and expectations of all local Chinese Adventist churches. If Chinese Adventists wish to utilize any help offered unconditionally by the Chinese Union Mission, all such resources can be contextualized.

7. The Chinese Union Mission has no intention to control and/or manage the internal affairs of the Adventist Church in China. Our church and Chinese Adventists are involved with exchange but based on the principles of mutual learning and the understanding that neither party is subject to the other (Ash 2004).

Vietnam

There exists a house church movement in Vietnam of approximately 100,000 members that resulted from the Peace and Happiness radio broadcasts. A supervisory committee, the Peace and Happiness Coordinating Committee, was established by the Southeast Asia Union Mission (SAUM) in October of 2003. Members of that committee include the president of SAUM as chair, the speaker of the radio ministry as secretary, the Adventist World Radio (AWR) executive director, the secretary of the Southern-Asia Pacific Division (SSD), a representative from the General Conference Secretariat, and a representative from Adventist Southeast Asia Projects, a supporting ministry that is a major funding source for the house churches in Vietnam. The terms of reference for the committee are: (1) meet at least once a year at the time of the General Conference Annual Council, (2) approve an annual financial budget, (3) discuss strategies and approve training schedules, (4) maintain a liaison with Adventist World Radio and the Southeast Asia Union Mission, and (5) work toward eventual integration of the Peace and Happiness house church movement with the Vietnam Mission (Bauer 2005).
An Asian Muslim Country

With 8,100 members and direct access to approximately 150 million people, the director of this FDIC ministry reports directly to the division Global Mission director and division evangelist for Muslim ministry. There is a division Adventist Muslim Relations (AMR) coordinating committee which further oversees such ministries. The director of the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (GCAMR) is in regular contact with the director for this ministry and has attended the annual camp meeting when possible (security issues have prevented this for the past two years).

An African Muslim Country

This ministry has 4,500 members and has direct access to approximately 1 million people. An Adventist lay member supervises the ministry and at present there is no formal oversight committee. The supervisor keeps the division administration informed regarding the ministry and involves division leadership in training workshops. The division is in the process of establishing a division level oversight committee. The director of GCAMR has made several visits to the ministry for training and field evaluations.

A Muslim Region

This ministry has over 2,000 members and has direct access to over 2 million people. The ministries in this union are directly under the supervision of the union Global Missions (GM) director who counsels with local union administration and other union personnel. Direct administrative responsibility lies with the Division AMR Committee which meets twice annually. Members of the Division AMR Committee are: the division executive secretary, chair, division GM director, secretary, the president of the division, the president of the union, the union GM director, and the director of the Christian Muslim Studies program at an Adventist college. Invitees include the union treasurer, union communications director, and the GCAMR director who has also met with this committee on several occasions.
In June 2004, an ad hoc group of FDIC leaders was convened for the purpose of developing a consensus regarding FDIC work by those intimately involved in it. In addition to reviewing the scope of FDIC work, the biblical basis for FDIC, and the history of how the denomination has arrived at our present position, the group worked on a set of guidelines for various areas of the ministry. These guidelines are intended to be reviewed by an official church body, pending further refinement and clarification of a process for review. The guidelines pertaining to relationship to the church are cited here:

1. Relation to Church Structure

   a. We encourage linkage to the Adventist organization at a higher level from the local conference or mission where the local FDIC ministry is located.
   b. Because of security issues, cultural differences, and the need for broad coordination of a rapidly growing movement, it may be necessary to pursue the development of an administrative structure dedicated to the global FDIC ministry. [It is understood that this arrangement would operate under guidelines developed by a duly constituted church committee.]
   c. FDIC ministries need the church as a resource base to facilitate (1) the training of solid leaders who are thoroughly grounded in the Scriptures, Adventist faith, and practice, and (2) preparation of appropriate materials.
   d. In the future, we see the possibility, as certain criteria are met and circumstances allow, for a closer linkage between FDIC and the church.
   e. Criteria for a closer linkage in 10 years, with an evaluation visit suggested three years before the end of the 10 year period:
      i. Openness in Muslim countries to freedom of personal faith choice.
      ii. Willingness of church to receive the MBs in full fellowship and representation in church governance.
      iii. Broad understanding within Islam that Adventism is distinct from Christendom, qualifies as a “true People of the Book,” i.e., are “fellow believers.”
      iv. Adventism acknowledges the genuineness of a remnant within Islam in the form of the FDIC ministries.

2. People interfacing between FDIC ministries and the church need to be very careful because of security concerns (FDIC Guidelines 2004).
Why Is Any Relationship Necessary?

Some may ask why it is important for any relationship to exist between the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the FDIC ministries. I suggest the following reasons:

1. The gospel commission is to all people.
2. The Seventh-day Adventist prophetic role is inclusive of all people.
3. The emerging spiritual movements seem to be God’s way of working particularly in ‘creative access’ environments.
4. God’s larger “end-time people of true faith,” while exhibiting a diversity in expression are counseled to “press together,” to exhibit a unity of faith and mission. Engaging with FDIC ministries, even in a “modified” manner, offers the only hope of including them in some manner in the larger body of believers that express a shared faith and mission.
5. The emerging spiritual movements are requesting input particularly in training and materials for more effective spiritual nurture, leadership, and outreach.
6. The emerging spiritual movements are a reality. The Adventist church has the choice of initiating some relationship mechanism that will provide specific inputs for nurture, leadership development, theological orthodoxy, and mission, or it risks forfeiting the opportunity to influence these movements in a positive way.
7. Adventist leaders who are presently relating with these movements need some recognized mechanism from which to relate with them.

The bottom line is we may chose to continue operating the same as we have in Muslim areas with the same result as we have had for a century. Or we have the opportunity to create a relationship that will have the potential of an enormous effect in the Muslim world. Seventh-day Adventists are not discussing these potentials so that certain individuals will have their own arrangements, but to provide the Muslim world the right to hear the gospel, to hear God’s end-time message, and to prepare people in the Muslim world for the coming of Jesus.

Possible Solutions

These emerging movements in “creative access” contexts are committed to the same faith and mission as we in the formally organized Seventh-day Adventist Church. The movements, and those of us involved with them, desire
some relationship in order to access expertise and resources to facilitate their
spiritual nurture and mission and to participate as they are able in the larger
global mission of God’s end-time spiritual movement among all peoples. How-
ever, due to certain political, religious freedom, safety, and prejudice issues, this
linkage must preserve some distance and anonymity. The following suggestions
are therefore offered for discussion:

First, an important initial step would be to request the General Conference
president to constitute a small team to develop a plan that stages the implemen-
tation of an alternative administrative relationship. The team would work with
all entities involved to see the process accomplished. Such a team could chose
to follow the subsequent suggestions listed below or those coming out of our
discussion, or change, adapt, or replace them with other plans as agreed on by
all entities involved.

Second, a small duly authorized “oversight” committee could be appoint-
ed at the General Conference presidential level to oversee the relation with
the various emerging movements. Such a committee would also interact with
the division and/or union supervisory committees, and the appropriate Study
Center staff. The planning team suggested above under number one could con-
tinue to function in this capacity or the committee could suggest another ar-
angement.

Third, at the division and/or union levels a supervisory committee with ap-
propriate representation from the denomination and the emerging movement
could be appointed. This committee could function at a division level for all
“emerging movements” in their territory, or at a union level for a specific min-
istry. Local circumstances would influence the details of this group. This group
could (1) assess the quality of the “change agents” or local movement leaders,
(2) provide guidelines for leadership selection, training, and general conduct
of the work, (3) provide guidelines for the use of tithe, (4) approve an annual
budget, (5) authorize ordinations and set criteria for the functions of the ones
ordained, (6) coordinate development of literature, media, and other resourc-
es, (7) provide general administrative oversight, and (8) coordinate with other
similar committees/ministries in other locations.

Fourth, involve the appropriate Study Center director and other personnel
of the Center in oversight, development of guidelines, regular monitoring, and
the development of training and outreach materials. This person(s) would need
to be responsible to a higher oversight committee such as the General Confer-
ence level oversight committee as noted in number two above.
Fifth, strengthen the specific Study Center involved so as to provide the needed training, materials preparation, and monitoring capacity to ensure that the guidelines agreed upon are followed.3

Sixth, membership lists should, where possible without endangering members, be kept in some location so that the church recognizes these members as part of the larger body of believers (see appendix A, policy C 40: Conference or Field Church).

**APPENDIX A**

**General Conference Working Policy**

**B 35 05 General Conference Constitution Expresses Unity of Church.** As the Scriptures represent the church of Christ as one body, all the parts are members one of another, so our Constitution, adopted by the representatives of the worldwide sisterhood of churches, seeks to express the unity and oneness of all organizations that make up the General Conference, which represents the one undivided remnant church of God.

**B 35 10 Representative Character of Church Organization.** The truly representative character of our organization is thus set forth in the Testimonies: “Every member of the church has a voice in choosing officers of the church. The church chooses the officers of the state conferences. Delegates chosen by the state conferences choose the officers of the union conferences; and delegates chosen by the union conferences choose the officers of the General Conference. By this arrangement, every conference, every institution, every church, and every individual, either directly or through representatives, has a voice in the election of the men who bear the chief responsibilities of the General Conference.” – Vol 8, pp. 236, 237.

**B 35 65 Attached Unions and Conferences.** For union or local fields which, because of war emergency or other special reasons, are not included in any division, the General Conference Executive Committee serves as division committee in all matters of division administration and counsel.
B 35 70 Attached Local Fields.

1. Criteria—When a local conference/mission cannot be conveniently included in an existing union organization, due to special circumstances, it shall be attached directly to a division organization and classed as an attached local field.

2. Special Provisions/Procedures—The election of officers, the representation on the Division Committee, the delegates to the General Conference session, and the tithe percentage remittances of an attached local field shall be governed by the following special provision/procedures:

   a. Election of Officers—Officers and departmental directors of an attached local field (conference/missions) shall be elected in the same way as for a local conference/mission, with the division organization taking the place of the union organization in such elections.

   b. Representation on the Division Committee—The president of the attached local field (conference/mission) shall be a member of the Division Committee.

   c. Delegates to General Conference Sessions—Representation at General Conference sessions for fields attached directly to the division shall be in harmony with the constitutional provision.

   d. Tithe Percentages—1) Attached local fields shall pass on to the division organization 10 percent of their tithe receipts, tithe sharing percentages, all mission offerings, and such other funds as may be called for by the policies of the division organization. 2) Union organizations consisting of only one local conference/mission which have not been passing on 10 percent of their tithe receipts to the division shall be required to follow the regular policy. Because this may require some financial adjustments, it may be taken into account by the division in the making of the yearly appropriations.

3. Special Wage Scale Provision—Because of the direct relationships between the division and attached local fields approved as unions of churches, and because the organizational responsibilities may be more involved than in a local conference/mission within a union, the percentage rates for officers and departmental directors of attached fields shall be approximately halfway between those of a local conference/mission and those of a union.

C 40 Conference or Field Church. Isolated members should unite with the conference or local field church, which is a body organized for the benefit of
scattered believers who are otherwise without church privileges. Aged and infirm members who live adjacent to a local church organization should be members of the local church. It is the duty and responsibility of the local church to minister to such members. Such should not be transferred to the conference or field church, which is not designed to function in place of the local church. Although conference and field officers are the officers of their field churches, they should hold their membership in the church in the locality in which they reside.

The conference or field president shall be the presiding elder of the conference or field church, and the work normally carried by the church clerk and the church treasurer shall be handled by the secretary-treasurer of the conference or field. Any business normally conducted by a local church and its board shall, in the conference or field church for which in the nature of the case there is no board, be conducted by the conference or field committee. They shall also appoint the delegates from the conference or field church to attend their respective sessions.

APPENDIX B

Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission

NOTE: The following guidelines were developed by the Global Mission Issues Committee (ADCOM-S) and edited by the Biblical Research Institute. These are the first of a series of guidelines brought to the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee for approval in June and July, 2003. These guidelines are intended to be used, as appropriate, by church administrators, educators, and others when proclaiming the gospel in predominate non-Christian environments. As new guidelines are approved, they will be added in this section.

1. Use of the Bible in Mission Vis-à-vis “Sacred Writings”

   In building bridges with non-Christians, the use of their “sacred writings” could be very useful in the initial contact in order to show sensitivity and to lead persons along paths which are somewhat familiar. They may contain elements of truth that find their fullest and richest significance in the way of life found in the Bible. These writings should be used in a deliberate attempt to introduce
people to the Bible as the inspired Word of God and to help them transfer their allegiance to the biblical writings as their source of faith and practice. However, certain risks are involved in the use of these writings. The following guidelines will help to avoid those risks.

a. The Bible should be recognized as the teaching instrument and source of authority to be used in leading a person to Christ and to a life of faith in a society where another religion is dominant.

b. The Church should not use language that may give the impression that it recognizes or accepts the nature and authority assigned to the “sacred writings” by the followers of specific non-Christian religions.

c. Those using “sacred writings” as outlined above should develop or create a plan indicating how the transfer of allegiance to the Bible will take place.

d. The nurture and spiritual growth of new believers in non-Christian societies shall be accomplished on the basis of the Bible and its exclusive authority.

2. Transitional Organizational Structures

According to Matthew 28:18-20, the mission of the Church has three major inseparable components: 1) The mission should lead people to Jesus as their Saviour and Lord through conversion and baptism; 2) The mission is to incorporate a community of believers, the church, into an environment where they can grow in faith, knowledge, and the enjoyment of a universal fellowship of believers; and, 3) The mission is to nurture and train members as active disciples who recognize and utilize their spiritual gifts to assist in sharing the gospel. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been founded and organized by the Lord to fulfill that gospel commission. The universal nature of the Church requires the existence of a basic and common organizational structure throughout the world that will facilitate the fulfillment of its mission.

Political and religious conditions in some countries could make it difficult or even impossible for the Church to function within its traditional organizational structure. A transitional organizational structure may be needed. In such cases the following guidelines should be employed to deal with the situation:

a. The transitional organizational structure would be justifiable under one of the following conditions:

1) When new initiatives need to be tested in the mission of reaching resistant or previously unreached peoples;
2) When regular church work and organization is not permitted due to local religious or political circumstances.
   b. Church leaders at the division/union/local field where the transitional organizational structures are being set up should determine the nature of the transitional organization and whether it is appropriate to choose local leadership. They should also define the management of tithe and offerings within the transitional organization.
   c. Workers who are providing leadership in the transitional organization should be personally committed to the doctrinal unity and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and to its worldwide ecclesiastical organization.
   d. New converts should, as soon as possible, be made aware of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and that it has a particular message and mission to the world.
   e. As soon as it is feasible, the transitional organizational structure should be replaced by the regular church organizational system.

3. Fundamental Beliefs and Preparation for Baptism

   **Fundamental Beliefs and Non-Christians**

   The Statement of Fundamental Beliefs is an expression of the Church’s message in language that is meaningful to Christian communities. The challenge is to determine how to make this statement meaningful to societies where Christians are a minority or non-existent. The mission to non-Christians will raise new questions which are not addressed in the Fundamental Beliefs, and relevant biblical answers should be provided. The following suggestions could be of help when addressing this particular issue.

   a. The way the Fundamental Beliefs are presented and the language used to present them must be carefully studied and selected in order to facilitate the comprehension of the Church’s message by non-Christians. The development of locally-prepared Bible studies and teaching instruments is to be encouraged.

   b. The task just described should be done at the religious study centers, with the assistance of front-line workers and in consultation with the church community, theologians, missiologists, and administrators.
c. The religious study center directors should refer local questions and concerns not addressed in the fundamental beliefs to the Office of Global Mission of the General Conference for study.

**Baptismal Guidelines**

In the preparation of new converts for baptism and membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, these sequential guidelines must be followed.

a. A candidate must give clear evidence of a personal experience of salvation by faith in Christ and of a clear understanding of the Seventh-day Adventist message.

b. A candidate must be guided by the local community of believers until the community can testify that the candidate has reached an adequate knowledge and experience of the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

c. The Baptismal Vow, as set forth in the Church Manual, must be taken as summarizing the minimum required beliefs and experiences for baptism.

**4. Forms of Worship**

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church continues to come into contact with many different cultures in non-Christian countries, the topic of proper worship practices becomes very relevant. In those settings, deciding what is or is not acceptable in a Seventh-day Adventist worship service is important. Calling people to worship the only true God plays a significant role in the message and mission of the Church. In fact, in Adventist eschatology the central element in the closing controversy is the subject of worship and the true object of worship. We should be careful and prudent as we seek ways to contextualize Adventist worship around the world. In this task we should be constantly informed by the following aspects of Adventist worship.

a. God is at the very center of worship as its supreme object. When we approach God in adoration we come in contact with the very source of life, our Creator, and with the One who in an act of grace redeemed us through the sacrificial death of His beloved Son. No human being should usurp that divine right.

b. Corporate worship is God’s people coming into His presence as the Body of Christ in reverence and humility to honor and give homage to Him through adoration, confession, prayer, thanksgiving, and singing. Believers come together to listen to the Word, for fellowship, for the celebration of the Lord’s
Supper, for service to all, and to be equipped for the proclamation of the gospel. Our faith invites wholehearted and highly participatory worship where the Word of God is central, prayer is fervent, music is heartfelt, and fellowship in faith is palpable. These elements of worship are indispensable in Adventist worship services around the world and should be part of any attempt to contextualize Adventist worship.

c. We are complex creatures in which reason and emotions play a significant role. True worship expresses itself through our body, mind, spirit, and emotions. The Adventist Church calls for a proper balance of the involvement of these aspects of our personality in worship. It is important to keep in mind that any element of the worship service that tends to place humans at its center must be rejected. The extent to which the body participates in worship will vary from culture to culture, but whatever is done should be done under discipline and self-control, keeping in mind that the central aspect of the worship service is the proclamation of the Word and its call to serve God and others.

d. Adventist worship should draw on the treasure trove of Seventh-day Adventist theology to proclaim with exuberance and joy the communion and unity of believers in Christ and the grand theme of God’s infinite love as seen in creation, the plan of redemption, the life of Christ, His high priestly work in the heavenly sanctuary, and His soon return in glory.

e. Music should be used to praise Him and not as a means to over stimulate emotions that will simply make individuals “feel good” about themselves. Through it worshippers should express their deepest feelings of gratitude and joy to the Lord in a spirit of holiness and reverence. Adventist worship is to celebrate God’s creative and redemptive power.

If the need to contextualize the form of worship in a particular culture arises, the guidelines provided in the document entitled “Contextualization and Syncretism” should be followed.

5. Contextualization and Syncretism

Contextualization is defined in this document as the intentional and discriminating attempt to communicate the gospel message in a culturally meaningful way. Seventh-day Adventist contextualization is motivated by the serious responsibility of fulfilling the gospel commission in a very diverse world. It is based on the authority of the Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit and aims at communicating biblical truth in a culturally-relevant way. In that task
contextualization must be faithful to the Scripture and meaningful to the new host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged by the gospel.

Intentional contextualization of the way we communicate our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it the Church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, adaptation has taken place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the three angels’ messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. This will continue to happen.

As the Church enters more non-Christian areas, the question of syncretism— the blending of religious truth and error—is a constant challenge and threat. It affects all parts of the world and must be taken seriously as we explore the practice of contextualization. This topic is highlighted by the Seventh-day Adventist understanding of the great controversy between good and evil which explains Satan’s mode of operation—distorting and compromising truth, not by denying it, but by mixing truth and error, thus robbing the gospel of its true impact and power. In this context of danger and potential distortion, critical contextualization is indispensable.

Since the effects of sin and the need for salvation are common to all humanity, there are eternal truths that all cultures need to know, which in some cases can be communicated and experienced in different and yet equivalent ways. Contextualization aims to uphold all of the Fundamental Beliefs and to make them truly understood in their fullness.

In the search for the best way to contextualize, while at the same time rejecting syncretism, certain guidelines must be followed.

a. Because uncritical contextualization is as dangerous as non-contextualization, it is not to be done at a distance, but within the specific cultural situation.

b. Contextualization is a process that should involve world Church leaders, theologians, missiologists, local people, and ministers. These individuals should have a clear understanding of the core elements of the biblical worldview in order to be able to distinguish between truth and error.

c. The examination of the specific cultural element would necessitate an especially careful analysis by cultural insiders of the significance of the particular cultural element in question.

d. The examination of all the Scripture says about the issue or related issues is indispensable. The implications of scriptural teachings and principles should be carefully thought through and factored into proposed strategies.
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e. In the context of reflection and prayer, scriptural insights are normative and must be applied to the specific cultural element in question. The analysis could lead to one of the following results:

1) The particular cultural element is accepted, because it is compatible with scriptural principles;

2) The particular cultural element is modified to make it compatible with Christian principles;

3) The particular cultural element is rejected, because it contradicts the principles of Scripture.

f. The particular cultural element that was accepted or modified is carefully implemented.

g. After a period of trial it may be necessary to evaluate the decision made and determined whether it should be discontinued, modified, or retained.

In the end, all true contextualization must be subject to biblical truth and bear results for God’s kingdom. The unity of the global Church requires regular exposure to each other, each other’s culture, and each other’s insights that “together with all the saints we may grasp the breadth, length, height, and depth of Christ’s love.”--Eph 3:18

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Notes

1 As an example, we have a current request from one of the spiritual movements in the Middle East for leadership training. They have identified the following areas in which they feel they need further training: (1) The core elements of New Testament light that explain God’s plan for solving the problem of rebellion/sin and how this truth relates with the Old Testament. Further, to what degree these biblical understandings are reflected in the Qur’an; (2) Personal spirituality and spiritual formation; (3) Stewardship; (4) Membership nurture and accountability; (5) Strategic planning of their work; (6) Developing contextual forms for baptism, communion, marriage, funerals, and feasts; (7) How to lead others in spiritual growth, the psychology of teaching; (8) Risk management, security issues; and (9) Development of internal structure.

2 www.adventist.org/beliefs/guidelines/main_guide7.html

3 For example, there is a voted action by the Global Mission Operating Committee (October, 2004) to strengthen the Global Center for Adventist Muslim Relations with several additional personnel and to associate with it a number of field
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personnel focused on the preparation of materials and empowerment of ministries in the Arab world.

Reference List


Chapter 35

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SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT STRUCTURES
FOR FDIC COMMUNITIES

BERTIL WIKLANDER

April 4-5, 2005

Many of us are aware of the existence of Seventh-day Adventist-sponsored work among non-Christian believers that we define as “Faith Development in Context” (FDIC). The issues relating to such ministries among Muslim believers were highlighted at the symposium at Andrews University, 17-21 January 2005.

Dr. Jerry Whitehouse further defined the challenges and needs of FDIC in his Global Mission Issues Committee paper “Variations in Administrative Relationships for Special Situations.” The concept is not limited to Islamic contexts, but includes ministries among Buddhists and others.

I have been asked by the General Conference Global Mission Office to address the topic of “Process for the Development of Special Arrangement Structures (Parallel).” Let me begin with a few comments on the title of my paper.
First, I confess that I am not fond of the term *parallel* for this situation, and I will explain why a little later.

Second, I think it helps if we make the title a bit clearer. Out of a multitude of terms for the phenomenon we are addressing here, we have agreed to consistently use Faith Development in Context (FDIC).

For these reasons, I have worded the title of my paper *Special Arrangement Structures for FDIC Communities*, while letting the *process of development* be my main concern.

I have many limitations in addressing this topic and approach it as a learner. While my experience of FDIC work is limited to reports about what is taking place in the Islamic context, I hope the principles I advocate may be useful in our work among other groups too.

We are considering a phenomenon with many names, as Dr. Whitehouse points out in his paper, and perhaps this is because it is a very complex thing of which we have short and limited experience. I refer to it generally as “FDIC Communities,” and by that I mean communities that were somehow initiated among non-Christian people groups, are “supported” and “monitored” by officially recognized Seventh-day Adventist Church employees, and are located where circumstances are such that any official church recognition of, overt link or cooperation with the ministry or community would lead to its termination. For practical purposes I have tried to distinguish between FDIC ministries as the *mission initiative of the church* and FDIC communities as the *resulting fellowship* that continues to sustain itself.

The issue before us is: What might be the best process for developing special arrangement structures for FDIC communities? Drawing on the terminology in the General Conference Working Policy B 05 35 (appendix), we could speak of “modified organizational structures,” “modified administrative relationships,” or “alternative arrangements.” The situations for which this policy was written, however, are essentially different from what we are considering here, and some of the conditions outlined in this policy could not be transferred to our dealings with FDIC communities. I therefore suggest that we need to develop a new concept which helps us address the crucial element of what kind of “faith” and “doctrine” the FDIC fellowship has in relation to the teachings of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The topic I have been given underlines the need for a process by which we develop the special arrangement structures. This suggests that a *very careful and long-term view of the issue* is desirable from the point of view of the Global
Mission Office. The purpose of my paper is to make some suggested actions we can implement.

In his significant paper, “Variations in Administrative Relationships for Special Situations” that Dr. Jerald Whitehouse presented to this committee, he addresses our issue in eight main steps. I welcome his paper and believe it has merit to us. For the sake of discussion and as an introduction to what I will add later, I will begin by making some comments on each of the eight steps.

The Setting

Terminology

The paper opens by highlighting the present reality of what Jerald Whitehouse terms emerging spiritual movements within creative access contexts and points out that they are to be found “within Faith Development in Context (FDIC) ministries in the Muslim World and in Buddhist areas such as Vietnam and China.” The author then mentions various names used to refer to these movements and says that “each of these titles have raised its own set of misunderstandings.” His own choice of term for the purposes of his paper is: “emerging spiritual movements within ‘creative access’ contexts.”

In response to this, I would first say that it is true that terminology is a challenge. It seems that every time we address this matter in the Adventist Church, we need to learn a new name for it. This may confuse those who are not frontline workers or experts but who need to understand and decide on the shape and form of church policy.

The new terms introduced in section one are defined in section two. I still ask myself what the distinction is between FDIC ministries and emerging spiritual movements within creative access contexts. Why isn’t the accepted and general “FDIC ministries” sufficient? What does the term, emerging spiritual movements say that the traditional revivalist or awakening movements do not say? Is the term emerging to be associated with the concept of emerging church which seems to embrace a specific new kind of theology and spirituality and is now becoming popular among some evangelicals?

Does this imply a link between FDIC and the broader concept of church planting? Is this plausible link with an emerging church desirable for an Adventist and is it appropriate? I do not know yet. But I would hope that we do the theological analysis, thinking, and dialogue first and then move on to the
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practice. If not, the practice may run away based on undefined or loosely defined concepts which could create unwanted challenges later on. These are just a few of the questions coming to my mind as I read this passage.

Evidence of God’s Broader Mission Activity

The author says that these movements provide evidence of God’s broader mission activity. But how do we as a church identify what is genuine evidence of God’s activity in mission? We may hear and see things and, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit may intuitively understand that a certain phenomenon fits into God’s work. But do we need clear criteria for evaluating a spiritual movement as being raised by God? I think so, because FDIC ministry leaders and church leaders need a common language. If we do not find that language, we will not understand each other. And lack of understanding of what we say to each other is one of the major threats to our mission.

The Primary Purpose of Structure Is to Support Mission

In his paper, Dr. Whitehouse says that these movements “provide evidence of the need to recognize that the primary purpose of structure is to support mission.” It is perhaps of minor importance to ask why and how these movements in particular “provide evidence of the need to recognize” this rule. Personally, as a simple marginal note, I would think that such evidence could be provided by every local church.

But the more important point here concerns, rather, the missiological doctrine that “the primary purpose of structure is to support mission.” No doubt mission is of primary importance to the church, as made clear by (1) the Great Commission, which serves as the highpoint of the four gospels in the Bible, (2) the message, structure, and purpose of the book of Acts, (3) the three angels’ messages, and (4) the Advent Movement and our historical position. But I suggest that mission is integrated with other aspects too. Thus, our church has tended to outline several reasons for structure, and we may need to bear these in mind as we make mission our main priority. For example, The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia says under “Development of Organization in the SDA Church”:

A system of church government or polity is essential for directing the affairs of the church in an orderly manner. Organization functions to preserve the identity of a
church society, to maintain purity of doctrine, to discipline members, to direct concerted efforts, and to care for the temporal as well as the spiritual existence of the church” (1976:1042 emphasis mine).

I agree with Dr. Whitehouse that “mission is the primary purpose of structure,” but maybe there are also other purposes that support mission and that should be integrated with the function of mission. Values like order, coordination, preserving identity and unity, and maintaining doctrinal faithfulness to the Bible, would, in my view, also need to be integrated with mission. If we apply a too simplistic concept of mission, the FDIC ministries may bring disorder, and the effort could become counterproductive. I am not at all suggesting that this would be the intent of Dr. Whitehouse’s paper, but the church needs to be aware of various factors that make mission possible.

We believe that the mission of God is the mission of the Church and vice versa. And this is based on our understanding of biblical ecclesiology. The Church is the “Church of God” (Acts 20:28) and Ellen White reminds us that “the church of Christ, enfeebled and defective as it may be, is the only object on earth on which He bestows his supreme regard” (White 1923:15). In our thinking, therefore, we should not keep the concept of “the church as an organization” in opposition to the concept of “the church as a spiritual movement.” Rather, we should seek to keep these concepts together in unison, and be willing to sacrifice our old views in order to allow for that unity to materialize not only on paper but in the life of the church and its mission.

Challenges

Dr. Whitehouse lists some of the challenges FDIC movements pose to our church: “Unity of faith and mission, doctrinal orthodoxy, quality of leadership, fiscal responsibility, and role in a world movement.” He adds that “if the church does not creatively lead on this critical issue then it risks sharing responsibility in future failures in the area of orthodoxy, leadership selection, and training and accountability.” My response to this is:

First, for the church to be able to lead anything, frontline workers (or practitioners) and church leaders need to communicate well. Both parties need to listen to each other. There needs to be a transparent language, honesty, and trust.

Second, the statement on the church’s responsibility to “lead” presumes that the FDIC communities are part of the Adventist Church. But that is what
we have yet to define. A colleague of mine has said on this very point: “The church needs to be responsive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in these as in other things, but it is also possible to assume so much responsibility that not much is left to the Holy Spirit.” I believe we should not automatically assume, and certainly not with the knowledge available at this point, that the church should develop formal structures that make these groups part of the Adventist Church. What we may say today is, perhaps, that they are “affinity groups.”

Desire to Protect and Foster the Right of Every Person to Hear the Gospel

Here lies the key to our understanding of the rationale for FDIC ministries. People will not understand and be able to act on the gospel message, unless we share it in the forms and concepts of their culture. I assume we are all in agreement on this reason for contextualization in our mission. I refer here to my paper presented to the General Conference Global Mission Issues Committee on 14 January 1998 entitled “The Boundaries of Contextualization in Mission: How Flexible and Absolute Are They? What Principles Should Guide the Church?”

However, it has been pointed out to me that we should also ask ourselves where FDIC ministries are appropriate and for what reasons, and where they are not appropriate and for what reasons. One might otherwise conclude that we should encourage FDIC within Catholicism, Pentecostalism, secular philosophies, and so on. And this would compromise our identity, honesty, and public image.

Definition of Terms

I appreciate very much Dr. Whitehouse’s section on definition of terms. It is not only a necessary help to understanding the author’s reasoning, but it also gives us an insight into the nature of FDIC ministry.

Just a word of caution. A frequent introduction of too many new terms may create confusion in the communication process. We need to be careful in the choice of terms, since they may be taken from an original context that charges them with associations that we may not want to adopt. I think that church leaders at the General Conference and its divisions would be best served at
this stage by a very careful use of new terminology until we have agreed on the theology and guidelines that we want to adopt together.

I have already made some comments on the phrase that Dr. Whitehouse has adopted in his paper: “emerging spiritual movements in ‘creative access’ environments (or contexts).” The expression “emerging spiritual movements” is defined as “movements of increasingly large numbers of seekers in the non-Christian and even post-modern worlds, moving to a biblically based saving faith in God and salvation through Jesus Christ.” I do not understand why it needs to be said in this way. Are we not simply talking of a spiritual revival movement?

Jerald Whitehouse then goes on to say that “these movements, for various reasons, are emerging within their respective contexts and are choosing or are required, because of the hostile environment to growth in faith, to remain within their context.” Are not all revivals emerging from their respective context? And are they not, usually, remaining within their context (although they may spread to other places)? And could not hostile environment be not only Islamic or Buddhist, but even, in its own way, Roman Catholic (as in Poland) and the aggressive secular culture that we find in Sweden, where people are taken to court when they preach against homosexual marriages? So, in what way does the term used specify the matter we talk about here and why not simply stay with the general term of Faith Development in Context?

The Question

The question Dr. Whitehouse seeks to address also defines the purpose of his paper: “What process or mechanism is possible to meet the concerns of the church for accountability, unity, quality of spiritual life, in relation to the ministry and yet provide the distance and flexibility necessary to prepare God’s people for his coming in areas where traditional structures are not possible or not conducive to mission?”

Generally speaking, this is a good way of wording the issue. However, I think that when the Adventist Church discusses issues relating to FDIC ministries, it needs to be aware of how we define the “church.” And in the same way, the leaders of the FDIC ministries need to understand that their concern for recognition and distance from the church structure is conditioned by the same definition of “church.” In particular, I think we need to become more inten-
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ationally aware of the distinction between the visible and invisible church, and I shall therefore come back to that theme later.

In addition, in wording the ultimate purpose of the FDIC ministries, Dr. Whitehouse refers to things that are “necessary to prepare God's people for his coming in areas where traditional structures are not possible or not conducive to mission.” It is perhaps debatable if this suggested mission of our church covers all that we believe to be our mission. If we say that our mission is to “prepare God's people for the Lord's coming,” it may not require a unified world church organization. But if we define our mission as we have done in our mission statement, the situation is different: “The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages of Rev 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return.”

Our mission statement perceives the preparation for the Lord's coming as part of the task of nurture, while the two main purposes are “leading people to accept Jesus as personal Saviour” and “to unite with His church.” If our purpose is to bring people to unite with God's world church, then what “distance and flexibility” can we have towards the FDIC ministries without neither including a strange element that does not really belong to the Adventist Church, nor keeping such distance and flexibility that they in fact become more different than similar to us?

Specific Needs

It is a very fundamental question that Dr. Whitehouse raises toward the end of his paper, namely, “Why is any relation necessary?” Perhaps it should be answered before one addresses the specific needs.

So, what does the Adventist Church need in the current situation? Whitehouse provides six points: (1) guidelines for the work approved by a proper church body; (2) regular reporting of activities and use of finances to a recognized church body; (3) assurance of quality control in selection of leadership; (4) knowledge that at least the FDIC leaders recognize relations to the Seventh-day Adventist Church; (5) assurance of theological orthodoxy with sensitivity to the spiritual growth process being evidenced in the FDIC ministry; and (6) a plan to, at some point and in some way, unite the FDIC ministries with the larger church family.
I would underline the need for a process of developing special structures which is based on a thorough theological preparation. To be more specific:

1. The church needs to define, (a) the nature of church and how the visible church relates to the invisible church, with a view to the relationship between spiritual movement and church organization, (b) the structured purpose of our mission and identity as organization, and (c) how our mission is integrated in the visible organization of the church.

2. The church needs to define criteria for membership of the world church organization that responds to the nature of the FDIC ministries. Is it enough to fulfill the “commitments from the emerging ministries” as outlined by Dr. Whitehouse, or do we need something more than that?

In view of these definitions, it should be possible to outline a list of the needs of the Adventist Church. I will make an attempt later in this paper in regards to Jerald Whitehouse’s proposal.

Dr. Whitehouse also outlines the needs of the FDIC ministries. These are: (1) usually, no visible linkage with a Western or a Christian organization; (2) local “ownership;” (3) flexibility to develop organizational structures to fit the local situation; (4) guidelines that allow local leaders to arrive at Spirit-led solutions to local issues; and (5) assistance with training for spiritual leadership.

This is helpful for the Adventist Church to know. However, what the Church does in response to these needs would depend on the theological definitions that I have suggested under the sections dealing with “The Setting” and “The Primary Purpose of Structure Is to Support Mission.”

Existing Relevant Policies and Guidelines

Dr. Whitehouse provides valuable information on existing policies and guidelines that we need to consider as we develop the process for FDIC communities. I agree that the concept of “variations in administrative relationships” provides a good tool and that the term “parallel structures” can be misunderstood and therefore should be avoided.

The guidelines in the “Transitional Organizational Structures” should perhaps form the point of departure for what we discuss today. However, they do not seem to fully comply within the FDIC ministries described by Dr. Whitehouse.

I may be mistaken, but I do not see that his description matches, as the policy puts it, the matter of “new converts being made aware, as soon as pos-
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sible, of the fact that they belong to a particular worldwide ecclesiastical community—the Seventh-day Adventist Church—and that it has a particular message and mission to the world.” I also ask myself if the matter under “e” is part of the FDIC ministries described in Dr. Whitehouse’s paper: “As soon as it is feasible, the transitional organizational structure should be replaced by the regular church organizational system.”

I get the impression, but I am still open to being corrected here, that the FDIC ministries are to remain within their context and that the transitional arrangement is to be considered as permanent. If that is the case, then we must ask ourselves if these groups are part of our Church or not. And if they are, then how are they part of our organization? But if they are not, then what are they and how do they relate to our Church in their different identity?

I ask myself: Can a Muslim FDIC community that “remains in their Muslim context,” be considered part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church? I think not. But I believe it has to do with how I see “Islam” and how I define the “church.” I would not see “Islam” as a whole as teaching the truth. And I would consider membership in the “church” as requiring a theological and organizational unity with the visible church that I do not yet see in the FDIC communities. But, as I said, I stand to be corrected here.

Existing Examples

Here is another valuable collection of material covering various existing FDIC ministries in the world today. Dr. Whitehouse also includes the June 2004 Zelenika FDIC Consultation Guidelines which offer a first attempt to draft what we are looking for. These have not been adopted by any official church body. It demonstrates the urgency of the Church addressing the issues.

Why Is Any Relation Necessary?

Jerald Whitehouse gives seven answers to this important question. Obviously, our mission implies a commitment to “relate” to all people, regardless of language and culture. But the issue now is perhaps rather how we organize the FDIC work in relationship to our church organization. I would like to share my response to the seven answers as follows:
The Gospel Commission Is to All People and
The Seventh-day Adventist Prophetic
Role Is Inclusive of All People

These statements are of course true. But they underline the necessity of Adventist believers reaching out and being inclusive rather than the importance for the Adventist Church to build specific structural relations with organized FDIC ministries. The same statements could be used to support the position that the Seventh-day Adventist Church ought to have structural relations with a multitude of other groups and organizations. But I think we have found that we can still reach out and be inclusive in our prophetic role, even if we do not have any structural relations with other groups or organizations. This is particularly obvious in the area of ecumenical relations to other Christian churches.

The Emerging Spiritual Movements Seem to Be
God's Way of Working Particularly in
The Creative Access Environments

This answer leads me to ask: How do we know when God is working in a spiritual movement? Is he also working through the various Charismatic or Roman Catholic movements because they share many of our beliefs, and should we therefore build specific structural relations with them? What makes the FDIC ministries unique in this regard? I do not see an answer to that in Dr. Whitehouse's paper. We need to define where and why FDIC ministries are appropriate and where they are not.

God’s Larger End-Time People of True Faith . . .
Are Counseled to Press Together

My response to this would be: The first statement is of course true. But it also explains why we are faced with issues. While it is our calling as a church to be united in faith and mission, the point at issue is, what our calling would be when that unity in faith and mission cannot be fully accomplished. How many people or groups have left our fellowship in the past as a result of smaller divergences than the ones we are looking at here? Are the FDIC communities one with the Adventist Church in faith and mission? How do we determine that and who determines it?
In regard to the second sentence in Dr. Whitehouse’s fourth answer, I ask myself if we should even try to “include the FDIC groups in the larger body of believers,” until we have carefully evaluated their faith and view of mission. Again, who will do the evaluation? The FDIC leader? Church leaders? Or both entities working together? And where are the limits for church membership and being integrated with our unity as a “church”? Is being part of the “invisible” church enough? Why do FDIC communities also need to be a part of the “visible” church? Can they not be dealt with in much the same way as we deal with faithful believers living in other Christian churches? Leaving the “coming out of her” to the eschatological “time of trouble”?

As I mentioned before, it has been pointed out to me in this context that we need to address the issue of where FDIC is appropriate and for what reasons, and where it is not appropriate and for what reasons. Why Islam but not Roman Catholicism or European secularism?

These Movements Are Requesting Training and Materials for More Effective Spiritual Nurture, Leadership, and Outreach

Here I would like to say that this is positive and we should, of course, respond generously to this. That is our mission. However, I do not see how this can serve as an argument for organized relations other than providing the necessary material and training.

These Movements Are a Reality. We Have the Choice of Initiating Some Relationship for Nurture, Leadership Development, Theological Orthodoxy, and Mission

I agree that “the opportunity to influence these movements in a positive way” is important for us and we need to do something about it. I consider this to be a weighty argument for some kind of relationship. But it is not an argument for seeing these FDIC communities as members of our church. We might as well see them as some kind of “affinity group” to whom our church is positive, relating positively as far as possible, but ultimately not responsible in terms of a mutually agreed on organizational relationship.
Those Working with These Movements Need Some Recognized Mechanism from Which to Relate to Them

I would also agree with this argument as being weighty, but with the same reservations as in my comments in the paragraph above.

In summary, I would see the last two answers as the most important arguments for a relationship, for taking opportunities to influence the FDIC communities in a positive direction, for the need to provide Adventist personnel to work with these communities, and for a mechanism that defines the nature of their work within the church. But I do not see any of these as weighty arguments for organizing these groups as part of the Adventist Church.

Possible Solutions

Dr. Whitehouse concludes with some possible solutions, divided into a brief preamble and five main points. In the preamble, three statements are made that provide the foundation for the kind of steps recommended:

First, it is stated that the FDIC ministries are “committed to the same faith and mission as we in the formally organized Seventh-day Adventist Church” (emphasis mine). Looking at the section “Commitments from the Emerging Ministries,” I ask myself: No doubt, they are close to us in faith and mission, but are they fully Seventh-day Adventist? I realize that Dr. Whitehouse intends these points to be not a full statement of faith but rather as a general description of the main points of faith. But I need to say here that, for example, I personally do not see in those main points a commitment expressed to some important convictions that we hold as a church such as listed in Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines (FD): (1) the Bible as the only creed and authoritative revealer of doctrines (FD 1); (2) the worship of the triune God as a unity of co-eternal Persons (FD 2); (3) the nature of man, especially as far as the woman is concerned (FD 7); (4) the Great Controversy including evil powers identified with all those who oppose Christ (FD 8); (5) the Church as universal, composed of all believers in Christ (FD 10, 11, 12); (6) baptism as entrance into membership in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (FD 14); (7) the gift of prophecy in Ellen White’s ministry (FD 17); (8) marriage as monogamous (FD 22); and (9) Christ’s heavenly ministry and the pre-advent judgment (FD 23).
I do not want to be understood as negative or critical of these groups. My knowledge is too limited to be able to pass judgment. But I do wish to indicate points of concern that I do not feel have been addressed to my satisfaction.

Perhaps we need to find a more nuanced language when identifying their faith and mission with ours. Clearly, we need to carefully study and monitor the doctrinal issues involved in the FDIC communities if we are to relate to them.

Second, it is stated that “they desire a liaison arrangement to access expertise and resources to facilitate their spiritual nurture and mission and to participate as able in the larger global mission of God's end-time spiritual movement among all peoples.” I find this statement quite acceptable as an argument for having a special relationship with these groups.

Third, it is stated that “due to certain political, religious freedom and safety issues this linkage must preserve some distance and anonymity.” This argument is acceptable in principle and has been implemented by the Adventist Church in past times. However, it is one thing to apply it when the groups involved share our faith fully and would not refuse a connection with the world church. It is slightly different when the groups do not fully share our understanding of the Bible and when the connection with the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church must be veiled to them. In my view, therefore, we cannot treat them as members of our visible church, but we need to see them as different groups that are close to us and that may, over time and by the leading of the Holy Spirit, grow to deeper closeness.

Based on Dr. Whitehouse’s three basic assumptions, he then offers five points that could be used to define the linkage. I will discuss them in connection with my proposal later in the paper.

**The Concept of the Invisible Church**

From the previous survey, it is clear that we need a common understanding of what we mean with the “church.” Seventh-day Adventists define the church as both invisible and visible, as both universal and particular, and as both a spiritual movement and an organized body (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* 1976:302-304). Notice the following description of the invisible church:

*The visible church is God’s church organized for service.* It fulfills Christ’s great commission to carry the gospel to the world (Matt. 28:18-20), and prepares people for His glorious return (1 Thess. 5:23; Eph. 5:27).
The invisible church, also called the church universal, is composed of all God’s people throughout the world. It includes the believers within the visible church, and many who, though they do not belong to a church organization, have followed all the light Christ has given them (John 1:9). This latter group includes those who have never had the opportunity to learn the truth about Jesus Christ but who have responded to the Holy Spirit and “by nature do the things contained in the law” of God (Rom. 2:14).

The existence of the invisible church reveals that worship of God is, in the highest sense, spiritual. “The true worshippers,” Jesus said, “will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship him” (John 4:23). Because of the spiritual nature of true worship, human beings cannot calculate precisely who is and who is not part of God’s church.

Through the Holy Spirit, God leads His people from the invisible church into union with His visible church. “I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen, I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd” (John 10:16). It is only in the visible church that they can fully experience God’s truth, love, and fellowship, because He has given the visible church the spiritual gifts that edify its members corporately and individually (Eph. 4:4-16). When Paul was converted, God put him in touch with His visible church and then appointed him to lead out in the mission of His church (Acts 9:10-22). Just so today, He intends to lead His people into His visible church, characterized by loyalty to God’s commandments and possessing the faith of Jesus, so they may participate in finishing His mission on earth (Rev. 14:12; 18:4; Matt. 24:14).

The concept of the invisible church has also been considered to include the united church in heaven and on earth (Eph. 1:22-23) and the church in hiding during times of persecution (Rev. 12:6, 14) (Ministerial Association 1988:142, emphasis mine).

The article on the “Nature of Church” in the Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia (1976:302-304) lays it out in more detail: First, it exposes the biblical concept that the church universal includes the whole family of God from Adam to the end of the world, while being distinguished from the particular sense of the Christian church established during Christ’s incarnation.

Second, in defining the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it draws a distinction between “special movements” that God raises up in order to convey “a particular message of warning or instruction, or to lead people to a more complete understanding of his will,” and the practical need for organization in order to accomplish this God-given task: “The accomplishment of this task demanded more than the devotion of a host of Christians scattered among many denominations. It called for a united, organized body dedicated to a common task and working together in unison to achieve the goal described in prophecy” (303).

Third, it defines the visible church as “a body of people God calls out and commissions to accomplish his purpose at a given period in history,” while the
invisible church is “the multitude of sincere and devoted men and women of all churches, or no church, who worship Him in spirit and in truth to the extent of their knowledge of truth” (303).

Fourth, while stating that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is, in a unique way, God’s visible church on earth today, it also acknowledges that Seventh-day Adventists do not alone constitute the true children of God today, but that God works in and through all organizations that accept his divine guidance:

Seventh-day Adventists do not believe that they alone constitute the true children of God today. While they hold that the SDA movement is the visible organization through which God is proclaiming the last special message for the world at this time, they also heartily accept the words of Jesus, “Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold” (John 10:16).

Adventists believe that God works in and through all organizations whose leaders are willing to accept divine guidance in their decisions, and to the extent that they do so. They believe, also, that the message they as SDAs are bearing to the world—and which, indeed, gave rise to the SDA Church—was divinely ordained for this time, and that this sublime commission constitutes the SDA Church, in a unique way, God’s visible church on earth today (303).

Thus, the idea that we may recognize people groups outside our organized Seventh-day Adventist Church community as being true believers is in keeping with our understanding of the Bible. These may be communities of believers in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior that are one or all of the following: (1) part of the church universal, while not being part of the particular Christian church; (2) part of a special spiritual movement raised up by God in a particular people group in order to bring a more complete understanding of his will at the end of time, a movement which may eventually need to be organized for practical purposes; (3) part of God’s invisible church, while not being part of the visible church; and (4) part of God’s true children, with true spiritual leaders, while not being part of God’s visible church today, which we believe to be the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

We may also see such groups as spiritually and theologically closely related to us, as temporarily out of touch for us due to persecution or external conditions that render open contacts impossible, and as groups which God may eventually bring into full (even visible) fellowship with us, when the situation changes or when earth’s history enters its conclusive phase.

All this lends increased weight to the need for us to understand how we should be linked, spiritually and formally, to such groups, particularly in other
religions. I find more attraction in the concept of “special affinity groups” than anything resembling “ministries within the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”

**Definition of FDIC Communities**

At the conclusion of the Symposium on Faith Development in Context at Andrews University in January, 2005, Elder Lowell Cooper issued a statement with which I concur. I believe it has great merit in summing up the situation and providing guidance for where we go at this point in time. He said:

1. FDIC movements should be viewed by the SDA Church as expressions of the Holy Spirit’s leading within a particular cultural/religious setting.

2. In certain situations (i.e., Islam and Buddhism) such movements will be compromised by an overt identification with Christianity. The Seventh-day Adventist Church should not develop formal linkages nor imprint these movements with denominational structure. These movements should be encouraged to develop their own organizational structures and accountability systems.

3. The Seventh-day Adventist Church should continue its informal encouragement of these movements.

4. The FDIC movements in some Muslim areas have enormous potential for growth. Therefore the SDA Muslim Relations Office is a necessary feature of our structure. It should be augmented so that relationships, as may be appropriate, are not solely dependent on one person. This would hold true also for whatever FDIC movement takes place among Buddhism.

5. There is a rather urgent need for the Church to address the matter of its relationship to these movements. Some very unrealistic expectations are developing that could bring serious consequences to the Church as well as to some of these movements.

In view of this statement and what I have said so far in this paper, I suggest the following definition of certain FDIC communities: FDIC communities that cannot openly be identified as Seventh-day Adventist, for whatever reason, should be understood as special affinity groups in the invisible church and the participants should be seen as God’s true children. As such, they may be seen as part of a spiritual movement, led by God, and encouraged and supported by our Church as far as is deemed appropriate. However, since the doctrinal harmony of FDIC communities with Seventh-day Adventist beliefs remains to be
evaluated, since they may include certain elements that the Adventist Church has not endorsed from explicit Bible texts, and since they cannot be openly identified with our Church, there needs to be no formal linkages between them and the Adventist Church. The Church may view the FDIC communities as an attractive mission field, but not see them as integrated in the church family.

Rather, having defined where FDIC ministries are appropriate and why, the Church needs to ensure that those who function as Seventh-day Adventist leaders (mediators or bridge builders) have the necessary support and protection. The Church needs to establish procedures by which ongoing dialogue and counsel may be exchanged between FDIC leaders (in the church) and church officials. The advice given may follow the lines of my suggestions in the paper from 1998 regarding “Boundaries in Contextualization.”

Process of Development

In view of my observations so far, I suggest that the Adventist Church establish a process of development for special arrangement structures relating to FDIC Communities that include the following.

First, develop guidelines for theological preparation and evaluation. The General Conference needs to initiate a process through its divisions to establish certain definitions and guidelines in the following areas: (a) the biblical criteria for determining “God’s work” among FDIC ministries; (b) the nature of “church,” particularly the relationship between the visible church and the invisible church, with a view to the relationship between “spiritual movement” and “church organization”; (c) the structured and mutually interacting purposes of our mission and our identity as organization; (d) the relationship between mission and church structure, showing how God’s mission overlaps with the church’s mission and how God’s mission is integrated in the visible organization of the church; (e) define criteria for membership in the world church organization that responds to the nature of the FDIC ministries by clearly defining when these are mature enough to be integrated into our Church fellowship; (f) define the concept of “special affinity groups” and its appropriateness for FDIC ministries; (g) evaluate the doctrinal relationship between FDIC ministries and the Church; (h) define criteria for defining where and why FDIC work is appropriate or not appropriate; (i) evaluate the growing criticism in the world that some types of FDIC ministries in Islamic contexts are “deceitful” and “dishonest,” and that they undermine the credibility of the Church (see a recent article...
in the Danish paper Kristeligt Dagblad, 18 March, 2005, where, among others, the supporting ministry Adventist Frontier Missions is being mentioned). It would help if this work could be concluded by the General Conference spring meeting in 2006.

Second, develop a special arrangement structure. The General Conference needs to approve a flexible special arrangement structure for FDIC Communities so that divisions with FDIC ministries may implement that arrangement as of 1 July 2005. (See the provisional model outlined in the section titled Special Arrangement Structure below.)

Third, further enable the General Conference Global Mission Study Centers. These centers need to be reorganized and equipped to produce material and train the bridge-building agents who are to supervise and facilitate the work within FDIC ministries. The Study Center’s work needs to be advisory, promotional, and educational, but not governing or administrative. Responsibility for the work remains with the properly constituted church body, which is responsible to a church constituency.

Fourth, responsibility of the Church. Divisions, unions, conferences, and missions where FDIC work is carried out are responsible for ensuring that church officials relating to this ministry are sufficiently orientated and knowledgeable concerning this kind of ministry. Special introduction courses for church administrators need to be on offer to church offices from the Global Mission Study Centers before 1 July 2005. Church officers in charge of the area where an FDIC ministry is in operation should provide an annual report of trends and issues to the division president and the General Conference Oversight Committee.

Fifth, annual evaluation by the General Conference Oversight Committee. The General Conference should establish a small oversight committee for FDIC ministries that meets once a year at the time of the Annual Council. This should involve a review of the practicality of having a 10/40 Window Committee, an Arabic Materials and Broadcasting Committee besides the Global Mission Issues Committee, and a Global Mission Operations Committee. The terms of reference for this oversight committee should include receiving reports from the fields, identifying current issues, and passing them on for action to the proper body. The committee should be small and be chaired by someone who can take an active, leading role in addressing theological and organizational issues faced in the fields.
In view of my observations above and following the ideas presented by Dr. Whitehouse, I recommend the following special arrangement structures for FDIC work:

First, FDIC ministries should have the approval of the divisions. Before any new FDIC ministry work is initiated, the respective division needs to approve of it. The division will be responsible for establishing a process for how such decisions are taken and with those decisions recorded.

Second, responsibility for FDIC ministries should be given to specially designated persons. In order to carry on its informal encouragement of the FDIC movement, Seventh-day Adventist Church entities (division, union, conference or mission) may, where feasible, assign responsibility to an employee or employees to care for the way the church attends to the needs of the FDIC ministry. This person should have a minimum preparation of at least one year of study in the applicable area of expertise (such as diploma or certificate in Christian Muslim Studies).

Three, there may be differences in attitude between a church-sponsored FDIC Ministry Project initiative that seeks to establish a new community of FDIC believers and a FDIC community itself. In the former case, the Adventist Church may be more involved in supervision and voting budgets, while in the latter case the community needs to develop its own ways of managing its affairs with as little involvement from the Church as possible.

Four, there needs to be a supervisory committee. At the appropriate church level (division, union or conference, or mission), a supervisory committee should be established to care for all FDIC ministries in the territory. Reports from this committee need to be shared with the division president or a specially assigned officer at the division office, so that information may flow on to the General Conference Oversight Committee. The composition and terms of reference of this supervisory committee may vary according to local needs, but could include the tasks listed by Dr. Whitehouse in his paper. However, the committee should act on the understanding that the FDIC communities are not part of the Adventist Church but are closely related communities that may be served by advice and encouragement. I would suggest that at least the following functions be included:
Functions Related to the Church

Employed Project Leaders

1. Receive plans and reports.
2. Authorize travel and approve of equipment purchase.

Functions Related to Local Leaders

In the FDIC Community

1. Provide guidelines for leadership selection.
2. Assist project leader with recruitment and assessment.
3. Approve of plans for training.
4. Develop guidelines that define biblical criteria for ordination.

Functions Related to Faith Development

1. Receive information regarding the theological teaching and its development in the FDIC community and issuing advice where feasible.
2. Give input on plans towards bringing the FDIC communities closer to the Seventh-day Adventist faith.

Functions Related to Material Production

1. Coordinate development of literature, media, and other resources.

Functions Relating to Administration

1. Provide general administrative oversight.
2. Coordinate work with other similar ministries within the same division.
3. Coordinate work with other similar committees in other divisions.

The areas of approving budgets, giving guidelines for using tithe, approving candidates for ordination, membership records, etc. seem to imply that the Adventist Church takes responsibility for the work as if these communities actually belong to our Church. The Church needs to leave many of these responsibilities to the groups, albeit providing counsel.
Small General Conference Oversight Committee

The General Conference should establish a small oversight committee for FDIC ministries that meets once a year at the time of the Annual Council. The annual meeting should involve a review of the practicality of having a 10/40 Window Committee, an Arabic Materials and Broadcasting Committee, besides the Global Mission Issues Committee and a Global Mission Operations Committee. The terms of reference for this oversight committee should include receiving reports from the fields, identifying current issues, and passing them on for action to the proper body. The committee should be small and be chaired by someone who can take an active leading role in addressing theological and organizational issues faced in the fields.

The General Conference Global Mission Study Centers

The various study centers, in reorganized form and significantly strengthened, could provide advice, training, and expertise to the Church (see above). As the work expands, it may be necessary for each division to have one person employed who functions like a field expert in this area.

Baptism and Church Authority

Baptism may be authorized for FDIC ministries as an act by which “we confess our faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and testify to our death of sin and of our purpose to walk in newness of life,” “acknowledging Christ as Lord and Savior,” and “becoming His people” (see Ministerial Association 1988:180-193). However, the final element in our understanding of baptism, “being received as members by His church,” cannot be fully implemented in the present circumstances, at least in the sense that the Seventh-day Adventist Church cannot recognize the FDIC believers and they cannot recognize us. This experience linked to baptism must be put on hold, being made a subject of prayer. We may have to look to the future to see FDIC ministries join the visible church.

The fact that the FDIC community is not officially recognizing the Seventh-day Adventist Church means that the Church has no right to exercise authority in church affairs over these communities. This can only be done by advice, encouragement, guidelines, training, providing materials, and praying for them as brothers and sisters that are not fully joined to us.
Appendix

B 05 35 Variations in Administrative Relationships

1. For the purpose of fulfilling the mission of the church, division administrations are authorized to recommend modified organizational structures and/or administrative relationships in situations which do not involve the resizing of unions, as outlined below in paragraphs a. through c., or to experiment with further modifications in territories where unusual economic, political, geographic, religious, or demographic circumstances, or strategic purposes make normal church organizational and administrative structures impractical or inefficient. In all cases where alternative arrangements are implemented, the four constituent levels of Church organization shall be maintained, and the following fundamental principles for Seventh-day Adventist organizational structure and relationships shall be preserved:

a. All basic administrative units shall have a constituency voice (regular constituency sessions).

b. All administrative relationships shall be clearly defined (responsibility is ultimately held by an elected/appointed officer[s] who is accountable to an executive committee).

c. Constitutions and bylaws may be amended to provide for alternative administrative arrangements and the process by which such arrangements are continued or suspended.

2. Innovations in organizational structure and administrative relationships must be approved by the respective division committees and the General Conference Executive Committee and will be reviewed periodically by division administrations to determine the strengths and weaknesses of each arrangement. Division committees may grant constituencies the option to continue or discontinue the alternative administrative arrangement (General Conference Working Policy 2003-2004:48, 49).

Notes

1 Reasons for this would be one or more of the following: (1) non-Christian doctrinal tenets deeply embedded in the local culture and religion, (2) prejudice against Christianity for various reasons, (3) legal restrictions in the country based on (1) and (2), (4) family codes of honor, and (5) religious/political fanaticism that results in acts of terrorism.
Adventist Responses to Cross-Cultural Mission


Reference List


Seven years ago this spring Bertil Wiklander presented a paper to the Global Mission Issues Committee on the topic of contextualization entitled “The Boundaries of Contextualization in Mission” (1998). It would be good for all of us to go back to that document and review the suggestions of that fine paper. Several of the suggestions have been incorporated into a document that was vetted by the Global Mission Issues Committee, the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM), and the Biblical Research Institute entitled “Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission (2003). But several of the suggestions that Wiklander made have not been dealt with, so the issues are still present and need to be looked at again.

The purpose of this paper is to clarify some of the issues involved in the contextualization/syncretism discussion, to sharpen Adventist focus on the problems of under-contextualization, as well as over-contextualization, and
then to suggest a balanced approach to contextualization, to highlight the ongoing challenges to contextualization within Adventism, and to list safeguards for the Seventh-day Adventist Church as it approaches the task of mission contextualization.

Perhaps it is good to remind each other at the beginning of this paper that the only reason why anyone would ever put our church through the challenges of doing contextualization is that every person in God’s creation has the right to hear a clear gospel presentation that is unencumbered by syncretistic cultural baggage. Much of the syncretism that we observe in our world is caused by poor contextualization, not over-contextualization, so it is important that we learn to do contextualization right.

Definition of Terms

**Definition:** Contextualization is the presentation of the eternal truths of Scripture within the cultural setting of a group of people.

We do not contextualize the message, rather we present the timeless message of the Scriptures by using the cultural forms, words, and symbols of a people in order to better present that timeless message. This is what makes cross-cultural communication of the gospel such a challenge, for it is not easy work. We must not only understand the biblical message well, but we must also understand the language and culture of a people group well before we can be effective communicators.

Some might ask why contextualization is important. But without careful contextualization the communicator of the gospel runs the risk of sending a garbled message, of misrepresenting the Good News, of creating non-theological barriers to the gospel and in reality making it harder for people to accept Jesus as Lord and Savior.

**Garble the message:** When the people who hear our message receive an impression that is vastly different than what we intended, we have garbled the message and true communication has not taken place.

**Misrepresent the Good News:** When people listen to terms and concepts that are clear in their meanings to us as we attempt to communicate the gospel to them, but if they end up with a skewed understanding of Jesus, forgiveness, salvation, and other biblical topics, we have misrepresented the Good News.

**Create non-theological barriers:** By not being culturally sensitive and not using culturally appropriate terms, we could give the impression that Christi-
anity is a foreign religion and not for the people we are making the presentation
to. Gospel presentations could actually become a hindrance and a barrier to the
very ones we want to introduce to Jesus Christ if we do not do it in a contextual
way.

The necessity of doing contextualization rests on four basic presuppositions. First, the Great Commission must be fulfilled and all people evangelized. Second, no matter how we may define world evangelization, it would include the idea that the people being evangelized have a right to an understandable
hearing of the gospel. Third, contextualization must be true to the authority
and message of the Bible. Fourth, contextualization must relate to the culture,
language, and religion of the people being addressed (Hesselgrave and Rom-

Again, let me say that contextualization is the presentation of the eternal
truths of Scripture within the cultural context of a people. We do not water
down the impact of the Word; we present the truths of the Word to the people
in a culture in such a way that they understand those principles and truths.
Perhaps we should also state that culture is never an excuse for sin. I believe it
is possible to have a deep respect for culture without allowing culture to water
down the impact of the biblical message.

Definition: Syncretism is a word that also needs to be defined, for it is
often part of any discussion dealing with contextualization. Syncretism is the
“blending of one idea, practice, or attitude with another. Traditionally among
Christians it has been used of the replacement or dilution of the essential truths
of the gospel through the incorporation of non-Christian elements” (Moreau
2000:924).

Syncretism is also something that is much easier to see in others’ belief sys-
tem than it is to see in our own. I have a lot of fun in my classes at the seminary
by asking the international students what it is about the American Adventist
Church that they find troubling. Some have responded that they have noticed
a lack of community in the American church where the individual is empha-
sized to the exclusion of the family and the body of Christ. Does the American
tendency towards rugged individualism and independence go against biblical
principles of community and being our brother’s keeper? When the Ameri-
can Church holds such individualistic views in opposition to the principles of
Scripture, is that syncretism?

At the Symposium on Faith Development in Context held at Andrews Uni-
versity in January 2005, Jon Paulien presented a paper entitled “Dealing with
Syncretism in Insider Movements” in which he suggests that “in the process of conversion syncretism will always occur for a time” and “syncretism is always the unintended consequence of a healthy desire to make the gospel relevant” (2005, 4). Then, a little later in the paper Paulien suggests that, “Everyone who makes changes in their faith goes through at least a short period of syncretism” (2005, 13).

This suggestion, that in the process of introducing someone to faith in Jesus Christ everyone goes through a time where they hold a syncretistic blend of true and false beliefs, was troubling to Angel Rodriguez. In his response to Paulien’s paper, Rodriguez stated, “Conversion has traditionally been understood as the action of leaving behind the old way of life and thinking in order to live for the Lord. It is not the blending of intrinsically incompatible ideas, but on the contrary the recognition or realization that they are incompatible. If the term syncretism is to be associated with the conversion process it will have to be defined in a loose way” (2005, 1, 2).

Perhaps an illustration can help us understand what Paulien was suggesting. I was teaching a Bible class to a group of Japanese college students. We had been studying together for several weeks and for that particular night I was teaching about sin. Towards the end of the presentation I made the statement, “We are all sinners, right?” and received a lot of blank looks. Feeling that perhaps they had not understood my question I asked it in Japanese, “Watakushi takushi wa minna sumibito desu ne?” But instead of getting the agreement that I expected they all shook their heads, “no.” I think we sang a song, and had a quick closing prayer. Then I started to explore how the Japanese understand the word “sumi” or “sin” in their language. What I found out was fascinating.

The typical Buddhist Japanese thinks of a sinner as someone who has broken one of the five sila, or moral precepts (Halverson 1996:59) by committing some terrible offense against a person such as rape or murder, who has been caught, and is now being led off in handcuffs to prison. That was the typical Japanese view of sin, so when I said, “We are all sinners, right?” they were totally confused. As soon as I understood the cultural definition of sin I then went on to pour the Christian and biblical meaning of sin into their Japanese word. I taught that the biblical concept included all that the Japanese concept of “sumi” entailed, plus selfishness, plus the idea of not measuring up to perfection, plus offence against a Creator God. What we ended up with was a subgroup of people who understood “sumi,” but not in the traditional Japanese sense. They had added biblical content to the word and now viewed the word in a broader sense
with Christian meanings attached. But for several weeks these people who were coming to faith in Jesus Christ held a mixed concept or a syncretistic blend of old and new in their understanding of sin.

In this particular case what was needed was only an addition of Christian meanings to the traditional Japanese word for sin. However, in those situations where concepts must not only be added, but must also be removed from a word, symbol, or ceremony, the task is even more difficult and the chance of syncretism greater.

Take, for example, the term “Allah” as used by Arabic speaking Christians. Allah, to them, has had biblical meanings attached to the term, while on the other hand, the same word as used by Arabic speaking Muslims has Qur’anic meanings attached to it. In a conversion process an Arabic speaking Muslim would not only need to have biblical meanings added to his understanding of the term, but he would also need to have some of the Qur’anic meanings stripped from the word as he moves towards a biblical understanding. During that process of moving from a Muslim understanding of the term to a Christian understanding of the term syncretistic concepts are present.

This illustrates the hard work of teaching and changing the basic building blocks of a culture and its people. It takes time, but if it is not done, then the people we are witnessing to will not have a biblically shaped worldview and will not understand biblical values and principles. Conversion is always a process, and in that process people move from holding beliefs and practices that oppose biblical principles, to a blend of old and new, and then as the Word of God continues to impact their value system, they move closer and closer to having a biblically shaped worldview and value system. But, in the process of conversion there is the danger of syncretism—the blending of truth and error. For some groups that process may only take a few months, but for others the process leading to a biblically shaped worldview and value system may take several years. The important thing is that people continue to allow the Word of God to shape and direct them in the process. The danger is that people might stop in their spiritual growth before the process is completed.

What is the antidote to syncretism? How do we minimize syncretism in the conversion process? By doing intentional critical contextualization and engaging in good biblical teaching. Whenever we present the Good News in new cultural settings there is the danger of syncretism as people move from the old ways to the new ways in Jesus Christ. The important point in this matter is to never be satisfied in leaving a process uncompleted so that people remain in a
state of syncretism. Intentional critical contextualization and a strong emphasis on the Word are the antidotes that will move people to a healthy understanding of biblical principles. I will share what I mean by critical contextualization later in the paper.

**Issues in Contextualization**

Throughout the history of Christian mission there has been a battle between those who see little need for contextualization and those who are so sensitive to culture that they allow culture to dominate the biblical message and in the process distort that message. These two extremes have been called by various names. Hiebert has referred to these extremes in contextualization as “rejection of contextualization” where there is wholesale denial of the validity of the old cultural ways, where everything in a culture is viewed as evil, pagan, or unfit to be used to communicate the Christian message, and “uncritical contextualization” where cultural practices are accepted wholesale with little concern that the result is gross syncretism (Hiebert 1985:184, 185).

Hesselgrave refers to these two extremes as under-contextualization and over-contextualization (2004:5-7). Jon Paulien has adapted the contextualization model of Phil Parshall (1998:405) to reflect this idea that syncretism could result from two extremes: over-contextualization and under-contextualization. But, both over- and under-contextualization miss the ideal center point where healthy contextualization takes place (Paulien 2005:15).

**A Three-Part Contextualization Continuum**

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<tr>
<th>Low</th>
<th>Healthy Contextualization</th>
<th>High</th>
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<tr>
<td>Under-Contextualization (syncretism)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Over-Contextualization (syncretism)</td>
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Over-Contextualization

Over-contextualization is largely lacking in the Adventist mission experience. In fact, I do not know of any instance where Seventh-day Adventist missionaries over-contextualized by accepting the traditional cultural ways almost in total into the practices of Adventism in a particular culture. Over-contextualization is something that Adventists often accuse other Christian denominations of. Over-contextualization results in christo-paganism, the watering down of Christian distinctives, the blending of Christianity, and the traditional religions with the result that the gospel is distorted and gross syncretism exists.

Those who practice what we would term over-contextualization are very concerned and sensitive towards culture. So, one redeeming factor for those who over-contextualize is that they do not have attitudes of cultural superiority or practice cultural imperialism by being insensitive or riding rough shod over the culture to which they are taking the Good News.

Over-contextualization overlooks the fact that there is good and evil in every culture. Sin is found in the cultural practices of every society, and for the Christian witness not to allow the Word to root out such practices goes against the very purpose of mission. The gospel calls men and women to a new life in Christ, which predisposes a turning from the evil of the past (Hiebert 1985:185).

Under-Contextualization

Under-contextualization occurs when the Christians introducing the Good News to a people group label most of the culture as pagan and unfit to carry the gospel message. In such situations the music forms, architectural styles for religious buildings, marriage and funeral ceremonies, dress, and a host of others cultural forms are rejected. Rejection is based at times on the ethnocentrism of the Christian communicator and at times on the sense that the form is too closely tied to the old cultural practices. Rejection of the local forms can also occur because it is just easier to give new Christians in a new area the songs, Sabbath dress, architectural styles for churches, marriage and funeral ceremonies those forms and practices that the Christian communicator is used to and comfortable with from his home culture.

When whole areas of a culture are written off as not fit for use in the communication of the gospel, the results are often less than what was desired.
When under-contextualization is practiced three major areas of weaknesses surface (Hiebert 1985:184-5). First, there is a tendency, when taking customs and practices away from a people and in the process of labeling them as pagan, to create a cultural vacuum. Christian missionaries then try to fill the vacuum by giving the people substitute customs and practices from the missionary’s home culture. This process often results in the church in that part of the world being viewed as foreign, strange, and dominated by foreign ways and practices. I will give examples of this below that illustrate why under-contextualization is such a barrier to gospel witness.

Second, under-contextualization causes many of the cultural practices of a people to go into hiding, to go underground, with the result that the people continue to practice many of the old ways in secret. This type of syncretism is caused by not dealing with the old ways and by not applying the principles of the Word to the issues in the culture. The result is syncretism as the old fears and beliefs exist underneath but with a veneer of Christian practice on the surface. There are countless examples of this happening in Adventism in many parts of the world, with a lot of such syncretism resulting from a lack of dealing with evil spiritual forces. There is also the sad example of some in the Adventist Church in Rwanda where issues of tribal allegiance were allowed to remain in syncretistic blend with biblical truth that resulted in Adventists killing Adventists.

Third, under-contextualization causes church leaders and missionaries to assume the role of policemen. When the local body of believers is not allowed to or encouraged to apply the principles of God’s Word to their own culture, they learn to live by the rules given to them by the first missionaries. They never grow in their faith to the point where they can assume their proper role as part of the world hermeneutical community of believers who discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. Church leaders in such situations are the rule givers and the rule enforcers—the religious police.

Under-contextualization has been practiced for understandable reasons. Those who under-contextualize often have a deep desire to root out evil practices and beliefs associated with the culture of the people being presented with the Good News. There is a low tolerance for sin and evil in the culture. There is concern that the local forms are too tainted with evil to be used by God in communicating his message.

But Christian workers who are unwilling to work at communicating the gospel through the cultural forms of the people often are themselves tainted
with the view that their culture is a “Christian culture,” whereas the culture to which they go is pagan. Cultural pride and ethnocentrism could be partially responsible for such attitudes. We must also admit that we can more easily see the pagan splinters in other peoples’ culture while we are blind to the pagan planks in our own culture. It is so easy to miss syncretism and sin in our own cultural setting. We must also remember that Adventist mission had its heyday during the age when “manifest destiny” and the “white man’s burden” were common expressions of Western imperialism and ethnocentrism. These are phrases that we find very offensive today, but the results of mission done under that mindset linger on in the form of under-contextualization.

**Examples of Under-Contextualization**

Under-contextualization has occurred in recent Adventist mission history because of unwillingness on the part of some of our evangelists to study and learn about the culture in which they preach. Examples from the 1990s in Russia are painful reminders that traditional evangelistic preaching that ignores the culture and religious practices of a people often leaves the local church with antagonism and hostility.

Evangelists that preach a traditional set message without seeking to understand the local needs, worldview, and values often baptize large numbers of people who retain a syncretistic blend of true and false because many of their areas of confusion and need were not dealt with in the sermons prepared for a Western audience. I am particularly concerned with organizations that send evangelists out with little if any understanding of the local situation. One size does not fit all when it comes to bringing people to Jesus Christ. There must be careful understanding of culture, beliefs, and worldview to allow the Word of God to root out the old and create a new set of beliefs and values.

Several years ago I taught at an Adventist College in the Caribbean. I noticed a very interesting thing about the singing on that campus. On Sabbath morning for Sabbath School and church, singing was done from the *Adventist Hymnal*, but much of the singing was lackluster, done without spirit and passion. Then on Friday evenings on the steps of the library the young people gathered to sing with guitars and to sing the music they had written about the themes of the Sabbath, the second coming and Jesus their Lord. What a contrast! Is it possible that we have given the suggestion that for Sabbath School and church only north Atlantic church music is acceptable to praise God with? Are we perhaps sending the wrong message to Latino young people suggesting
that the music they have written is not good enough for church but can only be used on the steps of the library on Friday nights? Under-contextualization allows for foreign cultural domination and often results in a religious system that looks foreign to the local people.

When I first went to Japan I noticed that an imported custom caused a great deal of discomfort for the Japanese. On those Sabbaths when there was a baptism, the Japanese pastors followed the suggestion of the Church Manual exactly by having the candidate for baptism stand in front of the church while he read the thirteen articles of faith. The candidate stood alone, uncomfortable, feeling almost as if the whole group was involved in her interrogation. No attempt had been made to contextualize the procedure—just a blind following after the suggestions in the Church Manual.

It was more than I could take. The pain was too obvious, so I contextualized the procedure by having the candidate read the statement of faith followed by the whole congregation responding with “I believe that too.” The change of atmosphere was incredible. The person felt that she was a part of a group, that others believed like she did, and that these were people who would support her in her new faith. Under-contextualization can create non-theological barriers that often make it more difficult for people to come to faith in Jesus Christ, or that even prevent them from giving the gospel an honest hearing. The packaging of the gospel in foreign or Western forms is also syncretism, for it mixes culture, another culture, a foreign culture with the biblical message.

When I arrived in Cambodia, the previous administration was requiring the pastors to wear shirts and ties. Those of you who have been to Cambodia know that it is hot and humid, with mud and dust everywhere. Villagers viewed a shirt and tie as foreign, and they then assumed that the religion of those who wore the shirt and tie was also foreign. We made a change, giving the pastors an off-white shirt made with a Chinese collar. It was interesting to learn that village people recognized those who wore such a shirt as a spiritual teacher.

Singing, church ceremonies, and pastoral dress are little things, but they can impact how local people view the message about Jesus Christ. Under-contextualization can distort the message and cause syncretism just as over-contextualization can damage the Christian message. Adventists have under-contextualized in a multitude of areas by not dealing with issues such as fear of evil spiritual forces, dowry, house dedications, field dedications, harvest festivals, naming ceremonies, use of instruments in worship, and use of pictures and symbols.
Avoiding Comfortable Syncretism by Doing Critical Contextualization  499

Is it possible that much more damage has been done to the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church through under-contextualization and its associated syncretism than through over-contextualization? The sad thing about this is that those who would become agitated by over-contextualization because of the obvious syncretism can feel very comfortable with under-contextualization. I have often heard church leaders say, “Isn’t it wonderful, you can go anywhere in the world and our Adventist members sing the same songs, have the same order of worship, and do things just like we do at home.” We are very comfortable with under-contextualization because under-contextualization often produces Christians who look and act just like we do, but with devastating affect in terms of those look-alike Christians being unable to witness effectively in their home cultures. Such Adventist Christians look foreign, feel dominated, and out of sync with the local culture of their friends and neighbors. Under-contextualization produces syncretism just as surely as does over-contextualization by mixing in Western cultural baggage and calling it part of the gospel. As the Global Mission Issues Committee grapples with the challenges of presenting the Good News effectively to the Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Chinese worlds we must not remain comfortable with under-contextualization that also distorts the gospel and creates non-theological barriers that prevent people from hearing a clear gospel presentation. Just because we are more comfortable with the syncretism of under-contextualization should never allow us to complacently accept it.

Critical Contextualization—The Process

Paul Hiebert has suggested an approach to contextualization that has come to be known as critical contextualization (1985:186, 187). Critical contextualization is a four-step process that begins with a deep appreciation for the Word of God. People who are coming to Christ must be brought to a position where they are willing to deal biblically with all areas of their lives. This is a process that needs to be practiced by the Western church as well, as they hold up to the biblical norm issues such as TV and video viewing, dating practices, leisure time and activities, use of disposable income, simplicity, etc.

The second step is to lead the group in looking uncritically at the cultural item or practice. This step involves gathering information. Understanding is sought concerning the deep issues and meaning of the cultural practice.
The third step involves applying biblical passages and principles to the cultural item in question. What aspects of the practice are incompatible with principles of the Word? What aspects are neutral? What aspects are opposed to biblical principles?

The fourth step is the hardest for most church leaders to practice—to let the local people, under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, join in the decision of what they can do and what they cannot do in the light of their understanding of biblical principles and the leading of the Spirit. This is an interactive process where local people are often challenged by the missionary or church leader to look at local issues in new ways and to see things they had never seen in their culture before. This is what the international students at the seminary do for the American church when they challenge us to consider our lack of community. When we are unwilling to let local groups of Christians have an interactive part in deciding such issues, we perpetuate a system that produces weak and dependent Christians who can only accept the rules and practices given them. Those who only live by the rules handed down will never become a full part of a community that reads and discerns the principles of God's Word for themselves.

Critical contextualization needs to be practiced in both the new areas of the world where the gospel is being heard for the first time, but also in the Western world where each generation of Christian believers needs to also hold up to the biblical norm the practices that their generation struggles with. Just last year the General Conference committee took hours going back and forth on a document dealing with music issues. Perhaps we would have a better impact on Adventists around the world if we would teach all age groups how to do critical contextualization.

Case study: A group of inner-city young people in Los Angeles were faced with the question of whether or not they could listen to hard rock music. Most of them were new converts from gangs and drugs and knew well the message and power of contemporary music.

Many Christian parents forbid their children to listen to rock music; they lay down the rule: there will be no listening to rock music in this house. What happens is that the children listen to the music at their friend’s homes, or in secret, so in reality the parents end up being policemen. Other parents just give up and allow their children to listen to whatever they like with their children never learning the lesson of discernment but just accepting the ways of their culture.
The youth leader in the Los Angeles church used critical contextualization in dealing with the rock music issue. He had the young people bring all their CDs of rock music to a Bible study. After a discussion of the meaning of Christian lifestyles and the place of music in one’s life he had the young people play each CD and evaluate it in terms of biblical principles. They destroyed those CDs that contained messages that went against the message of the Word, and kept the rest and listened to them without having guilty consciences. The next Sunday they brought their broken CDs and presented them to the church. There was no longer any need for parents or church leaders to monitor their listening habits. They had learned discernment for themselves (Hiebert 1985:190, 191). Perhaps we would do well to teach our members biblical discernment by learning how to do critical contextualization.

Ongoing Challenges to Contextualization Within Adventism

There are at least three areas where ongoing challenges exist that hinder the Adventist Church from being able to maintain healthy contextualization throughout its various levels.

Leadership Awareness of Missiological Issues

As the Seventh-day Adventist Church becomes more international and diverse, it is more and more important that leaders at all levels of the Church be given opportunity to understand cross-cultural issues and be trained to think missiologically. Why? They must have a clear missiological understanding of cultural issues. Without this widespread understanding what one leader builds up in developing a contextualized ministry, the next leader dismantles. It is much easier to destroy contextualized ministries in the Church today then it is to build them. Why? Again, because it is easier to and there is more comfort in syncretism at the under-contextualization level than there is at the over-contextualization level. It is comfortable to see people worshipping, and dressing, and doing things just like us. It is the rare person who works intentionally to help people become a hermeneutical community that grapples with how to live within abiblically shaped worldview. It is easier to give rules based on my cultural understanding of life than to do the hard work of understanding the culture of others and allowing the gospel to work through that culture. So what
is the solution? I believe the solution includes widespread education of leaders at all levels of the organization concerning the issues of ethnocentrism, how culture affects our perception of reality, and even our reading of the Word; it includes an understanding of the process of contextualization and training in cultural sensitivity issues.

Ministerial Training That Teaches On Cultural Issues

Seven years ago Dr. Wiklander suggested in his paper that “ministerial training programs need to offer balanced training” in the areas of contextualization. All of us on this committee know that to be effective in cross-cultural situations one must not only know the Word of God well, but must also understand the people to whom we wish to share the Good News with. Yet, as far as I know, Avondale College is the only place where a B.A. in Theology degree offered by any Adventist college requires students to do any study in cultural anthropology or in the area of missiology. Mission classes that stress topics like worldview, culture, contextualization, and that encourage sensitivity towards people of other cultures, ethnicity, and religions are usually only offered at the M.A. level. In many parts of the world only a few Adventist pastors are trained to the M.A. level. Unless we begin teaching cultural sensitivity at the B.A. level, we will perpetuate the current problem with future generations of Adventist pastors, leaders, and teachers, so that they, too, will have the same difficulties understanding why other people do things in different ways.

General Conference Documents That Model Contextualization

The General Conference has a responsibility to model a contextualized approach in its documents and guidelines. We have all sat on committees that have worked on long, complicated documents that spell out lifestyle issues and practices in great detail. It is easier to govern by edict, and it is easy to issue guidelines and policy papers that spell out how to live and act. But would it not be better to teach all levels of the church to do critical contextualization so that each segment of the Adventist Church could become a hermeneutical body of believers, applying the principles of God’s Word to their cultural situations. I firmly believe that instead of more guidelines, more time should be
spent teaching the principles to guide each people group in doing critical contextualization. Perhaps more time of the General Conference should be spent in teaching principles to guide in decision making than sending down the line of command lists of guidelines on music, dress, eating, simplicity, etc. If we could inculcate the principles of critical contextualization in the hearts and minds of all people groups in our church we would have far fewer issues to deal with administratively. Perhaps we need seminars that teach and deal with the issues. We could start right here in North America teaching this generation of Seventh-day Adventists how to do critical contextualization with the cultural issues of Sabbath observance, dress and adornment, music, and simplicity. Other parts of the world would have other issues to grapple with such as life cycle rituals, funerals, weddings, birth ceremonies, liturgy, places of worship, dealing with evil spirits, charms, magic, and a host of issues that are non-issues for many of us. But that is the point. We can never issue enough guidelines to cover all the issues. We would be better off teaching each group of people how to apply the Word to their situation.

We have mentioned the danger of over and under-contextualization, and we have suggested critical contextualization as the preferred approach; but what are some safeguards that can maintain doctrinal unity in our church?

**Safeguards for Contextualization**

Whenever contextualization is in progress there must be safeguards that act as a check and balance for those situations where the process leaves the center “Ideal Contextualization” area and begins to move into the dangerous, syncretistic, over-contextualization areas. Hiebert suggested three important safeguards: (1) the Word of God that is taken as the final authority for faith and practice, (2) the belief in the priesthood of all believers that assumes that the Holy Spirit is capable of guiding all Seventh-day Adventists in helping them apply the principles of the Word to their lives, and (3) the realization that the task of contextualization is not the work for a few individuals, but is a responsibility that the whole church should be engaged in. The church, from different regions of the world, has the responsibility to give counsel and advice to the church in other parts of the world. There is no room for lone rangers or people insisting in doing their own things without being willing to open the discussion to the larger hermeneutical community (Hiebert 1985:191, 192).
Conclusion and Recommendations

The topic of contextualization is relevant to this Global Mission Issues Committee because every person in God’s creation has the right to hear the gospel in understandable terms.

It is normal for people to be ethnocentric, mono-cultural, see things only from their perspective, think that their way of thinking and viewing God and religious topics is the only correct way, and believe that their styles of music, worship forms, and order of worship are normative and the RIGHT way to do things. However, this “normal way,” if applied to mission results in under-contextualization leading to syncretism that creates non-theological barriers that keep people from accepting Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

As we increase our mission activities in the Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, and Buddhist worlds, and as we bring an ever-increasing number of people from those areas of our world to faith in Jesus Christ, we must no longer westernize before we Christianize. Therefore the members of this committee, who are the leaders of the world divisions, should seriously consider what each of us could do to begin to change this situation. I offer the following recommendations as starting points:

1. Recommended that the Global Mission Issues Committee request General Conference leadership to commission a major revision of the Church Manual to reflect sensitivity to the issues facing a world church with much diversity and many cultures.

   We have a long-term member of this committee, Pat Gustin, who will be retiring in just a couple of months. Perhaps she could be commissioned to make an initial draft of what such a Church Manual would look like.

2. Recommended that the Education Department, Ministerial Association, and the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) (General Conference Working Policy 2003-2004:233-7) work to incorporate in the B.A. curriculum for religion and theology majors a course on Missionary Anthropology that will develop missiological skills, encourage cultural sensitivity, and teach the process of doing critical contextualization among the next generation of Adventist pastors.

3. Recommended that the Institute of World Mission be asked to conduct seminars for each division with two purposes in mind: (1) to train Adventist leadership at all levels in cross-cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and showing how culture can be used for God’s glory in reaching unreached
peoples, and (2) to train trainers for each division to continue the education of all levels of leadership concerning the need for contextualized approaches.

Let us not be complacent and do nothing, for doing nothing continues the practice of under-contextualization that leads to syncretism, builds barriers that keep people from hearing a clear presentation of God’s Good News, and in the end denies people the right to hear the gospel clearly in their own cultural context.

When the people of Russia or China or Turkey or Cambodia walk down the street and pass a Seventh-day Adventist church and hear singing, they deserve to hear music from their part of the world and not imported music from Europe or America. When people in the Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu world look at an Adventist church in their part of the world, they deserve to see a building that is culturally appropriate and not a replica of a church in Kansas. Animistic peoples from Asia, Africa, Oceania, Europe, and the Americas deserve theological answers to their questions, and not just answers to questions being asked in the secular West. We dare not allow under-contextualization to erect non-theological barriers that keep large numbers of the world’s unreached people from having an understandable hearing of the gospel. If people reject Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, I want them to reject him because they do not want to obey and follow him, not because I mixed my gospel presentation with my foreign culture.

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In the years leading up to the 1990 General Conference session at Indianapolis, the Adventist Church became increasingly aware of the challenge faced in the parts of the world that were as yet virtually unreached. God’s blessing throughout 100 years of Adventist mission had created strong, vibrant churches in the former mission fields of Central and South America, most of sub-Sahara Africa, the islands of the Pacific, and a few pockets in Asia. But the reality of “the land that remains” was pushing the Adventist Church to begin to think of mission in new and innovative ways. As the concept of reaching the unreached grew in the hearts of many church leaders, the need to create new strategies to face this challenge became apparent. Adventists realized that the greatest challenge facing the church was reaching the areas of the world where there was previously little or no success—the Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, and secular/postmodern worlds.
To help meet this challenge, the office of Global Mission was established at the 1990 General Conference session with the special mandate to find ways to take the Three Angels’ Messages to these unreached and hard to reach people, and where Adventists had not worked with any major success before.

Over the next few years, the Global Mission Study Centers were developed one by one. Each one had the mandate to work for one of the major unreached groups and to accomplish the following: (1) “to evaluate ongoing models, programs, and current literature with the purpose of refining and developing more effective models of evangelism, (2) to participate with planning teams in analyzing specific people groups, developing plans, and evaluating results, (3) to facilitate field testing model strategies whose purpose is to ‘establish an SDA presence among selected groups,’ and (4) to communicate the strengths and weaknesses of past or ongoing models of evangelism” (Guidelines for the Religious Study Centers n.d.:1).

In summary, the centers were commissioned to evaluate current methods and strategies; to develop new and different methods; and to experiment and run pilot programs focused on reaching the various groups they represented. The Office of Global Mission also began the Global Mission Pioneer program, eventually sending thousands of minimally-trained, dedicated lay persons to work in unentered areas in their own countries, pioneering the work among the unreached. Since 1990 many new initiatives have been tried by the Global Mission Study Centers and Global Mission Pioneers. As a result, we have seen the Lord’s blessing in many areas that had previously been resistant.

Almost immediately, however, questions began to arise about methods and materials that would be most effective. It quickly became apparent that many standard ways of doing evangelism would be impossible or virtually ineffective.

The Global Mission Study Centers then began the process of experimenting with new approaches and methods that would enable them to reach the unreached groups. Out of this situation, a whole new set of mission-driven questions emerged, leading the Adventist Church to establish the Global Mission Issues Committee which met for the first time in January 1998 at the General Conference headquarters with Elders Jan Paulsen and Mike Ryan leading out. The Issues Committee has met yearly since then.

From 1997 to 1999 several significant papers addressing some of the pressing questions arising out of the work of the Global Mission Study Centers and the Global Mission Pioneers were presented by respected church leaders. In January 1998, Dr. B. B. Beach presented a paper entitled, “The Church, Struc-
tural Organization, and Acculturation.” Dr. Jerald Whitehouse prepared two papers, the first of which was also presented at the 1998 Issues Committee entitled “Developing New Church Structures for More Effective Mission, Nurture, and Growth of New Believers,” and the second one was entitled, “Critical Contextualization and Beyond: How Shall We Move in a Pluralistic World?” For the same January 1998 Global Mission Issues Committee, Dr. Bertil Wiklander, president of the Trans-European Division, presented a paper entitled, “The Boundaries of Contextualization in Mission: How Flexible and Absolute Are They? What Principles Should Guide the Church?” Then in 1999 Dr. Russell Staples presented a paper titled “Contextualization, Church and Confessions.”

In these papers church leaders grappled with the very challenging issue of the difficulties and limits of adapting methods, message, and organization to effectively reach and nurture those from cultures and religious traditions vastly removed from the Christianity of the West.


Before examining, in some detail, what has happened since 1998 and 1999, I would like to briefly review some of the major points made in the papers that were presented at those meetings.

**The Necessity for Contextualization and Adaptation**

One of the issues addressed in those early papers was why this discussion on contextualization and adaptation is so important. The core reason adaptations must be made was addressed by Dr. Wiklander. He stated, “In our discussions of the boundaries of contextualization . . . we must keep the practical realities of Global Mission in mind” (Wiklander 1998:2). “Our mission is completed only when the receivers have had a fair chance of hearing and understanding the message—on their terms, not ours” (Wiklander 1998:4). Wiklander went on to make a practical application of this principle by referring to the work of Paul with the Athenians:

How would these Greeks understand the Word of God? By their culture and views, they were extremely distant from the proclamation of the gospel. No Old Testament
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Scriptures, no Jewish tradition, no expectation for Messiah, no eschatology, no belief in the resurrection, but a rich Greek heathen tradition. Paul has to preach the gospel in a Greek “pagan” way. His boldness leaves me impressed. First, he establishes a good relationship with the Athenians, which is a way of building trust. . . . Then he makes a connection with idolatry by referring to an altar and the inscription ‘to an unknown God.’ There is not a word of criticism or judgment against idolatry here. . . . If he wants to be understood and save them, he must disregard his own knowledge and operate at the level of the receivers. Nobody would accuse Paul of idolatry or apostasy, although in his proclamation he not only refers to altars and inscriptions of idols, but he also quotes a piece of Greek pagan poetry, written by the Stocist poet Aratos (310-240 B.C.) taken from a context where the words are referring to the pagan god Zeus. . . . He argues in their conceptual framework in order to make them hear and understand the word of God (Wiklander 1998:10).

Dr. Wiklander clearly stated that there is a need for a “totally different style of evangelism” (Wiklander 1998:2). The “why” of contextualization and adaptation in all areas is answered with the very practical answer that there is a necessity for receptor-oriented communication. This is essential.

Different Organizational Structures For Special Circumstances

One of the early papers given by B. B. Beach gave a rational for the need to consider a variety of organizational structures. Beech very aptly outlined the special circumstances that have historically been addressed by the church in creative and pragmatic ways.

There are special situations which can only be effectively met by special organizational approaches. This we have done in various ways. Where it has not been feasible to organize churches, we have organized companies. In some areas we organize districts, with district leaders. In some countries it has been felt that neither a conference nor a union conference fits the bill, and we have organized unions of churches. In other places we have “attached unions” or “attached conferences.” Where local churches have not been permitted, we have had house churches. These do not fit into our regular structure, but the system works under the circumstances. Where it has not been possible to send missionaries or regular employed workers, “tentmakers” have been sent. Modified organizational terminology has been used, such as “field” or “diocese” instead of conference or mission. Other terms for president have been used where this term is not permitted. In places where our churches were closed, the people have met under trees. Where the use of banks, regular accounting and auditing were not permitted or caused a serious disadvantage for the church, these methods were abandoned. Where the church was banned, underground or secret churches, committees and cash
transactions have been used. Much of this is not in harmony with the organizational policies of the church, but in harmony with pragmatic pursuit of the church's mission (Beach 1998:4, 5).

**Security, Religious Liberty Issues, and Alternative Forms of Organization**

Dr. Beach addressed a further reason for extreme flexibility in organizational practice under certain unique circumstances.

There are areas in the world where the church can function in a regular organizational way. There are places where in order to function, the organizational structures have to be adapted or changed. Then there are places where the religious liberty situation is such that the church cannot function in an organized way at all. Where this is not possible, Adventist pragmatism dictates that other approaches should and must be used (Beach 1998:5).

Dr. Beach leaves no question about the historical wisdom of our church in adapting in very practical ways to the various challenges that different situations, cultures, and political and economic realities have created.

The compelling question of security and religious liberty was further discussed by Dr. Jerald Whitehouse. “The issue of security for both the existing church and the new ministry for an unreached group who are generally hostile towards Christianity is also a factor in looking at new structures or even separate structures for certain groups” (Whitehouse 1997:2).

**Working in Areas with Traditional Hostilities and Prejudices**

The presence of local prejudices and hostile histories among groups within a country was an additional reason given for the need for alterative forms of organization at times. In this context, Dr. Jerald Whitehouse raises the question, “If that [local SDA] congregation for whatever reasons—historic prejudices, social class disparities, protectionism, ethnic hatreds . . . is unable to reach out to a large unreached block in its territory, what do we do” (Whitehouse 1997:2)? He then suggests that under such circumstances our best choice is to work through an alternative organization or structure.
The work being facilitated by the Study Centers is resulting in new believer groups which are not able for various reasons to integrate into the existing local church. This has resulted in the establishment of new structures in order to provide nurture and allow for new growth among the new believers and to protect the existing church (Whitehouse 1997:1). The existing [traditional] structures have simply been unable to effectively implement mission initiatives for the major non-Christian blocks. The reasons are many, (1) ethnic prejudices, (2) the identity of the established SDA Church with the West (considered to be totally corrupt, immoral, etc.), and (3) the identity of the SDA Church with the rest of Christendom (Whitehouse 1997:2).

Dr. Bruce Bauer addressed this same issue of security in a paper presented at the Faith Development in Context Symposium held at Andrews University in January 2005. In his paper, Dr. Bauer examined the work of the house church movement in Vietnam and the organizational structures that guide and monitor it. He began his paper, however, by reminding us of some of the challenges the Adventist Church has faced in working in other challenging areas.

More recently, in countries with predominantly Muslim populations, the Adventist Church has experimented with a contextualized ministry approach that encourages faith development from within the Muslim community. For security purposes it is vital that the Adventist Church members remain separated from the remnant believers who have grown in their faith within the Muslim context. Danger and the necessity for a safe place within Islam where interested people can explore the truths in Scripture have created a situation in which parallel structures exist side by side, with both groups sharing similar beliefs (Bauer 2005:1).

**What Has God Wrought?**

Seven years have passed since the Global Mission Issues Committee met for the first time, when the issues of contextualization and alternate organizational structures were presented and grappled with. The questions that can be fairly asked as we look back at the years since these actions were first taken, are the following: What has happened? Has the mission of the church to reach the unreached and apparently resistant peoples been more or less successful? Have we seen greater growth among some of these groups? Are those coming to faith in a more contextualized environment becoming stronger, more mature Christians over time, or are we seeing evidences of a weakening of church beliefs and standards and the inroads of syncretism? To answer these questions, we will look briefly at several specific areas.
The first group we will consider is the work among Muslims in three specific areas. **Southeast Asia:** In 1990 in one Asian country there were approximately twenty-two church members with Muslim backgrounds and only two of these were active in church work. By 1997 after only a few years of following a more contextualized approach, the number of believers from Muslim backgrounds in that same country had grown to around 2,000. Today there are approximately 8,000 baptized believers who are able to continue living, working, and witnessing in their own communities.

**Africa:** In a strongly Muslim country there are approximately 4,500 believers from a Muslim background who have been baptized since 1998. In that same country, there is the potential for hundreds of thousands of additional Muslims coming to faith.

In another predominantly Muslim area of Africa where there had been less than ten baptisms of people from a Muslim background in the previous thirty years, approximately 2,500 new converts with Muslim backgrounds have been baptized in two separate movements in the last two to three years (Whitehouse 2005:1).

Other areas that challenge us organizationally are places with governments that are hostile to Christianity, with restrictions on evangelization, and in some cases even restricting meetings for worship.

**Asia:** In one Asian country, the official work of the church has been reduced to only six functioning churches, with only three of them being strong. The number of active members has dropped to around 700, although there are over 7,000 on the books. But the “secret” or “house church” movement in that country has been able to flourish. Though the official statistics are difficult to obtain for obvious reasons, we know of over 350 congregations meeting regularly in house churches and over 17,500 members who have either been baptized or are waiting for baptism (Duong 2005:1).

**Cambodia:** In this Asian country where the church has been planted quite recently, a more contextualized approach has been used extensively. Bible lessons, ceremonies, worship style, hymnody, church architecture, etc., are very different from those traditionally used in Western-style churches. But the growth of a strong church in such a short time has been exciting.

Finally, I will mention the work for Jewish people. Since the beginning of the Jewish-Adventist Friendship Center and the beginning of a contextualized approach for Jewish people that includes worship styles, music, ways and content of “preaching,” etc., the number of worship groups with believ-
ers from Jewish backgrounds both in Israel and in other parts of the world has increased dramatically. The statistics are as follows: **Israel:** Churches and members in 1998, 5 churches, 220 members; today, 29 churches, 950 members; **Worldwide:** Contextualized Jewish-Christian synagogues before 1998, 2 or 3 in South America; today, 27 or 28 worldwide. **Baptisms:** Since 1998 approximately 1,000 people from Jewish backgrounds have come to faith through a more contextual approach (Elofer 2005:1).

There is no doubt that numerically the church has grown in each of these previously resistant areas during the last seven years. In humility and awe we can only say, “What has God wrought!”

**What Are the Long-Term Benefits?**

The next question we must ask, however, is what results (aside from numerical growth) have been achieved. We are all aware of the fact that numerical growth, in itself, is not adequate. We must also be concerned about quality and what happens over time. What about discipleship and nurture? What about on-going spiritual growth? What about the witness of the new believers or the new community? What are the long-term results of these contextualized approaches and methods as well as alternative organizational structures that are definitely “outside the box” of normal church policy and structure?

All the evidence indicates that the contextualization of worship forms, methods, and even message, have made the Adventist faith “real” and meaningful both to converts and seekers who come from backgrounds so far removed and different from Christianity. New converts can pray, learn, and grow in a context that reaches their heart, and answers their life questions.

Converts have been able to maintain their identity within their local communities without either (1) committing cultural suicide and becoming so “other” that they cease to be effective witnesses, or (2) endangering their lives so that they have to be extracted from their communities for safety’s sake. This means that in hundreds of villages where these new believers live, they have been enabled to sustain a presence and a witness within their communities.

The potential for lasting life transformation has also been greatly increased by an approach that, more sensitively, answers their questions about life and religion. Contextualized approaches have been able to address people’s deepest questions with solid Adventist, biblical answers. In turn, this makes the message (1) more relevant to the hearers, and (2) much more likely to effect con-
version at the worldview level. This level of change can only happen when we address the “heart” issues of the hearers.

Finally, these new believers and churches remain as a witnessing body. We must always remember that because our mission is to reach people in every nation, family, language, and culture, each Seventh-day Adventist Church has a multiple mandate: (1) to nurture believers, (2) to disciple and nurture new believers—those who have recently come to faith by providing a “home” in which they can grow and mature, and (3) to reach those in the communities who have not yet come to faith. A church that has lost touch with the local culture and has become totally “alien” may nurture old believers who have become accustomed to its foreignness, but that church will only appear strange and unattractive to new converts and unreached local people. Every Adventist Church needs to ask itself on a regular basis what its appeal is to the unchurched, unreached people around it.

In summary, it seems clear that to meet all of these challenges, the more contextualized approach is proving effective. New converts coming out of religions and cultures that are totally different from Western Christianity are being nurtured and are growing in an environment that is familiar, comfortable, and sensitive to their challenges, their questions about life, and their concerns. At the same time, these churches are able to continue reaching out to those who have not yet come to faith. Their churches are easily recognized as places of worship and they speak a “language” that the average non-churched person in that culture can understand.

**Biblical and Historical Guidelines**

In his worship presentation, Dr. Gorden Doss reminded us of the first Global Mission Issues Committee, recorded in Acts 15 (Doss 2005). This general church meeting, driven by the needs and challenges of mission, is of extreme significance to us today. In Acts 15 several principles for mission today are emphasized:

1. The Gentile converts were not expected to commit cultural suicide to become believers. Even though Christians at that time were almost 100 percent Jewish, the leaders, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, were able to see the necessity of allowing for diversity in many aspects of church life and practice.
2. The leaders determined that they should not lay heavy burdens on the new Gentile converts, but should make it as easy as possible for them to believe (Acts 15:19).

3. Nothing would be required that was not absolutely necessary to maintain the integrity of the church and the only things actually forbidden were those that would jeopardize the faith of the new Christians.

Looking back at history, it is possible to see that for various reasons the church has, at times, had to function in very “unorthodox” ways. For many different reasons, first-century Christians were loosely organized—in house churches which at times met openly and at other times in secret. Elders, deacons, and overseers were eventually appointed, but the extent of their organizational responsibilities is unclear. There was obviously some structure provided by the “mother churches” in Palestine and Syria, but travel, economics, distance, and eventually persecution made it impossible to keep the churches organized in a way we would recognize today. The survival of the church and its witness demanded flexibility.

During the times of the Waldensees, the early reformers, and even into the time of the Protestant reformation, the survival of the church required extreme creativity in organization and structure, and even the need for secrecy at times. In recent history our own church has adapted again and again to the necessity for alternate organizational structures. Russia, China, Burma, Hungary, Romania, Albania, and North Korea (to mention just a few) are whole countries that for years operated with virtually no structure. There are significant biblical and historical precedents for a variety of structures that allow the church to spread and grow in safe and meaningful ways. However, there are significant questions we need to address as we move ahead in this area.

**Valid Concerns and Questions**

Some concerns we must consider as we examine what has happened to date and what we must face in the future are: (1) What kind of believers have resulted from these new methods and structures? (2) How can the church assess the results? (3) How can we be sure that new churches and converts are properly nurtured to prevent heresy and syncretism? (4) How can we monitor progress to improve biblical soundness and the quality of leadership?

Without a doubt these questions all need to be considered by the world church if it is to retain a unity of basic belief and essential practices around
the world. The fact, however, that there could be potential problems does not mean that the contextualized approach and alternative structures are at fault. The success we have seen both numerically and in quality of converts cannot be challenged. The difficulties we now face because of our “success” should simply challenge us to deal with them directly, rather than throw out the methods. To deal with these challenges, the following suggestions have been made in the past and should now be reconsidered.

**Guidelines**

The issue of parallel (or alternative) structures is one that has been discussed previously. Quite rightly it raised questions and concerns. The need to consider how to deal with such situations, however, remains obvious. In light of the practical realities that face the Adventist Church in many areas of the world, the challenge seems to be not “whether” the denomination should relate to these new realities, but how to do it well. Dr. Bertil Wiklander wisely stated, “The church needs to have a procedure for how and by whom the work of application is to be carried out. . . . The daily application of the ethics of social behavior and church life would rather be the responsibility of the local church where a larger degree of understanding of local cultural codes may exist” (Wiklander 1998:6).

As a guideline, I would suggest that the unity and diversity of the Church may be best preserved by (1) recognizing that the General Conference has the overarching responsibility for determining the core issues that constitute Adventism, but that this work needs to be carried out with flexibility and openness, through constant dialogue with Adventists in local cultures, and (2) that this interaction may be facilitated if the General Conference would focus on general principles of biblical theology and the theology of ethics that may then be applied locally in various forms in ethical behavior and church life. This approach would have an effect on the current shape of the *Church Manual* (Wiklander 1998:6).

In a paper presented at the symposium on Faith Development in Context, Dr. Bruce Bauer analyzed the various challenges that arise as the Adventist Church seeks to monitor, nurture, and maintain the church under alternative (parallel) circumstances. “Parallel structures, by their very definition, are committed to mirroring the beliefs of the SDA Church. Parallel means there is no divergence. But just as parallel train tracks need ties to keep them parallel, so
also the emerging parallel structures need ties to the denominational structure to maintain unity” (Bauer 2005:9).

Bauer then suggested several possible ways to develop these “ties.”
1. A supervisory committee that meets regularly to help oversee the details of the work.
2. An administrative body (mission, union, or division) that recognizes the group and works directly with the supervisory committee.
3. Oversight by the Global Mission Study Center director dealing with that area.
4. Assigning of a General Conference vice president to continue to be a liaison person with the supervisory committee that deals with the movement to keep the wider church informed of events, challenges, and growth.
5. Development of literature specifically designed for both evangelism and nurture of the group.
6. Development of assessment tools to track and assess the movement on a regular basis.
7. Recording of members at some level (at a place and in a way that is secure for the members) to promote a sense of responsibility to them by the wider church (Bauer 2005:9).

Bauer then lists several key areas that need to be considered: (1) maintaining administrative linkage, (2) guiding leadership selection and ordination, (3) fostering accountability, (4) maintaining orthodoxy, (5) promoting honesty and integrity (Bauer 2005:9, 10).

To these I would add the daunting challenge of ensuring continuity when various entities work without the following: (1) sufficient coordination, (2) adequate training in cross-cultural and contextual guidelines and methods, (3) appropriate literature and materials for either evangelism or discipleship, and (4) long-range plans of how to sustain the work beyond the initial “church planting phase” after which funds frequently are withdrawn, leaving new converts without leadership and other support.

Where to From Here?

When looking at the biblical and historical precedents for alternative forms of church organization and structure, it seems clear that the Adventist Church should not turn back now. If Adventism is going to finish the work and reach the unreached parts of this world, it must be flexible. But Adventism must also
find ways to ensure that syncretism and heresy do not creep in. Guidelines and safeguards need to be in place.

To begin with, if the Adventist Church wishes to avoid syncretism and heresy, it must continue to seek for ways to truly nurture new converts, no matter what their background, so that they become strong, Bible-based Seventh-day Adventists. To be truly effective such nurture must be unique to each of the various religious backgrounds from which these converts come, must be done in a fully contextualized way, addressing their worldview issues that are contrary to the gospel, and must answer the life questions growing out of their background, beliefs, and culture.

Adventist Church leaders need to continue to search for ways to put into practice the words of James at the Jerusalem Council: “It is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God” (Acts 15:19).

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Editor’s Note: At the conclusion of each year’s Global Mission Issues Committee a writing committee prepares written recommendations to the Administrative Committee of the General Conference (ADCOM) with the understanding that the Biblical Research Institute will be involved in the editing process. In 2005 one recommendation was prepared dealing with guidelines for alternate organizational structures and administrative relationships.

Guidelines on Alternative Organizational Structures and Administrative Relationships

Recommended 5 April 2005

Background

General Conference Working Policy B 05 35 provides for variations in administrative relationships for the purpose of fulfilling the mission of the church. Under certain circumstances such variations may be called for by a need to experiment with modifications in territories where unusual economic, political, geographic, religious, or demographic circumstances prevail, or where strategic purposes make normal organizational structures and administrative relationships impractical or inefficient.
The provisions made by this policy, however, do not cater for situations where work among unreached people groups has resulted in the formation of communities of believers that, while sharing much or all of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, must be kept separate from the church organization, operating either as an underground fellowship, or as a fellowship that remains locked into its own cultural context.

The world church has established an office to study global opportunities and challenges affecting the church’s mission. In addition various study centers have been set up to facilitate a greater understanding of various people groups. These centers function in an advisory role to the infrastructure of the church.

The following guidelines provide direction on how church leaders may manage organizational structures and administrative relationships in such circumstances.

**Definitions**

A “special arrangement structure” (SAS) is a general term for the organizational structure and administrative relationships that involve non-traditional movements which seek full cooperation with the official Seventh-day Adventist Church, but which are prevented from doing so by external circumstances.

A “special affinity group” (SAG) refers to a community which sees itself as an “Advent movement” while possibly being unaware of the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The only way for such groups to survive is to remain in their context without an organizational link with the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

**Process for Special Arrangement Structures (SAS)**

The processes identified here relate either to the initiation of a new SAS or to the acceptance of an already existing SAS. In both cases, the Special Arrangement Structure must function at a distance from the church, because normal operations would greatly restrict mission opportunities.

1. For a new SAS to be initiated by the church, the division needs to approve the venture based on the understanding of a new community as defined above.

2. The division should appoint a co-ordinator and a supervisory committee to look after the needs of the SAS community. The co-ordinator needs to
have special training for the task and will report to the supervisory committee chaired by a division officer.

3. The duties of the supervisory committee would include:
   a. Provide guidance for the operation of the SAS.
   b. Prepare guidelines for the organization of the SAS and monitor and supervise their implementation.
   c. Prepare guidelines for quality assurance of leaders and members to ensure faithfulness to the Bible.
   d. Prepare guidelines for financial accountability and the use of tithe.
   e. Prepare guidelines on administrative accountability at all levels.
   f. Coordinate development and production of literature, media, and other resources.
   g. Develop and implement a plan for an efficient leadership system that includes recruiting, training, ordaining, mentoring, and if necessary the dismissal of leaders.
   h. Progressively improve linkages with the church.
   i. Recommend the appointment of specific leaders to the division.
   j. Plan for integration with the church, when the time comes.
   k. Provide guidelines for communications.
   l. The coordinator will be responsible for the preparation of an annual assessment report for the division.

4. If possible, all basic administrative units in the SAS shall have a constituency voice.

**Process for Special Affinity Groups (SAG)**

The processes identified here relate either to the initiation of a new SAG or to establishing relations to an already existing SAG. In both cases, the Special Affinity Group must fulfill the criteria for a Faith Development in Context model, i.e., it remains in its cultural and religious context.

1. For a new SAG to be initiated by the church, the division needs to approve the venture based on the recognition that the new community will exist in an unreached people group or territory, and that it will contribute to the further spreading of the gospel there.

2. The church may assign a liaison and a consulting body to look after the needs of the SAG community. The liaison needs to have special training for the task and will report to the consulting committee chaired by a division officer.
3. The duties of the consulting committee would include:
   a. Functions related to local leaders in the SAG:
      Suggest guidelines for leadership selection;
      Assist project leader with recruitment/assessment and training plans;
      Suggest criteria for ordination.
   b. Functions related to faith development:
      Receive information regarding the theological teaching and its development in the SAG community and issue advice where feasible;
      Plan for integration with the church, when the time comes.
   c. Functions related to material production:
      Coordinate development of literature, media, and other resources.
   d. Provide advice and guidelines to the liaison that may bring the organization and faith development in the SAG into the closest possible harmony with the Church.

Editor's Note: No ADCOM action has been taken on this recommendation to date.