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A Principle-Based Model of Discipleship to Shape the Church as an Organic Community of Believers

Joel C. Barrios

Andrews University

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ABSTRACT

A PRINCIPLE-BASED MODEL OF DISCIPLESHIP TO SHAPE THE CHURCH AS AN ORGANIC COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

by

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Title: A PRINCIPLE-BASED MODEL OF DISCIPLESHIP TO SHAPE THE CHURCH AS AN ORGANIC COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

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Problem

Modernism and postmodernism are considered the first global worldviews. While modernism is marked by the quest for absolute truth through scientific explanations of reality, postmodernism is a reaction that denies the objectivity of all human explanations that claim to be valid as meta narratives. During the last 60 years the Seventh-day Adventist Church, following the cultural trends of Christianity in general, has developed a “modern” model of discipleship based mainly on orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Although this model has helped church members to know what is the “right” belief and to define what is a “Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle,” it appears to have failed to bring worldview transformation among members. Hence, it has demonstrated to be inefficient to reach the postmodern mind.
How can postmodern minds be discipled by a discipleship model that is based on modern assumptions? This is a ministerial oxymoron. Jesus addressed this kind of ministry challenge in his days when he said: “And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined” (Luke 5:37).

Method

A discipleship model based on principles was developed to be applied in a local multicultural Seventh-day Adventist Church in order to confront modern and postmodern assumptions. A strategy was set in order to convey the contents of principle based discipleship through mentoring relationships, creating communal spaces in this particular context, to experience God, and to grow healthy relationships among members.

Results

The application of a principle based model of discipleship helped people to experience a departure from worldly worldviews to the worldview of the kingdom of God. The success of this project cannot only be measured by some quantitative figures but by signs of a spiritual life that are experienced among members. These signs are growing relationships, unity, active mission, and community impact.

Conclusions

Jesus introduced the message of the kingdom saying: “Repent” (Matt 3:2). The idea of worldview transformation is embedded in the term “repentance.” That was the aim of Jesus’ way of doing discipleship. Jesus did not present in his discipleship model abstract theological concepts. He strictly taught relationship principles that were grounded in the character of God. That must be the content of every Christian
discipleship endeavor and will be the cause of the expansion of God’s kingdom on this earth, challenging every human worldview.

Principle-based discipleship is a practical example of critical contextualization. It presents a real living alternative for every human being, confronting modern and postmodern assumptions by an articulated biblical model. Beyond that, the application of this model will shape the community of believers to experience organic order to form the church as a living and united organism.
Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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A Project Dissertation
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

It was summer. I was doing my field practice to complete my bachelor’s degree and I was talking with the evangelist about my goals in ministry. At some point in the conversation he interrupted me and said, “When I was young I thought the same way you do, but as time went on, I came to the conclusion that I had to give up my dreams and principles if I wanted to be promoted.” This shocked me, and after a moment of silence, I replied, “I don’t think you did the right thing.” “You’ll see,” he said, “if you keep the dreams you have today, you are going to end up pastoring a little country church.”

Problem

After pastoring for about 22 years, I have seen that God has great blessings for those who serve him either in big churches or country churches, either at conferences or unions. However, I have worked under the leadership of many pastors and only in recent years I have started to hear more about the need of being aligned with the principles of the kingdom of God in our endeavors. I have been in too many meetings discussing doctrines, policies, procedures, goals, and many other topics but not principles. I have had the opportunity to visit different parts of the world and have noticed that wherever I have been, the church’s structures and polices are mostly the same worldwide, but values change according to the values of the leader in office or the culture in which our
organization is established. Where does the problem lay? This study intends to demonstrate that the problem lays in our way of doing discipleship.

We have spent much energy trying to define our doctrinal bases, but we have neglected to educate, train, and develop a principle-based paradigm that could make of our church a living and united organism. Our evangelistic and discipleship models have been based on making people discover what a Christian should believe, more than what a Christian should be; consequently, as members of this global church, it is easy for us to define what we believe, however, it is not the same situation when we must define who we are. When we arrive to that point, our cultural background is so prominent that it becomes the basis to define our identity and values. As Dunn (1999) says, “The kind of person I am shapes my experience of conflict and how I deal with it” (p. 41). Then, it is not a surprise to find separated White and Black Adventist conferences in North America, or Adventist “Latino” churches in Madrid, Spain, or some Adventist Hutus killing Adventist Tutsis at the Rwanda genocide of 1994. These Adventists accepted the same doctrine, but at the hour of resolving tension they defined themselves according to what they thought they were in relation to their culture. Their actions proved that even though they professed to be Adventists, their worldviews had remained untouched.

We have developed tools of accountability for all that relates to doctrine, policies, and structures (that may be the reason for our doctrinal and institutional uniformity around the world). However, we do not have a tool of accountability for biblical principles. If having a dynamic theology was not enough for our church and it considered necessary to make a declaration of doctrines from the Bible, how much more we should
consider making a declaration of principles knowing that they are unchangeable, dogmatic, and eternal?

The way of doing discipleship determines the kind of leaders that a church will have in its near and mediate future. Discipleship should be the process by which people shape their new identity in Christ. However, as we are so focused on believing the right doctrine (orthodoxy), we have transformed discipleship into an academic or training task ignoring that the aim of discipleship is not to bring people to fill the pews of the right church but to transform people into leaders of an eschatological movement. The aim of discipleship should be to shape people’s worldview with the principles of God’s kingdom in order to form a united and organic living system that is fueled by spiritual power.

Statement of the Task

The strategy that Jesus used to form leaders was discipleship. He dedicated three and a half years to train 12 leaders who would transform the world forever. Jesus did not base his model of discipleship on the presentation of a creed. He incarnated and taught the relational principles of creation in order to transform the culture of his disciples. White (1892) wrote: “The plan of Christ’s teaching should be ours” (p. 376). The task of this dissertation will be to develop a principle-based model of discipleship reflecting on Jesus’ teachings in order to affect not only beliefs and behavior but also worldview.

Justification for the Project

In the last 60 years the Seventh-day Adventist Church has developed a doctrinal-based model of discipleship that is very well articulated. However, as Zackrison (1991) says, “The Seventh-day Adventist church in particular, has fallen short, in its failure to systematically educate members and new converts on the principles set forth in the book
of Ephesians” (Zackrison, 1991, p. 180). Doctrine is not enough to shape identity or to create unity among the church and it should not be the only base for doing discipleship and evangelism. When emphasis is put on doctrine (orthodoxy), we allow our own cultures to take the role of defining who we are. Members of the church and newcomers should be instructed and informed primarily in the knowledge of the essential principles of the Kingdom of God. They need to know that since they have accepted Jesus as their Lord and Savior, they are no longer White or Black, American or European, Latin American or African. They need to accept that they are fellow citizens of a new kingdom. They need to know that to stop working on Sabbath does not matter if they are authoritarians. They need to know that being vegan does not matter if they cannot forgive their neighbor. They need to know that being like Jesus is more important than having a Seventh-day Adventist lifestyle. They need to know that cultural tension can be resolved with love and acceptance rather than with cordiality and tolerance. They need to know that doctrines are included in the Adventist message but they are not the message. They need to be identified with a set of principles that rule the life of those who accepted the right doctrine.

This dissertation intends to present a model of discipleship that will confront the distorted assumptions of secular cosmologies that shape people’s worldview, beliefs, and behavior. It will present a real alternative for minds that are longing for experiencing God in a materialistic world. As results of the implementation of this model of discipleship in the church I expect to see three major outcomes: first, unity by forming a common identity through the principles of God’s kingdom; second, departure from a mechanic to
an organic view of the church fueled by spiritual power; and third, social impact through the mission of church members.

**Definition of Terms**

In this dissertation the term “principles of creation” is used as the content of the proclamation of God’s kingdom. These principles are the fundamental elements of an organic system that is characterized by natural growth, the interdependence of its components as well as its differentiation, steady change, and the ability to adapt to the environment. The term “mechanic” is used in contraposition to “organic.”

It is important to note that although the term “doctrine” may mean “teachings” or “instructions,” in this work it is used as a codification of beliefs that are promulgated by a church as propositional and abstract truths. Doctrine is used with the connotation of orthodoxy. However, I am conscious that this dissertation in some way is also proposing a “doctrine,” but the doctrine of this work puts emphasis on the principles of creation that are grounded in the character of God. These principles are the frame of existence and the ultimate created reality.

**Delimitations**

This dissertation aims to articulate missiological, anthropological, theological, and ethical knowledge in order to present an integrated model of discipleship based on principles that need to be acknowledged, embraced, and taught by a community of believers in order to experience true unity. Like a cook who is interested more in the outcome of the integration of each ingredient of a recipe rather than to analyze each ingredient in itself, I will focus on the outcome of the integration of the cognitive elements that these sciences have contributed to the field of discipleship rather than
analyzing the particular theories that they have developed along the years. Thus, when I present the major themes of modernism and postmodernism I do not do an exhaustive enumeration and analysis. I just present those themes that have had a major impact on the way of doing discipleship among Christians in general, trying to demonstrate why discipleship has not been effective on reaching the individual’s worldview. The material studied and presented has been selected according to the significance it has on the overall goal.

The application of this model will be delimited to a multicultural Hispanic church in Atlanta; however, it is important to highlight that the strategy of implementing this model may be as varied and unique according to the characteristics and culture of the community of believers on which it is applied. This is the reason why this study focuses more on the contents of discipleship than on its implementation. I consider the contents of this model to be a universal parameter and its implementation just a particular point of reference.

When I present the seven strategic principles of a principle-based discipleship, they are not the principles of creation although they are in consonance with them. They are the frame in which principle-based discipleship can be applied and developed.

**Limitations**

Due to the limitations of my own world and the scope of the matter that this dissertation intends to address, this work should be considered as a starting point of discussion and never as a final conclusion. What I wrote is the outcome of meditation, study, research, experience, discussion, and test through all the years of my ministry. However, this work represents just an individual description of seven basic principles that
are the frame of principle-based discipleship. To make a presentation of the principles of creation that are grounded in the character of God it is a never-ending task that has a beginning but never a final point. As they are grounded in the character of God, and God is infinite, to pretend presenting a thorough study of the topic would be a demonstration of ignorance about our human limitation.

I have always worked as a pastor of some local churches and have never served in administrative or academic positions. I may lack a broader perspective of the church; therefore, the parameters of implementation of this model will be limited by the scope of my ministry and my world. It takes dialogue and community at all levels to develop a comprehensive content of principle-based discipleship. It is my desire during the future years, to continue developing and refining the content of principle-based discipleship.

**Methodology**

This dissertation focuses on presenting the contents of biblical discipleship and the impact that this process has on the individual’s worldview and the church. The first chapter presents the ministry challenge and sets the stage for analysis and proposal. Chapter 2 describes what the kingdom of God is presenting its theological foundations in order to establish the contents of principle-based discipleship. Chapter 3 analyzes the major themes of modernism and postmodernism, their influence on the shaping of Christian discipleship in general, and on the Adventist discipleship more specifically. It is important to highlight that principle-based discipleship aims to confront the particular assumptions on which modernism and postmodernism are built.

Chapter 4 presents the rudiments of principle-based discipleship and how the application of this model creates the frame for worldview transformation. The last section
of the chapter gives evidences on how in its beginnings the Seventh-day Adventist movement tended to be organic in its structure. It shows there was an incipient implementation of a principle-based model of discipleship and how this notion faded away as modern assumptions were used by church leaders to confront the particular ministry challenges that the Adventist movement faced. For this section of the chapter I present data and a variety of articles from *Ministry Magazine* published during the years from 1928 to 1945.

Chapter 5 defines seven strategic universal principles as the frame of principle-based discipleship, thus setting the stage for Chapter 6 where I describe the strategy that I followed to implement this model in the First Hispanic Seventh-day Adventist Church of Atlanta and its particular outcomes.
CHAPTER 2

THE KINGDOM WORLDVIEW

When Jesus came to earth, the central theme of his preaching was the kingdom of God (Newbigin, 1981, p. vii). His teaching was designed to show men how they might enter the kingdom of God and his mighty works were intended to prove that the kingdom has come upon them (Ladd, 1959, p. 14). Even though he used metaphors to describe it, the kingdom was not a metaphor, it was the reality.

The kingdom of God was established at creation. It was a state of things as they actually exist. However, our assumptions of kingship are affected by a contingent reality that came up as an outcome of sin; hence, our definitions of God’s kingdom will be limited by our earthly words which were created out of our particular contexts and assumptions. In spite of this, as Jesus triumphed in history in human form, our definitions of the kingdom of God will be affected for better by those realities that they describe. They will be affected by the reality of God’s kingdom, but the reality of the kingdom of God will not be affected by our definitions. Our task will be descriptive, allowing the Holy Spirit to help us arrive to those realities that the natural heart cannot grasp.

The purpose of this chapter is to elucidate what the kingdom of God is. It is to present a glimpse of its particular worldview essence.
The Kingdom of God Grounded in His Character

We cannot understand the kingdom of God if we do not understand who its king is and who his subjects are. When the Bible describes the creation of man it says: “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground” (Gen 1:26, 27). As God created humans in his image, he gave them a kingdom to “rule” as he rules over all creation. Mathews (1996) says that the language of this passage “reflects this idea of a royal figure representing God as his appointed ruler” (p. 169). The essence of God’s kingdom is grounded on God’s character. The kingdom of God has the imprint of its king.

In the kingdom of God we can have a glimpse of who God is through humanity. And we can also know who human beings are discovering who God is. This is the reason why Jesus as human is the perfect revelation of God (Col 1:15). In him God is revealed to humans and in him humans are reunited to God. Jesus is the essence of God’s kingdom. He is God in human form and that is a sample of the original human. He is the second Adam (1 Cor 15:45).

If we want to know how human beings were in essence when they were created, we need to look for the characteristics of God which are his essence, and which are presented in the Scriptures in the life of Jesus and in those that are pointed out as the fruit of the Holy Spirit. First of all, the Scriptures tell us that God is Creator of all (Gen 1:1; Exod 20:8-11; Deut 4:32; Ps 89:11-12; Isa 42:5; 45:7, 12; John 1:3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2; 11:3). As he is the creator of all also he is the king. The scriptures point out that God is compassionate, gracious, patient, love, faithful, forgiving, and just (Exod 34:6, 7). He is
holy (Lev 11:44), impartial (Deut 10:17), wise (Rom 16:27), good and upright (Ps 25:8). He is truth and life (John 14:6) and joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22, 23). To finish this list that can be endless, scriptures confirm that God is perfect (Matt 5:45).

When Adam and Eve were created they were created “in” the image of God, not only “with” his image. They were created in the kingdom and the characteristics of God were their essence. God’s characteristics were and are the most basic principles of the universe. They are the frame of existence. Miller (2001) states that “these principles are universal, fixed, eternal, and absolute—the unity that provides a solid foundation for infinite diversity” (p. 173).

Thus, human beings’ essence was in a relational harmony with God and creation. This means that reality was not perceived by Adam and Eve but lived it. For them, knowledge was a picture of reality and not a social construct. Beyond that, as human beings, they were all what they could be. They were perfect beings created in harmonic relationship with God and nature.

The Image of God and the Spirit

Genesis 2 gives more details about human’s creation. It says: “Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). There are two terms that need to be analyzed for a better understanding of human nature: “breath of life” and “living being.” I will begin first by discussing the last term.
Living Being

The Hebrew term used in Genesis to describe the outcome of the union of dust and breathe of life is “

nepeš.” Older Bible English versions translated this word as “soul.” However, as Mathews (1996) rightly says, this rendering can mislead the reader since its semantic range is much broader, including the meanings “life,” “person,” “self,” “appetite,” and “mind.” He argues that the Platonic notion of “soul” as an abstract, metaphysical inner person that is separated from the body “is not central to Hebrew thought. . . . The Old Testament emphasizes the individual person as a unified whole” (p. 198). Later he adds that “Hebrew thought does not envision life apart from the body (Job 19:26-27). The breath of God assures life while its absence means death (e.g., Job 34:14; Ps 104:29)” (p. 199). The idea of Scripture is that humans are souls and not that they have souls.

Breath of Life

This term comes closer to the common notion of “soul,” however it would be a great mistake of devastating consequences for our understanding of God’s kingdom to give it a Greek connotation. “Breath of life” translates the Hebrew expression “nišmat hayyin” which is a synonym of “spirit” (rūah). These two Hebrew terms are treated as virtually the same in Genesis and at times elsewhere (Mathews, 1996, p. 197). Therefore we can rightly say that God breathed his spirit (rūah) to the dust body that he had carefully formed with his hands. This creative act was deeply relational. Kidner (1967) describes the scene and says that “breathed is warmly personal, with the face-to-face intimacy of a kiss and the significance that this was an act of giving as was as making; and self giving at that” (p. 60, emphasis added).
Fabry (2004) states that “when the constitution of human beings is involved, the word \textit{rūah} proves to be a relational term, comparable to the notion of the ‘image of God.’” Then he adds: “Just as the later relates human beings to God as their exemplar, so \textit{rūah} denotes their dynamic relationship with God (p. 387). In other words, when God breathed his spirit in the body formed of dust, he was giving the element that would make humans capable of interacting with him. He was giving them the attributes that would make them able to experience the nature of his kingdom. He was sharing his image. This is the reason why for humans the kingdom of God is always a spiritual reality. This notion brings light on the words of Jesus that were uttered a few millennia after, when he said: “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

Paul uses the term “spirit” in contraposition with “soul and body.” For him the spirit “was given of God and was the means by which man and God communed. . . . [It] indicates the higher capacities of the person in relation to God” (Mathews, 1996, p. 199). He calls the man who lives in an intimate relationship with God “the spiritual \textit{(pneumatikos)} man,” while those who live dominated by the desires of the body and soul “the natural” or “the physical \textit{(psychicos)} man” (1 Cor 2:14-15).

Hastings (1912) states that “speaking of man as being created in the image of God, one must speak first of the \textit{intellectual powers} with which man has been endowed” (p. 53, emphasis added). He points out that those parts of the image of God are reason, conscience, and will (pp. 53-61). On the other hand, the Bible also implies that God created humans with passions and desires (Gen 2:23; 3:6). They work from the body. They are what Paul calls “the flesh” (Gal 5:24). White (1952) makes a distinction
between these elements. She calls the powers of the mind as the higher powers and the powers of the body as the lower ones (White, 1952, p. 327). When the higher powers control the lower powers of individuals, then they live a spiritual life (Gal 2:23-25). That is to live in the image of God. That means to be a spiritual.

**Spirit and Death**

“Unlike the nepeš, the ṛūah is not bound up with the body of blood” (Mathews, 1996, p. 199). Therefore, as the union of spirit and body brings life, their separation brings death (Eccl 12:7). Scripture presents “resurrection” as the divine solution for death for those who have lived in relationship with God. Although the Bible does not say how God is going to do it, in Ezekiel 37, we find an indirect hint: God is going to breathe his spirit into a body to bring life again (v. 6). If we apply the Scripture notions of “spirit” to this fact, we can arrive to the following conclusions:

1. At resurrection God is going to give those who died in relationship with him the same capacity by which they were able to live with God, the spirit.

2. That spirit is stored in God (Eccl 12:7).

3. If the spirit is the same element that God breathed into Adam and Eve in the beginning, he will give to humans at resurrection the attributes of his kingdom, the relational capacities to live with him, his image.

Based on White’s (1900) statements, we have always stated that the character according to the divine likeness “is the only treasure that we can take from this world to the next” (p. 332). If that is true, we should equate “spirit” with “character” because the spirit is the only thing that God is going to bring for those who will participate in the
resurrection. This notion has tremendous consequences on discipleship, mission, and church.

The Kingdom and Freedom

Freedom is one of the main attributes of God. It is the state of living in his kingdom. It is ontological. Freedom is framed by the principles of creation, which are laws of existence. Miller (2001) points out:

Intended to benefit man, God’s laws enable individuals and entire cultures to reach God’s purpose for them. Physical laws give structure to nature, while metaphysical laws guide social and human development. The former are descriptive, while the later are prescriptive. . . . They are the form that makes freedom possible, in contrast to the anarchy of freedom without form and the tyranny of form without freedom. (p. 173)

God is free because “He Is.” In the same sense, Adam and Eve were free while “they were” in God’s image. The spirit of life that God breathed in the body made of dust was the element that made humans able to commune with God and creation. While Adam and Eve lived in harmony with God and creation they would be free. An act of disobedience would be an act against their own spirits. That was their essence and the essence of the Kingdom. Their spirits were in harmony with the principles of creation that were grounded in God’s character. However, it is important to highlight that Adam and Eve did not know sin; therefore, their freedom was not freedom from decadence, decease or displeasure, but it was freedom for growth, perfectibility, and increasing satisfaction.

In this context the “free will” with what Adam and Eve were endowed at creation was just one aspect of freedom but it was not freedom in itself. It was the element that enabled them to open the door to get out from the Kingdom of God. They could choose to live against their own essence (their spirits or the Kingdom) or they could choose to
remain in their natural state that was in harmony with God and the principles of creation.

**The Fall**

Adam and Eve made the fatal decision of choosing to live against their essence that was in harmony with God and creation. By doubting God’s word they entered in a decadent state of existence ruled by deteriorated principles that turned upon themselves leading to destruction. However, this new reality was not self-existent or eternal. It was contingent to God’s kingdom. It was a departure from the original state of integrity and wholeness toward a state where fragmentation, disintegration, and death were the end. It was not an “ex-nihilo” (out of nothing) construction, but an impairment of the original kingdom. It was not an act of creation but an act of deterioration. The fall opened a gap between two realms: the supernatural realm of the kingdom of God and the natural realm of the kingdom of this world. They would be counter-kingsdoms.

With their act, Adam and Eve were not just choosing another state of existence but they were delivering the kingdom that had been delegated to them to rule (Ps 8:5-8) to the rule of Satan. They provided a place where decadent principles were going to be exposed through the actions of a race that would be submitted to a tyrant. This kingdom would be a realm of existence between the principles of the kingdom of God or creation and their opposites (see Table 1).
Table 1

The Kingdom of God and the Counter-Kingdom of Satan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principles of Creation</th>
<th>A wall that can be trespassed from left to right but not from right to left</th>
<th>Kingdom of this world. After the Fall affected by decadent principles.</th>
<th>The kingdom of Satan grounded in his character.</th>
<th>Principles of sin.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creation</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Destruction</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingship</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Tyranny</td>
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<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Coldness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Graciousness</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Rudeness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Patience</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Impatience</td>
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<tr>
<td>Love</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Hate</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faithfulness</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Unfaithfulness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Condemnation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Justice</td>
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<td>Tendency toward ➔ Injustice</td>
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<td>Holiness</td>
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<td>Tendency toward ➔ Depravity</td>
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<td>Impartiality</td>
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<td>Tendency toward ➔ Bias</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Foolishness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Evil</td>
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<td>Upright</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Dishonesty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Truth</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Falsehood</td>
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<tr>
<td>Life</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Death</td>
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<td>Joy</td>
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<td>Tendency toward ➔ Sadness</td>
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<td>Peace</td>
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<td>Tendency toward ➔ War</td>
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<td>Forbearance</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Intolerance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kindness</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Cruelty</td>
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<td>Gentleness</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Roughness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-control</td>
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<td>Tendency toward ➔ Self-indulgence</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perfection</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Imperfection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Freedom</td>
<td>➔</td>
<td>Tendency toward ➔ Enslavement</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Consequences of the Fall

As a result of their transgression Adam and Eve took their first step toward the path of spiritual death. They lost the relational capability by which they were put in harmony with God and creation. Their spirit was severely wounded. “They passed out of the life that belongs to subjects of the kingdom of God, entered into the realm of death, and became subjects of the kingdom of Satan” (Pentecost, 1990, p. 37).
Before the fall they could choose to leave that blessed state of life, but after it, it was impossible to regain the former position. They entered in a decadent state of existence that was going to end at the moment of the separation of the spirit from the body.

Before the fall Adam and Eve saw reality as it was, but after the fall their worldview was distorted especially in three areas:

1. Spiritual reality. They could not see God as it was (Gen 3:8-10).

2. Daily life. They could not percieve what had been the real problem (3:11-13). Hence, they couldn’t provide appropriate solutions for them (3:7).

3. They could not live in a constructive relationship with God and other humans anymore (3:12-13).

What was the reason of this change? As Adam and Eve yielded to the new realm of existence through their desires and passions, now their desires and passions were going to rule their lives. The lower powers of their nature were going to be in rebellion against their inner and decadent spirits: reason, concience, and will (see Figure 1).

The higher powers that before sin were inclined toward God and humans, after the fall were going to turn upon themselves producing a state of unbelief, pride, and self-righteousness (Newbigin, 1956, p. 25). Because of sin and spiritual corruption human reason lost its capability to experience all what is supernatural. At the same time, it got affected to percieve natural reality as it was.
As stated earlier, before the fall, Adam and Eve saw reality as it was. Their spirits were in harmony with God and creation. After the fall they could not see reality as it was anymore. Their desires and passions that before the fall were subjected by reason, after the fall they were controlling and blurring it. As Adam and Eve’s spirit became corrupted, they were unable to perceive divine spiritual realities. After the fall, humans focused either on physical realities or evil spiritual realities that were in accordance with their corrupted spirit. All humans know that there is a problem but they are not able to find a right way to solve it. Their worldviews were affected by falsehood, partiality, and imperfection (see Gen 3 and Table 1). From that moment onward any attempt to solve human problems apart from God and the principles of his kingdom would be characterized by a particular human worldview. Rifkin (1980) points out that “the need to
establish and order to explain the hows and whys of daily existence has been the essential cultural ingredient of every society” (p. 5). Wilkens and Sanford (2009) state that “all worldviews offer definitions of the fundamental human problem and how we might fix it” (p. 14). Then they add that “every philosopher and religion acknowledges that something is deeply and universally wrong with us” (p. 190).

Since the Fall there has been only two worldviews: (1) The natural worldview based on the decadent principles of this world, and (2) the supernatural worldview of the kingdom of God that is based on the principles of creation. The natural worldview manifests itself in as many ways as there are proposals to solve human problems. On the other hand, the kingdom worldview that is based on the principles of creation, while living in this world, always will be a counter worldview. It can be experienced as a departure from the natural worldview but never as an arrival. It is a conversion from a decadent process to a living process by means of the gospel and the Holy Spirit. The pure kingdom worldview will be experienced only after the second coming.

**The Problem and the Solution**

Adam and Eve were without hope. Their existence was going to end up in death. Beyond that, they were condemned by the protective justice of God’s kingdom that gives in judgment what creature chooses and deserves. Since that moment, the natural inclination of human beings was against God and toward Satan. Corruption was at the very heart of people’s nature and would spread through the whole human race (Newbigin, 1956, p. 40). It was impossible for Adam to go back to God and escape from Satan’s kingdom. As an act of the will, Adam could delay the process toward death trying to
behave in harmony with those principles of life that he had experienced in Eden.

However, the decadent process had started and it was irreversible.

In spite of that, God had a solution that was based on the nature of his kingdom. Although Adam and Eve could not come back to God’s kingdom, those who live in the kingdom of God can always enter into the kingdom of Satan by two means: either sin or missional service. “The higher reality can experience the lower realm, but the lower reality cannot experience the higher realm” (Canale, 2001, p. 115).

God came looking for Adam and Eve in missional service (Gen 3:8-9). After a short dialogue with them, God declared a sentence over Satan and his kingdom: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel” (Gen 3:15). This passage traditionally has been called the *protoevangelium*—the first gospel (Davis, 1989, p. 93). It presents at least three ideas:

1. As Satan had put enmity between the spirit of Adam and God causing the breakup of a loving relationship, God was going to put enmity between Adam and Satan through an offspring of the woman. This would be a miraculous act, because God, thanks to the Offspring, would put a seed into the human nature that was going to be the seed of his kingdom—his Spirit.

2. As a man had lost the kingdom of God, a man had to recover it. The justice of God required that a man had to live according to the principles of creation inside the kingdom that was established upon the decadent principles of this world. This act would be an act of conquer, but it would unavoidably cause a war reaction from Satan’s side.
3. This act also will cause a wound to the Offspring, but at the same time was going to cause the total annihilation of Satan and his kingdom.

This sentence-promise was interpreted in the New Testament as clear reference to the Messiah who came to destroy the works of the devil (Gal 3:16, 19; Heb 2:14; 1 John 3:8).

How Jesus Overcame Satan

Jesus came to this world as a man with two purposes: (a) to overcome Satan and rescue humans from his evil kingdom and (b) to enable humans to live again in God’s image.

To reach these goals Jesus had to live according to the principles of creation in the mist of Satan’s kingdom, and to pay vicariously the death sentence that the justice of God’s kingdom requires for those who had chosen death.

Jesus did it. How? He was born as a man conceived by the Spirit (Matt 1:20). His human nature had the same elements shared by all humans: higher and lower powers. However, because of his spiritual conception, Jesus’ high powers were in control of his lower ones (see Figure 1). His reason was so clear that his definitions of truth were in accordance with reality (1 John 1:14). His worldview was the cosmology of the kingdom of God. He became the second Adam (1 Cor 15:47; Rom 5:14-15) and never yielded to temptation (Heb 4:15).

The impact that Jesus’ work made on humans is beautifully described in scripture: “Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12-13). To become children of God means to
have his Spirit (Rom 8:9). It is to receive the seed of his kingdom. It is to obtain again those divine spiritual attributes that enabled Adam and Eve to have communion with God, fellow humans, and creation.

How Humans Are Saved

Human salvation by nature requires two requisites: (a) perfect harmony with the principles of creation, and (b) life without sin. The only person that fulfills these requisites is Jesus. That is the reason why salvation is based on God’s initiative and not on human action. Newbigin (1956) speaking about the practical reality of human salvation states: “Our gospel is not the thoughts of men but the acts of God” (p. 43). God sent his Son to live the life that humans cannot live and to die the death that humans deserve. This act of God made salvation available for everyone. However, the Bible clearly says that only those who willingly accept the act of God are the only ones who are benefited by salvation. An act of the will was what determined Adam to lose the kingdom. An act of the will must be involved to regain it. A decision is what enables humans to accept the act of God and receive the Holy Spirit to live again in harmony with the principles of creation. As sin started a decadent process leading to death by the action of the will, salvation starts a recreation process leading to glorification by an act of the will. This act of the will is what we call “faith.”

How can a corrupted will choose to accept Christ as savior? Newbigin (1956) explains it with the following words:

It is not that by an act of the will I have decided to choose Christ as my savior. It is that Christ has laid hold of me with this tremendous judgment and mercy and I am forced to cry out in shame and wondering gratitude: “Lord, I am a traitor fit to die; Lord, thou hast died for me, and I am thine for ever.” This faith is, thus, wholly the result of what God has first done for me. (p. 99)
Faith is an answer not an inquiry. It is a reaction to the loving act of God on behalf of humanity (Rom 10:17). Faith is the result of being exposed to the gospel. Jesus said: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). At the same time, the gospel is “the power of God” (Rom 1:16). The gospel does not need to be helped it just needs to be presented. When it is presented as it is in the life of Jesus, it causes faith. That is the reason why humans, in order not to be caught by the gospel, need to reject it. That is the only cause of downfall.

Discipleship Through Ritual

God asked Adam and Eve to perform a ritual to show their acceptance of the plan of salvation. God asked them to sacrifice an animal. That ritual did not have power in itself it was what it pointed to. It symbolized an offering not from human beings but from God. It was a didactic way to teach that forgiveness cannot be given without bloodshed. At the same time, the sacrifice, presented with sincerity, showed a value through and action. By performing the ritual the worshiper was allowing God to implant enmity in his/her spirit against Satan through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 6:1-6; 8:15-17).

Every altar that was built after the Fall was an act of conquest of the world. In every altar it symbolized the door by which every human could depart from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God. As worshipers accepted God’s sacrifice, they could experience a new attitude implanted by God by means of the Holy Spirit that enabled them to live in an incipient harmony with the principles of creation. In that context, around each altar, the principles of creation were manifested through the lives of those who worshiped.
However, since human worldview was affected by sin, people needed divine revelation to learn those principles that were the base of the lost kingdom. That knowledge was conveyed through Scripture.

**Discipleship Through Scripture**

God in an act of missional service chose prophets to write his message. The message was originated in God but communicated by humans led by the Holy Spirit (1 Pet 1:21). Those prophets did not interpret God’s message, they described and wrote it. However, what they wrote “was not the manifestation of their own reasoning, imagination, or creation” (Canale, 2001, p. 69). It was the description of God’s thoughts and actions in relation to humans. They described supernatural principles in natural words. Their words, although imperfect, were affected for better by the realities that they pointed out and by means of the Holy Spirit.

It is important to highlight that Scripture was not written as a logically constructed, tightly interconnected and cross-referenced system of truthful propositions. . . [It] resembles an epic story stretching from creation to history’s consummation, encompassing smaller stories of God’s interaction with people over a broad span of years and cultural contexts. (Wilkens & Sanford, 2009, p. 17)

In that story we always find described the way of salvation, and the principles of creation as opposed to the principles of this world that characterize human worldviews.

Thus, discipleship was always the method that God used to make people know the way of salvation and the principles of creation through Scripture, teaching, preaching, and ritual. It was always considered an ongoing process by which reason, conscience, and will are sensitized by spiritual knowledge and power. Discipleship was to prompt people to put their lives in harmony with those principles grounded in God’s character. That
process created awareness and made people understand who they were in relation with God and his kingdom. It had a communal nuance and it was expected to be conducted by godly parents, teachers, and leaders who were in a covenant relationship with God.

That process was cyclic. As the principles of creation always collided with secular worldviews, teachers or disciplers several times yielded to worldly presuppositions creating new forms of religion based on decadent principles. White (1907) points out that this problem was caused by allowing human philosophy to take the place of divine revelation (p. 74). However, she says that among the people of God “from time to time, teachers arose who pointed men to the Source of truth. Right principles were enunciated, and human lives witnessed to their power” (p. 74).

In spite of the ministry of the prophets, during the Old Testament times, revelation was partial because the plan of salvation and the principles of creation were taught through symbols and figures (Col 2:16-17; Heb 10:1). In that sense, people could grasp spiritual realities only partially. This fact limited the work of the Holy Spirit since he works upon truth (John 17:17). The Bible says that reality was found in Christ (Col 2:17).

**Christ**

Jesus was the act of God. He was God in missional service coming to this world in order to rescue it (1 Tim 2:5-6). He was the manifestation of the principles of creation in a living example (Heb 1:3). He was the bridge between supernatural and natural realms (1 Tim 2:5). He was salvation from this world, and the entrance to God’s kingdom (John 10:9). He was light irrupting in darkness (John 1:5). He was the perfect expression of the kingdom of God in a contextualized human form.
As those who were people of God during Old Testament times met around the altar, Jesus chose twelve disciples to meet around him. They were called to be witnesses of his life, actions, and passion. For Jesus, discipleship meant more than teaching; it was exposition to his life. He confronted his disciples with a total different worldview. The aim of Jesus’ way of doing discipleship was worldview transformation through worldview confrontation. It was an invitation for departure from the kingdom of this world to the kingdom of God through the adoption of the principles of creation.

That is the reason why Jesus introduced the message of the kingdom saying: “Repent” (Matt 3:2). The Greek term for repentance is metanoia. Chryssavgis (2012, para. 5) points out that this term denotes a change of mind, a reorientation, a fundamental transformation of outlook, of man’s vision of the world and of himself. . . . It involves, that is, not mere regret of past evil but a recognition by man of a darkened vision of his own condition, in which sin, by separating him from God, has reduced him to a divided, autonomous existence, depraving him of both his natural glory and freedom.

The idea of worldview transformation is embedded in the term “repentance.” Jesus knew that repentance comes as a result of a crisis. Jesus walked with his disciples around three and a half years, talking with them, healing with them, teaching with them, confronting them, sending them, and revealing himself to them. However, we find that in spite of that, repentance or worldview transformation was experienced by them only around Calvary. It was in that mount that revelation was completed. It caused such a worldview crisis upon the disciples that their will was impelled to accept Jesus as he was, more than to accept him according to their egocentric ideas. The spiritual reality of Jesus always will confront the ideas that we have in regard to him.

For Jesus, discipleship started with the teaching of the principles of creation, but became a transformational process only after understanding the meaning of the cross.
Worldview confrontation creates necessity but does not produce transformation. It is the meaning of the act of God, when it is accepted, that opens the door to worldview transformation. As Dupertuis (2011) states: “The cross is not the only truth, but it is the great truth which gives meaning to all other truths” (p. 104).

Jesus’ Teaching

Jesus did not teach philosophy, theology, or abstracts rational propositions. He taught the principles of creation in a contextualized form. He taught a principle-system of life that those who accept him as savior and king would experience as a result of receiving his Spirit. These principles were magnificently exposed in the Sermon of the Mount.

Stassen and Gushee (2003) state that those principles “are not high ideals, but about God’s gracious deliverance and our joyous participation” (p. 35). White (1896) wrote that “the principles enunciated in this discourse are for all ages and for all classes of men” (p. 3). However, for the sake of Christian discipleship, it is important to highlight that all of them without exception are relational principles. The center of Jesus’ prophetic teachings was about how people could live in harmony with God and their neighbors as an anticipation of the future kingdom. That is the essence of God’s kingdom.

As Jesus’ worldview was grounded on the principles of creation or the character of God, he knew that his teaching would produce crisis, confrontation, and rejection (Matt 10:34-37; John 15:18-20). Jesus’ worldview was a counter worldview first for the Jews (Mark 7:1-13), and then for Greeks, Romans, and every culture of this world. That is the reason why Jesus always warned his disciples to expect persecution as a result of

The Great Commission

As Jesus died and rose from the death, the disciples had in a real story all they needed to proclaim. Jesus gathered his disciples around him and gave them what we call the Great Commission. He spoke in kingly terms. He said: “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples” (Matt 28:18). Nussbaum (2009) says that although the word ‘kingdom’ does not occur in the Great Commission, the idea clearly does in two ways. First, “Jesus is saying, ‘since I am now installed as king and my kingdom is inaugurated, go and make disciples. . . .’ Second, ‘teaching them to obey . . .’ is in effect ‘teaching them to live as loyal subjects in my kingdom’” (pp. 23-24). Jesus did not separate discipleship from his kingdom. The content of his teaching were the principles of creation and the content of his followers’ teaching should be the same as his.

At the same time Jesus was calling his followers to engage in mission to make disciples of all nations. The kingdom’s worldview was to shape the worldview of those who claimed to be people of God and of those who were gentiles. Nusbaum (2009) states that “the arrival of the ‘kingdom’ in Jesus has redefined everything. . . . [It] is a new cosmic reference point, the basis for all personal and group identity ever since Jesus announced it” (p. 23). Jesus was anticipating a movement that was going to be able to unite all cultures within the frame of his kingdom. White (1898) commenting on the Great Commission wrote: “But Christ commissioned His disciples to proclaim a faith and worship that would have in it nothing of caste or country, a faith that would be adapted to
all peoples, all nations, all classes of men” (White, 1898, p. 819). This faith could only be based on the principles of creation, not on any human invention. White also states:

The disciples were to teach what Christ has taught. That which had spoken not only in person, but through all the prophets and teachers of the Old Testament, is here included. Human teaching is shut out. There is no place for tradition, for man’s theories and conclusions, or for church legislation. No laws ordained by ecclesiastical authority are included in the commission. None of these are Christ’s servants to teach. (p. 826)

The Holy Spirit

However, there was still a step to follow. The disciples as personal witnesses of Jesus’ story had only facts to proclaim. However, the kingdom of God is not only facts, it is “meaning.” If they proclaimed just facts, they would proclaim history. But, if they added meaning to the facts, they had the gospel. The gospel is the result of the integration of natural and supranatural realms. It is total reality. It is living power. It is worldview purification. It is Emmanuel, “God with us.”

Jesus asked his disciples: “Wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about” (Acts 1:4). The disciples as a community were a dust handmade body. They were called by Jesus, like God’s hands formed a body from the dust at creation. Like dust, they were only natural reality. They could not find meaning in Jesus’ story. They needed rūah, the Spirit from the Father, in order to be nepeš, a communal leaving being. In that sense, the disciples were about to witness and experience one of the most wonderful acts of creation: the creation of the Church.

The Church

When the disciples received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost the church became a living organism. Viola (2008) points out that in the New Testament “each image teaches
us that the church is a living organism rather than an institutional organization” (Viola, 2008, p. 32). The Father provided the meaningful story of salvation through Jesus, and the relational image of his kingdom, the spirit or rūah, through his Holy Spirit. The church became the living representation of the kingdom of God on earth. As Stassen and Gushee (2003) state, the church is “the beachhead of the kingdom, visibly bearing witness to God’s reign (p. 116).

However, it is important to note that the church would be a departure from this world but not an arrival. That fact gives it an eschatological nuance that makes the church be always on the move. Nussbaum (2009) says, “Its members are not proclaiming, ‘Come to us!’ but ‘Let us follow him!’” (p. 118). Bosch (1991) explains it in the following words:

The “church in the power of the Spirit” is not yet the reign of God; it is blundering and often unfaithful, and yet it is anticipation of that reign in history. Christianity if not yet the new creation, but is the working of the Spirit of the new creation; it is not yet the new humankind, but it is its vanguard. (pp. 387-388)

The church is the place on earth where the principles of creation are constantly being developed by the power of the Holy Spirit. That fact makes the church an anticipation of the future kingdom. It is the presence of the Spirit that assures the living condition of the church. When the church is separated from the Spirit, the church is no longer a living organism, it becomes only dust. On the other hand, when the church lives in the Spirit, the principles of creation become the frame of its existence. The church becomes a body where supernatural and natural realms mingle in one. It becomes the body of Christ. As there is life, there is movement. As there is movement, there is mission. That is the only way that the church can be an anticipation of God’s kingdom.
The Content and Purpose of Discipleship

For Jesus the content of discipleship was framed by the notion of the kingdom of God. It had two interdependent elements: (a) the gospel, and (b) the principles of creation that are grounded in God’s character. Discipleship both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament addressed this content. In the Old Testament the gospel was taught prominently by ritual, in the New Testament by reality. That determined the action scope of the Holy Spirit.

However, the purpose of discipleship is not only to convey content. That only would make of discipleship an academic task. The ultimate purpose of discipleship is to recreate the image of God in human beings to reinstall them into the kingdom of God (Gal 5:22-23; Eph 4:11-24; 5:1-2; Phil 2:5). White (1894) wrote: “The true object of education is to restore the image of God in the soul” (p. 236). Later White (1911) wrote: “God can be honored by those who profess to believe in Him, only if they are conformed to His image and controlled by His Spirit. Then as witnesses for the Savior, they may make known what divine grace has done for them” (p. 559).

In this context mission has nothing to do with making people accept a set of propositional beliefs. It has to do with giving people the possibility to see and experience the reality of the kingdom of God by worldview transformation. It has to do with extending the kingdom on this earth through life transformation. It has to do with confronting natural worldviews by teaching the principles of creation to encourage the search of something real and better.

The Outcome of Discipleship

As people, by the power of the Holy Spirit, put their lives in harmony with the
principles of creation by believing the Gospel, true unity is the outcome. Viola (2008) implies that unity is the sign of a living church. He says that when the seed of the gospel is planted into the hearts of women and men they are permitted to gather together naturally (p. 45). Hiebert (2008) states, “The unity of the church is the essence, not a goal to be sought” (p. 282). Unity will be the qualification to make the church a living system composed of interdependent members that act together in a common purpose producing results impossible to be obtained by the action of one member alone.

Conclusion

Viola (2008), speaking on the church as a living organism, states:

The DNA of the church produces certain identifiable features. Some of them are the experience of authentic community, a familial love and devotion of its members to one another, the centrality of Jesus Christ, the innate instinct to gather together without static ritual, the internal drive for open-participatory gatherings, and the loving impulse to display Jesus to a fallen world. (pp. 45-46)

What Viola calls the DNA of the church I call the principles of creation that are grounded in the character of God. They are the frame of existence. They are the foundations of the Kingdom of God. They are the content of discipleship and the means to the Gospel. They are the essence of God.
CHAPTER 3

WORLDVIEW AND CHURCH

Storti (as cited in Pocock & Henriques, 2002) states: “Each of us is in part a product of culture (and to that extent similar to others from the same culture) and in part a product of our own unique life circumstances (and to that extent like no one else anywhere)” (p. 102). All of the first disciples were Jews. They were the product of a Jewish cultural heritage that dictated their way to see the world. Jesus’ teachings confronted their worldviews. That process was not easy. Jesus worldview was difficult to grasp for the disciples and the church (Hiebert, 2008, p. 266). The New Testament is full of descriptions of worldview confrontations at individual, church, and social levels. The church confronted inner tension especially when members wanted to judge reality through Jewish or Greek worldview assumptions and not through Jesus’ worldview values. This fact was made imperative for the first disciples to bring to the conscious level their own worldview assumptions to be confronted with the teachings of Jesus. The apostle Paul was a champion doing that task, and for church’s sake, he reflected on this process along all his epistles. We can find principles in them that are worthy to apply for the church today.

Like the Apostolic Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church was not born in a cultural vacuum. Therefore, whether we like it or not, the church today is affected by culture as the Apostolic Church was affected by Jewish and Greek culture. This does not
imply that culture should be authoritative for the church; this means that discipleship should start first in “Jerusalem” not at “the ends of the earth.” If all of us are a product of culture, then, our church is a product of culture as well. This reality makes it imperative that assumptions, values, beliefs, and rituals that are part of major current secular worldviews be confronted by the principles that are rooted in the Bible’s narrative if the church wants to be successful in its mission. Thus, discipleship should start with the missionary. In this sense, mission and discipleship will not be an invitation to come up to the missionary’s religious cultural platform, but instead will be an invitation to share “a way out” from our particular worldview assumptions. As Bosch (1991) says, “It is an illusion to believe that we can penetrate to a pure gospel unaffected by any cultural and other human accretions” (p. 182). Even though we know the Bible, we are affected by our own cultural biases as those people we want to disciple are affected by them. Nussbaum (2009) commenting on Bosh states that “the way we cop with our cultural limitations is to become aware of them, which is tricky because they are like dirt on the back of our clothing. We cannot see them without a mirror” (p. 45). Bosh and Nussbaum use history as their mirror. I am going to use in this work worldviews.

Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church was born amid modern times, and because it became a world-wide church during postmodernism, it is necessary to analyze the main assumptions that marked these worldviews in order to see which of them are still present in our ways of doing discipleship and what a transformational discipleship process should address.

**Modernism**

Modernism is rooted in the Greek dualistic worldview that separated reality in
two realms: supernatural and natural. Between these two realms modernism set a gap that was unbridgeable. The supernatural realm was the world of a timeless God, soul, religion, and values. The natural realm was the world of matter, facts, law, and science. Plato and Aristotle were the philosophical referents for the Western World. While Plato focused in the supernatural world, Aristotle focused in the natural one (Walsh & Middleton, 1984, p. 108). This was the main difference between the Classic and the Modern worldview. While one is Platonic, trying to grasp the supernatural world through logical thought, the other one is Aristotelian, trying to explain the natural world by the same means.

Canale (2001) points out that modern thought did not deny the existence of a realm beyond itself. While in classical view, the two realms were connected by analogy, in modernism the discontinuity is absolute and “God becomes ‘Wholly Other’ than every created thing.” He also states that this new notion of reality (introduced by the German philosopher Inmanuel Kant) “reshaped the very notions of religion and Theology” (p. 108). This thought paved the way for Naturalism, which asserts that all that exists is physical, and all supernatural explanations are excluded. Walsh and Middleton (1984) affirm that “the problems of dualism are our problems” and “they create a plague that still afflicts us” (p. 113). They argue that “to this day Christians are still not free, in either their world view or lifestyle, from the debilitating effects of this unbiblical dualism” (p. 115).

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1When referring to a “timeless God,” modern philosophers did not mean what we commonly understand by “eternal God.” They see a timeless reality as a realm where time and space do not exist. For a notion of “timelessness” see Canale (2001, p. 104).
With the adoption of the Greek supernatural/natural dualism modernism pushed God to a corner. “The result was a shift from a world ordered by God, to one engineered by humans” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 148). God is considered as the perfect designer of the universe, but not its machinist. This task is carried on by unmovable natural laws governing the whole existence. Humans are the ones who discover these laws to describe them systematically for their application and for the sake of progress. As God does not intervene in human affairs, humans became the center of the universe and the arbiters of truth. Thus, science became the public instrument to explain reality, and religion was pushed to a more private domain becoming increasingly irrelevant.

In modernism what is important is what humans think about God and the world, not what God thinks about them (Hiebert, 2008, p. 149). Rational and logical definitions became more important than moral actions. This led to Christianity “to the view that faith is believing the truth, not about transformed lives and covenant relationships” (p. 185). In modernism, the span of years assigned to private formation at home was progressively shrunken giving way to the acquisition of specialized information through public institutions where science was considered the glasses to see reality. Universities became temples of “true religion” where people went to find life’s ultimate answers. Home and church were considered the places where people learned superstition. Hiebert (2008) states that “one of the consequences of this worship of science is that not only scientific data but also scientific theories are held to be ‘facts,’ not mental constructs” (p. 151). In this worldview salvation comes through progress and the application of unchangeable laws relying on rational understanding.

Scientific progress, which was amazingly fast, was based on the assumption that
human reason can indeed find the truth, Scripture was judged by reason and not reason
decided by Scripture (Sire, 2004, p. 217). Some Christian theologians, wanting to re-
engage in discussion at the center of the stage, adopted modernistic worldview
assumptions to interpret the Bible. They were called “liberals.” They gave naturalistic
explanations to miracles and relegated the Bible message to the world of “values.” Other
theologians, the conservatives, saw its stories as an objective reality just like nature as a
whole. They engaged in a kind of apologetic evangelism that tried to demonstrate the
relevance of Scripture through archaeology discoveries, and the existence of God through
scientific arguments. Nussbaum (2009) argues that this tension paved the way for
“biblical inerrancy” assumptions (p. 73). Although these groups claimed to fight against
modernism, unwittingly they used its methods to approach people. Thus, people heard a
superficial gospel that was based on rational propositions but did not necessarily cause
transformation. The kind of disciples that arose from the application of that model of
discipleship were better able to engage in rational discussions than showing other people
a God that is willing to manifest in daily life. They were affected at the level of
propositional beliefs but their worldview assumptions were not affected. They were a
new kind of religious product of modernity.

Mechanistic Worldview

Francis Bacon (1561-1626) laid the foundations for the mechanistic worldview,
which permeated modern thought. Rifkin (1980) describing Bacon’s intention says that
“he didn’t want to sit around contemplating nature. He wanted to find a methodology for
controlling it” (p. 19). As a dualistic Christian, Bacon wanted to restore the pre-Fall
human dominion over nature. But this task, as God was considered existing in a timeless
realm, it was in human hands. He saw science as the only key to fill this void of a God, since he does not intervene in human affairs. Thus, the machine is the element that crystallized Bacon’s intention. It is applied nature for the benefit of progress. Overall, machine means control. Control over nature, over time, over processes, over production, and finally over humans.

Answering the question why the machine is so important for the modern world Walsh and Middleton (1984) say,

A machine is something we can understand. We can take it apart and put it back together. We scientifically create it and quantatively analyze it in terms of energy input and production output. . . . The machine makes us more powerful because it makes us more efficient. (p. 134)

For the mechanistic modern worldview the why question became irrelevant to give way to the how (Hiebert, 2008, p. 162). This emphasis also shaped the human sciences. In modernism it is more important to know how we function than knowing why we exist. How we love versus why we love, and how to reach goals rather than why to reach goals. Discussion and dialogue within the church also adopted this same emphasis. The modern church engaged in this kind of mechanical discussions trying to define how we must worship, how we must dress, how we can reach the whole world, how we can have more baptisms, how we must read the Bible, how we must pray, how we must praise. In this view, the way in which people answer these questions will determine in what group they are or what is the tendency of their thoughts. Thus, the question why is overshadowed by these kind of discussions creating uniform groups without a real sense of purpose.

This worldview gave birth to disciples who knew mechanically the hows and whats but they were not very sure about the whys. They became disoriented when
something did not fit into the mechanical thought model on which they were formed. As time passed, they became church leaders, applying mechanistic assumptions to mission, discipleship, and religion.

**Structure**

With this shift, the concept of structure was changed and it was seen as “the interrelation of impersonal parts in a common system governed by impersonal codes or rules of functioning” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 156). In this view, systems were hierarchical and static in nature. Change was seen as a threat when it came from the lower levels of the system because it was considered as a sign of malfunction and, for sure, it would cause a problem because there was no adaptability. Change could only be accepted in mechanical hierarchical terms and systems were managed by engineering and control (p. 79).

In modernism laws were considered the instruments of order. As the application of laws enabled humans to order nature, then moral laws were legislated and mechanically applied to order society (Hiebert, 2008, p. 158). Manuals, procedures, and creeds were considered essential for functioning. Control was used to ensure that all parts were working in their roles and people were considered “like cogs in a machine, each carrying out a specialized task” (p. 161). It is not necessary to highlight the impact that this view had in relationships.

The mechanistic systems were prone to confuse *unity* with *uniformity*. As the emphasis was placed on the *how*, those who held more “mechanic” power within a system imposed their views over those who were considered powerless. Each part of the machine performed its function driven by hierarchical and linear causality. Function, defined in these terms, was essential to remain inside the system and it was measured by
quantitative standards. This mechanical worldview gave birth to a new type of social organization: the corporation. Hiebert (2008) defines them as “‘public’ homes where most people spend their working days and earn a living” (p. 172).

**Technique**

Technique was central to the modern worldview. It required routinization, standardization, and quantification. It was “a rational mechanical process designated to produce the maximum results with a minimum of input by focusing on efficiency and speed and reducing all that is spontaneous and irrational” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 163). What it could not be evaluated quantitatively was not important. Placing the focus on technique, efficiency, and profit became the supreme values “which are founded on utilitarianism and pragmatism not in moral absolutes” (p. 164). Relationships were ordered by constitutions and bylaws. This resulted “in a focus on the importance of leaders and leadership defined in managerial styles” (p. 167). Joseph Rost (1991), a remarkable leadership scholar, noted that during the modern mechanistic worldview, leadership was seen as “rational, management oriented, male, technocratic, quantitative, goal dominated, cost-benefit driven, personalistic, hierarchical, short-term, pragmatic and materialistic” (p. 94). In this context training became more important than formation, and quantitative production was seen as the symbol of success and progress.

Mechanic structure and technique made an impact about how Christians saw the church. Churches became corporations “characterized by a sharp division between leaders and laity. The former are thought to have specialized competencies, the latter to

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1 Rost defines it as *the industrial paradigm of leadership* common to the industrial era (1750-1980).
offer only general skills” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 174). Religious leaders tended to design strategies to produce maximum results in the shortest time possible. Mechanistic evangelism has become a way of producing converts by bringing them to an arena where a skilled professional presents the mechanical arguments to choose the “best” or the “true” church. Hiebert also affirms that in this worldview “some see the church in terms of social engineering: if subjected to the right formula of social and cultural laws, churches will grow” (p. 174). In the context of mission, Phillips and Brown (1991) suggest that in modernism “the idea of being a witness has become confused with questions of techniques and methods” (p. 242). In many cases, the modern church has confused witnessing with advertising, propaganda, or marketing.

The Quest of Universal Truth

Hoffecker (2007) suggests that Bacon’s dream was to construct a new and impartial science to find “the one true method by which thinkers can settle all disputes about matters of fact or truth” (p. 243). Wilkens and Sanford (2009) present an overview description of modernism worthy of quoting:

Modernity, at its root, was the search for absolute certainty. This was not just a matter of my certainty, but a quest for universal truth. Modernists believed that each individual could arrive at this truth if biases were set aside and the proper means of investigation were used. The route to truth went through rational thought, usually understood to be grounded in empirical observation and scientific method. Once harnessed, truth could be put into the service of solving all of our problems, since problems resulted from believing untrue ideas. Whatever vestiges of error that remained from tribal superstition, the ideas of particular cultures or beliefs that could not be confirmed by observation—in short, illogical ideas—had to be uprooted, satirized into submission, corrected through proper education or marginalized. In other words, beliefs that did not conform to modernism’s standards of logic had to be conquered. (p. 145)
This worldview brought in itself tension. As in modernism humans are the arbiters of truth, those who possess the “truth” by rational means needed to convince those who were captives of ignorance and superstition. This tension was central to either secular or to religious settings.\(^1\) Hoffecker (2007), discussing about this tension, argues that the root for cultural war was laid in this period and he describes it in the following words,

None of the protagonists believed their worldviews were merely a matter of private belief. None wanted their views to be relegated to the private dimension of human life. . . . [They] believed their worldviews competent to guide both private and public life, and they fought aggressively to attain that end. Their agendas also looked similar. They defended their perspectives and launched polemics against competitors. They articulated both individual and social moralities to achieve their ends, since they believed their ideas had political, economic, and social implications. In short, all participants viewed their worldviews as holistic commitments that transcended their own particularity and thus applied to the universal human conditions. (pp. 277, 278)

Recapturing, in modernism my view must be public and yours private, if I fail to convince you. The implications that this vision had in Christian missions and discipleship can be seen among us until today. As Western countries expanded through war, commerce, and trade, Christian missionaries took advantage from the open doors that those enterprises opened around the world. There is still a discussion if missionaries were accomplices of these cultural western projects or if they were real ambassadors of the Kingdom. Hiebert (2008) comments that they “often saw their task as Christianizing and civilizing the world. This led to churches modeled on those in the West and the stifling of any local expressions of Christianity” (p. 210). In Christian countries evangelism in many cases was an effort to denounce competitors more than the proclamation of gospel

\(^1\)It is important to note that at the first stages of Modernism all discussions were at religious levels. Bacon, Descartes, and Newton were Christians.
principles. In discipleship, western modern standards were imposed as part of the gospel and “conversion was defined primarily in terms of affirming a particular set of doctrines (orthodoxy) or practices (orthopraxy). . . . The focus of truth and the use of digital categories influenced evangelism and the mission of the church” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 195).

Individualism, Consumerism, and Competition

John Locke (1632-1704), who was one of the most influential modernists, removed God from society. Seduced by how the mechanical model helped to understand nature, he applied it to society and government. Supporting Descarte’s mechanical assumptions on human beings as being “matter in motion,” he considered human beings as “blank slates” at time of birth. The proper addition of data through experience or education would determine human direction and social prosperity (Sunshine, 2009, p. 152). He concluded that social problems were caused because the “natural laws of society were being violated because the social order was built upon irrational traditions and customs that originated from the theocentrism that had ruled the world for so long” (Rifkin, 1980, p. 23). In his view problems were functional and circumstantial and not ontological.

Locke saw in human nature an inherent driving force to acquire property. In that context, scarcity and lack of property was the individual cause that makes humans evil and wicked. Therefore, as Rifkin (1980) points out, in Locke’s view, the recipe for social peace and harmony is given when a government ensures the increasing wealth of society. “Pure self-interest thus becomes, in Locke’s formulation, the sole basis for the establishment of the state” (pp. 24, 25).
With this thought, John Locke planted the seed for individualism that has invaded Western society until now. Wilkens and Sanford (2009) define individualism as the belief that “the individual is the primary reality and that our understanding of the universe and lifestyle should be centered in oneself” (p. 27). They point out that the outcome of this worldview is to consider individual interests and goals as the primary source of meaning in life and the driving force for progress. In consequence, individual performance defines self-worth. They also argue that at a short or a long run this view will end up making society think that the ends are justified by the means. In this context family, community, and society will be considered something significant only if they contribute to personal pursuits (pp. 27-34).

Individualism set the basis for consumerism that, according to Wilkens and Sanford (2009), is built mainly in five assumptions: (a) accumulation and using things brings fulfillment; (b) money is power; (c) never we will have enough; (c) people are objects to consume, and (d) we need to discard what ceases to fulfill us or meet our needs (pp. 45-51).

This worldview saw competition as something necessary and desirable for the cause of progress. This position was deepened into society by the adoption of Darwin theories. Although Rifkin (1980) says that “the full implications of Darwin’s discoveries were never really explored,” he argues that “some of the more superficial trappings of his theory were immediately taken hold of and exploited in a way that further legitimizied the mechanical world view” (p. 28). Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) applying Darwin’s assumptions to society coined the concept “survival of the fittest.” There has been great
discussion about the meaning of this concept, but Rifkin defines it in the following words:

Survival of the fittest was interpreted to mean that in the state of nature, each organism is engaged in a relentless battle with all other creatures. Those who survive and pass on their traits to their offspring are simply those best able to protect their own material self-interest. (1980, p. 29)

As a result of the application of these assumptions, in modernism cooperation is submitted to competition. Cooperation is appreciated only if it is useful to the fulfillment of one’s own achievements. Competition was seen as essential for progress and excellence was seen as its outcome. Gifts that were given as displays of appreciation or affection are now replaced by awards given to those who “win,” and “achieve” or function according to hierarchical and linear parameters. They end up being tools of control and reference to show people where the power is in a particular mechanical system. They are used to motivate those who are working together to enter into a “healthy” competition for the sake of reaching corporative goals. In this view you compete against your colleagues, fight against your enemies.

This worldview also shaped the thought in Christian circles, where competition between partners was seen as a proper tool to reach corporative goals. Offering charts, statistics, goal achievements are used as an acceptable way of self-promotion considering those who are the “fittest” as the right ones to exercise leadership. Discipleship was also affected by this trend, because it was seen as pure strategy goal-oriented task.

Modernism, Race, and Nationalism

The adoption of Darwin’s theories had a great impact on how people viewed other races. Although Darwin rejected racism, he wrote (as cited in Sunshine, 2009): “At some future period, not very distant as measured by centuries, the civilized races of man will
almost certainly exterminate, and replace, the savage races throughout the world.” Sunshine then adds that “this kind of thinking contributed directly to rising racism and neocolonialism in the Western world” (2009, p. 169). White nations, in accordance with modern thinking, were considered superior and civilized because of their achievements in science, technology, and industrialization. Sunshine suggests that this notion led these nations to think that they “had a right and a responsibility to dominate the nonwhite races, either to give them the benefits of Western civilization or to exploit them for profit” (p. 170).

Modernism gave birth to the notion of nations. Before Modernism societies were bound together in ties of kinship, their religion, or their ruler. Wilkens and Sanford (2009) assert that the concept of nation is artificial and the “means by which they are established is frequently arbitrary” (p. 63). As there is not a natural justification for the concept, then, “the modern nation-state claims an identity deeper than that of religion, becoming, in fact, a new religion with its own foundational beliefs and public practices” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 179). As Western nations were the stage of an unparallel scientific and technological progress, they became more powerful than the rest of the world. Bosh (1991) asserts that this circumstance brought a national feeling of superiority that affected Christian thought, and he adds that “in most cases there was no attempt to distinguish between religious and cultural supremacy—what applied to the one, applied equally axiomatically to the other” (p. 291). In this context, and in accordance with modernistic assumptions, western missionaries unconsciously worked under the consensus that they had the ‘right’ to impose not only their religious views but also their cultural views on others (p. 292). These assumptions widened the gap between races, social casts, and
fertilized the soil to make a distinction between “civilized” and “non-developed” cultures. Mission and discipleship was developed under paternalist assumptions considering that those who were discipled in “uncivilized countries” only could grasp the form of the gospel but not its essence. In other countries national history and war events were used to illustrate values of the Bible making the message of the kingdom subjected to the message of a nation.

**Postmodernism**

To analyze postmodernism is not an easy task due to the fact that is still emerging from the debris of modernism. Nussbaum (2009), summarizing Bosh’s thought, identifies five threats that challenged modern thinking and paved the way for postmodernism:

1. Modernism promised unlimited progress for humanity, instead it stunted human growth (p. 87).

2. The mechanic worldview supposed to “liberate humans by giving them control over nature; instead it has enslaved humans and ruined nature.”

3. When Modernism circumscribed everything to matter and energy, it left humanity in a vacuum without purpose and meaning.

4. Even though modernism utterly trusted in human race as capable of resolve every problem, in this paradigm development was not a new word for peace, but another word for exploitation.

5. Trust in humans, a belief in “value-free” objective knowledge and the loss of meaning gave way to the great curses of the twentieth century: Marxism, Capitalism, Fascism, and Nazism (p. 88).
Modernity is a victim of itself and the seeds that it planted became the judges of its own failure. However, modernism is not a past paradigm. It still coexists in the West along with postmodernism. As Hiebert (2008) speaking on paradigm shifts states that “paradigm shifts rarely are total displacements of the old by the new. The new incorporates many elements from the old but gives them new meaning within a new configuration” (p. 212). Some scholars, such as Sire (2004) and Giddens (1990) consider that postmodernism is the last phase of modernism, or the radicalization of it (p. 52).

I will analyze in this section some elements of postmodernism that are going to help with the purpose of this dissertation. It will be impossible for me to grasp all the elements of this worldview. However, I will present those, which have shaped directly or indirectly Christian discipleship. The task is not easy because postmodernism is contradictory in itself (Sire, 2004, pp. 235-238).

Postmodernism, Truth, and Deconstructionism

If modernism was characterized by the quest of absolute truth, postmodernism is marked by the denial of it. For postmodernists truth is a social constructed context-bound belief. For example, if you are a male this is an arbitrary language designation determined by your social context, but in other social contexts the same male can be a female. For postmodernists “language does not reveal meaning (which would imply that there is an objective, transcendent realm of truth); rather language constructs meaning” (Veith, 1994, p. 54). Although abstract, Payne (as cited in Hoffecker, 2007) states that “no other issue has had a more singular impact on twenty-first century thought than the ‘linguistic turn’” (p. 321). This notion is called “Deconstructionism.” Deconstructionism seeks to expose the deep contradictions in a text arguing that it is always influenced by power
interests or class conflict in society. This method of thought is applied in postmodernism to all sciences. Sunshine (2009) points out that the most obvious implication of deconstructionism is that it “eliminates the possibility of saying anything that is objectively true.” He adds that in this view “all truth claims are equally true and equally false” (p. 186). There is not an objective reality, everything is relative. Knowledge is not seen as a picture of reality, like the metaphor used by modernism, but as a patchwork, a quilt, or collage where fragmentation is assumed as an essential element.

In postmodernism history is not a record of facts, it is arbitrary. It is not found by the historian but created by him (Evans, 2002). As a record of facts it is uncertain and trivial. It only becomes important as a myth or model to believe (Sire, 2004, p. 135). However, by no way myths are unimportant in postmodernism. What is powerful and transforming are the morals that a person finds behind them. Those morals are socially constructed and they are the means of power cohesion for a specific community.

In this worldview ethics is also a linguistic and social construct. As all truth claims are suspect, they are treated “as a cover up of power plays” (Veith, 1994, p. 56). Postmodernism suspects all meta-narrative as imperialistic. You and only you are the judge to decide what is right or wrong. What is the criterion? What the person experiences and enjoys is what is right and that is the essence of freedom. Thus, reason is replaced by emotional gratification. Anything against this notion of freedom is regarded as oppression.

This view had a major impact on Christianity. As there is not objective truth, post modern Christians transformed discipleship to an inculturation task. As ethics is a social construct, what becomes important is to attach those elements of culture that makes a
person feel good to the form of the gospel. For instance, if a person is a Cuban islander, authoritarianism gives cohesion to his/her community. That “works” for them and makes them feel good. Therefore, authoritarianism must be tolerated because it is their truth. It is not necessary to address it when doing discipleship.

Postmodern Christianity sees the Bible as a collection of myths that we need to believe to give cohesion to our community. Therefore, virginal birth, expiation, resurrection, miracles are just mythological didactic models to teach us how to value life and spirituality. These models are important because they are “examples of good life and its timeless truths of morality” (Sire, 2004, p. 136).

**Postmodernism and Power**

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Michel Foucault (1926-1984) who are considered as the main referents of postmodern thought taught that knowledge is always bound up to power (Hoffecker, 2007, p. 319). Their assumption was that “knowledge is constructed by groups motivated by self-interests” (Hiebert, 2008, p. 227). Therefore, in this thought frame, societies are seen as inherently oppressive and “institutions are really ‘masks’ for a sinister, though perhaps unconscious, conspiracy” (Veith, 1994, pp. 53, 54).

Hiebert (2008) contends that “postmodernity calls for an end to authority and replaces it with self expression” (p. 224). There are no more experts or specialists. Nobody can have the monopoly of truth. That is pretentious, petulant, and the seed of segregation. Postmodernists “celebrate the popular culture, not the elite culture, and demand popular control” (p. 225). While in modernity oppression was caused by the elites, in postmodernity the way to solve this problem is by the application of counter power. The only way to revert oppression is empowering those who are oppressed to
challenge the problems caused by systemic injustice. This notion planted the seed for terrorism, Liberation theologies, and revolutions.

The New Tribalism

With the spread of globalization and the growing access to the internet for all communities, the world lives in an unparallel cultural flux and exposition. People move around the globe as no other time in history. Ideas, news, and fashions can be at worldwide stage in just seconds via Twitter or Facebook. Hiebert (2008) points out that “one of the causes of the emergence of postmodernity is the growing social pluralism in Western societies” (p. 222). Nationalism that marked modernity is giving way to internationalism, taking away a notable point of identity reference that marked the last centuries. The “melting pot” metaphor is changed for the “mosaic.” Hiebert argues that in postmodernity we no longer “speak of assimilating immigrant communities into the dominant culture. Rather we encourage them to affirm their distinct identities” (p. 222). While modernism celebrated uniformity, postmodernism celebrates diversity and fragmentation.

The family in the past was a predictable basic structural system in society; in postmodernity it became unpredictable, amorphous, and in many cases a dysfunctional system. As Veith (1994) states, postmodern people find their identities “not so much in themselves, nor in their families, nor in their communities or nation, but in the groups that they belong to” (p. 146). Society is segmented in sub-cultures that are defined in terms of what they exclude: “conservatives,” “liberals,” “Black-Americans,” “Caucasians,” “Hispanics,” “Koreans,” “homosexuals,” “heterosexuals,” “pro-lifers,”
“pro-choisers,” “feminists,” “machists,” “Adventist conservatives,” “Adventist progressives” and so on. This postmodern notion is called “new tribalism.”

Although the most revered and proclaimed value in postmodernism is “tolerance.” Veith (1994) argues that due to the lack of a common philosophy and language, “these special interest groups cannot persuade each other or even forge a compromise. They can only exert power over each other. One wins, the other loses, and the battles are often ugly and ruthless” (p. 147). In Christian circles this conception has led to see discipleship as a strategy to gain someone to my group. The gospel is taught in terms of exclusion or fragmentation. In some cases it is conceived more as a shield to protect us from other groups than as leaven that pervades society. In others, the gospel is only a nuance of sub-culture. Then we find organizations or groups like Bikers for Christ, Christian Gays, Black Church, Christian Golfers’ Association, Christian Coalition of America, Conservative Christians, Transgendered Christians.

Image Over Substance and Entertainment

If worldview is the eyeglasses by which people see reality, in postmodernity television has become its lenses. Hoenisch (2005, para. 1) states that “on TV, the image dominates, overpowering not only the fact of speech but also its content.” The outcome of this circumstance has had a big impact in society and lifestyle. Hiebert (2008) asserts that in postmodernity the boundaries “between images and reality, are blurred. . . . Reality is now virtual, created by media artists who can make anything appear real” (p. 228). Postmodernist media sell the idea that life is a kind of play and play is a kind of life. In a movie a married actress may play as a prostitute and in another one may play as a nun. Postmodern minds were formed in a framework that can articulate these two
exclusive roles in a whole. Substance is subdued by image and image is subdued by circumstance. That is why public relation experts, image consultants, and pollster are so required in the postmodern world. They not only help to show tendencies, but to catch them. They are experts pointing out what is the role to play, and what are the values to uplift. This leaning is clearly shown in an image consultant ad that shows the contradiction of these times: “Your appearance is an outward projection of your character. The way you present yourself will either make or break you!” The words of the ad are true, but the service that offers is deceptive. An image consultant cannot change your character. Therefore what this ad offers is to make you a deceiver using your image as a tool.

Due to the lack of meaning that postmodernism has taken from society, people are prone to seek fulfillment in those things that ads want to sell. Business corporations try to relate their products with people’s essential needs in order to project a benign image and get permanent buyers. Thus, beer can be sold as friendship; a phone is sold as efficiency. A drug can be sold as health, and a car is happiness. In this way, the core human values are bounded up to superficial and artificial definitions that lead society to experience greater dissatisfaction.

As in modern medicine a drug can solve a symptom caused by another drug, the postmodernist dissatisfaction caused by switching image over substance is solved by entertainment. Hiebert (2008) points out that “the great evil in postmodernity is boredom” and entertainment has become the new religion (p. 235). It has their own temples: cinemas, sport stadiums, and concert arenas. Members call themselves fans, they sing songs, they call the performers “idols,” they dress accordingly, and they go to their
“temples” often. Entertainment is the “drug” that Existentialism uses to mitigate the
symptoms caused by the adoption of its own assumptions.

Churches in their desire to be relevant were also pushed to this trend. Hiebert
(2008) states,

Some modern churches see themselves as multimedia performances staged by a
skilled few for a mass audience. They may seek to communicate the gospel, but the
underlying worldview message is that this is really religious entertainment, and that
to live a religious life all people really need to do is to participate regularly in the
services. There is little call for live-in covenant communities or for radical
discipleship that challenges the dominant culture in which most of the members
participate. (pp. 234, 235)

Quoting Postman, Hiebert (2008) states that “on these shows, the preacher is tops.
God comes out as second” (p. 234). Sermons are excellent exhibitions of oratory skills,
putting the messenger above the message. In many cases salvation is switched by success
and the problem of sin is addressed by psychological methods. Everything is done so that
none should feel guilty because of their sins.

Capitalism

Capitalism has been one of the big columns of modernism and still is a column
for postmodernism. However, while modernism was focused on production, in
postmodernism the focus is on consumption (Hiebert, 2008, pp. 244, 245). After mass
production emerged as a result of applying the assembly line to industry, products that
were once accessible only to the upper classes came to the masses. “Americans have
consumed more resources over the last fifty years than the total used by the entire
population of earth prior 1950” (Wilkens & Sanford, 2009, p. 45). As a result of this
trend people give monetary value to those things that previously were not considered in
economic terms. For instance, in postmodernism teachers, administrators, ideas, blood,
athletes, identity, or gender can be bought or sold. “Human bodies, too, are reduced to commodities to be shaped, colored and sold (Hiebert, 2008, p. 232).

In postmodernism, corporations have gained a great amount of power and influence. They have limited liability and are capable of modifying government policies in order to extend their profit and gain. As a result corporations are increasingly stronger and nations increasingly weaker. More people are millionaires and more families are poorer. In this postmodern society greed is considered a virtue and share is a sin. While this dissertation is being written there are clear signs that this present economic system is reaching the hedge of collapse. Some people seeing that capitalism survived two world wars and emerged stronger from that, are thinking that war is the solution, while others, perhaps the few, see the that solution is in a worldview shift.

As many Christian churches became large corporations they have the tendency to operate on the assumptions of postmodernism. People are considered and listened to according to their contributions. Successful pastors are considered as products. Those who operate at the high levels of corporate Christianity sometimes enjoy a very different lifestyle of those who work at lower levels. They may enjoy benefits and prerogatives that differ greatly from the others working at lower levels. They also may have limited liability and may be capable of modifying church policies to extend their power and gain. In this context doctrinal discipleship may be a way to feed the corporation but not a way to transform it. Even though this notion is more related to modernist assumptions, if they are not corrected the natural and cultural outcome could be postmodern revolution that brings secession and fragmentation with itself.
The Seventh-day Adventist Church Shaped by Human Worldviews

Rosado (1990) says that “institutions do not exist in a social vacuum, but are social-historical entities that influence, and are influenced by, their cultural milieu” (p. 14). However, western religious institutions are not avant-garde (vanguard) elements in today’s society. Even those ecclesiastic institutions that seem most engaged and updated to the times may be considered as conservative institutions with respect to the latest tendencies of society. Thus, while in the world the dialogue may be framed within a wholesome postmodern worldview, into the church the dialogue may be framed within the assumptions of the modern worldview, and discussion may be focused between accepting or rejecting the postmodern presuppositions. The only way the church could be an avant-garde element in society is when its dialogue and discussion is shaped by the principles of the kingdom of God.

As I said earlier, the Seventh-day Adventist movement was born in modern times and became a worldwide church in postmodern times. Self-evident realities show that modernist and postmodernist assumptions are present in our midst trying to make of this movement a product of this time, and not a real avant-garde alternative. Discipleship must address these elements and must ensure that our church is in a “way out” from worldly worldviews and not in a “way in.”

As the invention of the mechanic clock was a landmark for modernity and its mechanistic worldview (Giddens, 1990, pp. 17-20), the introduction of the Church Manual in the SDA church may be seen as a sign that at that point the church was adopting modern mechanistic assumptions. It is interesting to note the modern wording of the following statement found in the official web page on the historical development of
the church manual: “This action revealed the growing realization that church order was imperative if church organization was to function effectively, and that uniformity in such order required its guiding principles to be put in printed form” (Church Manual, 2005, para. 4, emphasis added). Some questions may come up from that statement, what the church meant by “order”? Was order defined in mechanistic or organic terms? What they meant by “function effectively”? Was the church disorganized before the manual’s adoption?

The first time that the adoption of a church manual was proposed was at the 1883 General Conference Session. It was rejected. “The brethren feared that it would possibly formalize the church and take from its ministers their freedom to deal with matters of church order as they might individually desire” (Church Manual, 2005, para. 4). It took about 40 years to adopt the church manual since the first motion. This fact brings out the next question: Is this transition equal to the one experienced by Israel when it left the organic judge system to adopt the hierarchic monarchy system? In that context, what was the meaning of “order” for God and what was the meaning of “order” for his people? God did not want a hierarchical monarch system for Israel. He allowed it. This reality brings up another question: Is it possible that when the Seventh-day Adventist Church adopted the Church Manual to bring uniformity it lost its avant-garde position in society?

The adoption of a mechanistic worldview by Christians affected all aspects of mission and discipleship. Hiebert (2008) suggests that in the nineteenth and twentieth century, behavioral and doctrinal change was the focus in the Protestant model of discipleship and mission (pp. 11-12). The Seventh-day Adventist Church has not been an exception to these trends. Since the first decades of the twentieth century, it has been
clear that having the “truth” in propositional terms (orthodoxy) has been central to us. This emphasis led the way to the formulation of our 28 fundamental beliefs. Speaking in general terms, our evangelistic efforts and our methods of discipleship have been based on making people discover what a Christian should believe and how they should behave, more than what a Christian should be. It seems that we have conveyed the following message: If you believe the wrong doctrine, you have to believe in the right doctrine. If you are in the wrong church, you have to be in the right church. If you keep holy the wrong day, you have to keep holy the right day. If you eat the wrong food, you have to eat the right food.

Consequently, it is easy for Adventists, speaking in general terms, to define what they believe. However, it is not the same situation when they must define who they are. When arriving at that point, their cultural background is so prominent that it becomes the basis to define their identity. As I presented in the introduction, that is the reason why the church has regional conferences or ethnic churches where there is no a real necessity for their presence. We have the tendency to give tribalist “solutions” to paternalistic, racist, nationalistic, or imperialistic problems. This reality has shown that discipleship did not affect the identity of those disciples or ecclesiastic leaders who confronted those problems. They changed beliefs but their worldview assumptions were not affected. They did not apply biblical principles to their problems. They confronted them as cultural issues when in reality they were problems that were rooted in their sinful condition. They gave postmodern solutions to modern problems and the problems still exist today but in a more updated form.
The adoption of a mechanistic worldview has shaped our discussion about health, worship, personal adornment, meaning of revival, church growth, genre ordination, structure and organization, leaving us without a sense of purpose. The how’s have became more important than the why’s. As a result of this view the only thing that we can expect is a postmodern reaction framed in all its elements and assumptions that will leave the church not only without purpose, but totally fragmented.

**Conclusion**

Christian discipleship must address and confront the assumptions of worldly worldviews. It must affect all cultural dimensions and all its elements at all levels in order to present a real alternative for those who still are not part of the church. It must teach the principles of creation that are based to form a biblical worldview. As Wilkens and Sanford (2009) state: “The goal of a Christian worldview is transformation, the rearrangement of our identity, convictions, ethics and actions” (p. 184).
CHAPTER 4

WORLDVIEW TRANSFORMATION AND ADVENTISM

Worldview transformation should be the aim of discipleship. However, during the last 70 years Seventh-day Adventists have had some difficulties reaching this goal. We have developed a belief-based model of discipleship that brought some kind of doctrinal uniformity to our worldwide church but it has been inefficient to create unity and worldview cohesion among its members.

In the first part of this chapter I will present the essence of a principle-based model of discipleship as a means to shape and transform worldview. In the second part I will present a brief overview of how the Seventh-day Adventist movement in its early years showed an incipient development of a principle-based model of discipleship, but as years passed, modern assumptions became more prominent than biblical principles making the church a product of modernism.

The Twofold Aspects of Discipleship

A pure Christian worldview will be lived only in heaven; therefore, Christianity, in this earthly instance, should not be considered as an arrival but as a departure. It is a way out from secular worldviews. It is ecclesia (ἐκ = out; καλέω = call). Thus, Christianity cannot be stagnant at any point. If that happens it becomes a new form of a secular worldview. In this context discipleship is a call to partnership in a pilgrimage to
Canaan. It is a pilgrimage where God, through the Holy Spirit by means of the gospel, teaches the rudiments of his kingdom.

This reality makes imperative that discipleship starts with the disciplers. They are, in the words of Scheuerer (2001), cultural beings not by accident but by nature (p. 20). Consequently, they need to know that their definitions of truth may be shaped by their own worldly worldviews to avoid the mistakes made by modern missions. They also need to be acquainted with the fact that “Scripture is divine revelation given to us by God,” but theology “is an attempt to understand that revelation in our historical and cultural contexts” (Hiebert, 2009, p. 38). Breckenridge (1995) affirms that “each of us has experienced Christianity as presented in a cultural container. Each of us also reflects our own cultural ‘stew’” (p. 24). He suggests that every discipler needs to ask two questions: “(1) How do we arrive at our own self-understanding as Christians? (2) How do we interface with the culture of those who come from different worlds?” (p. 25). Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989) suggest two potential hazards that every discipler must avoid: (1) the perception of the communicator’s own cultural heritage as an integral element of the gospel, and (2) a syncretistic insertion of elements from the receptor culture which would alter aspects of the message upon which the integrity of the gospel depends (p. 1). Thus, Christian discipleship should take into account the discipler and the disciple. The first one will be always experiencing an ongoing process of acculturation through the adoption of the principles of creation, and the second one must be initiated into it. For the success of Christian discipleship the discipler needs to accept that the Christian worldview is not the property of any institution or country, but the cosmology of heaven.
It will always be a counter worldview for each human cosmology. It is the content of God’s mission for native earthly people wherever they are.

**Contextualization**

According to Paul the gospel in itself is power. Therefore, disciplers do not need to create the gospel, because it is already created and described along the Bible’s narrative. As Jesus came to live among humans in a particular cultural setting, the gospel has the same property. It does not act in a vacuum, but in culture. Kraft (2005) suggests that “culture is the milieu in which all encounters with or between humans beings take place and in terms of which all human understanding and maturation occur” (p. 89).

Hesselgrave and Rommen (1989) believe that the disciplers task is to “interpret (decontextualize) the biblical message to limit the intrusion of materials growing out of their own culture. They then must contextualize the message to communicate it effectively to respondents in a target culture” (p. 201). They need to take the gospel out from its cultural context to communicate it effectively to the disciple. This task is not only necessary for missions abroad, but for every single discipleship effort. Cognitive understanding will be essential for a volitional decision, and that decision is what will initiate people into the process of developing a Christian worldview. This process is called “contextualization.”

Hiebert (2009) presents three major views of contextualization: (a) noncontextualization, (b) uncritical contextualization, and (c) critical contextualization (pp. 19-31).
Noncontextualization

This kind of contextualization is seen among people in monocultural settings. For them the need of contextualization is not an issue. They unconsciously see reality based on modernistic assumptions thinking that their “truth” is like a picture of reality. They see Christianity as an arrival, but not as a departure. They confuse the natural expressions of their own cultures with the gospel. Their approach to discipleship is mechanistic and rigid trying to civilize or enlighten those who are ignorant. They view discipleship as teaching a set of propositional truths which can be codified in abstract rational terms under the assumptions of their own cultural biases (Hiebert, 2009, p. 21). They tend to assume a paternalistic attitude, and those people who willingly accept their instruction see them as truth and lifestyle referents. On the other hand, this kind of approach to discipleship causes rejection and polarization, not by the disciplers’ humble attitude, but by their pride.

It is important to note that under this approach there is a more flexible form of noncontextualization that is called *minimal contextualization*. This view is adopted when disciplers enter into very different cultures. They may adopt the food, the clothing, and the house styles of those who are target disciples; however “these forms of behavior are the outward ‘shapes’ of cultural symbols but without their meaning” (Scheuerer, 2001, p. 18). They use minimal contextualization as a “lure” to bring people to their own cultural religious platform. In the same way, when doing discipleship they put a strong emphasis over the cultural “signs” of Christianity assuming, as in Hiebert (2009) words, “that signs in other cultures, such as drama, drums and music, are inherently tied to their pagan meanings and therefore cannot be used by Christians” (p. 23). In these contexts of
minimal contextualization, disciplers use unconsciously racist arguments to dictate what is right and what is wrong in worship. For instance, drums are connected to native and uncivilized people, while pipe organs are considered the most sacred instrument, overlooking the fact that pipe organs were used originally for the Greek theater and the Roman circus games.

Uncritical Contextualization

In this view “all cultures are considered to be equally good and true” (Hiebert, 2009, p. 25). This is the postmodern approach for missions which denies all meta-narrative. Every intent to consider something valuable for all cultures is seen as oppressive and imperialistic. This vision unavoidably results in syncretism, defined by Van Rheenen (2006) as “the blending of Christian beliefs and practices with those of the dominant culture so that Christianity loses it distinctiveness and speaks with a voice reflective of its culture” (pp. 24, 25).

Syncretism is considered a problem related not only to missions abroad but to Western contexts as well, where the gospel has become part of the culture, not an outside counter-culture alternative (Hiebert, 2009, p. 26). Uncritical contextualizers miss the point trying to make the gospel attractive. They invalidate a basic principle of biblical mission that says that the gospel always will be considered folly and a stumbling block (1 Cor 1:22-24). The gospel does not have to be attractive but understandable. The cries of a heart without God is the only guarantee that the gospel will be at least heard, not the addition of elements foreign to the gospel but common to human ambitions.
Critical Contextualization

In modernism, knowledge was seen as a picture of reality. In postmodernism it is seen as a relative social construct. Critical contextualization sees knowledge as a map. “Maps must correspond to reality in what they claim to affirm, but they are mental images that are schematic, approximate, and—of necessity—limited and selective” (Hiebert, 2009, p. 28). In this view the heart of the gospel is kept “by encoding it in forms that are understood by the people, without making the gospel captive to the contexts” (p. 29). As I presented earlier, theology is our understanding of Scripture but no divine revelation in itself, “it is always partial and perspectival,” and Hiebert asserts that this fact “calls for a community-based hermeneutics in which dialogue serves to correct the biases of individuals” (p. 29). He mentions something that would be worthy to apply in the Seventh-day Adventist church as an organic approach to discipleship,

On the global scale, this calls for both local and global theologies. Local churches have the right to interpret and apply the gospel in their contexts, but also a responsibility to join the larger church community around the world in seeking to overcome the limited perspectives each brings, and the biases each has that might distort the gospel. (p. 29)

How can these three views of contextualization be compared in one example? Compare the discipler with an aunt who wants to give carrots to eat to her nephews who do not have teeth because of their bad habits of eating junk food. The gospel would be the carrot. In the noncontextualization approach the aunt would give a raw carrot to her nephews and would ask them to eat it without taking care of their sore gums and the sacrifice that this fact would imply. This experience would not be pleasant for them. It would be necessary to use some authoritarian approach from part of the aunt to reach her goal. As a result, neither of the nephews would eat the whole carrot, they would just taste it.
In the uncritical contextualization approach the aunt buys an ice cream in the shape and color of a carrot. Her nephews would happily eat the carrot shaped ice cream but they would never eat the carrot. In the critical contextualization approach the aunt liquefies the carrot to make juice, and after her nephews drink it, she calls a dentist to fix their teeth.

I believe that discipleship within the Seventh-day Adventist church should adopt the critical contextualization approach. But, how can we contextualize and at the same time be united as a worldwide church? How can we contextualize the gospel without affecting its essence? My suggestion is to apply a principle-based model of discipleship.

**Principle-Based Model of Discipleship**

If the aim of Christian discipleship is worldview transformation, then we have to analyze what is worldview and what is its relation to culture.

**Levels of Culture and Discipleship**

De Oliveira (2009) defines worldview “as the silent force that explains, gives meaning, and evaluates in order to produce behavior” (p. 26). He asserts “that worldview is the deepest level of culture” (p. 27). On the other hand, Hiebert (2009) defines culture as

the more or less integrated system of beliefs, feelings, and values created and shared by a group of people that enable to live together socially and that are communicated by means of their systems of symbols and rituals, patterns of behavior, and the material products they make. (p. 150)

Hiebert (2009) points out three cultural levels: (a) patterns of behavior, which is sensorial; (b) belief system, which is explicit, and (c) worldview, which is implicit
De Oliveira (2009) adds another level between the belief system and worldview level: the value system level (p. 27). I will use this classification to describe the integration of worldview and culture in an individual (Figure 2).

The diagram illustrates the levels of culture:

- **Surface**
  - Behavior
  - Beliefs
  - Values
  - Worldview

As written in the last chapter, the Adventist way of doing discipleship and evangelism during the last decades has clearly focused on the first two levels of culture: behavior and beliefs. Generally speaking we have been using the modern mechanical noncontextualized approach to do discipleship by giving carrots to people without teeth. Lately, what we have begun to realize is the fact that due to the lack of using a critical contextualization approach here in the West, perhaps we have been giving people carrot-shaped Western ice cream while we thought we were giving them real carrots.

Then, the question that needs to be answered is, how can discipleship reach the deepest level of culture?

**Reality and Principles**

As I stated before, Christianity is a departure but not an arrival. It is a departure from our social constructed beliefs and ideas. It is a pilgrimage to a different reality that is miraculously experienced but still not reached. It is a bridge built in the future that
reaches our present with hope. The raw material from which it was constructed was taken from the past and it is the wooden cross. Then, What is reality for Christians? Reality has two dimensions: one is corrupted but affected for good by Calvary and the Second Coming. This is our present reality. The second one is totally uncorrupted and pure and it will be lived in the future. In a few words, reality for Christians is God’s kingdom. This reality can be experienced by individuals by means of the Holy Spirit and conversion. On the other hand, human beings experience a corrupted reality by means of natural conception that is called in the Bible as “this world” (Rom 12:2).

As atoms are the basic units of matter, principles are the basic units of God’s Kingdom. They are the most basic reality. They cannot be broken down further. They are the frame of existence. They are grounded in God’s character, will, and reign (Stassen & Gushee, 2003, p. 113). They do not have to be created; they need to be discovered. They are objective realities that are not affected by our imperfect perceptions. They are organized in a contiguous living system. They are organic. When they are applied in existence they cause growth, plenitude, and organization. On the other hand, the principles of this world are corrupted and decadent. They turn in upon themselves leading to destruction; however, this process can be momentarily delayed by the application of mechanical work. The principles of this world are entropic and we, as human beings, have a natural allegiance with them. Thus, the Bible describes that there are two systems of basic realities: (1) the principles of the Kingdom or creation, and (2) the principles of this world.

In this context, the aim of Christian discipleship is to present the living principles of God’s kingdom to invite people to live in a growing relationship with God. Disciplers
need to present those principles in two aspects, cognitively and in experience. In this regard it is necessary to highlight that principles are not values. Principles are objective and values are subjective. Principles are external realities. Values are conscious or unconscious allegiances which put our culture and worldview in harmony either with the principles of God’s kingdom or with the principles of this world. In this context, a value is the door of culture which connects us with either the kingdom principles or the principles of this world. As Covey (1990) points out, “Principles are not invented by us or by society, they are the laws of the universe” (p. 18). Therefore, the principles of God’s kingdom must be the content of Christian discipleship.

How the Principles of God’s Kingdom Affect Worldview

De Oliveira (2009) suggests that “worldview transformation occurs by creating instability at the worldview level, providing new explanations, and, as a result, a new cultural integration occurs that will incorporate the new worldview assumptions, shaping the new [old] worldview and restoring stability” (p. 38).

Speaking in terms of mission, the principles of God’s kingdom are a system of counter worldview and they will always cause worldview instability when presented. The question that we need to answer is: At what stage do the principles of the kingdom begin shaping a person’s worldview? To this effect Kraft (2005) affirms that “the basic change upon which transformational processes are built is the change in allegiance” (p. 272). It does not have to do with accepting a correct doctrine or with changing a pattern of behavior. It has to do with voluntary allegiance at the value level. When a person makes a volitive conscious decision of allegiance to the principles of creation at the value level of
culture, the person’s worldview is affected. When values are attached to principles, as a result beliefs, behavior patterns, and worldview assumptions are affected and shaped.

In this context Christian discipleship is the process by which the discipler causes worldview instability by the presentation of the principles of the Kingdom incarnated in the person, ministry, and teachings of Jesus Christ in connection with all scriptures. The climax of this process is when the disciple makes a volitive conscious allegiance to Jesus, adopting the principles of his kingdom as personal values. I describe that process as “principle-based discipleship.”

It is important to highlight that worldview transformation by Christian discipleship is not given by the change of allegiance from one religious system to another. Although that is a change of allegiance at the value level, it is only a kind of cultural conversion but not the real Christian conversion that we see in Scripture (Kraft, 2005, p. 273). Conversion in Scripture means total allegiance to a person: Jesus. This experience is shown by a volitive adoption of the Kingdom principles.

The Source of Kingdom Principles

The source of Kingdom principles is the Bible. It is along its narrative that we can find a description of those divine organic principles that are the frame of existence. However, Scripture is a human container for divine revelation. It is a divine message embodied by human agents. Its message is reflected in stories that take place in a specific cultural context and time. Regarding the Bible’s language Canale (2005) affirms that “while God’s mode of cognition is perfect, the human cognition and language into which revelation is incarnated is all too imperfect.” Then he asks, “Does that mean that Scripture contains imperfections?” And he answers: “At the level of the human vehicle,
yes, but not at that of the revealed content” (Canale, 2005, p. 337). Scheuerer (2001) affirms that “the Gospel is not acting on its own, as it were an autonomous human person. It has to be proclaimed by its followers. It is always inserted into another culture through the instrumentality of an alien culture” (pp. 121, 122). Hiebert (2009) also points out that Scriptures themselves were given to humans in particular and in sociocultural contexts. He says that differentiating between them and eternal truth is essential to understand the universal scope of the gospel (p. 29). This decontextualization and contextualization task is fundamental for a principle-based model of discipleship.

Biblical principles are the message of God. They are descriptions of his kingdom’s foundations. While they are expressed through the imperfect vehicle of language, they are objective realities that are not affected by imperfect descriptions. Said in other words, the objective reality of God’s kingdom affects for better our imperfect descriptions of it. In that sense, we can take the imperfect descriptions of principles as a map to help us find the right way in our pilgrimage to Canaan. What we need to highlight is the fact that in the Bible those principles are manifested in different cultural expressions and contexts that existed 2,000 to 4,000 years ago (Whiteman, 2010, p. 118). Those cultural expressions can be seen along the Bible’s narrative as commandments, rules, patterns of behavior and customs that are bound up to time, space, and context.

Differentiating Principles From Their Manifestations

Failure to differentiae principles from their manifestations has brought much confusion in the proclamation of the gospel. In many cases our message has become just a cultural religious product that does not have the power to transform people’s worldview. Breckenridge (1995) says that “it can be very difficult to admit that some
church teachings regarding social customs or preferences are, in almost cases, cultural conditionings of little consequences for the Christian faith” (p. 25).

Even though principles generally are not presented explicitly in the Bible, they are objective realities. They are the reason of beliefs or actions. Principles establish purpose. They are syncronic in its essence, but they are dyachronic in their manifestation. They are universal and are the frame of existence and action. They are not attached to culture, but culture is attached to them through values. On the other hand, rules, norms, church standards, and behavior are manifestations of principles. They are always shaped by culture. Although they are concrete, they are subjective. They may change in relation to space and time (Table 2). Unlike principles, they do not explain the why but the how. Principles need the existence of rules to be seen, as rules need the existence of principles to be explained.

Table 2

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difference Between Principles and Rules</th>
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<tr>
<td>Space</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
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As said before, for the success of Christian discipleship it is necessary to know that distinction. I will present an example of this task and its outcomes in a case scenario. In Deut 23:13 the following rule is found: “As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement.” This was a divine rule based on a hygienic principle. As a rule, it was local, temporary, and
questionable. It was local since it could be only applied in places where soldiers could dig with a paddle. It was temporary, because it would be applied while wild and primitive conditions existed. It would be questionable, since some day, as place and circumstances change, it would be necessary to challenge the rule and reconsider it in order to keep applying the principle. For the people of Israel there would not be tension while circumstances remained the same as the time that the rule was given. However, tension surely would arise when circumstances changed and time passed. Tension would be the sign which would show that the time of contextualization of the rule had come in order to continue keeping the hygienic principle. Tension, in this case, would be a sign of progress and an opportunity to grow in social and religious maturity. Let us suppose that today Israeli soldiers are considering this divine rule. Tension could become a real conflict if soldiers, discussing what it means to be faithful, split in two groups, one of them sincerely saying that they need to keep using the paddle in order to be faithful to God’s rules, and the other one advocating the use of “new technology” (portable toilets) in order to keep the hygienic principle set down by God at Sinai. For a superficial observer, the first group would be considered as the “faithful” one, since it did not change the divine rule. Nevertheless, this group is not seeing the principle behind the rule, and as time passes or as places are changed, they are willing to break the hygienic principle as long as the rule could be kept. In other words, when we obey a religious rule without considering the principle behind it, we follow just a cultural tradition. In that sense we will have a mechanical approach to religion so peculiar to modern thought.

One of the main problems that Jesus had to confront during his ministry was the lack of this understanding among his people. The Pharisees considered that Jesus was
against religion when in reality he was against some customs that did not have any relation with fundamental principles of the Kingdom. Jesus knew that rules, norms, and behavior are cultural manifestations of principles but they are not principles in itself. He knew that rules may change as time passes, or as contexts change. That was the reason why he broke some rules or customs. However, he always manifested through behavior, beliefs, and values that he was in total allegiance to his Father and to the principles of his kingdom. Jesus also was a cultural being. He was Jew and he followed all Jewish traditions which were not in conflict with his kingdom principles.

Jesus showed that he understood that in his kingdom there is a hierarchy of principles. In that sense every discipler should show the same awareness. In God’s Kingdom there are higher principles and lower principles (I will discuss more about this topic Chapter 5). When Jesus was confronted by the Pharisees about his Sabbath observance, he responded in a way that showed how he approached and interpreted the Bible message.

He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. (Matt 12:3)

Jesus supported David’s attitude of breaking a divine rule that was attached to a lower principle in order to apply a higher relational principle of providing food for the hungry. In this case the Pharisees saw Jesus as being against the law, when in reality he was fulfilling it. Jesus did not approach the law mechanically. He saw each rule or commandment as a reflection of an eternal principle.

Jesus also considered that the Ten Commandments were cultural manifestations of principles but not principles in themselves. In other words, they were a contextualized effort made by God to make understandable the principles of his kingdom in the cultural
context of Israel. Someone with some anxiety may ask: “Are they local, temporary and conditional?” As commandments, yes; but not the principles they point out.

When we were kids we went to Sabbath School. There, we were asked to repeat the first commandment: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exod 20:3). The teacher used to tell us: “Other gods for you may be money, television, sports, etc.” She was contextualizing the commandment according to our cultural experience. She changed the commandment but not the principle. She rightly pointed out our problem at the level of values.

When Jesus was asked about the greatest commandment in the law (Matt 22:36), he pointed out two eternal principles:

> Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your entire mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments. (Matt 22:36-40)

Those who do not make distinction between rules and principles wrongly consider that Jesus nullified the Ten Commandments, without knowing that principles always confirm commandments if they are still attached to them. Principles without commandments are only theoretical enunciations. When they are applied, they enter into culture as concrete elements but they can be manifested in different forms. For example, making a spiritual retreat on a cruise in the United States may be something desirable, good, and the cheapest option for a church, but making a spiritual retreat on a cruise in Argentina may be a waste of money and an attempt to break the principle of modesty due to what a cruise represents in Argentina.

For some cultures, going to church with a hat on is a sign of respect, but for other cultures a sign of respect is taking their shoes off. Both cultures show respect for God’s
place of worship, but both show respect in different ways. There is no problem while both cultures remain separated. But, what happens when both cultures meet together to worship? What would be the right way to show respect? A modern mind would say “my way.” A postmodern mind would say in words: “neither,” but in acts it will defend the way of those who are oppressed by imperialistic cultural impositions. Principle-based discipleship would say: “Both may be right, while neither of those cultural ways violates a kingdom principle.”

To follow the principle-based approach among the Christian community it is necessary to exercise tolerance and acceptance in an open ongoing dialogue. As there is no perfect culture, it will be a learning experience that will bring a priceless opportunity for maturity.

This kind of approach to life brings dynamism and flexibility. It makes of the Christian experience something intelligent and reasonable within its own framework. It is not static and stagnant. It does not detach religion from daily life. It is organic and not mechanic. It promotes freedom and responsibility. Due to its rich nature and variability, it is impossible to circumscribe it to a manual. In this context, dialogue and discussion will be the key strategic elements in order to enrich the process and maintain its organic growing nature.

The core of principle-based discipleship is to do this task in order to present a real gospel to make a person decide to live in allegiance with the principles of the kingdom. This process will allow confronting cultural elements that press on our lives and in which in many instances take dominion in the shaping of our worldviews.
The Seventh-day Adventist Church and Principle-Based Discipleship

When the Seventh-day Adventist movement was born it tended to be organic. Its pioneers were conscious that in this world, including the religious one, there was something wrong. They considered Adventism as a departure, a pilgrimage, and not as an arrival. Due to its nature, it represented an avant-garde proposal among Christianity and society. At its beginnings there was an incipient development of a principle-based model of discipleship. One of the main reasons for that situation was the presence of the prophetic gift manifested in the person of Ellen White. When reading her books people do not need to be very perceptive in order to note that she put the major emphasis of her teachings and discussions on principles more than on doctrines or rules. Her influence permeated the years which follow her death. However, as time passed, modernist assumption pressed on the movement in order to make their incursion. Some leaders and members started to yield to the mechanistic worldview that was dominating the western world. To confront this problem the ministerial department of the General Conference on January of 1928 launched a tool of dialogue and discussion to address those “modern” issues in order to maintain unity and cohesion among the workers that at that time were spread around the globe. That tool was the Ministry Magazine.

When reading those articles it is interesting to note what was the vision of the Adventist leaders at that time, and how they confronted the issues that were common elements of modernism such as “doctrinalism,” “nationalism,” “institutionalism,” “nonessentials over essentials,” etc. It can be noted that in the early years leaders focused more on principles and fundamentals than on its manifestations. However, as time passed they tended to confront “modern” problems with “modern” solutions, preparing the
church to arrive unavoidably into postmodern arenas. My research will cover a selection from *Ministry Magazine* from 1928 to 1945, the year in which modernism started to collapse as the main worldview of the western world as the result of the World War II.

**Doctrinalism and Creeds**

In the first year of the magazine, Dickson (1928), a pastor from New York, in an article titled “The Greatest Need,” wrote that it is “better by far that one be uninformed on doctrines than to be unconverted.” And he added:

The great cause of so many leaving the church by apostasy is not so much because they do not know or believe the doctrines which we teach, but rather because of the fact that they have never known what a thorough and true surrender of heart is. (p. 3)

Leroy Froom (1931), the chief editor of *Ministry Magazine* and the most prolific denominational writer of that time, alleged that there were people that suggested the necessity of adopting, in his words, “a statement of beliefs, a confession of faith, or creed, as variously phrased, though in the ultimate these expressions mean but one and the same thing.” He said that those people alleged that having a statement of beliefs would help to confront internal divisions and the threats of higher criticism. Froom considered that suggestion as “inadvisable and perilous, and in direct violation of the unvarying principle that has guided all through the years of our denominational history” (emphasis added).

Then, he adds:

The remedy lies not in a creed, but in the eager, reverent pursuit of unfolding light which God purposes to have shine upon our pathway more and more unto the perfect day. This light is to be found in the open, frank, united investigation of truth that was followed by the pioneers of this cause. (p. 7)

He affirms as a historian that “it is a mistake to think that among the founding fathers there was uniformity of belief on all points of doctrine and prophetic interpretation. . . . This very fact should in itself enhearten us.” Next he adds, “But there
was a spiritual unity that bound all together in one coordinated whole. In the early days of this movement there was no hesitancy about candidly examining the positions submitted by a brother believer” (Froom, 1931, p. 7).

Speaking about the environment of dialogue and free discussion that governed those former times he wrote:

There did not seem to be a haunting fear, in those days, of disintegration through frank, honest discussion of differences. We may well learn from them, for their premises were fundamentally sound. In this way inaccuracies were detected and laid aside; and real strength, growth, and unity ensued. There was no thought of a creed, for they had and followed something infinitely better. (p. 7)

He finished his editorial warning to the readers:

Beware of the adoption of a creed. Let us seek a real remedy for our needs, not an expedient that will disappoint and fail. One deadening thing about a creed is the stagnation it produces. Crystallizing and codifying the truth received, it drives its stakes. It becomes static, rigid, orthodox, and looks askance, if not with hostility, upon any advance study by men as loyal and true as the ultraconservatives who ultimately control in a situation of that kind. This leads to repression and a kind of odium, if not actual persecution, of those in whose being burns the spirit that animated the pioneers in their search for everincreasing light and truth. Additional light is never inimical to the light already received. If truth had to be buttressed and walled about, it could never have survived the onslaughts of the centuries. (p. 7)

Westphal (1934) writes a provocative article stating that a formal religion based on doctrine, form and ritual, is easier to maintain. He applies this principle either for churches as for individuals. He wrote:

Any church, after it has degenerated into formalism, may continue the same, or nearly so, almost indefinitely. Whatever of truth it has brought with it may remain, but stripped of its vitality. The same is true of the individual. He will maintain and proclaim his religious theories and fight to the death for them, and will pride himself on faithfulness to his creed and his orthodoxy, and all the while be devoid of spiritual life. (p. 4)

Westphal points out that “doctrines may be received as a heritage from father to son, but life must be received directly and constantly from God through Christ.” He finishes his article making an appeal in the following words:
But unless we, as a church and as individuals, maintain that living relation to God through faith in Him as our personal Saviour, we shall have ultimately but a shell of religion left, a beautiful theory that cannot save us. The inevitable result will be formalism, dependence on a creed, whether written or unwritten, as a hoped-for carnal security. This is perhaps the most insidious peril that confronts us collectively as a movement, and in individually as workers in that movement. (1934, p. 4)

In the same year, Froom (1935) wrote an article titled “Stultification.” In this article, he warns readers about the adoption of a creed. Describing how the Adventist movement saw truth in its early years, he wrote that “at such times truth was conceived to be an expanding principle, constantly amplifying, illuminating, clarifying, or correcting past understandings.” It is important to highlight that Froom defines truth in organic terms as an “expanding principle.” He continues saying that “investigation, discussion, revision, incorporation, development these were the key words and attitudes of those days.” He affirms that the adoption of creeds attempts against unity and places “an official frown upon investigation.” He suggests that in those churches which adopted a creed “truth which is an expansive, progressive principle was thus stultified, and satisfied stagnation ensued, and opposition to further advances . . . became the order of the hour.” He finishes his editorial saying, “Blind are we if we do not see and avoid this menace to our own movement” (1935, p. 11).

Essentials and Nonessentials

Years before, Froom (1931) had written about differentiating essentials and nonessentials on truth (which he defined in organic terms) and prophesy interpretation. There were some ministerial colleagues that suggested that all points of view must be stated in the same terms of that in the past. Froom argued that, as members of a movement, they needed to have the same attitude of the pioners but not necessarily arrive
at the same conclusions on every single matter. He writes always using organic
descriptions of truth:

We face the future, not the past. Our faces are set toward the dawn. The light that
shines “more and more” is for us. A spirit of repressive conservatism that crystallizes
into rigid form, or an attitude of “we are the people possessing all the truth for the
hour” that degenerates into a mere contention for a position held in the past, can be
viewed only with apprehension. It must not attain the ascendancy. Our pioneers were
honest men. As such, they ever sought advancing light, and when they found an
additional ray, never hesitated to walk in it. This frequently led them to make certain
readjustments in the field of these secondaries. They desired their positions to be in
agreement with all known facts, and to harmonize with all related truths. Many a
detail was consequently altered to conform to this right principle, and many an early
position that was hazy was later clarified because of this honest and commendable
attitude. (Froom, 1931, p. 4, emphasis added)

Froom considered orthodoxy as a great threat for the Adventist movement and it
is interesting to note that he saw implicitly human knowledge as a “map” not as a
“picture” of reality. In the same editorial he wrote:

Nor let us be beguiled into believing that God has committed to a select few the
preservation of orthodoxy. Self-appointments are easy; but no one has patent
rights upon this movement. God alone reads hearts, and He alone has the ultimate
truth. Therefore criminations and recriminations as to orthodoxy have no rightful
place whatever hit this message. (p. 4, emphasis added)

Froom (1931) finished his editorial describing what he understood by unity,
distinguishing essentials from secondaries. He stated:

Let us greet every man who subscribes to the saving essentials and call him brother. If
he differs or errs on minor points, let us faithfully tell him why we think so,
submitting our evidence for his examination. But let us distinguish between primaries
and secondaries. Such a spirit will foster peace, mutual confidence, and joy in service,
and it will inevitably lead to greater unity in the truth. (p. 4)

A year after, speaking about systematic theology and prophecy interpretation,
Froom (1932) writes: “But we must never forget that the fundamentals of personal
salvation are comparatively few and simple. And they are basic.” Then, he adds:

These fundamentals can be grasped by the child as well as the adult, the weak as well
as the strong, the untutored as well as the scholar, the heathen along with the
Christian. Yet these fundamentals never have been and can never be fully fathomed even by the greatest intellect among men. (Froom, 1932, p. 9)

In 1940, Froom would write an editorial titled “Neglect Not the Weighter Matters” showing a clearer distinction between principles and standards. He warned readers about falling on the same mistakes of the Pharisees:

But we should never forget the divinely recorded balance fixed by our Master between meticulous fidelity to external details, and those weightier matters justice, mercy, and truth which transcend all else. These comprehend the fundamentals of relationship to God and man, and are the standard by which God judges man. . . . But the Master's principles are timeless in application. They preclude high profession coupled with some nullifying practice that crucifies a basic principle. Both the lesson and the underlying principle are worthy of prayerful study. We must not fail as they failed. (p. 21)

Nationalism

It is important to highlight that in the early years of the Ministry Magazine every journal had a clear emphasis on missions. The Adventist movement was growing and they confronted particular demands from every mission field. Modern assumptions on nationalism were pressing on missionary’s views. In an article titled “Submerging National Consciousness” Froom (1932) expressed his point of view stating: “Other divisions outside America are becoming the bases of supplies and of men, and more and more we must submerge national backgrounds and enthusiasms” (p. 21). Encouraging the utilization of nationals in the work, he adds:

We must remember as never before that we have a message for all men, that is to be given by heralds from all nations. . . . God loves the world. Our message is for the world. And more and more as our cause expands, there must be a blending of talent from all portions of the world field. (p. 21) Considering the ethnocentric attitudes that permeated the western Christian world, Froom points out that the Adventist movement “is now the property of God’s people throughout the whole world. No one has patent rights upon it. It is neither American, British, nor
German.” To be clearer, he adds: “When the missionary goes to foreign soil, let him keep his homeland flag in the bottom of his trunk” (1932, p. 21). It is remarkable to see how Froom, at the end of its article, presents a critical contextualization view of mission.

Speaking about missionaries, he wrote:

He goes not as an Occidental to foreignize the Oriental, the African, or the islander, but to proclaim the eternal good news in its universal application. God’s ideal is that His gospel message shall become indigenous, adapted to the distinctive characteristics of the people to whom it is proclaimed. (p. 21)

Froom understood that the principles of the gospel do not change and they are universal. But he also understood that they can be manifested in indigenous forms and adapted to the people to whom it is proclaimed. But, what were the limits? He states:

As missionaries we must never forget the distinction between evangelizing and Europeanizing, Christianizing and civilizing. Knives and forks instead of chopsticks, European clothes instead of the native garb, have naught to do with the great commission, except as moral standards are involved. (p. 21)

When we take into account that Froom wrote this article amid modern times we rightly may affirm that the Seventh-day Adventist movement was an **avant-garde** (vanguard) proposal in those days for society and Christianity.

However, as the Second World II brought an unparalleled prosperity to North America, American nationalism took the hearts of its people. Nationalistic feelings were infiltrating the way how the Adventist message was proclaimed. Exploiting the war atmosphere evangelists designed some strategies that would have been considered contradictory to the multiethnic attitude of the Adventist movement in the 1930s. In this period evangelists began to mingle national symbols in public events making the gospel captive to a particular culture. Patriotic hymns were also included into the youth hymnals making the impression that the message of the kingdom had to do more with this earth than heaven. For example, in his article “Effective Patriotic Tableau,” Mansell (1944)
tells the readers how successfully he used a patriotic play showing national emblems to get the attention of the public for prophecy exposition. Actors and singers dressed in patriotic and war costumes recreating the history of the United State’s flag in relation with its impact in World War II. Patriotic hymns were sung to create a climate. Describing the moment in which the patriotic song was sung he says that “this stirring climax to the song is most effective, and usually brings the entire audience to their feet in tribute to the American flag” (p. 38). Mansell ends his article with the following description:

The spotlight can be focused on the flag while the other lights are dimmed. Immediately following the tableau, we have a large group of church school children enter from rap wing of the platform and sing in chorus, “God Bless America,” or some other appropriate patriotic number for a final climax to this presentation. (p. 38)

Needless to say that Mansell’s description of his patriotic representation leaves the readers wondering whether the purpose of this meeting was about celebrating the success of the war or to study prophecy.

Unity versus Uniformity

Unity was one of the most recurrent topics in the Ministry Magazine at that time. In 1933, Froom wrote in an article titled “Maintaining the Unity of the Faith” affirming that unity had a twofold purpose for the movement: (a) ensure the success of church mission, and (b) defend her from her enemies. He also defined unity in organic but not in mechanic terms. He wrote:

Unity is not necessarily synonymous with uniformity. One may exist without the other, and often does. It is not to be expected that all will see alike on unessential details, or that there will be blind assent to the positive assertions of some who may assume to lead in matters of faith. There can be arbitrary uniformity without real unity, and, on the contrary, genuine unity without deadening uniformity. (Froom, 1933, p. 11)
Froom, almost always, drew on the pioneer’s experience in order to take an example from their dynamic attitude. He wrote,

Divergencies of opinion on detail there are and always have been, and these may continue to exist in varying degrees without affecting the essential unity of the church for which Christ prayed, and for which the spiritual gifts have been bestowed. (p. 11)

It is important to say that although Froom defined unity in organic terms when he referred to “essentials” and pointed out some basic fundamental doctrines of the movement. However, as seen before he saw “truth” as an expanding principle.

In the same article Froom also speaks about its concerns, in his words, “over patent drifts and sagging standards within the church we love” (p. 11). But he confronts some who wanted to enforce a solution rather than inspire it. He writes:

A few in their concern have resorted from time to time to unwise agitation, and even in instances to projection of charges against those who differ with them. But such an attitude is most regrettable, and only antagonizes and alienates. (p. 11)

Froom points out again that differences of view in minor points had always marked the Adventist movement, and adds:

This is but natural and inevitable, else men would have to put away their reasoning powers and become mere automatons, which would be one of the greatest calamities that could come to afflict us. Blind subservience or forced acquiescence to the positions of a few dominant minds would be ruinous. It would make for a body of weaklings. (p. 11)

Froom ends his argument making a statement that describes the administrative environment of that time pointing out that it was a continuation of the same one experienced by the pioneers of the Adventist movement. He pens: “Happily, that is neither the historic way nor is it the present spirit of this movement. We are indeed glad that such a destructive procedure has no place in the plans and policies of our appointed leaders.” (Froom, 1933, p. 11, emphasis added).
In spite of Froom’s administrative environment description, there were some voices that were trying to impose some modern assumptions to solve modern problems. It is interesting to note the tone of an article written by Carlyle Haynes (1934), at that time the president of the Michigan Conference. He uses a kind of wording very different from that used by former writers. Speaking about church dress standards he writes that “our silence puts us on the side of wrong. Soon we will have no standards left unless we support and defend and enforce what we have” (p. 3, emphasis added). He continues writing:

Church officers should uphold church standards. If they fail to do so, they should not remain church officers. . . . The time has fully come when ministers everywhere should see to it that our church standards are upheld and enforced. They should not permit them to be lowered and trampled upon. The good name of the cause of God is at stake. We should not permit it to suffer. . . . A firm stand is demanded on the part of our ministry in order to change our present situation and restore the old, tried, established standards of the faith. Let us not only “ask for the old paths,” but walk in them in faithfulness and devotion. (p. 3, emphasis added)

This emphasis started to permeate the mission field and the General Conference (GC) secretary, E. D. Dick (1941) as he pointed out that there were people in high positions in the mission field who wanted to maintain church standards. He wrote:

What should be done? One thought that the church should legislate—determine what should be the length of skirts worn by growing girls, and how far from the ground should come the skirts of our older sisters. Another thought that there should be some regulation against half hose, and another thought that the sisters should wear stockings to church. Still another had a burden to see a regulation that would prohibit any from coming to church without shoes. (p. 3)

Then he adds quoting Ellen White:

While I believe fully in maintaining high church standards, I believe there is danger that we sometimes “sit in the seat of the scornful” and legislate or dictate instead of cultivating, neglecting the power of the love of Christ to transform lives. We forget at times, I fear, that true religion and worship are exercises in expressing the soul’s devotion to God for His love revealed in the gift of Jesus. Its success is measured by holiness of heart and life, but “to substitute external forms of religion for holiness of
heart and life, is still as pleasing to the unrenewed nature as it was in the days of these Jewish teachers.” *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 387. (Dick, 1941, p. 3)

Dick finishes his article pointing out the necessity of lifting up principles rather than standards and emphasizing purpose over legalistic behavior. That was a counter theme proposal for a modern assumption. He wrote:

Instead of plucking off the leaves of worldly trends in dress or fashion by legislation, let us rather produce the fruits of holiness by digging deep in the soil of the heart, enriching the spiritual life by holding before our dear people the beauty, the love, of Jesus, His death on the cross that we might live eternally, and His coming again that we might dwell with Him. Let this, the love of Christ and the hope of His soon return, be the pure stimulus for purity of heart and life, rather than church legislation and fear of church discipline. (p. 3)

A Modern Solution for the Problem of Apostasy

In the 1940s there was an evident preocupation over apostasy. Leaders saw the cause of this problem in the lack of pre-baptismal preparation. J. F. Weight (1942), who was vice president for the GC, wrote an article addressing this problem revealing an ethnocentric language that was not common for the 1930s and a mechanical and propositional approach to discipleship. He stated:

No worker or church board has a right, or is privileged, to depart from the general rules, standards, and procedure which we have so faithfully followed through the years. Especially should it be emphasized that where the work is being conducted among the indigenous or the more primitive peoples, the instruction should be all the more thorough and otherwise be necessary. The aim at all times should be to make real Seventh-day Adventists and to firmly establish those newly come to the faith. . . . Some of our fields overseas are finding it advantageous to hold their new converts in the Bible classes under instruction and observation for a period of from one to three years. Obviously the more backward and primitive the tribe, the more necessary to extend the period. . . . During this period of preparation, the individual is reckoned as a Sabbath keeper, and is therefore a member on probation. That is to say, he is not a fully baptized member of the church as yet. In this respect he is not accorded all the rights, ordinances, and privileges of a full-fledged church member, though he does enjoy the blessings of the Sabbath school, the Missionary Volunteer Society, and the general meetings of the church. But until baptized, he cannot hold an office of any kind in the church proper. The real purpose of the probationary period is to give opportunity for the individual to test out his own experience, for observation regarding
whether a real transformation has taken place in the life, and to bring forth fruits unto righteousness. (Weight, 1942, p. 3)

Weight was right pointing out that the goal of discipleship was transformation instead of proposing an organic approach for discipleship, Weight follows modernist assumptions and offers a mechanical one. He saw discipleship and life transformation through a modern worldview. In the same article he described and supported the way of doing discipleship abroad.

It is during this time that he [the candidate] is carefully instructed from the baptismal manual, which covers the doctrines, church order, and Christian experience. A weekly record is kept of his attendance at meetings, and a careful note is taken of his habits and general deportment. (p. 3)

In a tone that today would sound ethnocentric, he adds:

When the examination is held, it is well, if at all possible, for a European minister or missionary to be present. In many cases, however, if an experienced native pastor is in charge, just as thorough work is done. In fact, in not a few instances, we have found the native minister to be somewhat more careful and exacting than others. The main thing is to use every precaution to see that the work done is thorough and satisfactory. (p. 3)

Using the example about how a native minister would examine a candidate, Weight clearly shows that the mechanical approach to discipleship was giving birth to kinds of “modern” authoritarian native leaders. At the end of his article, Weight (1942) suggests that all baptismal candidates should be subject to an evaluation. This evaluation is based on 34 questions the candidate should answer before being considered for baptism. The examination had a hierarchical and mechanistic emphasis typical of the modern worldview.

In the same year, W. H. Branson (1942), who was also a GC vice-president, had announced the adoption of the baptismal vows and the inclusion of 27 fundamental doctrines in the baptismal certificate. He wrote, “For many years it has been felt that
there was a great need of uniformity in the matter of receiving persons into the fellowship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (p. 5). It was alleged that the measure was taken because some workers took a very liberal attitude lowering the church’s standards and others overwhelmed baptismal candidates with issues that never had been considered as tests of fellowship, such as: candidates participation in ingathering, meticulous questions of what new members shall eat, drink, and wear, support of Christian education, etc. He wrote:

There are many questions concerning present truth upon which all those contemplating baptism and church membership should be thoroughly instructed. Yet these matters should always remain on the basis of education, persuasion, and individual conscience. In other words, not all that we as a people believe and teach has been incorporated into what is known among us as tests of fellowship, which tests must be satisfactorily passed by those who apply for membership in our church. (p. 5)

Branson rightly suggested that disciplers need to differentiate between those things that are tests of fellowship and those which are not; however, he suggested a doctrinal-based test of fellowship (p. 5). This approach was in total agreement with the assumptions of modernisms.

Institutionalism

As the Adventist organization grew there were some signs that showed that mechanistic modern assumptions were pressing to take over the movement. In 1933, the *Ministry Magazine* published an article that was a portion of a sermon given at the Autumn Council by Professor Kern where he addressed the leaders pointing out the dangers of institutionalism. He said:

As necessary institutions and departments develop, and rigid plans and policies are formulated, when drives and campaigns are the order of the day, there is the greatest danger that the driving power of machinery will be substituted for the mighty power
of the Holy Spirit. There is danger that the subconscious ideal shall become a perfected organization rather than a living organism. (Kern, 1933, p. 3)

Kern shows preoccupation saying that great evangelistic events were replacing personal discipleship efforts and that he saw that fact as a loss of one of the unique traits of the Adventist movement. He said that “if formality, professionalism, and institutionalism predominate, we are lost” (p. 3).

In 1941, Froom wrote that the perils of maturity beset the Adventist movement. He stated: “We have numbers, means, a full-rounded body of faith—and a growing complacency that tends to benumb our minds to subtle dangers which not only surround us, but seek to penetrate our inner lives.” He added that “this complacency tends to obscure our vision, deflect our efforts, and cause us to go the way of all religious bodies before us” (p. 21). He also mentioned that modern assumptions were pressing on our movement: evangelists were relying on entertainment and not in the power of the Word to win souls (p. 21).

Two years later, in 1943, Weight, who was vice president of the GC, saw in institutionalism one of the main causes of apostasy in the Adventist church. He stated:

It seemed clear then, and it seems just as clear now, that one cause for such heavy losses lies in the fact that we are producing Christian activities more rapidly than we are developing Christian experience. This we found to be a grave danger. Obviously, in our zeal to hasten on with the work, we give so much time to pushing activities that spiritual and devotional life is to a marked degree neglected. . . . Let it be said in all earnestness of soul that activity, zeal, and success in promoting this or that program can never, no never, supplant or supply the spiritual power demanded by these times. (p. 5, emphasis added)

On the same line of thought, Wright (1943) in an article entitled “A Great and Sovering Challenge” wrote that “we spend too much time over plans, methods, and machinery, to the neglect of the spiritual; hence our loss in spiritual matters” (p. 4).
Froom (1943) saw in institutionalism a sign of weakness because, according to him, it repressed the legitimate and forthright discussion that characterized the early days of the Adventist movement. He penned: “Now that we have established ourselves and our policies, the tendency is to restrict all examination of the status quo. That is not a healthy attitude. Weaknesses thus become fixed, and indispensable progress is retarded” (p. 48, emphasis added).

In 1944, Henry L. Rudy, who was at that time the president of the Canadian Union Conference, wrote an article titled “Our Relationship with God’s Work” pointing out four reasons of failure to build up strong membership among the church.

1. He mentioned that financial prosperity was blurring the vision of the church. He asked, “Are we interested only in increasing the church membership in order to assure a certain financial income to the conference?” (p. 4).

2. As the second reason he pointed out the substitution of personal evangelism by machinery. He said that “the idea of winning souls by proxy has fastened itself so strongly upon us that we are in danger of losing the real power to win people.” Then he added, “So many are satisfied with the mechanical equipment at their disposal as the only means for success in soul winning. They believe that the radio, Bible correspondence schools, picture rolls and films, and many other excellent helps are a sufficient guaranty for success.” He stated that “the personal messenger is still, and always will be, the primary factor in communicating the truth to others.”

3. He pointed out “overdepartmentalization” as a third factor of weak membership. According to Rudy, among the leaders it seemed to be the reasoning that the only way to solve a new problem was to create a new department.
4. He introduced the fourth reason for Adventist failures in what he called “councilitis.” He said that “with all these new creations added to the standard organization along these lines, it has come to pass that there is almost a continuous round of councils and conventions and committees.” When asked which were the accomplishments of some of these councils, he answered, “Well, the men had a get-together, and some times little more was accomplished than working out a new kind of report blank to further bewilder the harassed church officer!” Then he added:

Whenever a new department, or branch of a department, is created, it means that new secretaries must be elected in the churches, in the local conferences, and in the unions. It means more reports, more conventions, etc., until we become involved in a continuous cycle of activity. Let us ask ourselves the question: Are we using time and means that could better be devoted to actual soul winning? (Rudy, 1944, p. 4)

That same year Froom (1944) had written that “the dangerous tendency is ever with us to substitute human motion for spiritual power, activity for fellowship with God, and sweat for tears of intercession. Human mechanics tend to crowd out the divine dynamics” (p. 48).

It is clear that as time passed Adventist leaders adopted positions that tended to suffocate the organic movement that Adventism used to be, to give birth to a “modern” Adventist church. Froom (1945) denounced some practices that in the 1930s would have been considered foreign to the Adventist movement. He wrote:

There is a certain type of conference administration which virtually demands so many converts for so much financial investment, or even worse, which requires that the evangelistic effort be consummated within a specified time, and that results be commensurate with some other field or some other evangelist. But this is bound to react unfavorably in the end. Such administration encourages the workers to be superficial in their endeavors. The tendency is to force-feed these new converts in order to make a favorable showing. But, brethren, that kind of work makes us guilty of the charge of trafficking in souls. (Froom, 1945, p. 25)
Conclusion

By the end of the World War II, in spite of its growing numbers, the Adventist church ceased to be an avant-garde proposal for Christianity and society. Since that time we have been developing a discipleship model based on modern assumptions. We have made of creeds and doctrine the base of our mission endeavor. We have put too much energy trying to define the right doctrine in propositional terms that we have forgotten the importance of being in allegiance with right principles. This kind of approach has produced disciples who, in spite of their beliefs are authoritarian, ethnocentric, or selfish. They were not induced to be in allegiance to Jesus through the adoption of the principles of creation, but to be in allegiance with a church. They may have changed beliefs and behavior but not worldview. This approach brings in itself tension that cannot be resolved.

Due to the lack of the application of a critical contextualization view for mission, we also have standarized the manifestations of the gospel. In many cases, we have done this task using the assumptions of the more “civilized” cultures of the world. On the other hand, seeing the advances of the fragmenting postmodern cosmology permeating as a tsunami in all levels of society, we have tried to keep the whole body of the church as a worldwide united community of believers applying modern recipes to postmodern problems. We have considered in many cases revival and reformation as a way back to the past instead of pressing forward to advance to the future kingdom. The result: polarization, confusion, division, and competition.

To finish this chapter I will present one example to show what has been the immediate outcome of this way of doing discipleship. At first, I will refer to William
Shea (1987) when he addressed authoritarianism among Adventist Hispanic leaders at the Adventist Society of Religious Studies (ASRS). He said,

Thus there is more of a dictatorial attitude in the conduct of church affairs in those areas. While this may be a generalization that is unfair to some church leaders in Central and South America, I have had two General Conference officers talk with me about this situation and admit that they too were of a similar attitude when they worked in those areas, but that now that they have worked in North America for some time they have seen a more democratic way is preferable. . . . These same officers have told me about religion teachers who have been fired for what would be considered rather minor variations here in North America. (emphasis added)

This example demonstrates that for those two leaders of the GC, American culture had more success teaching them what is right and what is wrong than the principles of the gospel. The questions that come up as a result of this case are: On which basis were these two leaders formed as disciples? On which basis were they promoted? If we need to come to North America to know that we do not have to be authoritarian, what gospel are we preaching abroad? Is it a carrot shaped ice cream? What kind of contextualization view are we using when doing mission?

At the beginning of my ministry I was an assistant pastor. One day, a candidate for baptism approached me complaining about her instructor. She was receiving Bible studies by a well-known multigenerational Adventist book writer. She told me with some kind of anxiety: “Pastor, this lady is asking me to remove my thin little necklace if I wish to be baptized. She says that the Bible teaches that we don’t have to use jewelry. But, I have had this necklace since my childhood. My grandmother gave it to me.” She continued saying, “I told her that I would remove it only if she would take off her luxurious brooch from her blouse, but she replied saying that her brooch had a specific use but my necklace didn’t. Pastor, what about this little necklace with its emotional meaning? Is God asking me to do this to get baptized?”
What would you say to this baptismal candidate? Let us say that she removes her little necklace to get baptized, what would she teach as a discipler to other people after her experience? Is personal adornment an essential or a secondary? Let us say that she did not get baptized because she rejected those conditions, would it be right to say that she did not love Jesus as much as to put aside her little necklace? Or it would be better to say that we did not love Jesus as much as to put a little necklace aside from our view to let people enter the Kingdom.

These two examples are not isolated. If we visit different local churches around the world we will see that these problems are one of the big sources of tension among members and leaders, especially in multicultural settings. These problems weaken our witness to the world and make us captive of our cultural traditions. This reality makes imperative the creation of a new model of discipleship based on the principles of the kingdom and not just on biblical doctrine. This process will not be easy or fast, but its implementation will again place us in an avant-garde position for Christianity and society, confronting modernism and postmodernism with sound biblical assumptions.
CHAPTER 5

SEVEN STRATEGIC PRINCIPLES FOR
PRINCIPLE-BASED DISCIPLESHIP

In this chapter I will present seven strategic principles to frame principle-based discipleship. They are (a) the work of the Holy Spirit, (b) the meaning of religion and the gospel, (c) Scripture and authority, (d) ethics based on principle, (e) sanctification,
(f) the church as an organic system, and (g) eschatological mission. These principles are the means to integrate spiritual and natural realities in a discipleship model in order to assure a transformational process.

**The Work of the Holy Spirit**

The work of the Holy Spirit is strategically essential for principle-based discipleship. As the union of spirit and dust resulted in human life at creation, in the same way the union between the Holy Spirit and the body of Christ results in church life. It is the power of the Spirit that makes the church a living organism. It is the Holy Spirit who is going to transform the believer’s worldview. Jesus said regarding the work of the Holy Spirit: “And He, when He comes, will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment (John 16:8, NAS). “But when He, the Spirit of truth, comes, He will guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13). These verses are speaking explicitly about worldview.

It is the Spirit who convicts and guides into all truth, not the discipler. When this principle is not respected a dogmatic and authoritarian model of discipleship based on cultural assumptions shapes the church and its mission. In a principle-based discipleship, the only pressure that is recognized is the pressure of the Holy Spirit.

White (1902) wrote:

Do not feel that the responsibility rests upon you to convict and convert the hearers. The power of God alone can soften the hearts of the people. You are to hold forth the word of life, that all may have an opportunity of receiving the truth if they will. (p. 35)
Disciplers need to present the gospel by words and witness and let the Holy Spirit convince people and show truth. The application of this principle will foster healthy discussion and respectful dialogue.

However this organic process is jeopardized when discipleship is driven primarily by numeric goals that are framed in a specific time period. When that happens, mechanical power is applied in order to comply with corporative agendas that use control as the main element to ensure function. Thus, the spiritual side of discipleship is underestimated as being considered unpractical and idealist because it cannot be measured in numbers that fill a business report.

In this mechanical context it is more useful to use the application of doctrinal-based discipleship because the cause of baptism is at the discipler’s side but not at the Spirit’s side. It is true that the teaching of a creed may result in conviction but not in worldview transformation which is the main objective of principle-based discipleship. This mechanical approach is more “modern,” “scientific,” and “real” because, although it can be classified as an ecclesiastic activity, it relies only on the natural realm where everything can be measured in a specific time frame and in concrete numbers.

If disciplers do not respect the work of the Holy Spirit, discipleship becomes just a proselytizing activity but not a transforming mission. In principle-based discipleship baptisms are expected but not provoked. Viola (2008) asserts, “The assumption that chaos would ensue if clerical control were removed betrays a lack of confidence in the Holy Spirit. It also reveals a lack of trust in God’s people, something that violates the New Testament outlook” (p. 64).
The Holy Spirit and the Revelation of Jesus

Our ideas of God are not God. The Holy Spirit is the only one who gives meaning to the story of Jesus. This spiritual process is one of the most difficult experiences for disciples. It will always confront our ideas about God. Ideas developed through the years that have become religious traditions. This process will always confront peoples’ worldview and will produce an effect upon them. This spiritual process will be especially hard for those who have taken their knowledge about God from a religious tradition. Ecclesiastic institutions may propitiate a right environment to let the Holy Spirit work but never will be the means to convey the meaning of Jesus. If that would be the case, our definitions of Jesus would be only social constructs. It is the Holy Spirit, the only agent that gives meaning to Jesus’ story.

In principle-based discipleship the person of Jesus is central and the work of the Holy Spirit foundational. As a result, the perfect combination of both is the only power able to change and shape the disciples’ worldview. Therefore, the discipler’s task is to deinstitutionalize the person of Jesus by presenting the gospel witness as it is in the Bible’s narrative, and allow the Holy Spirit to bring meaning and illumination.

The Holy Spirit and the Image of God

The aim of the work of the Holy Spirit is to restore the image of God in the individual who accepts Christ as Savior and Lord. In principle-based discipleship the image of God is defined by principle and not by some good and positive human attributes. The image of God is restored in individuals when they let the Holy Spirit subdue their desires and passions by a sanctified reason and will. When that happens, it
has a direct impact on relationships because the Holy Spirit is the means by which humans can commune with God and their neighbors.

**The Meaning of Religion and Gospel**

In the Bible there is not such a concept as “sacred life” and “secular life.” That view is rooted in the Greek worldview. Rops (1961) speaks about Hebrew thought: “So when we come to consider the religious life of Israel in their public utterances should not be forgotten that all life is religious in every sense of the word” (p. 382).

*Religion* comes from the Latin word *religare*. Re means “again” and ligare means “to bind,” “to unite.” Etymologically speaking, *religion* means “to unite something that was not united.” In this context *religion* means “to be united with God.” Therefore, *religion* does not mean to be a member of a church. *Religion* does not mean to give tithe and offerings. *Religion* does not mean to be a pastor. A person can be a member of a church, give tithes and offerings, be a pastor, and yet not being united with God. The true meaning of *religion* is to live constantly united to God.

Principle-based discipleship relies on this principle and it is in total desagrement with the Greek dualistic approach where spiritual and natural realms are desconnected. As Wilkens and Sanford (2009) put it, “Every aspect of our being is implicated in the Fall. Thus, salvation must reach into every dimension of our lives” (Wilkens & Sanford, 2009, p. 195). In this model disciples need to be taught to integrate God into their family life, their business endeavors, relationships, entertainment, administrative procedures, and every corner of their existence. When they fail to do so, they are affecting their religion; their union with God.

Miller (2001) states,
Many Christians today suffer from “split personalities.” Their lives are divided into compartments: the “religious,” what they do when attending church or a Bible study; and the “secular,” their jobs, recreation, and education. Millions of believers operate from this worldview. . . . Never hearing the challenge to be consciously Christians in their daily lives, they are conformed to the pattern of this world and have secular minds. (pp. 46, 47, emphasis added)

Principle-based discipleship follows the Anabaptist approach. Referring to this group Breckenridge points out:

Anabaptists focused on the effect of theology upon everyday life. It was not uncommon for Anabaptists to debate how Jesus would have acted as a businessman in this situation, or as a parent, a teacher, or a farmer in that setting. Second, faith was defined more in terms of “discipleship” than mental assent to dogmatic propositions. For Anabaptists, the presence of faith was seen in the transformation of a person’s life. The overall result of this view was a greater emphasis upon biblical theology rather than systematic theology. (1995, p. 36)

If the implications of the etymological definition of religion are followed we can arrive at a conclusion that there are only two religions: false and true.

False religion is based on the decadent principles of this world that were by the heathens the natural way of living. True religion is based on the principles of creation that are accessible by means of the Holy Spirit to those who accept God’s plan of salvation.

Pagans believed that natural disasters were the evidence that their gods were angry with them and they considered that they were being punished by them. Therefore, they offered sacrifices to propitiate their gods. As a result of their efforts, the goddesses calmed and loved them. In this religious view, human efforts and actions became central. They were the means to change the goddesses’ attitude. The gods reacted to human behavior and were unpredictable. Thus, humans became victims of their gods and were driven to them by fear.

On the other hand, in the biblical religious view, humans are angry with a loving and predictable God. God offers a sacrifice to calm the belligerent human attitude. He
changes humans, as humans accept the divine sacrifice. In true religion, God’s effort and action becomes central. God is the voluntary victim of humans and through the acceptance of his sacrifice humans are driven to him by love. In this view, human actions are considered a response to the unchanging love of God.

Figure 3. False and true religion.

In this context true religion is defined by a principle, the principle of the gospel. Therefore, if somebody centers religion in human efforts putting God’s actions and sacrifice in the background, it is presenting false religion. If that is the case, it does not matter if people are seventh-generation Adventists, theologians, or members of the “right” church. They are experiencing and teaching a false religion. If our worldview is centered on what humans do or upon what we offer to God, we are not experiencing true
religion. If pride and selfish attitudes are the mark of our pilgrimage, we are against the gospel and experiencing false religion even though we “believe” in the right doctrines.

Principle-based discipleship is rooted in the message of the gospel. It is the gospel that “is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes” (Rom 1:16). It is the Holy Spirit through the presentation of the gospel that shapes a person worldview guiding him/her to depart from the kingdom of this world and enter the kingdom of God.

**Scriptures and Authority**

What makes a person an Adventist? When the Adventist movement was formed, its adherents where united under a basic principle: The Scripture would be the authority of practice and doctrine. The application of that principle resulted in some distinctive characteristics and beliefs. However, it would be a mistake to define Adventism by its characteristics and not by its fundamental principle. If we do so, Adventism would lose its organic nature.

The distinction between Adventism and any other movement on earth is not based on the day of worship or in the possession of a distinctive doctrine, but on its approach to Scripture. This should be the starting point of comparison with other religious traditions.

The basic principle of Catholicism states: If the church contradicts the Bible, as a Catholic, your duty is to obey the church. On the other hand, Pentecostal circles find cohesion in the following principle: If your feelings contradict the Bible, your duty is to follow your feelings because through them the Holy Spirit works.

In the Adventist movement if the church contradicts the Bible, your duty is to follow the Bible. If your feelings contradict the Bible your duty is to follow the Bible, because the Holy Spirit works through reason to subdue feelings. Principle-based
discipleship defines religious traditions by principle and not by denomination. Therefore, we may find many nominal Catholics that are Pentecostals because they follow their feelings. We can find many nominal Pentecostals that are Catholics, because they follow their ecclesiastic leaders. We also can find many nominal Adventists that are Catholics or Pentecostals according to the principles they choose to live by.

For principle-based discipleship authority relies on Scripture. That is the reason why in this model discipleship needs to be framed in the knowledge of Scripture, not upon a church dogma. The aim of discipleship is not to make people feel good, but to make them aware that there is a problem about their natural feelings. Their feelings disqualify them to build healthy relationships with God and humans.

In this context, it is very important to highlight that in principle-based discipleship Scripture is not studied to find abstract doctrines but the relational principles of creation that are grounded in the character of God. At the same time, if Scripture is the authority, disciplers of this model need to show a humble attitude, helping disciples to think by themselves but not trying to impose a denominational canned “truth.” White (1901) wrote: “We are not at liberty to teach that which shall meet the world’s standard or the standard of the church, simply because it is the custom to do so. The lessons which Christ taught are to be the standard” (White, 1901, p. 420).

**Principle-Based Ethic**

One of the major purposes of principle-based discipleship is to provide a biblical framework to determine in every situation what is right and what is wrong. In Chapter 4, the difference between principles and rules and the necessity for disciplers of knowing
the distinction was pointed out. Also, it was said that principles are unchangeable laws that cannot be created, they must be discovered.

However, our cultural view of law is rooted in the Roman concept that brings adverse consequences to our approach to Christian discipleship. In the Roman view, which is also the modern view, law was defined as the impersonal rules necessary to maintain order and stop the spread of evil. The role of a Roman judge was to satisfy abstract rules that defined justice and injustice regardless of satisfying the injured person. A person was found innocent or guilty, just or unjust, depending on how he or she measured up against an abstract ideal code (Hiebert, 2008, p. 198). Two years ago I read in the newspaper something that can be a good illustration about how this approach to the law has shaped our worldview. There was a father who went camping with his kids to the mountains of northern Georgia. While his kids were eating around the camp fire, a hungry bear appeared. When the father saw that the animal was heading toward his children, he instinctively took a piece of wood and hit the bear’s head with full force. Thank God, the bear was killed instantly. When the ranger came and saw the dead bear, he fined the father $300 because it was against the law to kill bears. That was the “rule of law.” It did not matter why the father killed the bear, what it was important was the law.

That is not the biblical approach to the law. God gave the laws as a description of principles which are the frame to maintain healthy relationships with him and human beings. The central message of the Bible is relationships, but not rules or laws.

Nussbaum affirms: “If the center of our life is a person [Jesus], not a law, the tone of our life cannot be legalistic. We are subjects of a king, not dehumanized objects who must have our goodness measured by some abstract standard” (2009, p. 24). It is in the context
of relationships that a behavior can be classified as moral or immoral. As Rosado (1990) states: “God is our moral standard. Not some external rule; not some contrived and contradictory handbook policy, but God” (p. 125). Later he adds: “The reason of our moral behavior is others, not ourselves” (p. 126, emphasis added). These statements are in complete agreement with the essence of the gospel. Hiebert (2008) confirms that “the central message of Scripture concerns relationships between God and humans—shalom, love and peace. To be human is to be in relationships. Humans are created for true community. Without it there is no fullness of life” (p. 286).

Our modern approach to law has blurred our view about the law in the Bible. The Ten Commandments were rules given for the Israelites to protect their relationships with God and human beings. That was the reason why God proclaimed them to a community. All the messages of the prophets of the Old Testament were based on God’s desire to be in a covenant relationship with his people and about how they should relate to their peers. All the teachings of Jesus were about relationships. Dever (2006) comments about Jesus’ perspective on establishing a new covenant with his disciples: “Jesus’ language of covenant is not cold or legal, as some might think; he takes it from the Old Testament language for relationship-making. . . . A covenant is a relational commitment of trust, love, and care” (Dever, 2006, p. 29). Also, as in the Old Testament and the gospels, all the epistles center their message in how to be in harmonic relationship with God and human beings.

The Bible presents the idea that when our spiritual relationship with God is broken, it can be seen in our broken relationships with humans. That is called sin.
Righteousness and justice is related to relationships, never to the obedience of a cold and impersonal law.

Principle-based discipleship relies on this biblical view. The principles of creation that are the foundation of God’s kingdom are essentially relational. The task of disciplers is to help disciples to discover those principles in order to apply them to daily life by the power of the Holy Spirit. Those principles, as presented in Chapter 4, should be the root of values, beliefs, and behavior. Principles explain the why while rules and norms explain the what.

Rules and norms may change regarding context, time, and place; however, principles never change. They are eternal and universal. In other words, the principles of creation may manifest in different ways according to time and place. Therefore, to be faithful to the message of the Bible every rule, standard, or norm must be analyzed in its relational context and not just as a mere cold regulation that is totally disconnected from a communal life. In the Bible, relationship is what determines what is right and what is wrong.

In Chapter 4, an example on how Jesus supported the fact that David broke a divine rule in order to feed his soldiers was presented. Why did Jesus have the assurance that David had done right? Jesus understood that feeding hungry humans was in harmony with the principles of creation, of love, and compassion that are grounded in the character of God. In that moment, feeding the hungry was an act based on a higher divine principle than keeping a divine ritual rule. However, as the context remained in the same condition as when the rule was established, the divine rule should be kept.
Another example about how a divine rule should be broken in order to follow a divine relational principle is evidenced in the abolition of circumcision. Why did the apostles consider that circumcision, which was an “everlasting” divine command, was not necessary any longer? As principles establish the why of a rule, the first thing we need to do is to determine why circumcision was established in a relational context.

Although the Bible puts more emphasis on the what, God let us discover the why. The Bible renders that circumcision was the sign of a covenant relationship between God and his people (Gen 17:11). But why should this sign be carried on by males on their penises? To know the why we need to analyze the context. Paul said that “the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed” (Gal 3:16). It is insightful that the Greek word used by Paul for “seed” is spérmati. In other words, the Messiah was going to come as a result of experiencing covenant love between husbands and wives through sexual fruitful relationships.

On the other hand, the way that pagans worshiped their gods was through fornication (Exod 34:15, 16; Lev 20:5; Deut 31:16; Ezek 6:9). It was in that context that circumcision was established. If an Israelite wanted to practice idolatry, he was going to have a reminder in his own flesh that he was part of a special community which had a covenant relationship with God. Before practicing idolatry through fornication, he would see the reminder of the Messiah’s expectation that was confirmed through covenant love between a husband and wife. The sign of circumcision was a sign of covenant loving relationships and a “stop sign” for disloyalty.

When Jesus, the Messiah or the “seed,” came to this world and his people did not accept him, the sign of circumcision ceased to be a sign of loyalty or a reminder to stay in
The people of God did not accept the revelation of God through Jesus. They preferred to be attached to their own ideas of God rather than accept the revelation of God himself. It was a kind of idolatry. Circumcision, that was both a sign of a loving relationship framed in loyalty and a sign of the Messiah’s expectation, lost its meaning. It was necessary to establish another symbol to be a sign that was according to the new relational context. That symbol was baptism.

Principle-based discipleship helps people to discover the relational principles of creation that are grounded in the character of God to determine what is right and what is wrong for a particular situation.

There is a hierarchy of principles: First, those principles that are relational with God and humans; second, those principles which are related to integrity of being; third, principles that are related to our interaction with nature. For instance, Jesus supported the fact that some people made body mutilation for the sake of having a better relationship with God and humans (Matt 5:29-30; Matt 19:12). However, in the Old Testament, in another context, God prohibited body mutilation if was not for improving the relationship with God and humans (Lev 19:28; Deut 14:1; cf. Phil 3:2). In that context, it was considered as an attempt against self integrity.

At the same level we find “martyrdom.” Jesus allows us to give our lives for the sake of others (John 3:16; Rev 2:10), but on the other hand, he does not approve of the destruction of our body (1 Cor 3:16, 17).

Obstacles of Principle-Based Ethic

One of the major obstacles that principle-based ethic confronts is the fact that having this kind of scriptural approach has a direct impact on denominational traditions.
Customs that have been considered of higher importance for a long time may lose their status when confronted with the principles of creation. As contexts change, they may not have the importance that religious communities assign them. This can create resistance among the members of a religious community, thus jeopardizing the implementation of principle-based discipleship.

To clarify, I will refer to the topic of “jewelry” that was mentioned in a previous chapter. The Bible very clearly is against the use of jewelry in some contexts (Gen 35:1-4; Exod 33:1-6; 1 Tim 2:9; 1 Pet 3:3) and it is in favor of its use in other contexts (Gen 24:47, 48; Exod 3:22; Prov 25:12; Isa 61:10; Jer 2:32; Ezek 16:11-13; Luke 15:22). We need to discover the principles of creation upon what Bible narrative is built on in order to understand why God is against or in favor of jewelry. Thus, these principles must be relational principles and grounded in God’s character. It is important to note that principle-based discipleship believes that the Bible message is inspired by God, not its words.

Consequently, God is against jewelry in two contexts: (a) as a sign of idolatry and (b) as a sign status to put oneself above others by ostentation of external adornment.

**Idolatry**

When God asked the Israelites not wearing jewels, it was in the context of idolatry. In that context, wearing jewels were a sign of disloyalty to God. Therefore, the problem was not in the jewelry itself but on what it meant for those who wore them. The rule was based on a relational principle of loyalty.

A jewel was at the same time an amulet. According to the ancient Oriental view, metals and precious stones belonged to certain gods of the mineral world and possessed, therefore, a mysterious magic power. Aside from this, any trinket that diverts attention from the wearer itself still serves as a protection against the evil eye. For this reason everyone in the Orient wears an abundance of jewelry. Traces of this superstition are found in the Old Testament. In Isaiah 3:20 a piece of woman’s jewelry is designated as an amulet (cf. Gen 35:4); and it is evident that the ornaments on the camels of the Midianites were charms (Judg 8:21). (pp. 22, 23)

When I was a teenager, Argentina was involved in a war against communist terrorism. During that decade young communists used to wear a beard as a symbol of ideological identification. I remember that in ecclesiastic environments, the beard was seen as a symbol of rebellion also. In that context having a beard had a specific connotation. Do we still have to see beards with the same connotation?

**As a Sign of Status**

We have always said that the rules of the New Testament against jewelry are based on the principle of modesty. If this principle is a Kingdom principle, it must be a relational principle of creation that is grounded in the character of God. Therefore, we have to understand this rule in a relational context and not as a cold abstract rule to be followed in isolation. If that would be the case, we were doing a Roman approach to the Bible based on the “rule of law” that is foreign to the thinking of the Bible.

In James 2:1-7, we find that modesty is a principle that is related to our position in society regarding our neighbor. When jewelry is used to establish status, it points out two problems: (a) a lack of developing the inner relational attributes given by the fruit of the Spirit, and (b) the rejection of the essence of the gospel that establishes that all people are at the same level at the foot of the cross.
The same problem of lack of modesty can be seen with our cars, houses, academic degrees, Pathfinder uniforms, and so on. However, can we say that God is against cars, academic degrees, and Pathfinder uniforms? Not at all.

The problem of this rule with Adventism is that, as time passed, not wearing jewelry has become one of the main external symbols of Adventism. It is seen almost in the same way like circumcision in Judaism. As for Christians Jews it was very difficult to understand that the rule of circumcision had lost his relational sense with the rejection of Jesus; it is for Adventists to understand that the rule against jewelry may have lost its relational sense when it is not used for idolatry and in modesty. I have seen people literally doing verbal attacks to people that were using jewelry in modesty. They do not have a problem being harsh with people (relationship context), but they have a big problem about seeing Adventists using a little necklace in modesty (cold rule). This kind of approach to moral issues diminishes our Christian witness to society and undermines our claim to be the heirs of true Protestantism.

On the other hand, those texts of the Bible which show God as approving jewelry show that God likes beauty that is manifested in modesty.

Principle-Based Ethic Can Be Applied to All Topics

Principle-based discipleship supports this approach to ethics in all controversial issues such as worship, leadership, administration, grooming, and woman’s ordination. All issues in life must be resolved by the application of a principle of creation that is grounded in the character of God. This is the only way to bring true unity to a worldwide church. However, it is important to highlight that the application of principles will bring, at the same time, a variation in its application as contexts change. This is the cause of
diversity. It is the sign of every organic living movement in contrast with the uniformity that marks those that are mechanical or institutional. Thus, the creation of an environment of free discussion, dialogue, and loving confrontation among church members must be propitiated by those who are leaders in the church. That was the environment of the apostolic church. On this Verhey (2002) states:

The early churches were communities of moral discourse by being communities of moral deliberation. . . . They talk together not only about what they ought to do but also about why they ought to do it. They asked why they ought to do one thing rather than another or something rather than nothing. . . . By their practice of giving and hearing reasons, they were able to honor personal responsibility without surrendering it to the group and to protect communal responsibility without surrendering it to the leadership. By their readiness to give reasons and to hear reasons they could resist the reduction of personal responsibility to secret and private preferences and the reduction of communal responsibility to the public standards of other communities. By giving reasons and hearing reasons concerning personal and communal choices, the churches could protect the unity of human life when a cleavage into a secret private life and anonymous public life threatened to break it. (p. 18, emphasis added)

Stassen and Gushee (2003) affirm,

It takes community to shape a person with integrity of character. . . . When you cut yourself off from your roots and your community and become autonomous individual on the make, you lose your moral compass. Recovery of character requires confrontation by community. (p. 56, emphasis added)

Sanctification

Another principle is sanctification. Sanctification is seen as the way to better our relationship with God and human beings. It puts emphasis in five basic elements that mark all the process of discipleship. They are: (a) repentance, (b) consecration, (c) specific confession, (d) Sabbath, and (e) mission.
Repentance

Principle-based discipleship makes a distinct difference between “remorse” and “repentance.” Remorse is the result of the presence of sin, repentance is the outcome of the presence of the Holy Spirit. Remorse focuses on acts, repentance is focused on being. Remorse is sorrow for wrongdoing, repentance is sorrow for wrongbeing. Remorse is punctual, repentance is a state living. Repentance is what makes a disciple to remain in a continuous relationship with Jesus.

Knowing the distinction makes the discipler always in need of presenting the gospel.

Consecration

Consecration is what makes the disciple participate in the blessing of the gospel. It means to give all to Jesus in order to receive all from him. It is not holding anything. Consecration to Jesus always results in obedience, but obedience not always results in consecration to Jesus.

Principle based discipleship defines sin as “illegality,” not as the braking of cold commandments. For instance, illegal persons in the United States could keep the laws of the country all their lives. But keeping the laws does not make a person a legal citizen. What makes a person a legal citizen is to have a relative who is willing to share his/her status with him or her. When an illegal person accepts the offer, then she/he can become a citizen. The same thing applies to God’s kingdom. To keep commandments is not the same as keeping God’s law.

Somebody can keep the commandments all his/her life and still be an illegal in God’s sight. No illegals will be in the kingdom. For principle based discipleship to keep
the law means to be “in” the law by the power of the Holy Spirit as a result of giving all to Jesus. It is the result of accepting the gospel. It means to become a spiritual person.

Specific Confession

This is one of the key elements to remain consecrated to Jesus. The fact of having been transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit does not make a person stop being a sinner. Specific confession by trusting in the blood of Jesus is what humbles people and makes them aware of their inner problem. It makes people be constantly in touch with the essence of the gospel. Sin is the result of losing total consecration; therefore, specific confession should always be accompanied by total consecration.

Sabbath

Time is fundamental for relationships. God has separated a space of time for a special relationship with human beings. However, in the Bible the Sabbath is not just time for God, but time to rest in God. This rest in God is what restores the soul (Ps 23:3). It is what makes possible worldview transformation. It is what brings the future kingdom to the present.

It is the resting presence of God that helps us to permeate our week of work. As Muller (1999) states: “Sabbath time is not spiritually superior to our work. The practice is rather to find that balance point at which, having rested, we do our work with greater ease and joy, and bring healing and delight to our endeavors” (p. 8). He also warns us: “If we do not allow for a rhythm of rest in our overly busy lives, illness becomes our Sabbath—our pneumonia, our cancer, our heart attack, our accidents creates Sabbath for us” (p. 20).
In principle-based discipleship the Sabbath is the time of rest for special relationships; first, with God, and then, with our family, relatives, and friends. It is a special time for family and friends to gather in the presence of God through the study of His Word. This Sabbath rest prepares people not only for their work but for relational witness.

Regrettably Sabbath has become a day for board meetings, programs, missionary activity, and Pathfinders. In Adventist Hispanic milieus, people think that if they do not “work” for God during the Sabbath they are not keeping the Sabbath holy. This notion has transformed churches into machines of proselytism that are plagued with divorces, family problems, and struggles of power. People may be very active in church on the Sabbath day, involved in outreach programs or planning events, but they do not witness in their work, schools, and homes, giving witness of the resting power of the Sabbath in their lives. Organized missionary activity has replaced individual mission. Thus, the special time that God consecrated to relationships is dedicated to frenetic ecclesiastic activity.

Principle based discipleship aims to restore the biblical relational view of the Sabbath. In doctrinal-based discipleship Sabbath is one of the major pitfalls, in principle-based discipleship the Sabbath is a major attraction.

Mission

As said earlier, mission is not synonymous with missionary activity. It is the result of sanctification. Mission means to live in constant attention to share the rest of Jesus to those who are around us. Mission means to glorify God with our daily actions of
service. Disciples that are formed by principle-based discipleship do not do mission, they live in mission.

**The Church As an Organic System**

The way disciplers see the church has a major impact in the way of doing discipleship. Unfortunately, mechanistic assumptions created by modernism have shaped the ways of doing church. As Hiebert (2008) puts it: “The reintroduction of Greek dualism was accompanied by a shift to a mechanistic view of the world. . . . This shift from an organic to a mechanical root metaphor profoundly changed how people saw the world around them” (pp. 155, 156). As modernists could not integrate God’s realm with the human realm, they relied on machinery.

While in the New Testament the church was seen as a living organism that was constantly in movement by the power of the Holy Spirit; in modern times it was seen as a corporation where movements must be fueled and propelled by programs and human strategies. Viola (2008) points out that “the vice of the institutional church lies in its reliance upon a humanly divised, program-driven religious system that serves to scaffold the ‘church’ structure when the Spirit of God is absent” (p. 63). The way of doing discipleship presently is marked by these same tendencies.

It is clear that in the New Testament the church was organic in its structure. It was a living movement not a mechanical organization. Disciplers need to know, accept, live, and teach this difference in order to maintain the church as a living organism. The next section will present some basic differences between organic and mechanist systems.
Organic Movements and Change

In contrast to mechanical systems where change is seen as a sign of malfunction, “organic systems are in constant desequilibrium and change” (Hiebert, 2009, p. 134). This ability to change is one of the major strengths of an organic movement. It allows it to be adapted to different environments without losing its essence. Incarnation is a biblical example of this attribute. The apostolic church was also organic. It became adapted to different cultures, persecution, and inner tensions. There was not one recipe for solving problems, but always there was an attitude to confront them. The apostolic church adapted itself to the realities that confronted it. The advice given in all the epistles suggest how to apply divine principles to specific problems caused by culture. On the other hand Viola (2008) says that “very little that of what is practiced in the modern institutional church has its roots in the New Testament. Instead, human-invented practices that were spawned centuries ago have both shaped and redefined the church” (p. 41).

Brody and Sobel point out, as quoted in Hiebert (2009), that living systems are continuously exchanging matter, energy, and information with their environments and must periodically adapt their inner activities to accommodate changes in the environment. Environment is simply and relatively defined as everything outside the boundaries of the system. (p. 135)

Organic movements are open systems that continuously interact with its contexts. That is mission. That was what Jesus meant when he said: “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt 5:13). As mechanical structures see change as something bad, they do not adapt to the realities that they confront. They claim that the environment must adapt to the realities of their static structures, instead of mission adapting to the realities of the environment. This context comes up with a kind of mission that is based on special
programs like band and choir concerts, sport or social activities, or hobby clubs. These activities end up being good promotional endeavors, but they do not address the real necessity of people’s salvation.

Organic systems are driven by multidirectional causality. Change begins at different places. They are systemic. They are managed by building vision, relationships, teams, and ownership (Hiebert 2008, p. 79). By nature, organic systems are constantly in revival and reformation. Hiebert states that “in this view, the living beings in a system are not simply mechanical parts of objects controlled by the system; they are active parts in shaping the whole.” Then, he adds, “The result is a focus not only in the system but also on the individual that constitute it” (p. 78). In this context unity is forged not forced (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 83).

The apostolic church was a vivid example of an organic system. Change was one of its main attributes. Nussbaum (2009) points out that “the original audience for the New Testament writings was not catechism class or a seminary. It was an entire religious movement living a missionary life, spreading a missionary message, and along the way running into one crisis after another” (p. 13). As presented in Chapter 4, when the Adventist movement was born, it tended to have these same characteristics.

On the other hand, mechanical systems are driven by linear causality. Change begins at one point and affects other areas. They are managed by engineering and hierarchical control (Hiebert, 2008, p. 79). “Communication tends to be one-way or top-down, since managerial instructions dictate what subordinates do” (Courtright, Fairhurst, & Rogers, 1989, p. 774). Manuals, policies, and by-laws are very important and they are considered the cause of cohesion. When a church is aligned with this worldview, Viola
(2008) affirms that “the religious machinery of the church program is the force that fuels and propels the church service. Consequently, if the Spirit of God were ever to leave a typical institutional church, His absence would go unnoticed” (p. 62).

Organic Systems Privilege Quality Over Quantity

In this context, principle-based discipleship is not so important to bring a person to “our church” as to prompt people to accept Christ and live under the principles of creation whether they choose to live them within the institution that shelters disciplers or beyond that. I call this principle the “Jonah principle.” When the prophet preached to the Ninevites and they repented, God did not ask Jonah to tell them to accept the king of Jerusalem as their king and send their tithes to Israel. They became people of God in the same status like those who were in Jerusalem but living in another country. They started a process of “departure” from the principles of this world to the principles of the kingdom of God. Hiebert (2008) observes,

The church is not a gathering of individuals engaged in their own privatized religion and beliefs. Nor is it a human organization with clear boundaries defined in terms of orthodoxy or orthopraxy, in terms of who Christians are intrinsically. It is made up of those who follow Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. (p. 280)

Organic discipleship does not proselytize. As Bender (2005) puts it, “Numerical growth follows from spiritual growth, but they can never be equated. Numerical growth should not be pursued for its own sake, but neither should spiritual growth be pursued simply to procure numerical growth” (p. 181). Nussbaum (2009) affirms that “church membership cannot be the primary aim of the announcement. At its heart the gospel is news about God’s action and his reign, not its institution” (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 105). This fact does not mean that it is not important to belong to an identifiable community of
believers. What it means is that belonging to the church has to do more with sharing the values of God’s kingdom than to be member of a religious institution.

In the New Testament church, numeric growth was never used as symbol of success. That way of measuring success is related to mechanical systems which cannot integrate natural and supernatural realms. In the New Testament church the way of measuring success was based on purpose resulting in impact to society and good relationships (Matt 5:13-16; John 13:35; 17:21; Acts 4:32-37; 1 Cor 13; Eph 4:11-13; Phil 2:14-16; 1 Thess 1:3-10). When someone has an apple tree they do not evaluate the tree by the quantity of apples that are harvested but by the apple’s taste and quality. White (1909) wrote: “If numbers were evidence of success, Satan might claim the pre-eminence; for, in this world, his followers are largely in the majority” (p. 42).

In this sense, principle-based discipleship may not help to present growing statistics, but has an impact on society that is extremely effective. It is not focused on numeric goals but on organic living growth. That is the kind of discipleship that transforms society and was the one who transformed the early Christians.

Organic Church and Its Organization

People tend to confuse church with organization. The church is like water. A person can have a glass with water, a bottle with water, or a jug with water. The fact of having water in different containers does not change the water’s essence. In the same way, the church can be organized in different ways, but still remains as church. What defines the church is not its form but its essence. Newbigin states (as cited by Hiebert, 2008)
An entity can be defined either in terms of its boundaries or in terms of its centre. The Church is an entity which is properly described by its centre. It is impossible to define exactly the boundaries of the Church, and the attempt to do so always ends up in an unevangelical legalism. (p. 280).

An Organic Church Comes Up in Its Smallest Form

An organic church is always small at its beginnings. Machines can be created big but they are static. Organisms are always born in their smaller form but they are dynamic. They grow, they change, and adapt without losing their essence. The nature of their mission is so comprehensive and clear that it can affect the whole world within a generation. Thus, the Christian organic church is derived from mission for mission is not derived from the church (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 96). Organic mission is related to the proclamation and the establishment of the principles of the kingdom of God on earth through the lives of those who are part of it. Jesus described it as follows: “Though it is the smallest of all seeds [the Kingdom of God], yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches” (Matt 13:32).

The mission of an organic church favors the establishment of structures that nurture and revitalize it. An organic movement, though, can be corrupted. This process is usually slow and only can be perceived at its early stage by those who have learned to live by principle. It becomes evident when the majority of financial funds are invested in maintaining the administrative apparatus. Jesus said: “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21). People are no longer the objective of mission they become the means of maintaining the structure. This situation is not reached deliberately, but for a lack of correction of strategic errors that are caused by cultural pressures.
In this context, institutional leaders gradually began to proclaim the idea that the church is “the institution.” Then, the active power that should be overturned to mission that puts the movement in contact with people is spent on strategic planning, committees, official dinners, and business meetings. The result of these bureaucratic efforts is translated into productive pressure for those who work for the institution and for those who are church members. Thus, the ecclesiastical institution is increasingly present in society, but has less and less impact on it. The administrative apparatus grows and mission shrinks. Social approval increases, but spiritual transformation decreases.

Principle-based discipleship sees the church as an organic movement and not as an institution. Beyond presenting the principles of creation, it presents the organic nature of the church. This process will form spiritual and not institutional leaders that are going to impact their community as the early twelve disciples impacted their society.

**Eschatological Mission**

For principle-based discipleship to live in mission is not enough. For this model mission has to be “eschatological,” otherwise the model ceases to be organic to become institutional or at worst, anarchic. As Hiebert (2008) states: “The eschatological home keeps us from becoming too institutionalized in the church and too at home in the world. As Christians we must always have a temporary spirit about our lives on earth” (p. 279). Nussbaum (2009) affirms:

We must understand that Christian mission is bounded by two historical dates—the Day of Pentecost at the beginning and the Day of the return of Christ at the end. All Christian mission is done while keeping one eye on that past Day and the other on the future Day. These two historical reference points guarantee that the Christian missionary anywhere, at any time, in any situation will be able to operate with both confidence and hope and that Christian mission will always be intertwined with the
history of the whole world, not isolated in a religious or mystical compartment. (Nussbaum, 2009, p. 129)

This eschatological view was what kept Adventism as an organic movement at its beginnings to become a worldwide movement in just two generations.

Conclusion

The application of these seven strategic principles will result in true unity among the church. It will be a kind of meta-narrative that will bring cohesion to a group in spite of its multicultural diversity. Also, it will create the right environment to let the Holy Spirit shape worldview. The application of principle-based discipleship will confront every culture in every time and every place. It will transform the church in an avant-garde (vanguard) option for people that are weary by the demands of modernism and postmodernism.
CHAPTER 6

THE FIRST HISPANIC SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH OF ATLANTA AS AN INTEGRATIVE MODEL OF PRINCIPLE-BASED DISCIPLESHIP

In this chapter the strategies that are being followed to implement a principle-based model of discipleship while pastoring the First Hispanic SDA Church of Atlanta will be shared. It is important to highlight that principle-based discipleship cannot be considered just as a project to mobilize a local church to reach quantitative goals at a given time. The main goal of principle-based discipleship is not to mobilize people but to inject life in them. In a spiritual organic movement, changes are not made by programs or projects but by people filled with the Holy Spirit.

The limits of this process cannot be reduced to a local church; they should transcend it. At first, the success of the application of this model cannot be measured in quantitative results only. If the mission of Jesus at the hour of his trails is evaluated by quantitative parameters, the conclusion will be that his mission was a total failure. As members have different histories, come from different backgrounds, culture, and have different levels of spiritual disposition the process of worldview transformation could be slow and difficult. In a principle-based model experience is more important than numbers. As Blackaby (2001) states: “The definitive measure of leaders’ success is whether they moved their people from where they were to where God wanted them to be” (p. 111).
As the main goal of this model is to inject life in people, its application must begin with the leader. In this chapter, after presenting the ministry context, I will explain what I have done as a church pastor to create spaces in my personal and family life in order to expose the living power of God. In principle-based discipleship the messenger of God must be the first one to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit through the powerful principles of creation that are described in the Scriptures. Only as the messenger is faithful to experience this power in his/her own life, then that is ready to provide nourishing, encouragement, and exhortation to the church members and others.

Later, I will present what I have done to pass on the principles of creation to the members of my district. And finally, I will explain what I did to present the principles of creation in my ministry. If a principle based model of discipleship is successful about describing the principles of creation, it must be born as a mustard seed, since every organic endeavor is born in its smallest form. However, its matured stage should be seen when a group of people embrace an eschatological mission in the spirit of Christ and therefore impacts society.

**The Ministry Context**

In October of 2006, I was hired as a district pastor for the Georgia-Cumberland Conference to be the pastoral leader of the First Hispanic Seventh-day Adventist Church of Atlanta (FHSDACA).

The FHSDACA was organized as a company in 1974. It is the mother of several Hispanic churches in the city. The majority of its members came to the United States as Seventh-day Adventists. In its beginning years, the church bought its own building. It was later sold in order to move the church to a better and safer area. However, relocating
the church was more expensive than it was anticipated, and the members only could afford to buy land. Since that time, its members have been worshiping in rented facilities under the leadership of several pastors. The church’s last pastor asked the conference to divide the district due to several internal problems among members. He planted another church and was moved to the new district. The conference and the leaders of the church thought that the FHSDACA was going to die, but did not tell me that until after one year of ministry there. I was called to minister this church without knowing that this church was considered problematic.

The day of my interview, the church had a business meeting where it was decided to borrow $960,000 from the conference to build a new facility. If I accepted the position, the construction was going to be under my leadership. Beyond that, after finishing the first part of the building, it was projected that the church would have to collect $8,500 per month for a mortgage payment and $4,000 for operational spending. For me, the most shocking part of this process was based on the fact that in that business meeting there were not more than 25 people, and the Sabbath attendance in the church was not more than 50 or 60 people. I decided not to accept the position due to three factors: (a) the project was humanly impossible, (b) the church membership was weakened and dispersed, and (c) I did not have any experience in construction projects. However, after praying and struggling almost all that night, my wife and I in the morning felt that God was giving clear evidence that we should accept the position; therefore, we did.

I started to work on October 15, 2006. My first three months were spent evaluating the ministry context and developing a serial of steps that would be used as a strategy to accomplish the vision I had for the church. I spoke with the leaders in the
church and we agreed that they were going to lead the physical construction of the church and I was going to lead the spiritual one.

As I understood that the task ahead was humanly impossible due to the project scope and due to my own limitations, I tried to develop a strategy with the purpose of integrating the natural realm with the supernatural one. In other words, the natural realm was related with all I could do to create spaces where the Spirit of God may flow. The supernatural realm was under the leadership of the Holy Spirit. He was going to shape our worldview and to make possible what was impossible for us.

The church was composed of members from 17 different countries. Even though among the members there was harmony about beliefs, there was cultural tension and disagreement about worship, dress, how to keep the Sabbath holy, on what reverence means, and how to approach people who needed to be disciplined.

At this stage, it was imperative to develop a strategy to bring spiritual unity, maturity, and a desire for mission among the church members.

**Principle-Based Discipleship and the Discipler**

As stated before, I believe that principle-based discipleship must start with the discipler. There are three areas in which he/she must watch in order to create room to allow the Holy Spirit to flow. These areas are (a) personal life, (b) family life, and (c) ministry life. It is important to highlight that the process I am going to describe is an organic growing process that was born in its smallest form and it has been growing to reach maturity as I apply the model to my church and to myself.
Personal Life

I had to make some decisions in my personal and family life. As the principles of creation are described in Scripture, and since they must be injected in our personal life by the power of the Holy Spirit, I separated religiously a time in the morning for meditation and prayer. The success of the application of this model depends on experiencing God in these moments and not let the pressures of daily life to take off this timely space by any circumstance. Principle-based discipleship requires to have a little Sabbath each day to read Scripture, prayer, and specific confession.

On the other hand, I had to make conscientious decisions about applying the principles of creation that are grounded in the character of God in all my transactions: from my family life to my professional life. There must not be any excuse to pass over a principle of creation in order to reach any kind of success in any endeavor. However, this process must be centered on God’s character and not on my behavior. The character of God through Jesus should be a point of reference. My own behavior is just a source of witness and confession.

Family Life

During the last five years my family life has changed radically. When I started my doctoral program I did not have any children, but as of today God has given me three. As relationships are the main concern of a principle-based model of discipleship this area is the one area on which I had to work the most. I have to make sure that my obligations as a pastor of two churches, even though time demanding, do not obscure and interfere with my role as a father and husband.
Family Worship

When our first child was born, my wife and I set a time for family worship every evening. As the Bible shows, men are the ones who must be the priests at home. Therefore, we agreed that the initiative to call the family to the altar rested on me when I was at home. As time passed we realized and discovered that the Bible teaches us to have family worship not only at evening, but especially in the morning. We started to meet for family worship twice a day. At the beginning, it was difficult because we had to change some customs and habits, but after five years of application of these principles it has become a living habit.

We divide the morning worship time in three parts: (a) singing, (b) Bible study, and (c) prayer and confession; in the evenings (a) singing, (b) Scripture memory (not in a compulsive way), and (c) prayer and confession. On special occasions, like Friday nights, we have a moment of testimonies and allow the children to preach about the topic they choose. This is one of the activities the family enjoys the most.

From the time of my son’s fifth birthday, every night that I am at home when he goes to bed I tell him a Bible story and pray with him. This moment gives me a more intimate moment to teach him, as the firstborn, the principles of creation.

Mondays Off

In order to go against the modernist assumption that puts emphasis on quantitative production and work, I set apart every Monday for my family time. This practice, at the beginning, brought me some tension with some of the leaders of my church. They tried to set up meetings on Mondays and sometimes I was very tempted to yield to their demands. However, as time passed, I saw that the young members of my church were especially
pleased with my family practices. I used to receive text messages saying: “Pastor, enjoy this sunny Monday with your family. We appreciate what you are doing!” My own children are always waiting for Mondays, especially on summer days, because every Monday we go to play and swim in the lake.

**Fifth Sabbath Off**

Sometimes my Sabbaths are very busy. I used to preach every Sabbath and sometimes I would conduct seminars in different churches. Sometimes my family, instead of feeling they were near me on this special day, felt the contrary. Even though they enjoy going with me at some meetings, my wife and I felt that we had to have quality Sabbath time not only for the church but for our family. That is the reason why we set aside every fifth Sabbath as family Sabbath. On those Sabbaths we usually go to nature to celebrate the Sabbath and we like to do what we call “expeditions.” Our children enjoy these moments with intensity and we make full use of them teaching them lessons about the love of God using nature.

I have also set aside Friday nights in order to be at home, so that we can enjoy and participate in a full cycle of communion with our Creator and the family.

**Organic versus Mechanical Process**

It is worthy to highlight that in this process of moving from the mechanical worldview to an organic view the fundamental principles of creation must be applied. This organic process must be fueled by the presence of the Holy Spirit. Families may have their family worship twice a day, have some day off, and they can dedicate Sabbaths for the family but this is not enough. Without any doubt, these practices will improve
family relationships. But the goal is not to improve families but to transform them. These practices, in order to be organic must have as the main goal the enrichment of the spiritual life, not just quality time activities. The implementation of these practices has to be born out of spiritual necessity, not as a way of applying a functional project to make a show family. This emphasis is contrary to the principles of the gospel and puts the family in the center of the stage when the true gospel requires God as the center. When the emphasis is changed putting the family as the center, the organic approach becomes mechanical. The last one seeks improvement and it is born out of pride; the first one seeks transformation and it is born out of necessity.

**Principle-Based Discipleship Applied to My Ministry**

After taking three months to evaluate the ministry challenge that the church had ahead, I developed an incipient strategy in order to start the application of a principle-based model of discipleship. It is important to note that this process implies a “departure” but not an arrival as a result of the application of the strategy. What I will describe is going to be a growing process that was the result of the increasing awareness of our necessities and limitations. The main goal of this model is to inject spiritual life to grow toward maturity.

**Setting a Vision Statement**

The first Sunday of January 2007, I convened a general meeting. Thirty or forty people came. The group was divided into several groups. After presenting the goal of the meeting, each group made a list of the church’s strongholds and weaknesses. The following hour members were asked to write and develop a vision statement considering
where they wanted to be in the following five years.

Based on what they had written we developed the following vision statement that has served as a guide to implement future strategies.

**Vision Statement of the FHSDACA**

We are a united church that has been transformed by the power of the teachings of Christ. Each member has become a disciple who forms others disciples and the church is a torch in the community that we live and serve.

The reality of experiencing God’s power and love in our daily lives make our worship services a living, inspiring, participatory and reverent experience.

Youth and kids have much room and opportunities to deepen their love for God and serve him. Their enthusiasm and sincerity moves the whole church while being wisely guided by the experience of loving adults.

Many visitors come to church and want to live the same experience that we have in Christ.

We study our Bibles every day in our homes. Our families have been strengthened by the application of its principles to everyday life.

Not only await the second coming of Christ but we work to hasten it preparing a people who may be firm on that day.

This vision statement was more useful to me than to the church. It helped me to understand where I have to put the emphasis in a particular situation.

**Shared Values of the FHSDACA**

We decided to frame this process in five shared values: (a) love as Jesus loved, (b) consecration based on the principles of Scripture (not in tradition), (c) unity in diversity and equality, (d) selfless service, and (e) efficient communication.

During the first year in every church board meeting we discussed the implications of applying these principles into our church.
**Theme Bible Verse**

As the challenges ahead were too big for us I chose a Bible verse to guide and motivate the process of reaching our vision. The verse is in Psalms 60:12: “With God’s help we will do mighty things” (NLT).

**Discipleship**

The first month of 2007, I announced to members the launching of a discipleship program. The registration was open for three weeks and every member was invited to participate. As a result 15 members started a discipleship program that was held in different houses every other week.

I prepared a series of 25 Bible studies based on principles. I presented one in every session. Each session was divided in five parts: (a) songs, (b) ice breaker, (c) testimonies about mission, (d) Bible study, and (e) prayer and confession. Every two months we had a session only for prayer.

The aim of this discipleship program was to help people to integrate God into their daily life. I taught them the essence of the gospel, the differences between principles and norms, and how to study the Bible in order to have a meaningful spiritual experience discovering the principles of creation.

During 2007 there were six people who never missed a session. There were two people that attended 80% of the sessions, and the rest were not very consistent.

In November 2007, we organized an evangelistic effort to take place for two weeks. The sessions were conducted at different homes by the six disciples who had never missed a discipleship session. At the end of the meetings 12 people decided to begin studying the Bible.
In January 2008, for the inauguration of our new temple, I conducted a week of evangelism and decision. As a result 22 people were baptized and 17 of them were the direct result of the testimonies of those who were participating in the discipleship program.

It is important to highlight where these six people who never missed a session are today and their nationalities. This will help detect some evidences of worldview transformation:

1. **Marco Larumbe (Mexican):** After one year of dedicated service in the church he enrolled at the River Plate University in Argentina to study theology. He married an Argentinean girl while studying, and came to the FHSDACA to do his field practices in 2011 and 2012. He has done a very good job and is getting his degree in July 2012. As a result of his witness many people entered the church.

2. **Juan Villareal (Argentinean):** When he started the discipleship program, he had been baptized only the year before. Now, in 2012, he is one of the elders of the church giving a very dedicated service.

3. **Yanira Villarreal (from El Salvador):** At this moment she is the mission director of the church. During these years she became a cancer survivor giving a great testimony of faith and courage.

4. **Nohora Bryan (Colombian):** At this moment she is the community service director and she is hosting a cell group meeting at her home every week.

5. **Xinia Bryian (from El Salvador):** After serving as a youth director of the church for one year, she decided to prepare herself to be a missionary nurse at
Oakwood. Now she is studying professional nursing at Southern Adventist University.

6. Edward Bryan (second generation Hispanic): he was baptized during the discipleship process by the influence of Marco Larumbe and Xinia who is his wife. He used to be in gangs and drugs having a very fast kind of life. When Xinia started the discipleship program their matrimony was at the edge of collapse. After Edward was baptized, he started to do missionary work for the homeless of Atlanta. One person that he found living under a bridge today is one of thedeacons in our church. Edward decided to be a minister and he is currently studying religion at Southern Adventist University in Tennessee.

All of these people who came from different backgrounds formed a cohesive group which impacted the whole church. They started a process of “departure” from the principles of this world to the principles of creation that are grounded in the character of God. They are still in a growing process that should not be halted until the second coming.

Preaching

After seven months of developing the discipleship program I started to preach the same series of topics based on the principles of creation during the main services every other Sabbath. This gave me the opportunity to disciple the church on the essential principles of the gospel. However, preaching by itself is not discipleship. Discipleship happens when there is an individual relationship with people. Therefore, when anyone showed an interest in the topic that I was preaching I started a kind of informal relationship with those people.
I divided the preaching process in four stages:

1. Preaching based on the 25 Bible guides that I prepared based on the principles of creation in relationship with the gospel.

2. As the core message of the Bible is “relationships,” during three months I preached a series of sermons about relationship based on the principles of creation.

3. In this stage I preached a series of sermons about eschatological prophecy. I prepared a series of sermons where I related prophecy with the gospel. I did not use prophecy to denounce other denominations or to teach institutional doctrine but to call for eschatological revival among members.

4. In this last stage I prepared a series of sermons to define why we are Seventh-day Adventists in relation with the message of the Bible.

During all of this process, every other Wednesday I presented a series of meditations based on the gospels in order to explain what the principles are on what true discipleship is based on.

As a result of these presentations some members of the church started to experience a kind of worldview crisis. For instance, in the second year of my ministry in this church, one elder approached me with great disappointment and told me: “Since you came here, I became confused. You have been teaching us something very different from what I had learned about Adventism in my country!” Thank God this elder is still in the church and we are better friends now than in those days.

At the same time there were other people who began experiencing “departure.” They experienced God in a very different way than they had experienced before. They experienced revival in their lives and, as a consequence, they also experienced revival in
their relationships. However, it is important to note that there were people who could not bear the fact of living by principle. They were used to controlling people regarding dress, food, worship, and lifestyle. They left our congregation and went to another church where authoritarian attitudes are expected to have cohesion from the part of the leaders.

Prayer

One of the practices that we started recently is to hold a week of prayer every quarter. We meet at 6:00 a.m. during one week to present our special petitions to God. It is a special time to connect the natural world with the supernatural one. These sessions are designated only for prayer, not sermons or meditations. Instead of presenting our requests and petitions to the church, we present our petitions audibly one at a time directly to God. When we pray we present different kinds of requests, although there is one common petition: the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

As a way to connect these weeks of prayers, a group of members meet every Sabbath at 8:30 a.m. in a session that is called “the Hour for Power.” In this meeting the members include testimonies, meditation, and prayer.

In principle-based discipleship, leaders must lead by example and not by compulsion; therefore, we meet with the elders every other week to study the Bible and pray. We dedicate one hour for Bible study and prayer and 20 minutes for the business agenda.

Relationships

The main goal of a principle-based discipleship is to construct healthy relationships with God first and then with human beings. With the church board we have made strategic planning in this area in order to strengthen the family ties of the church.
The Couples Club

In 2008, my wife and I started a series of sessions that we called the “The Couples Club.” These meetings, that tended to be informal, were held the first Sunday of every other month. The main purpose of these sessions was to raise awareness of the fact that religion must begin at home. Even though we sometimes presented seminars about communication, conflict resolution, or intimacy, the core of the session was discussion, dialogue, and sharing. We made a strong emphasis on the use of prayer as the main tool for solving problems at home. At the same time we encouraged couples to return to the practice of family worship in order to confront the demands of modernism and postmodernism. As Christian families we began to learn how to integrate the supernatural and natural realm in one place that is called home.

Almost every session was divided in four main parts: (a) devotional, (b) icebreaker, (c) games, and (d) sharing and discussion of a specific topic. As time passed we assigned each part to be conducted by a different couple.

Every year we held a spiritual retreat for couples by inviting a special speaker to present a variety of topics on the family.

As a result of the influence of the Couples Club we could see how some men of the church were now assuming the priesthood of their families. At this moment, the church is aware of the importance of having strong marriages and families in order to be a real testimony for the world.

At the beginning of this process there were couples that joined the club that were experiencing stress and heavy tension. After three years of starting this process we can
see now that they are building strong families by relying on the power of prayer and confession as a result of a better understanding of the essence of the gospel.

**Family Life Department**

Since 2010, the family life department of the church has had the Couples Club and my wife and I participate as supporters and advisers. The nominating committee elected a family oriented and executive couple to lead this department. With the church board we voted to put all our emphasis around family life during 2010 and 2011. The Couples Club became a Family Club and at the end of each year we organized a family spiritual retreat.

In 2012, the nominating committee elected another strong couple to lead this department and we have every other month a family day where all the families of the church get together to play, talk, and eat. These events convey a strong message for the children and teens of our church about what we consider the most important things in our church.

Once in a while we plan a Family Sabbath. On this special Sabbath we start the Sabbath School at 11:00 a.m. in order to have more time to enjoy a relaxed family breakfast. We encourage people to invite friends to eat together after the service and we do not put any activity in the afternoon. We have not been doing this faithfully but we are planning on doing it once per quarter in the near future.

As a result of these measures we are seeing people of the church changing their ways on how they see Christian life. As they have discovered that good relationships are the true sign of our permanence in the Spirit of God, they are dedicating time and energy to strengthen family ties and relationships. Some families set apart some Sabbaths during
the year to go with their family members to enjoy nature and to teach them in a more intimate way about God and his providences.

There are some immigrant families who had never taken a vacation, and now they set apart at least one week per year to go out with their families to have a relaxed and recreating time together. This view is having a great impact in the environment of the church and mission. People are starting to see mission not as an eventual missionary activity but as a lifestyle. Mission is not related to baptisms but to persons who can be baptized to experience the same spiritual power that members enjoy in a good relationship with God and neighbors.

Community Outreach

When a local church begins to experience life, spiritual unity, and maturity, creativity and movement are the signs. Leaders do not have to work hard at proposing ideas and projects. Members of the church are those who plan and carry out projects to reach the community.

Hispanic Fair

Every second Sunday of October the church celebrates Hispanic day. Members invite their friends to come to share games, food, and a special cultural program. In the FHSDACA there are 17 countries or cultures represented. Members of each country have a stand where a delicious array of food is freely served. The Hispanic fair intends to convey a clear message to our community that says even though the members represent different nations and have a variety of customs they are earnest in seeking true unity based on the principles of God’s kingdom. The Hispanic Fair is put on you tube as an
evangelistic witness (see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7f5E6ThOHjl).

**The Road to Bethlehem**

In December of 2008 the church started an interactive play called “The Road to Bethlehem.” Almost all of the church members are now involved in this event. The story of Bethlehem is enacted and for this purpose we recreate an ancient middle-Eastern town in the parking lot of the church. This event is held for two nights with the launch of an interactive play every 20 minutes. At the end of each play I present a little meditation about the real meaning of Christmas and make an appeal about our necessity of adopting the principles of God’s kingdom in order to be ready to live with the same person that was born in a manger but that will come back as King of kings and Lord of lords.

Every year there is an average of 1,000 visitors. It is important to note that some small Hispanic entrepreneurs like to donate money and participate in this event. As a result of this effort there are three families consistently coming to our church and two people were baptized.

**The Passover Cantata**

In 2010, the members began presenting a Passover cantata. Since the fellowship hall is still under construction the event is in the parking lot of the church. For this event around 300 to 400 visitors come to our church every year. Evangelical churches, along with their pastors, like to come to this event. At the end of the play I present a Christ-centered message explaining the meaning of the gospel. As a result of coming, a leader of one the biggest Hispanic evangelical churches of Atlanta told a member: “I always thought that Adventists were legalists. After being with you today I am willing to delve
deeper into a study of the Sabbath.”

Radio Program

In 2009, a live one-hour radio program was launched at one of the most important Hispanic religious radio stations of Atlanta. At the beginning, a program was presented once a week, but as time passed, due to the quantity of calls, it was decided to have the program twice a week. Each program was divided into two parts. The first half hour was a kind of magazine, and the second half hour was a Bible study, discussion, and meditation. I presented myself as a Seventh-day Adventist pastor, but not promoting the Seventh-day Adventist church. I just invited the audience to be “true” Protestants, including myself, putting aside ecclesiastic traditions and culture. The main goal of the program was not to proselytize but to take people to the Bible analyzing the principles of creation that are the foundation of God’s Kingdom grounded in his character.

After the programs people could call in to the radio station asking questions. Often I would have to remain off air for quite some time answering questions from the listening audience. People always asked me: “What do you think about this or that.” I used to answer: “What I think it is not important, we have to find what the Bible says about your question.” Those questions gave me an opportunity to bring a biblical principle-based answer in future programs.

One day, the radio director, who was an Anglo and had been a missionary in Hispanic countries, invited me to eat at a restaurant. When we were eating he told me that he had invited me because since we had launched the program he had received numerous calls from evangelical pastors asking him why he had allowed an Adventist pastor to have a radio program. He told me that he wanted to know himself why people are so
prejudiced against Adventists. This gave me the opportunity to speak about principle-based Adventism, not about Adventists.

I told him that Adventism is not based on distinctive beliefs but it is based on a Protestant approach to Scripture, and that as a result of our approach to Scripture we have some distinctive beliefs that are not dogmas and they need to be in constant revision. This question gave me the opportunity to speak to him about seven basic beliefs: (a) the essence of the Gospel, (b) the great controversy, (b) sanctification, (c) Sabbath, (d) the sanctuary (e) mortality of the soul, and (f) the gift of prophecy. I presented him with a small Bible study of each of these beliefs. He told me that he did not have any problem with any of these beliefs and that he was willing to analyze the validity of each one.

When I mentioned the Seventh-day Adventist Church considered that the gift of prophecy was exercised by Ellen White, he told me: “This is the main complain about having you on our radio, but you never spoke in any programs about Ellen White. You always used the Bible!” “It is true,” I answered, “I never spoke about her because I personally believe that she was a prophet and, because of this, I always follow her counsel to preach my messages only based on the Bible and the Bible alone.” When we finished he told me that he believed that in the near future I was going to have the opportunity to discuss these topics with some important preachers in Atlanta.

In 2010, Salem Network determined to transform its Spanish radio of Atlanta into an Anglo radio. We had to end our program but launched by our church a series of videos based on principles.

As a result of the radio programs one of the radio administrative assistants was baptized and several people from the audience attended our community events. Even
though I cannot prove it, I am pretty sure that as a result of our radio programs there must be people keeping Saturday as their Sabbath in different Hispanic Evangelical churches of Atlanta and they must have a new and different approach to prophecy.

Literary and Media Projects: E-mails, Facebook, Videos, and Books

People are the main means by which the gospel can be shown; however, books and media are the means by which the gospel can be explained.

E-mails

Every week an email is sent to each member of the church pointing out future events at the church, but I dedicate a corner to share relational and leadership principles.

Facebook

Everyday I publish in Facebook a meditation about the rudiments of true discipleship. It gives me the opportunity to convey the principles of creation in the context of the gospels (see https://www.facebook.com/joel.barrios.167). This endeavor allows me to go beyond the boundaries of my local church. There are people from all over the world that read, comment, and react about the topics that I present.

When I finish the series I will make a compilation of all the meditations in a book and will title it Disciples. After that, I will continue posting on Facebook meditations about what it means to be an apostle. It will be a presentation of leadership principles in the context of the Acts of the Apostles.
Videos

I conducted a series of nine videos based on principles called El valor de la fe ("The Value of Faith"). These videos were prepared with the help of the members of both of my churches but produced with a team of professional people.

Time was spent in prayer for money to launch the video program. God answered by having a Seventh-day Adventist businessman from Alabama donated $25,000 for this purpose. The videos messages and formats are directed toward the postmodern mind. They are the beginning of a bigger series in which I will try to present the principles of the kingdom in an understandable and relevant way.

A group of professionals in Caracas, Venezuela, used two of these videos to prepare the ground for an evangelistic crusade. For around three months before the meetings they shared the videos with their friends and coworkers at the office. They rented an auditorium at the College of Medicine of Caracas and I went to present a series of speeches about how to integrate God into a person’s daily life. Every night the auditorium was full, mainly with lawyers, medical doctors, university students, and business professionals. We did not finish the series with a baptism, even though I spoke about it. I presented seven different talks based on principles: (a) What Is “Religion,” (b) The Essence of the Gospel, (c) How to be Transformed, (d) Victory about Ourselves (e) Relationships, (f) Why and What Is the Church, and (g) The Future Kingdom and Our Present Pilgrimage. At the end of the meetings I made an appeal to let God be real in our lives and to keep discovering his plan through the message of the Bible. As a result, 16 people accepted the invitation. After one year some of them were baptized and others are going to church trying to discover through the Bible God’s plan for their lives. I have
been invited to go to Venezuela again next year and will use the rest of the videos to prepare ground for the next evangelistic series. I posted these videos on YouTube and Facebook (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=GYGodG7u5FM).

Books

During my ministry in Atlanta I have written two books on prophecy. They are a commentary of the two first prophecies of Revelation, making an approach to prophecy based on the message of the gospel. They are not written to denounce other Christian denominations but to instill the Seventh-day Adventist members of our church to have an eschatological mission to avoid being swamped by the demands of secular worldviews.

One of the books has been published and the other one is in preparation (see http://www.amazon.com/Las-Cosas-Deben-Suceder-Pronto/dp/1463306067).

Evaluation and Results

The application of a principle-based model of discipleship in the First Hispanic SDA Church of Atlanta helped the members and myself to experience a departure from worldly worldviews but never to be considered as an arrival. The success of this project cannot be measured only by some quantitative figures but by signs of a spiritual life that is experienced among the members.

As not all the members experience life at the same time or level the role of the leader is like a gardener. That person can plant, water, and fertilize, but cannot make plants sprout. That is the result of having life and being exposed to the natural forces of the environment. The gardener’s task is to propitiate the fertile environment and then to wait. It is almost certain that every member who participated voluntarily in those events
that were planned to learn about God and to claim for his Holy Spirit has started to experience life. However, as this process is voluntary and personal not all the members decide to participate at the same time. Since I started to apply this model in my churches, little by little some members have experienced the beginning of this growing process. Their influence has impacted the whole church and each day more people are found experiencing revival. The success of this model can be seen in transformed lives.

The general goal of this project is to impact society with the message of the Gospel in such a way that the whole world may know the principles of the kingdom through the living example of those who proclaim them. The specific goal is to expose the members of the church to the influence of the supernatural realm of God in order to experience supernatural life and transformation that is manifested by growing relationships.

When this process was begun, the church was experiencing heavy tensions and disunity in such a way that the conference thought that the FHSDACA was going to sink. After five years of teaching the principles of creation that are grounded in the character of God and looking for the power of the Holy Spirit the church began to experience unity and a clear sense of purpose. I firmly believe that this situation is due to worldview transformation. It is important to highlight that this happened not without experiencing deep worldview crises. The second year of my service in this district perhaps was the most difficult year of my entire ministry; however, the church and I passed through the storm trying to know and show a real Jesus and clinging to the principles of creation.

Those discussions based on cultural presuppositions about dress, worship, church discipline, and standards that were so common in the beginning of the process, practically
have faded away through a clearer understanding of the principles of the gospel. Families are stronger and members are happier and faithful. However, in spite of these good changes we know that this is only a departure and not an arrival. There is a big potential of creativity and influence in each member who experiences supernatural life. As Hirsch (2010) states: “In the seed, there is a potential for the tree. In the tree, there is a potential for the forest. . . . Every believer has the potential for the whole in them” (Intro to the DNA of Movements). This project describes just the forest in seeds. We still need to go forward looking for more organic structural change. This is just the beginning.

Jesus said that miracles would be the sign of experiencing true discipleship (Mark 16:14-18). Miracles are the sign of integration of two worlds: the natural and supernatural. An example is when we started the construction of the fellowship hall we needed $14,000 dollars to pay the mortgage and for the operational expenses. The church does not have more than 130 active members. In spite of the challenge, along with the church board, it was decided that we were not going to halt mission due to the achievement of financial goals. We were going to keep investing in events of witnessing and mission. At the same time $450,000 was needed to finish the fellowship hall that was going to be afforded out-of-pocket without the help of any loan.

On April 2009, there was not enough money needed for our operational expenses. We were $3,000 short. One Sabbath, when members were praying together in “the Power Hour,” an unknown man came and gave $3,000 in an offering to the head deacon and left. We were shocked but grateful because he brought the exact amount that was needed. Since that time, the church members have always prayed for him. In the last three years he has come four times before the service and dropped off a total of $23,000 so far. We
do not know him. The only thing we know is that he always comes when we need monetary help and that he shows up when the church is praying. He is a Black man from Africa who does not speak Spanish. Why did he choose our church to give his offerings? No one knows. The only thing we know is that God is doing miracles. At this moment, 70% of the fellowship hall is built. The other 30% is in God’s hands.
CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of principle-based discipleship is to make people align their values with the principles of creation that are grounded in the character of God. Those principles were exemplified in a living form in the life of Jesus Christ. When they are embraced by individuals through a volitional decision of surrendering their life to the lordship of Jesus, the Holy Spirit empowers them with relational capacities that produce worldview, belief, and behavior transformation. On the other hand, as the content of Christian discipleship is always a counter option for every secular worldview, the result of its proclamation will produce crisis that will be caused by the challenge of the particular themes which mark the modern and postmodern worldviews.

In the last 60 years, Seventh-day Adventists have been focusing on creeds, doctrines, and propositional beliefs that, without realizing it, have allowed secular worldview assumptions to permeate their way of doing church and discipleship. This situation paved the way to lose the spiritual power of the Gospel, making it just a cultural product that comes in a biblical form. Its proclamation has produced proselytes, that although have entered into the same church, they cannot be united in the same spirit. As the church became a worldwide institution, cultural confrontation has been one of the greatest threats that it has faced. It has been very difficult for church leaders to find the right tool to bring cohesion and unity.
At the same time, the cultural pressures of postmodernism are challenging our revered traditions. Even though we have believed in the right doctrine, this secular worldview is invading our churches and institutions threatening our movement with fragmentation and secularization. To such a threat, there are many “conservative” voices proposing modern recipes based on creeds, manuals, policies, and by-laws in order to achieve cohesion and structure. This situation is polarizing our church even more.

We have thought that the cause of our failures lies in the fact that we have been lax with old church norms and traditions. That is the reason why we find advocates who are more willing on returning to a “modern” past rather than moving toward the future. We have confounded revival and reformation as an intent of restoring the customs and traditions that brought us to the place where we are in the present. Thus, unconsciously we have been looking for a stage where we feel secure and culturally more accommodated ignoring that our reluctance to confront crisis was one of the major obstacles in the past to keep experiencing worldview transformation.

On the other hand, in an effort to be “relevant,” other members and leaders have adopted postmodern values in order to reach postmodern minds overlooking that we do not have to make the gospel attractive but understandable. Both of these perspectives, although well intentioned, are based on cultural assumptions that dilute the testimony of the church as a real and higher alternative for the secular society that is longing for a transforming experience.

Principle-based discipleship intends to confront all the elements of each secular worldview by presenting, teaching, and embracing the relational principles of creation that are the foundations of God’s kingdom. By the implementation of this model, every
discipler will plant a living seed that will transform the church into a living organism. Revival and reformation will not be considered as a goal to be sought but the essential condition of an organic process which will lead to the eschatological event of the second coming of Christ.

In this context, cultural tension will be seen as an opportunity to discover and apply the right principles of creation that are grounded in the character of God in order to grow in unity in the new culture of the kingdom of God. As humans, it is a fact that embracing the new culture of the kingdom does not mean that we will completely disregard our own cultures. It means that the relational principles of creation will elevate our own cultures to the level of the new one (not vice versa), shaping the disciple’s identity and creating a unique tone that will enrich the divine fabric of the church. In this sense the church will be monocultural. However, this new culture will be expressed in numberless shades according to the cultural background of its members.

**Recommendations**

As a church, we have tried to create unity by promoting doctrinal and policy agreement. Even though those efforts have helped to work together for a common organizational purpose, they have not been enough to make the church a united organism. The way in which we have been dealing with tension (cultural, theological, and administrative) has clearly shown that we have failed to form a unified culture and identity in Christ by worldview transformation. This reality makes imperative the creation of a new model of discipleship, evangelism, education, leadership, and health based on the biblical principles of the Kingdom of God and not just on biblical doctrines or cultural assumptions. Applying this principle-based paradigm will facilitate the
transformation of cultural tension into an opportunity to grow into a worldwide and multiethnic church united on a common foundation.

This process will not be easy or fast. Therefore, church leaders should not yield to the pressures of management-oriented paradigm of leadership that sees profit and production as the essence of success and realization. We never find in the Bible a commission to baptize the whole world but a commission to make disciples from all the nations. Discipleship is the key factor.

Consequently, leaders whose actions, beliefs, and values are based on biblical principles will be the result of the application of the principle-based model of discipleship that will create a united identity in Christ. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy will be integrated in a spiritual model that will be a powerful testimony to the world.

Conclusion

Every four years, the attention of the globe is captivated by the Olympic Games. Athletes representing 204 countries of the world are in a chosen city in order to participate in different disciplines. Undoubtedly, this is a multicultural event. All people are gathered in the same event with the same goal: to break old records and win a medal. However, the fact that they are gathered with the same goal does not mean that all people are united. Each team intends to compete under the distinction of its own flag and their goal is to beat the other.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a worldwide and multicultural church. Apparently all its members have the same goal: to preach the gospel. This fact, however, does not make her a united church. It appears we have considered our church as an “Olympic church.” Although we participate in the same event and we play the same
sport, we compete against each other in order to win the medal under the shadows of our own cultural flags. We just need to attend a General Conference Session to witness the parade of nations to see a small sample of what the prevalent and natural spirit is among church members and leaders.

Knowing the game rules (orthodoxy) allows us to participate in the same game (orthopraxy); however, it does not mean that we are in the same team. Even though we have spent great energy in teaching the rules of the contest, at the hour of defining who we are, we have defined ourselves as contestants rather than family. The country where we were physically born has become more prominent than the kingdom where we were born again. We are not on the same team even though we participate in the same event.

Having the “right doctrine” does not assure us to have the right spirit. It is necessary for the organic future of our church to implement a principle-based model of discipleship that will shape our church as an organic living movement that will grow in unity and mission until the second coming. In this frame Adventism will be a vanguard proposal to society presenting the only alternative for an exhausted and decadent world.

Heschel (1955) has made a good point:

Religion declines not because it is refuted or rejected, but because it often times becomes irrelevant, dull, oppressive and insipid. When faith is completely replaced by creeds and dogmas, when worship is replaced by discipline, love by habit; when the crisis of today is ignored because of the splendor of the past. . . . When faith becomes captive of traditions rather than a living fountain; when religion speaks only in the name of authority rather than with the voice of compassion—its message becomes meaningless. (p. 3)

As Seventh-day Adventists, we need to align our values with the relational principles of creation in order to become an organic movement. We are not going be able to reach the postmodern mind if our values and procedures are anchored in modernistic
and mechanistic assumptions. We need to be what we were called to be: a real alternative for every human worldview. The true sign of this experience will be a concrete answer of Jesus prayer: “that they may all be one; even as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you sent me” (John 17:21).
REFERENCE LIST


VITA

Name: Joel C. Barrios

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1983 – 1985 – Music Professor, River Plate University

1983 – 1989 – Licenciate in Theology and Religion Professor, River Plate University


Ordination:

June 21, 2003 – Ordained to the SDA Gospel Ministry

Experience:

October 2006 – Present – Senior Pastor – First Hispanic SDA Church of Atlanta

January 2000 – October 2006 – Pastor of the First Hispanic Church, Battle Creek

September 1998 – December 1999 – Assistant Pastor for Hispanic Evangelism of the SDA Tabernacle, Battle Creek, Michigan

March 1996 – March 1997 – Pastor of the SDA Church of Baradero, Buenos Aires, Argentina

March 1993 – February 1996 – Pastor of the SDA Church of Las Heras, Mar del Plata, Argentina

March 1991 – February 1993 – Youth Pastor of the SDA Church of Palermo, Buenos Aires, Argentina