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Seventh-day Adventists
and the **formation of ministerial**
identity: *Lessons from our past*



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06 Seventh-day Adventists and the formation of ministerial identity: Lessons from our past

Michael W. Campbell

This article sheds light on an important aspect of Seventh-day ecclesiology.

11 The forgotten movement: Church planting trends and lessons (Part 1 of 2)

S. Joseph Kidder and Dustin Serns

Is a massive church planting movement needed, or even possible? See what the statistics say.

16 Christus Victor: Armageddon and atonement in the Apocalypse

Ikechukwu Michael Oluikpe

How does Armageddon fit into the plan of redemption?

20 Adventists: Why are we really here?

Clinton Wahlen

Read about why the author says “Seventh-day Adventists, as a people, are built to last.”

24 Signs, wonders, and the Adventist Church (Part 1 of 2)

Kelvin Onongha

The author discusses the relevance of signs and wonders and if they can still occur today as in the past.

A note of clarification in regards to the article “Why the Sanctuary is so Important” by Norman R. Gulley in the August 2014 issue: The book of Hebrews speaks of the original tabernacle in heaven (Heb. 8:1–5) and states that after Christ made His sacrifice at Calvary He entered the heavenly sanctuary (Heb. 1:3b) to begin a two-phased ministry, indicated in the type as “the Holy Place” (Heb. 9:2b) and then into the “Most Holy Place” (*hagia hagiōn*) of Hebrews 9:3. The Greek *ta hagia* is not the “Most Holy Place” as translated in the New International Version of Hebrews 9:12, but “holy places.”

Correction: In the article “The Cross and the Sanctuary: Do We Really Need Both?” by Wilson Paroschi in the August 2014 issue, page 7, the sentence starting on line 6 underneath the subtitle “God’s righteousness,” instead of verses 25 and 26, should indicate: “The traditional interpretation, which seems to fit the context better, is that *dikaioynē autou* in those verses refers to an attribute of God, meaning that God is righteous, while in verses 21 and 22 it must be taken as a gift from God, the righteousness that He imputes to those who believe.” We apologize for any confusion.

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04 Letters

05 Editorial

23 Revival & Reformation

27 Resources

28 Dateline

30 Practical Pointers

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The betrothal promise of Christ

What a perfectly lovely message, from Pastor Lennox Abrigo, in the June 2014 issue (“Jesus’ ‘Betrothal Promise’ Is His Bride’s Guarantee of Heaven”) framed in the setting of a first-century Jewish betrothal of marriage and later the wedding, and drawing for us the sublime thoughts in connection with our waiting period. Our preparation for the wedding: taking heed, watching, praying, putting on the wedding garment of Christ’s righteousness, reflecting Him to the world, and being transformed into His likeness.

The author’s mention of the first-century Jewish wedding brought back some previous memories of my

own upbringing. We were three boys, brought up in the Dutch Presbyterian tradition, and our parents taught us the simple principles of the earliest Bible marriages. First, the betrothal, which we called the “engagement,” then the marriage. When we were sure of our intentions, the boy wrote to the girl’s parents, seeking their consent to meet, go out together, plan for the wedding, etc. This was followed by a simple ceremony we called “the engagement,” the term used by the *Good News Bible* in Deuteronomy 20:7, for “betrothal.”

It is plain to see the lovely parallel as it applies to Jesus’ betrothal to us, later the marriage, and the marriage supper when Jesus comes!

How much of present-day broken marriages, with broken homes and broken hearts involved, could be averted if God’s plan were followed, with the great lesson of God’s betrothal to us and our loyalty to Him as we await the marriage supper of the Lamb, when Jesus comes to take us to His Father’s home at last.

Thank you, Pastor Abrigo, for the lovely thoughts you brought us through your message. Yes, with glad hearts, we await the coming of Jesus and the marriage supper of the Lamb!

—Cliff Drieberg, Canada

Dream list: A dream?

Reflecting on the short article by Gordon Botting in the April 2014 issue (“A Church Pastor’s Dream List”), fortunately or unfortunately depending upon which side of the pew one sits, pastors do not design churches because the wish list is most often too lengthy, as described in the article. It is true there is never enough storage or cupboard space. However, that is a good sign as well in that there is growth and may be time for church planting in an adjacent community.

What about churches that meet under trees and lack all the amenities that we take for granted in our desire for more?

The church you described sounds beautiful. How were the services attended? I presume well, with a pastoral staff of five; maybe the (congregation) had outgrown that church and needed larger accommodations. Maybe the church could not supply the needs of an Adventist congregation with all its functions.

Most congregations do not have the funds on hand to even contemplate your suggestions, let alone fulfill them. I have been there.

—Andy Kemperle, email

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Appreciating my fellow clergy

In some parts of the world, during the month of October, Christians express gratitude for their pastor in any number of tangible ways. Regardless of how they do it, the message is clear: “We’re glad you’re our pastor. Thank you for sacrificing yourself in our behalf.”

During my district pastoral ministry, I was the beneficiary of such kindness from my church members; and they inspired me to reciprocate. Once a year, I had a special service to return the favor. I took a Sabbath afternoon to honor each of my parishioners with certificates that focused on some element of their service to the church (yes, each one!).

Throughout the years, however, I gave thought to how I could expand upon such a ministry. Church members reach out to their pastors; I, as pastor, reached out to my parishioners. But I felt that we, as pastors, needed to do a better job of appreciating our fellow clergy.

Grateful for mentors

A year into my pastoral ministry, I was discouraged. Knowing there would be growing pains, I still felt the challenges were overwhelming. So, during a workers’ meeting, I approached a fellow minister, who had approximately 20 years of pastoral experience, and shared my frustrations with him. As I placed before him several scenarios that I was encountering, Alfred Booker took this inexperienced rookie to the side, gave me that proverbial shoulder to cry on, then counseled and prayed with me.

That event transpired almost 30 years ago, yet it left an indelible mark on me. I shall forever be grateful for his ministry to me. I’m sure many church members, over the years, expressed their appreciation to Pastor Booker for ministering to them, as well. I wonder,

however, how many of his fellow clergy have taken the time to do the same.

Grateful for retirees

Early in 2013, my colleague, Jonas Arrais, and I were in Ghana, participating in a beautiful ceremony honoring retired pastors from throughout the country. The Ghana Union Conference, under the leadership of Dr. Samuel Larmie, presented each retiree with a medallion and the wife of each pastor with flowers.

Later that afternoon as I was reflecting upon the events of the day, that which most deeply impressed me was the joy on the faces of the recipients of such an honor. It was as if someone said to them, “We recognize you have labored sacrificially in God’s name for His people. Rest assured that your efforts are not in vain.”

Since that day, I have given more thought to retirees who have contributed to shaping me to be the person and minister that I am—and strive to become. One such minister is my Greek professor during my undergraduate matriculation, James Melançon. Time and space prevent me from sharing his blessings in my life. But no visit to Huntsville, Alabama, is complete without visiting him and his wife in their home—letting him know how thankful I am for his influence in my life.

Grateful for young pastors


In the 1980s, when I began my pastoral ministry, I never imagined most Adventist pastors would someday be younger than I! But here I am. When young, I reminded myself of Paul’s words to Timothy: “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young” (1 Tim. 4:12, NIV).

In my attempts to practice the golden rule of Matthew 7:12, I celebrate and applaud the ministries of those who are younger than I. They are advancing the kingdom of God with force! Whether they are Tara VinCross in Pennsylvania, Clifford Owusu-Gyamfi in Switzerland, Noah Washington in Maryland, or Gerardo Farias Alvarez in Chile, to name only a few, these soldiers of the cross impact countless thousands through their ministries; and I am grateful for how they allow God to use them.



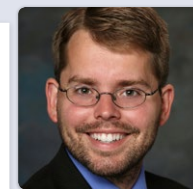
James Melançon and Willie E. Hucks II

Be grateful

As you reflect on ministers who have impacted you, whether in the past or present, take the time to let them know how much you appreciate what they’ve done for you. We, as clergy, form a team that moves unitedly under the direction of Christ; and our greatest strength comes when we lend our support to one another, recognizing that we are not competitors—rather, we are colleagues who labor together under the headship of Christ. 

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Seventh-day Adventists and the **formation of ministerial identity**: *Lessons from our past*

While the message, organization, and other factors have played a vital role in the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the role of the minister has been overlooked.¹ Joseph Bates and James White contributed from 1848 to 1850 to the core theological framework of the fledgling denomination. Based upon my research, there were 51 ministers within the Sabbatarian Adventist movement from 1846 to 1863.² At the time of organization in 1863, there were 31 active ministers. This number rapidly swelled to 276 by 1881.³

The period from 1863 to 1881 should be considered as the seminal period for Seventh-day Adventist ministerial identity. The handful of founding ministers, those who, like James White and Joseph Bates, played a leading role in the initial phase during the 1840s and 1850s, was followed by a second generation of recruits (including ministers who converted). Early Sabbatarian Adventist men and women felt compelled to proclaim the Adventist message.

This article sheds light on an important aspect of Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology by examining the development of the Seventh-day Adventist ministry from the time when the

denomination formed in 1863 through 1881—an arbitrary year that coincides with the death of James White. During this formative time, many precedents were set about the nature and role of the minister, the relationship of the minister to other church members, the financial support of the ministry, and even the development of the practice of ordination among early Seventh-day Adventists.

Ministerial composition and challenges

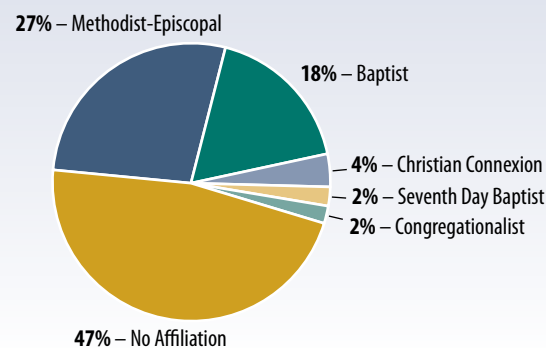
Of the 51 active Seventh-day Adventist ministers between 1846 and 1863, 14 were affiliated with the Millerite revival. Of those who had some sort of denominational affiliation, most were linked with some branch of Methodism (14 ministers, or 27 percent). This was followed by believers affiliated with one of the Baptist traditions (10 ministers, or 19 percent), including at least one minister who grew up

in a Seventh Day Baptist home.⁴ Other ministers included two prominent leaders, James White and Joseph Bates, who were ordained Christian Connexion ministers, a branch of the Restorationist movement committed to a return to the purity of the New Testament Church, and at least one Congregationalist convert.⁵ Early Seventh-day Adventist ministers reflected the wide diversity of socioeconomic and religious backgrounds out of which Adventism was born (see figure 1).⁶

Early challenges

During the late 1850s and early 1860s, leaders such as James White

FIGURE 1: Religious backgrounds of Seventh-day Adventist ministers 1846–1863



faced two challenges. The first came in the form of a few ministers who claimed to be bona fide Seventh-day Adventist clergy in order to solicit donations from unsuspecting church members. Such individuals were merely scam artists. Several *supposed* ministers duped early believers during a time when genuine ministers were often self-supporting and depended upon the generosity of believers to help defray their travel expenses.⁷ A second challenge came from some ministers who defected. Thus Moses Hull, who became a Spiritualist, as well as B. F. Snook and W. H. Brinkerhoff, formed the offshoot “Marion party.” Some did not defect but, like J. B. Frisbie, simply became discouraged and, for a time, gave up the ministry. Such losses diminished the ranks of Adventist ministers during the 1860s.

Each situation was extremely problematic. Once they defected, the typical pattern was to use their sphere of influence to draw others away from the Seventh-day Adventist Church. These problems necessitated that it was a sacred duty, according to James White in 1871, for church members to check ministers for their ministerial credentials.⁸

Ministerial identity

Church organization, therefore, played a crucial role in the formation of early Seventh-day Adventist ministerial identity.⁹ Ministers were credentialed through the local conference.¹⁰ Part of the purpose of the local conference was to provide a mechanism for aspiring ministers through which they received a “ministerial license.”¹¹ Such an aspiring minister would typically be expected to raise a congregation.¹² By 1869, there were sufficient aspiring ministers that the two-tier system was noticeable. After sufficient experience, a young minister received “ministerial credentials” in conjunction with the ordination service, which recognized their call to the gospel ministry.

As the church grew, so did the need for ministers. During the 1860s, letters published in the *Review and Herald* frequently contained appeals

for ministers to visit isolated church members. It was not uncommon for believers to go many months, or even years, without such a visit. Some ministers did show up for a “monthly” or “quarterly meeting” that were regional gatherings of believers; these meetings reflected earlier Pietistic gatherings from Evangelicalism in the eighteenth century.¹³ Such meetings were rich times that re-created the earlier “holy fairs” of Scotland.¹⁴ Such gatherings featured the minister, who was allowed to preach as much as possible, and the services typically concluded with the administering of church ordinances: a baptismal service and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper on Sunday evening at the conclusion of the weekend. The Lord’s Supper became a special “Advent ordinance” that expressed faith in the efficacious blood of Jesus Christ along with the command of Christ to continue to do this until the Second Advent. Thus, the communion service reflected these dual *foci* within Adventist theology, looking both past and forward.¹⁵

Life was fragile then. Many ministers succumbed to disease, which only increased the need for ministerial help. From 1846 to 1863, 18 ministers, by the formation of the denomination in 1863, were no longer active in ministry. Of the 18, 3 defected due to apostasy; the remaining 15 could no longer minister due to poor health or old age. From 1863 to 1881 the leading cause of death, based upon a random selection of obituaries in denominational publications, indicates that approximately 80 percent of church members died from tuberculosis. Even the adoption of the health message did very little to slow down the ravages of this disease. Thus, a prominent role of early Seventh-day Adventist ministers, in addition to itinerant preaching, was to conduct funerals. Yet with so few ministers, church members were admonished to seek ministers from other denominations because this proved to be too great a strain on the limited number of ministers.

The primary work of the minister was twofold: to make sure that local churches functioned properly and to

pursue evangelistic objectives. The first was accomplished by making sure the church was organized at the local church level. As a result, a basic structure was developed between 1863 and 1865: the spiritual leader of the local congregation responsible for leading out in services each week was chosen as the elder,¹⁶ a deacon who looked after the physical welfare of the congregation, and a church clerk who took care of finances and kept track of official church records, including the official membership list of the congregation and minutes from church business meetings. Unless the church was particularly large, only one elder or deacon was necessary for any congregation.

The only exception, at least up to 1881, was the Battle Creek Church, which had two elders for a time when the congregation had more than 400 members. During this time, the elder and deacon were ordained. If an ordained deacon became an elder, that person must be ordained once again. Only an ordained Seventh-day Adventist minister could do this ordination.¹⁷ Additions to the local church could be done only by a unanimous vote by the congregation.¹⁸

The earliest detailed job description for an Adventist minister dates to 1873. In this document, the minister is admonished to examine church records, check the list of members and ascertain their spiritual condition, take proper action about those who are backslidden, send letters to those who are absent, learn who should join the church, and inquire after those keeping the Sabbath but not at church. They were also expected to celebrate church ordinances, examine the financial books to make sure they are accurate, encourage people to contribute for the support of the church, make sure that local members subscribe to church periodicals, encourage members to support institutional endeavors (at this time by purchasing shares of stock in church institutions such as the fledgling Health Reform Institute), look after family prayers, supply publications, and

make sure that those who are poor also have those same publications.¹⁹

In another description, ministers were admonished to make sure they conducted the nominating committee when they visited the local church. Frequently, there were “church trials,” so the minister was a more neutral person who could help to settle squabbles between members. According to the earliest guidelines, the minister selected the nominating committee by appointing “two brethren of good judgment who with him shall act as a nominating committee to nominate candidates . . . and their nomination is to be ratified by a threefourths [*sic*] vote provided that no valid objection is raised by those not voting in the affirmative.” Church members were encouraged to nominate people and vote by secret ballot.²⁰

Thus from 1863 to 1873, ministerial identity was closely connected to both evangelism and the local church. The primary task of the minister was outreach: ministers must preach the gospel and hold evangelistic meetings. This was particularly true of young aspiring ministers. At the same time, the role of the minister was closely connected to ecclesiology and to the life of the local church. As the ministers traveled, they were responsible to ensure that order was maintained.

Ministerial growth

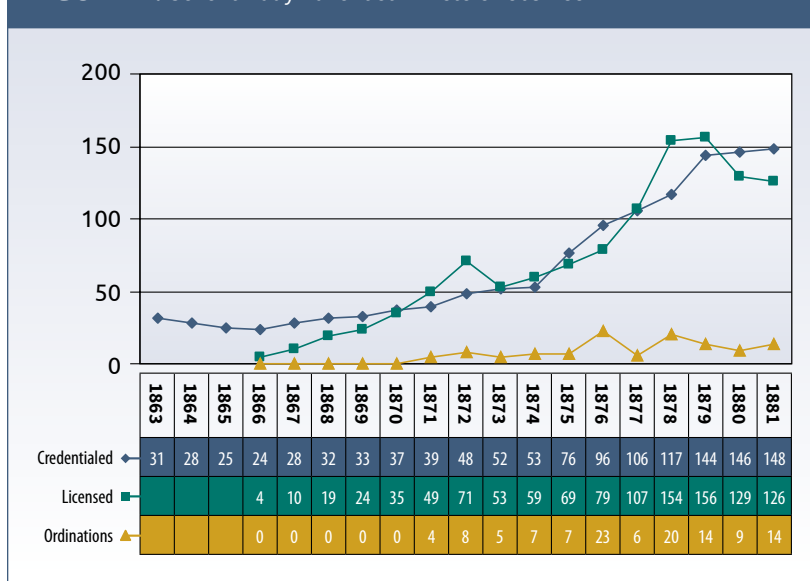
A series of defections by prominent ministers coupled with the expansion of the work only accentuated the need for ministers. Both James and Ellen G. White, from 1869 to 1873, repeatedly called for Seventh-day Adventist young people to prepare themselves for service. This was a significant reason why church leaders supported the educational endeavors of Goodloe Harper Bell, beginning in 1872, that culminated in the founding of Battle Creek College in 1874. A close corollary to this was the Bible lectures by *Review and Herald* editor Uriah Smith. He complemented his daily Bible class with short Biblical Institutes, in which area ministers, and their spouses, could come for brief

intensives. These were so popular that the Whites encouraged him to travel to California and New England to train pastors. Smith’s book *Biblical Institutes* was the first theological textbook for this early generation of Seventh-day Adventist ministers and served as a ready reference about Adventist beliefs.

In response to the repeated appeals by church leaders, a new generation of

church leaders took her counsel about the sacred role of ministers, and the need to train such ministers, very seriously. As a result, these same church leaders curbed the rapid expansion by restricting ministerial licenses. James and Ellen G. White, for their part, called not only for ministers but for “laborers” who had a sense of the sacrifice necessary to be truly successful in ministry.

FIGURE 2: Seventh-day Adventist Ministers 1863-1881



young men and women aspired to the ministry. This wave of new ministers really took off in 1871 (see figure 2), when the number of new recruits for the first time exceeded the number of ordained ministers. The 1870s witnessed two large waves of ministers: the first from 1871 to 1873 and a second from 1877 to 1879. Ellen G. White, in particular, had a series of admonitions for ministers during the 1870s.

Both she and James White were troubled that young ministers did not appreciate the spirit of sacrifice that characterized earlier ministers. Her cautions for young ministers, especially those from 1874 to 1875 and again around 1879, correspond with calls to limit ministerial licenses for aspiring ministers, and consequently the number of ministerial recruits also slowed down. It appears that the majority of

The rapid expansion of ministers during the 1870s (see figure 2) brought with it new challenges. One such problem was what title to give Adventist ministers. The title of reverend was quickly repudiated. James and Ellen White both referred to early clergy as “ministers,” and less frequently as “pastors,” but they were more concerned that they were “workers” or “laborers.” James White, for example, referred frequently to the role of *minister* but described himself also as “pastor” of the Battle Creek Church—even though he was largely absent from that congregation due to the constraints of his leadership role.²¹

Earlier problems during the 1860s resurfaced once again during the 1870s. Although the number of clergy was increasing quickly during the 1870s, there was still a severe shortage of

ministers. Obituaries in the 1870s frequently list ministers from other denominations as having conducted the funeral. Church members were encouraged to make use of ministers from other churches who did not emphasize doctrinal differences.

Even more challenging, as Seventh-day Adventists adopted Adventist lifestyle practices such as health and dress reform, was the problem of some ministers who were “addicted to the habit of tobacco.” The matter was referred to the “resolutions committee,” which proposed that “it is inexpedient for our churches to allow ministers of other denominations who are addicted to the use of tobacco, or who are avowedly hostile to important features of our faith.”²² While the use of ministers from other denominations was a stopgap measure as the church grew, new expectations along with lifestyle practices necessitated the formation of a distinctive Adventist ministerial identity.

From 1875 to 1881, Adventist ministerial identity matured somewhat further. Conference leaders admonished all ministers to send in regular reports, many of which were published in denominational periodicals. Ministers were instructed to procure copies of *Robert's Rules of Order* so that they could properly conduct church business meetings.²³ Understanding and applying these rules would help to alleviate local “church trials,” as churches were encouraged to hold annual elections to appoint local church leaders.²⁴ And if they could not obtain education any other way, a practice of developing a list of readings for ministers began in 1881.²⁵

Ordination

Perhaps the most interesting practice related to early Seventh-day Adventist ministers was that of ordination. The earliest ministers were previously ordained ministers. Thus, the first question in the development of a unique Seventh-day Adventist ministerial identity concerned ordination. James White argued in 1867 that just

like baptism, “when this is done to and by the proper persons, once is sufficient, if the candidate does not apostatize.”²⁶ My survey of ministers from 1863 to 1881 found only two examples where Seventh-day Adventist ministers were reordained. While this was apparently an option, it appears that by and large early Seventh-day Adventists recognized the ordination given by other denominations as still valid.


This changed as young ministers who aspired to the ministry proved themselves worthy as ministers. While not everyone who aspired to the ministry was ordained, of those who did, it appears that it typically took between four and six years of service, thus starting a precedent for a young minister that continues up to the present. The earliest ordinations that I found occurred in 1872, the same year in which Ellen G. White was first listed with other ordained ministers as having ministerial credentials.

Of the 117 ordinations I was able to document from 1872 to 1881 (there could have been other ordinations prior to 1872, but I constrained my search to those published in the *Review and Herald*), there appears to be a fairly uniform practice.²⁷ In all of the descriptions, clearly the ordination service was a solemn and sacred event. The event involved an “ordination sermon” that contained some aspects of personal admonition to be faithful. This was followed by a prayer, often by a different minister, in which the ministers who participated in the ceremony laid hands on the one to be ordained. And then this was followed by a charge that uniformly mentioned the “right hand of fellowship” in recognition of their special role.

Observations

James White repeatedly admonished that Seventh-day Adventist ministers should not hover over churches. Ministers seldom remained in one location for more than two or three years. More often, they operated as itinerants who maintained a route of churches. This was because the primary task of the minister was that

of evangelism. Both church members and ministers who failed to share their faith became spiritually weak. Church leaders recognized that there was a balance in which the minister did have a responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the flock entrusted to their care, but neither should the minister do the work for them. This dual focus between supervision and evangelism shows an inherent tension that characterized the life and work of the early Seventh-day Adventist minister.

Furthermore, the early pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church were pragmatists. Organization was a matter of necessity, and the need to recognize ministers contributed to the need for denominational organization. Church leaders accomplished this goal by issuing ministerial credentials through local conferences, thus placing the focus of authority for approving ministerial candidates one step beyond the local church. It was far too easy for early Seventh-day Adventists to be duped by scam artists or dissidents. As several ministers defected, the late 1860s and early 1870s witnessed a surge of young ministers who received a ministerial license. The ability to share their faith was seen as the litmus test of God's call. With time, church leaders developed more intentional ways to train ministers, all of which were closely tied to Seventh-day Adventist education. The early pioneers of the church believed that such an education would only enhance their effectiveness. Such a minister should be set apart to the work of the gospel ministry through ordination, a recognition of God's call that affirmed the sacred role of the minister within Seventh-day Adventist ecclesiology. 

1 Recent contributions by David J. B. Trim and Denis Kaiser now help to nuance and augment this picture on the role of Seventh-day Adventist ministers in early Adventism, particularly in relationship to recent discussions pertaining to ordination. This paper focuses instead upon the broader milieu of ministerial development. See D. J. B. Trim, “Ordination in Seventh-day Adventist History,” paper presented to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, 2013 (<http://www.adventistarchives.org/ordination-in-sda-history.pdf>); “The Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Policy and Practice,” paper presented to the Theology of Ordination Study Committee, 2013 (<http://www.adventistarchives.org/the-ordination-of-women-in-seventh-day-adventist-policy-and-practice.pdf>); Denis Kaiser, “Setting Apart for the Ministry: Theory

- and Practice in Seventh-day Adventism (1850–1920),” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 51, no. 2 (Autumn 2013): 177–218.
- 2 A search of the *Review and Herald* page by page indicates that the following ministers were active from 1846 to 1863: J. M. Aldrich, J. N. Andrews, D. Arnold, H. F. Baker, E. L. Barr, J. Bates, J. Bostwick, J. C. Bowles, A. C. Bourdeau, D. T. Bourdeau, W. H. Brinkerhoff, H. G. Buck, J. Byington, H. S. Case, M. E. Cornell, R. F. Cottrell, S. Cranson, D. T. Evans, E. Everts, J. Fisher, J. B. Frisbie, N. Fuller, H. Grant, D. P. Hall, J. R. Hart, G. W. Holton, J. Howlett, M. Hull, A. S. Hutchins, W. S. Ingraham, R. J. Lawrence, H. Lothrop, J. N. Loughborough, W. Morse, S. Pierce, D. C. Phillips, E. A. Poole, S. W. Rhodes, I. Sanborn, B. F. Snook, C. W. Sperry, J. M. Stephenson, T. M. Steward, A. Stone, C. O. Taylor, J. R. Towle, I. N. Van Gorder, J. H. Waggoner, F. Wheeler, J. White, and J. G. Wood.
 - 3 These statistics are based upon a detailed compendium of Seventh-day Adventist ministers that I compiled. See Michael W. Campbell, “Compendium of Seventh-day Adventist Ministers 1863–1881,” unpublished manuscript, 2013.
 - 4 Christian Connexion (2): James White, Joseph Bates; Methodist-Episcopal (13): David Arnold, Harry G. Buck, Samuel Cranson, J. B. Frisbie, Nathan Fuller, John Howlett, J. N. Loughborough, Moses Hull, B. F. Snook, Washington Morse, Frederick Wheeler; Methodist-Wesleyan (1): John Byington; Baptist (9): J. H. Waggoner, R. J. Lawrence, A. C. Bourdeau, D. T. Bourdeau, John Fisher, A. S. Hutchins, Stephen Pierce, T. S. Steward, A. Stone; Seventh Day Baptist (1): R. F. Cottrell; Congregationalist (1): Ezra A. Poole.
 - 5 Ministers from 1863 who were known to be active in the Millerite revival include (6): James White, Joseph Bates, M. E. Cornell, R. J.

- Lawrence, David Arnold, and Washington Morse.
- 6 James White celebrated this diversity; see [James White], “Seventh-day Adventists,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 24, 1871, 148.
 - 7 As an example, see the warning listed in *Review and Herald*, Oct. 15, 1872, 144.
 - 8 [James White], “Organization,” *Review and Herald*, Aug. 22, 1871, 76.
 - 9 See Trim, “Ordination in Seventh-day Adventist History,” “The Ordination of Women in Seventh-day Adventist Policy and Practice,” and Kaiser, “Setting Apart for the Ministry.”
 - 10 “Those who feel it their duty to improve their gifts as messengers or preachers, shall first lay their exercises of mind before the Conference Committee, to receive a license from them, if the Committee consider them qualified.” See “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *Review and Herald*, May 26, 1863, 205.
 - 11 In article V, sec. 2 of the “Model Constitution” for Conferences (1863) is the following provision: “Those who feel it their duty to improve their gifts as messengers or preachers, shall first lay their exercises of mind before the Conference Committee, to receive a license from them, if the Committee consider them qualified.” “Report of General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists,” *Review and Herald*, May 26, 1863, 205.
 - 12 A case in point is that of D. M. Canright, whom James White upheld as a model young minister in 1871. See description by James White, “What Shall Be Done? Laborers Wanted,” *Review and Herald*, Dec. 12, 1871, 204.
 - 13 Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical*

- Christianity in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 30, 31.
- 14 For an overview, see Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Holy Fairs: Scotland and the Making of American Revivalism*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2001).
 - 15 For an overview of these gatherings, see Michael W. Campbell, “A Holy Spell: Worshipping With Early Adventists,” *Adventist Review*, Oct. 22, 2009, 26–28.
 - 16 H. A. St. John, “Local Elders,” *Review and Herald*, Jan. 13, 1876, 11.
 - 17 See question along with answer, presumably by Uriah Smith, in *Review and Herald*, Aug. 16, 1864, 96.
 - 18 Cf. *Review and Herald*, June 6, 1871.
 - 19 “Pastoral Responsibilities,” *Review and Herald*, June 24, 1873, 13.
 - 20 “Answers to Correspondents,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 28, 1873, 160.
 - 21 [James White], “Battle Creek,” *Review and Herald*, Aug. 8, 1871, 60.
 - 22 *Review and Herald*, Oct. 14, 1880, 253.
 - 23 Cf. “Illinois Conference,” *Review and Herald*, Sept. 30, 1880, 237.
 - 24 General Conference Committee, “A Change of Church Officers,” *Review and Herald*, Jan. 4, 1881, 11.
 - 25 “Report of Committee on Course of Reading for Ministers,” *Review and Herald*, Dec. 20, 1881, 395.
 - 26 James White, “Re-Ordination,” *Review and Herald*, Aug. 6, 1867, 120.
 - 27 As one of the more detailed examples, see the ordination of Sands H. Lane: “Ordination,” *Review and Herald*, Oct. 1, 1872, 128. See also the ordination of Santee, *Review and Herald*, Nov. 21, 1878, 164.

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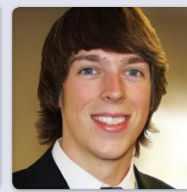


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Corinth - Temple of Apollo

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The forgotten movement: Church planting trends and lessons (Part 1 of 2)

**“Upon all who believe, God has placed the burden of raising up churches.”
—Ellen G. White**

At the inception of the Advent movement, believers united to advance the cause of the gospel by entering new territory and starting new congregations. The Seventh-day Adventist Church experienced explosive growth, launching a movement that spread and continues to advance across the world. Today, 150 years later, the time has come to ask, How are we doing with raising up new congregations to finish the harvest in North America?

To answer this question, we decided to look at statistics of the last century about church planting. We hope that the findings from this study will benefit the global church. Some divisions are growing rapidly; others are not.² The North American population has multiplied, but has the church also multiplied to reach the rapidly growing populace?

Figure 1 presents our analysis of the population growth in the United States, Canada, and Bermuda³ and the net growth of Seventh-day Adventist Churches in the North American Division (NAD)⁴ in the last 100 years.⁵

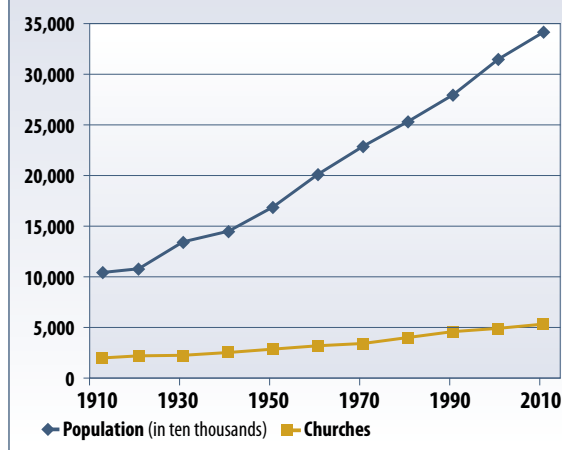
Figure 1 shows that in 1913 there were 2,006 churches for 105 million

people, but in 2011 we have 5,332 churches for 342 million people. While each church needed to influence about 52,000 people in 1913, in 2011 each church needed to influence 64,000 people.

The data confronts the Church in North America with a staggering reality: *we are not planting churches rapidly enough to keep up with population growth.* Established churches alone will never be able to accommodate the needs of the fast-growing population, especially in areas without an Adventist presence.

Reaching the population is possible. In the last century, the average growth in the number of churches in North America has been 1.03 percent per year. This number is in harmony with church growth expert Lyle Schaller’s 1 percent rule. According to this rule, each year, any denomination should plant new congregations at the rate of 1 percent of their existing total for “maintenance,” to avoid decline. If a denomination

FIGURE 1: Growth of population vs. net growth of churches in the NAD



wants to grow substantially, it must plant 2 to 3 percent per year.⁶

Figure 2 portrays what happens if approximately one in four churches plant a daughter church each decade. To illustrate this in the Adventist context over the last century, we projected a 2.5 percent growth rate of the number of churches per year (25 percent per decade).⁷

Figure 2 shows that if we had adopted a 2.5 percent rule, in 2011 we would have had more than three times as many churches (18,682) and dropped the ratio to one church per 18,000 people.

Through planting more churches, Seventh-day Adventists can improve the ratio of churches per population. Ratios are important because they reflect the number of people a church needs to influence in order to cooperate with God to fulfill the Great Commission. In other words, ratios identify the size of the mission field of each church. Dan Serns, who has planted at least one church in every district he has pastored (Texas, Kansas, and Washington) and now pastors the Richardson Seventh-day Adventist Church in Texas, shared his vision: “I believe we need a vibrant Seventh-day Adventist congregation for every ten thousand people.”⁸ This is in harmony with what Kevin Ezell discovered in his research on the Southern Baptist denomination: the church optimally thrives and grows when the ratio of churches to population drops below 10,000.⁹ Serns shared that new congregations are essential to expand the influence of the church for the kingdom of God.

Research of the ratios of Adventist churches per population for each decade revealed that while in some decades the church succeeded in lowering the ratio; the trend is falling behind.

A careful examination of the data in figure 3 reveals the following:

1. The best ratio was one church per 48,500 people in 1921.
2. The worst ratio was one church per 67,000 people in 1971.
3. There were four decades in which the ratio improved: 1910s, 1930s, 1970s, and 1980s.
4. The worst ratio in history (1971) was counteracted by a massive church planting movement in the 1970s that continued into the 1980s.
5. The current ratio (as of 2011)¹⁰ is one church per 64,000 people.
6. Today, the ratio is much closer to its worst in history than to its best.

Just as the Advent movement made great strides in church planting in the 1970s¹¹ to overcome the worst ratio in history, we need a massive church planting movement today. Established churches must be activated to plant

churches that will, in turn, plant new churches. “As churches are established, it should be set before them that it is even from among them that men must be taken to carry the truth to others and raise new churches.”¹² This paradigm shift must happen in the church on all levels. We believe that any pastor, administrator, member, conference, and church can be part of the solution.

Figure 4 shows that if the Seventh-day Adventist Church had planted at the rate of 2.5 percent per year, the number of people each congregation would need to influence would be about 18,000. This number would begin to approach a far more manageable ratio for fulfilling the Great Commission in North America. Instead, the ratio today is 64,000 people for each church.

Interpreting the data

For the past century, the NAD has grown an average of 35 churches per year. Taking into account the 59 conferences in the NAD, that is an average of about 6 churches per decade per conference. That means each conference has grown by about half a church (0.6) per year. This rate could be tripled if one additional pastor in each conference planted a church this next year.

The data reveals that Seventh-day Adventist church planting in North America is an exception rather than an expectation. In the last decade, there was a net increase of 399 churches. If we assumed that each came from

a distinct mother church, then this increase would suggest that only eight percent of churches in the NAD planted a church. That means 92 percent of churches in NAD have not planted within the last ten years. The potential for growth is almost unlimited! If even an additional 8 percent planted churches this decade, the year 2021 would see nearly 800 new Adventist congregations faithfully sharing Jesus with thousands who desperately need Him. The harvest in North America desperately calls for every Adventist to be involved in a massive church planting movement.

In order to reach Schaller’s 2.5 percent growth rate in churches for the next decade in North America, we need to experience a net growth of 1,333 churches. That is an average of 133.3 churches per year. Divided between

FIGURE 2: Projected net growth of churches at 2.5 percent growth per year

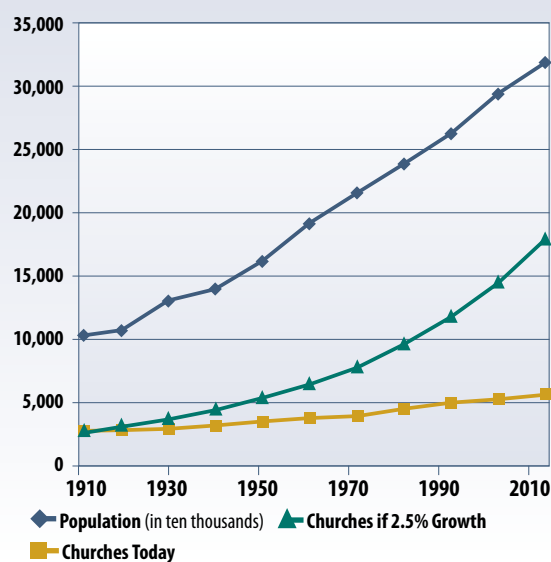


FIGURE 3: Ratios of one Seventh-day Adventist Church per population

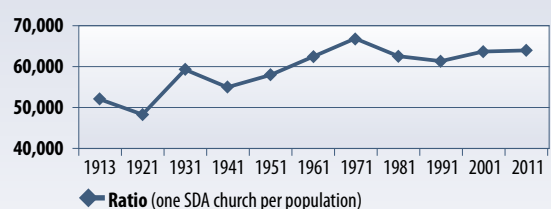
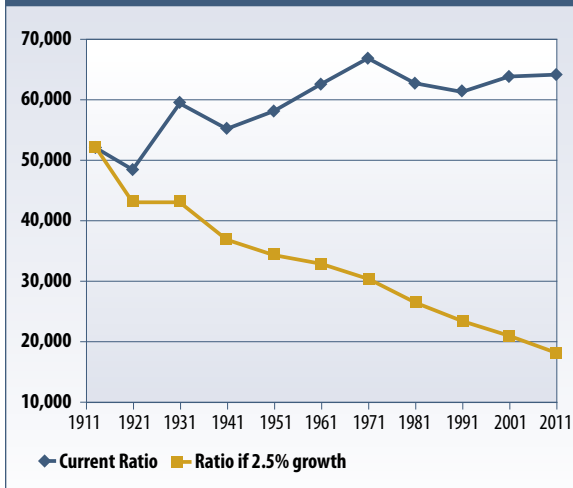


FIGURE 4: Ratios of SDA Churches per population as projected with 2.5 percent net growth per year



59 conferences, that is an average of 2.25 churches per conference per year. It will require significant intentionality to move from 0.60 to 2.25 churches per conference per year. However, this mark is very achievable considering the top four conferences in church planting in the last decade averaged 5.15 churches and companies per year (see table 1). A massive church planting movement in North America is definitely within reach.

What could a church planting movement look like?

To gain a realistic understanding of what a massive Adventist church planting movement might look like, we conducted research to see where successful church planting is taking place in North America. To limit our research sample, we identified and analyzed the top conferences in church planting in the last ten years.¹³ Only 4 out of 59 conferences showed a net increase of at least 45 churches and companies during that time.¹⁴

Renew or plant?

In our research, we discovered one of the greatest roadblocks to church planting is the need for renewal in the vast number of plateauing and declining Adventist churches in North America. Experts make the case that a lack of church planting is one of the major causes

of decline.¹⁵ Ellen White mentioned that many churches and members who are dying spiritually would experience renewal by spreading out to reach new areas.¹⁶ Renewal comes by focusing on the mission, developing disciples, and taking great steps out in faith. As the spirituality of the church members increases, they naturally become more aware of the harvest around them and seek training (discipleship) and structure (ministry and church planting) in order to reach them.¹⁷

Our study revealed that one of the best ways to experience church renewal is through planting another church. We believe that the Holy Spirit can lead any Adventist church to plant another within ten years, and many may be ready much sooner.

In the interviews we conducted, we could not find any mother church that suffered as a result of planting a church to reach the harvest. Contrarily, many examples showed that they were renewed and came away with more people and resources than ever before. Five years ago, the Hollywood Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church¹⁸ in Florida was meeting in a small rented facility and experiencing decline. They were “stuck in the same” every Sabbath until they experienced a reawakening to the needs around them. The leadership placed a new emphasis on mission and discipleship through preaching, education, and

continually bringing the importance of reaching the community before the people. The church shifted their focus from inward to outward and decided as a church body that they were going to begin planting new congregations.

“As soon as they put their heart into mission, they started to grow and multiply,” shared Allan Machado, Hispanic coordinator for the Florida Conference.¹⁹ An Adventist businessman saw God at work and bought them a new five-million-dollar church building. After moving into the building, they struggled financially to maintain it. They decided to trust God and continue planting new churches anyway. After five years, they have planted four churches and have worship services in English and Spanish. Their membership today is close to 300, while the combined membership of all five churches is about 1,000. Hollywood Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church is one of many churches we studied that experienced renewal as they stepped out in faith through church planting.

The new movement

Beginning an Adventist Church planting movement in North America requires participation on all levels. Everyone has a role to play. “Upon all who believe, God has placed the burden of raising up churches.”²⁰

Our research of the top four conferences in church planting revealed that a variety of models were successfully implemented. Gerson Santos, vice president for the Greater New York Conference, noted, “The city is so diverse, that I don’t think we can have just one model.” The following models used by the top four conferences in the last decade illustrate the role that every

TABLE 1: Top four conferences in church planting, 2001–2011

Conference	Churches	Companies	Total
Texas	31	26	57
Georgia Cumberland	22	31	53
Greater New York	40	8	48
Florida	13	35	48

level of the church can play in a massive church planting movement:

Member initiated models:

1. Members start small groups at their houses that meet during the week and witness in their community. As the groups grow and multiply, one to four groups may combine and begin meeting Sabbath mornings for worship.
2. A Seventh-day Adventist group not connected to any church works with the conference and/or a mother church to organize as a company.

Mother church initiated models:

1. One mother church elects a leader and core group to work toward planting a daughter church.
2. Two or more churches work together to plant a daughter church.
3. A mother church “plants” by starting a new worship service (either at the same facility or a new location) in order to reach a new demographic.
4. A Sabbath School class grows and becomes a new church plant.
5. A church speaking one language plants a church that speaks another: Spanish planting English, English planting Portuguese, etc.
6. A church with elderly population hosts or plants a youth or children’s church.

Conference initiated models:

1. The conference focuses on an area where there is little or no Adventist presence and sponsors a church planter to begin working there.
2. The conference identifies a lay-pastor and works with them to establish a new church.
3. The conference creates a Center of Influence to reach a city. For example, the Greater New York Conference converted an Adventist Book Center downtown into a juice bar café where people meet to have a Bible study and fellowship at lunchtime as well as worship services on Sabbath.

These are a few of many examples of how every level of the church can

get involved in a church planting movement. The common thread throughout all the conferences and churches we studied is that new church plants should be raised up to answer God’s mission. Successful church plants came out of a mission-driven consciousness, not out of conflict or dissension. All four conferences were very intentional, having allocated conference personnel and resources and developed strategic plans for church planting.

We discovered a correlation between church planting and membership growth. The top four conferences in church planting from 2001 to 2011 were above the NAD average (1.8 percent per year) in membership growth (Texas: 4.2 percent, Georgia-Cumberland: 2.8 percent, Greater New York: 2.4 percent, Florida: 2 percent). The significant numbers of baptisms and professions of faith per year in the top four conferences are evidence of the connection between church planting and evangelism (Texas: 2,279; Georgia-Cumberland: 1,130; Greater New York: 1,369; Florida: 2,365). All four conferences saw church planting as an invaluable key for reaching the harvest.

Reoccurring themes and lessons we learned

While the second part of this article will give more specific examples, we noticed some major recurring themes in our interviews and research. Here are some of the lessons we learned:

First, *anything you do is better than nothing*. Even talking about it or starting a new small group is a step forward in church planting. Once the concept has gained some momentum, you can work to identify and mentor the potential leaders.

Second, *church planting is a result of making disciples*. As people grow in their passion for God, they need new opportunities to use their energy and abilities in witness and service. A church plant provides abundant opportunities for involvement in ministry.

Third, *lay-led planting was more common, effective, and affordable*. The greatest investment you can make


toward church planting is in the spirituality and leadership development of a few key people.

Fourth, *church planting creates synergy for both mother and daughter churches*. Focusing on the mission and building new leaders brings renewal for the mother and equips the daughter. The churches that plant receive rich blessings and experience growth in number, health, and finances.

Fifth, *conferences that implement an intentional church planting strategy experience significant growth*. Effective strategies include appointing a church planting coordinator for the conference, recruiting and training lay leaders, coaching church planters, utilizing demographics studies, and allocating funds for special church planting projects.

Conclusion

The Seventh-day Adventist Church sprang up as a movement with the goal of fulfilling the Great Commission by rapidly entering new territory and raising new congregations. However, an evaluation of church planting over the last 100 years suggests that the church planting movement in North America has been largely forgotten. The challenge to reach the rapidly growing population in North America is great, but through the power of the Holy Spirit and intentionality among all levels of the church, the challenge is within reach. Planting new churches is essential for the growth and vitality of the Adventist church in all parts of the world. Every new church is a visible monument to God’s heart for humanity and able to reach distinct people groups and communities with the everlasting gospel. The vision for a massive church planting movement is daunting, but even a small step in that direction can be multiplied by the power of the Holy Spirit.²¹

(Part 2 will appear in the December 2014 issue). 

1 Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1932), 315.

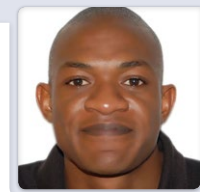
2 For example, from 2001 to 2011 the Southern Asia Division grew by 8.1 percent in churches and companies per year, and the

- South American Division grew by 4.9 percent per year. During that time period, the General Conference as a whole grew by 3 percent in churches and companies per year (Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, accessed January 20, 2014, www.adventiststatistics.org).
- 3 Population estimates taken from "Population Estimates: Current Estimates Data," United States Census Bureau, accessed September 20, 2013, www.census.gov/popest/data/index.html; "NPG Interactive U.S. Population Map," Negative Population Growth, accessed September 20, 2013, www.npg.org/facts/us_historical_pops.htm; Statistics Canada, accessed September 20, 2013, www.statcan.gc.ca/start-debut-eng.html; "Population of Canada," *Wikipedia*, accessed October 10, 2013, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_of_Canada_by_year; and "Bermuda Demographics Profile 2013," *index mundi*, accessed October 10, 2013, www.indexmundi.com/bermuda/demographics_profile.html.
 - 4 All church statistics taken from the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, accessed October 10, 2013, www.adventiststatistics.org. The net growth of churches accounts for church plants minus churches that close or merge.
 - 5 We did not include Seventh-day Adventist companies in order to remain consistent because of insufficient data. In 1913, the denomination reported the number of churches and companies, but between 1914 and 1996 the number of companies was not recorded in the official archives. Although a few individuals point out that there are some companies of considerable size in the NAD, we see this fact offset by the significant number of very small churches.
 - 6 Lyle Schaller, *44 Questions for Church Planters* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991), 12.
 - 7 A contemporary example of this growth rate from the world church in the last decade (2001–2011) is the Inter-American Division, which experienced a 2.4 percent increase in churches and companies per year. During that time period, the membership grew from 2,078,226 to 3,403,718, or 6.4 percent per year. This illustrates the correlation between church planting and membership growth.
 - 8 Dan Sems, telephone interview, November 15, 2013.
 - 9 Kevin Ezell, "Why We Need More Churches," North American Mission Board, accessed November 25, 2013, www.namb.net/Population_Church_Ratios/.
 - 10 The most recent year available with full church statistics at the time of this research was 2011.
 - 11 For extensive church planting research conducted through the 1970 and 1980s, see Roger Dudley and Clarence Gruesbeck, *Plant a Church, Reap a Harvest* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1989). Monte Sahlin also adds that one of the significant reasons for growth in church planting during that time was the church's response to the rise of immigrant groups in North America and the importance of addressing their needs (telephone interview, October 10, 2013). This is an illustration of an intentional church planting movement that aims to reach the ever-growing population.
 - 12 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1872), 205. Ed Stetzer affirms this principle, calling for churches not only to plant daughter churches but to aim to become "grandparent churches" (Ed Stetzer and Warren Bird, *Vital Churches: Helping Church Planters Become Movement Makers* [San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2010], 31–47).
 - 13 Research drawn from Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, www.adventiststatistics.org. The most current results available measured from 2001–2011.
 - 14 Statistics taken from the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research, accessed October 10, 2013, www.adventiststatistics.org, and interviews conducted with conference officials, pastors, and lay leaders.
 - 15 Aubrey Malphurs argues that church planting is the key to survival as a denomination (Aubrey Malphurs, *Planting Growing Churches for the 21st Century* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004], 32–38). Lyle Schaller makes the case that the lack of church planting is one major cause of the decline of mainline Protestantism (Schaller, *44 Questions*, 24–26). The same scenario is true for Adventism.
 - 16 Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), 244.
 - 17 For more details on simple strategic steps to move toward church planting, see part 2 of this article.
 - 18 For examples of this principle from other ethnic demographics, see part 2 of this article.
 - 19 Allan Machado, telephone interview, October 22, 2013.
 - 20 White, *Medical Ministry*, 315.
 - 21 Church planting is a difficult endeavor. Claiming territory for Jesus most certainly solicits opposition from many sides. Those who commit to church planting encounter significant obstacles, but as they depend on God, He answers with incredible blessings and rewards. Part 2 of this article will address three major obstacles to church planting based on data and interviews from the top four conferences in church planting.

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Inspired insights from Ellen G. White on church planting

1. "Upon all who believe, God has placed the burden of raising up churches" (*Medical Ministry*, 315).
2. "New churches must be established, new congregations organized. At this time there should be representatives in every city and in the remote parts of the earth" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, 24).
3. "In all countries and cities the gospel is to be proclaimed. . . .
"Churches are to be organized and plans laid for work to be done by the members of the newly organized churches" (*Evangelism* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1946], 19).
4. "Place after place is to be visited, church after church is to be raised up" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, 20).
5. "The need for a meeting-house where there is a newly formed company of believers, has been presented before me in a panoramic view. . . .
"The establishment of churches, the erection of meeting-houses and school-buildings, was extended from city to city, and the tithe was increasing to carry forward the work. Plants were made not only in one place, but in many places, and the Lord was working to increase His forces" (*Gospel Workers* [Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1915], 435).
6. "Let not the work of establishing memorials for God in many places be made difficult and burdensome because the necessary means is withheld" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, 132–133).
7. "The people who bear His sign are to establish churches and institutions as memorials to Him" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, 105).
8. "God's workers are to plant the standards of truth in every place to which they can gain access. . . . Memorials for Him are to be raised in America and in foreign countries" (*Selected Messages*, bk. 1 [Washington DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1958], 112).
9. "Many of the members of our large churches are doing comparatively nothing. They might accomplish a good work if, instead of crowding together, they would scatter into places that have not yet been entered by the truth. Trees that are planted too thickly do not flourish. They are transplanted by the gardener, that they may have room to grow and not become dwarfed and sickly. The same rule would work well for our large churches. Many of the members are dying spiritually for want of this very work. They are becoming sickly and inefficient" (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, 244).
10. "This gospel missionary work is to keep reaching out and annexing new territory, enlarging the cultivated portions of the vineyards. The circle is to extend until it belts the world.
"From town to town, from city to city, from country to country, the warning message is to be proclaimed, not with outward display, but in the power of the Spirit, by men of faith" (*Evangelism*, 19).



Christus Victor: *Armageddon and atonement in the Apocalypse*

Though the word appears only once in the Bible (Rev. 16:16), Armageddon is strongly associated with war because it is described as the place where the kings of the earth will gather for the battle of the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:14). Based on popular teachings regarding Bible prophecy, many Christians await the fulfillment of the great battle of Armageddon as they watch the military moves of world powers. All eyes anxiously watch the nations, especially those of the Middle East, awaiting the apocalyptic fulfillment of this end-time doomsday prophecy.

Although many exegetical and theological interpretations of Armageddon exist, they can be grouped into two major views: (1) Armageddon is a literal geographical place for a global war in the Middle East; (2) Armageddon symbolizes a spiritual battle between Jesus Christ and the antichrist. Despite the differing views, both agree on the reality and inevitability of the universal eschatological battle of Armageddon.

However, how does this great battle fit into the bigger picture of salvation history? Is Armageddon just a mere prophecy of a global nuclear mushroom, or is there something profoundly more? Does this battle

have any spiritual significance? How does Armageddon fit into the plan of redemption, sometimes referred to as the atonement?

Atonement as victory

Atonement is a key biblical teaching that deals with Christ's work for humanity's salvation with special emphasis on His death on the cross. In the history of Christian theology, many theories have sprung up to describe atonement.¹ Each one sheds light on a different perspective from which atonement can be understood.²

Among the varied models of atonement, the Christus Victor model is noteworthy. This model was proposed by the Swedish historical theologian Gustaf Aulén, who described atonement as divine conflict and conquest.³ According to this model, atonement is Christ's victory over the evil powers that hold humankind in bondage, causing separation from God.⁴ Atonement (Christ's victory over these evil powers) brings a new relationship of liberation from bondage for humanity and reconciliation between God and humankind. Based on the Christus Victor model, Christ's work for humanity's salvation is described as a victory over all evil. This description of atonement sets the stage for a better appreciation of the

relationship between Armageddon and atonement.

"The [evil] powers that be"

The book of Revelation provides both the context of the battle of Armageddon and the basis for its interpretation. Since the book of Revelation is apocalyptic literature, Armageddon needs to be understood against the backdrop of apocalypticism⁵—a worldview that the present age is one of despair because it is controlled by evil powers, both spiritual and political, that oppress and persecute God's people.⁶ However, the present evil age will give way to the future age of hope, when God will intervene and destroy all evil powers and restore the world to its pristine order and beauty.⁷

The Armageddon passage (Rev. 16:12–16) describes the evil powers that constitute the end-time coalition that war against God. They include the dragon, beast, false prophet, unclean demonic spirits, and kings and inhabitants of the earth. These powers in the eschatological battle are further described in the broad context of the apocalypse.

The first three powers may be described as the false trinity of the apocalypse.⁸ The details of their identity

and character are fully portrayed as part of the central section of the book of Revelation (chapters 12 and 13). The dragon's origin, character, and activities were introduced in Revelation 12:3–17 as the mastermind of all deception and evil (Rev. 12:9, 10), giving power and authority to the other beasts described in Revelation 13:2, 4, 11. The second power, described as the beast, refers to the sea beast of Revelation 13:1–10, and the third power, the false prophet, refers to the earth beast of Revelation 13:11–15. This trinity appears to act together for the first time as allies in the apocalypse in the Armageddon context (Rev. 16:13). As an unholy trinity, they are an imitation of the true Trinity, who are also present in the context of the apocalypse (Rev. 1:4, 5).⁹ The dragon counterfeits God the Father, the sea beast imitates God the Son, and the false prophet imitates the Holy Spirit. These three are the ultimate evil powers of the apocalypse.

The evil powers next in line are the unclean demonic spirits. They are sent as agents by the unholy trinity to deceive the kings of the earth (Rev. 16:13, 14). These evil angels are also a triad, parallel to the false trinity, and a counterfeit of the three angels of Revelation 14:6–12.¹⁰ While the angels of Revelation 14 preach the eternal gospel to the entire world, the evil angels deceive the world through miraculous signs and wonders. These miracles parallel the activity of the false prophet in Revelation 13:13, 14. These evil spirit beings, therefore, control the kings of the earth and the inhabitants they rule over,¹¹ gathering them against God and His people. In line with apocalyptic thought, these verses confirm that the political powers of the earth that oppress God's people are controlled by demons.¹² Thus, the apocalypse points out “the [evil] powers that be” in the battle of Armageddon—political powers controlled by demonic powers.

This coalition of evil powers gathers to make war against God by persecuting His people through an end-time global religio-political enforcement of anti-God law (Rev. 12:17; 13:7, 15–17). By so

doing, they prepare for the eschatological battle of Armageddon.

Since the atonement can be described as victory over evil powers, glimpses of Christ's victory over these powers in the apocalypse will give a better appreciation of the significance of Armageddon in the plan of redemption.

Christ's victory: Objective atonement

One of the first mentions of Christ's victory in the apocalypse is found in Revelation 5:5, 6. Though described as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, He appears as a Lamb that had been slain. *The Lamb* is the most prominent Christological name in Revelation.¹³ On the basis of biblical theology, the picture of Jesus as Lamb in Revelation 5 shows the reader a symbol of His death on the cross. The context of the chapter further implies that His sacrificial death demonstrates how He conquered.¹⁴

What did the Lamb conquer at the cross? The victory hymn in Revelation 12:10–12 answers the question. This victory song describes the fall of the dragon out of heaven and declares a new point in salvation history beginning with the temporal adverb “now” (KJV) or “it has happened at last” (NLT).¹⁵ This celebrates the establishment of God's kingdom overthrowing Satan's usurping rule. In addition to the dragon's first fall from heaven, presented in military imagery (Rev. 12:3, 4, 7–9),¹⁶ this hymn points out a legal or judicial expulsion of the dragon out of heaven.¹⁷ Satan's banishment from heavenly places as earth's ruler-representative and the incessant accuser of God's people was made possible by Christ's victory on the cross as the Lamb (John 12:23, 31, 32).¹⁸ The Lamb's victory on the cross was confirmed by His resurrection, ascension, and enthronement (Rev. 5:5–7, 12; cf. 12:5). These events, which make up the Christ-event, forever settled and sealed the dragon's destiny of doom and destruction.¹⁹ Therefore, Christ's objective victory on the cross became the basis for the victory of God's people over the dragon as well.

Christians' victory: Subjective atonement

The victory of Christ, manifested in the Christ-event, provides continual victory to be an experiential reality for Christians. Revelation provides glimpses of the objective victory of Christ applied to and experienced by His saints. Through this victory, they overcome the evil powers: the dragon, unclean demonic spirits, beast, false prophet, kings, and inhabitants of the earth.

In the judicial setting of the hymn of Revelation 12, the dragon seeks to defeat God's people by pressing accusations against them (Rev. 12:10). By personally accepting, claiming, and identifying with the blood of Christ through His death on the cross,²⁰ the saints win victory over the dragon's legal charges (Rev. 12:11).²¹ In addition, they defeat the dragon through their faithful witness in living in sacrificial obedience to God. They do this through a lifestyle of faithfulness to Christ and a sharing of the gospel with others.²² Their willingness to die for their faith in Christ is their ultimate witness and greatest victory of all.²³ By so doing, they follow the Lamb, both in life and in death. Therefore, they overcome the dragon by the blood of the Lamb and their faithful witness in life and death, if necessary (Rev. 12:11).

In addition, the saints of God manifest Christ's victory over the unclean demonic spirits by refusing to yield to the deceptions of the spirits' false gospel. They heed the warning of spiritual vigilance given in the heart of the Armageddon passage (Rev. 16:15, cf. Rev. 3:2, 3, 18) to avoid spiritual compromise and apostasy.²⁴ Under the influence of these demonic spirits and the false trinity, the kings and inhabitants of the world create an ever-increasing anti-Christian environment of deception and persecution of the saints. Bearing in mind the Apocalypse's charge “to the one who continues to overcome,” the saints' victory is a continuous one. The saints demonstrate a personal and communal victory over self-deception (2:4, 5; 3:1–6,

14–22), doctrinal deceptions within and without the church (2:6, 14, 15, 20–23), and persecution and fear of death by martyrdom (2:8–13; 3:8–10) among others.²⁵ Under great temptations and pressures of the world, they resist and refuse to give up their faith even in the face of death (Rev. 12:17; 13:7, 15–17). In so doing, they have victory over the beast, the false prophet, the kings, and the inhabitants of the earth (Rev. 15:2, 3; 20:4). The saints will overcome in this great time of trouble because of the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 7:14).²⁶ They experience the same victory over evil powers that He experienced. Christ's victory becomes their victory.

Armageddon's victory: Ultimate goal of atonement

The battle of Armageddon takes place on the great day of God Almighty (Rev. 16:13, 14, 16). This brings to mind the day of the Lord, a recurring theme in the Old Testament Prophets, the Gospels, and the Epistles. This is a time when God intervenes and fights for His people who have been oppressed by evil powers. This again relates with apocalyptic thought as earlier mentioned.

The second half of the book of Revelation (15–20) describes God's final victory over evil powers.²⁷ The Lamb appears again, not as one slain, but as King of kings and Lord of lords. He appears to defeat the kings of the earth who make war against Him and those who are with Him (Rev. 17:14). This comprises the day of the Lamb's wrath (Rev. 6:17) and one glimpse of final victory over the kings of the earth.

Another glimpse of victory portrays Jesus Christ as the Divine Warrior who comes to make war in righteousness and justice (Rev. 19:11–16). He defeats the beast, false prophet, kings, and inhabitants of the earth (their armies) with the sword of His mouth, leaving them as food for the birds (Rev. 19:17–21).

God's ultimate victory and the end of sin are seen as coming at the end of the millennium when the dragon, and

his entire host, are finally destroyed in the lake of fire (Rev. 20:1–15).²⁸ This final victory will bring an end to all evil powers, human and superhuman. According to the Christus Victor theory, this victory fulfills the ultimate goal of atonement.

Armageddon and atonement: The victory of the Cross

To emphasize again: the eschatological battle of Armageddon is the end-time culmination of Christ's victory on the cross. While Christ's sacrificial death broke the power of evil forces over humanity, His death did not annihilate them.²⁹ However, "through His death, Christ fixed the ultimate fate of evil powers."³⁰ At the cross the final future eradication of evil and its powers was made certain, and complete victory was made sure.³¹

This can be better understood through an illustration from World War II. After the victory of the Allied forces at Normandy on D-day, the outcome of the war was assured.³² Though D-day's victory did not end the war (since battles continued after it), D-day pointed forward to the time when the enemies would finally surrender on V-day. Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation defeated the evil powers and gave Him authority over them (Col. 2:15; Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9–11; Eph. 1:20–23; 1 Pet. 3:22), but this has not yet brought about the complete subjection of evil forces or of all rebellion in the universe (Heb. 2:8). However, the Christ event was the D-day of the cosmic conflict between good and evil, giving assurance of the V-day that Armageddon will bring.

Armageddon's ultimate victory over evil is anchored in and assured by the victory of the Cross. Therefore, Armageddon in the book of Revelation is not really about political military battles among international world powers but about the final victory of Christ over all evil powers assured by the Cross. "It is in His death that Christ overcomes His enemies . . . not on a bloody eschatological battlefield. . . .

For him [John the Revelator], there is only one victory of Christ; it was won in the past and it has resulted in the debilitation of all enemy powers once and for all."³³

Conclusion

The Christus Victor model describes atonement as Christ's victory over evil powers. Though these powers were broken and defeated by the Cross, they were not destroyed. Armageddon will bring Christ's victory on the cross to its logical culmination when all these evil powers that alienated humanity from God are completely and ultimately destroyed. This destruction will result in the perfect reconciliation (at-one-ment) between God and redeemed humanity, and the perfect restoration of peace and harmony in the whole universe: God dwelling with His people, with sin and sinners no more (Rev. 21:3, 4).³⁴

Thus, Armageddon must not be located in world events marked by terrorism, continual wars fought with ferocity, smart bombs, and threats of mushroom clouds—important as these are as signs of the end. The Scriptural understanding of Armageddon expects us to refrain from speculation but look forward to the ultimate triumph of God in the cosmic conflict between good and evil, between Christ and Satan. The biblical focus of Armageddon is Christus Victor. 📖

- 1 These include the substitution model, satisfaction model, moral influence model, governmental model, and exemplary model among others. These models have been divided into two major categories: the objective and subjective theories of the atonement. See Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), 800–817; Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 384–391; Norman R. Gulley, "Toward Understanding the Atonement," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 1, no. 1 (1990): 57–89; Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, "Growing in Christ: Atonement and Christus Victor," *Ministry*, June 2007, 17–20, endnote 1.
- 2 Edmund A. Parker, "The Ministry of the Atonement," *Ministry*, August 1974, 10; Ikechukwu Michael Olukpe, "The Christus Victor Model of Atonement," *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 13, no. 2 (2010): 127, 139.
- 3 Gustaf Aulén, *Christus Victor: An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Atonement*, trans. A. G. Herbert (New York, NY: Macmillan, 1969), 4.
- 4 Aulén, *Christus Victor*, 4, 5; Robert Letham, *The Work of Christ: Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 161, 162; Thomas Finger, *Christian Theology: An Eschatological Approach*, vol. 1 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985), 317–324.

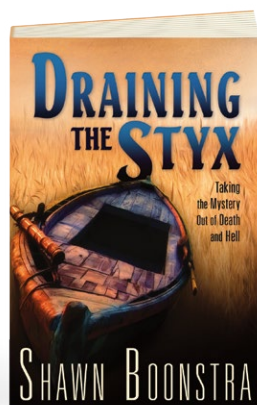
- 5 Apocalypticism is one "among three distinct but frequently confused categories. They include 'apocalypse' as a literary category, 'apocalyptic eschatology' as a theological category, and 'apocalypticism' as a comprehensive worldview. The apocalyptic worldview includes the literary and theological apocalyptic elements" (Gregory A. Boyd, *God at War: The Bible and Spiritual Conflict* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997), 174). Though there are Jewish and Christian apocalypses that are noncanonical, there is a need to understand this worldview because it is the background of the New Testament writers (Boyd, *God at War*, 173, 174). This worldview is consistent with and not contrary to the historicist interpretation of the book of Revelation.
- 6 David E. Aune, "Apocalypticism: New Testament," *The IVP Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Daniel G. Reid (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 61, 62.
- 7 Ibid.; Norman Perrin, "Apocalyptic Christianity" in *Visionaries and Their Apocalypses*, ed. Paul Hanson (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1983), 121, 122.
- 8 Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 2002), 369–371.
- 9 Jon Paulien, *Armageddon at the Door* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2008), 64–68.
- 10 Ibid., 76, 151–165.
- 11 Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, ed. Moisés Silva (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 592.
- 12 Tremper Longman III and Daniel G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 139–143.
- 13 Ekkehardt Mueller, "Christological Concepts in the Book of

- Revelation, Part 1: Jesus in the Apocalypse," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 21, no. 1 (2010): 278, 292.
- 14 Ekkehardt Mueller, "Christological concepts in the book of Revelation, Part 3: The Lamb Christology," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 22, no. 2 (2011): 45, 46.
- 15 Larry L. Lichtenwaller, *Revelation's Great Love Story: More Than I Ever Imagined* (Hagerstown, MD: Autumn House, 2008), 106.
- 16 Kayle de Waal, "The Downfalls of Satan in the Book of Revelation," *Ministry*, February 2013, 22.
- 17 Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 388; Michael O. Akpa, "The Identity and Role of Michael in the Narrative of the War in Heaven: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Revelation 12:7–12" (PhD diss., Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, 2007), 248.
- 18 Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 388; de Waal, "The Downfalls of Satan," 23; Judith L. Kovacs, "Now Shall the Ruler of This World Be Driven Out: Jesus' Death as Cosmic Battle in John 12:20–36," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 114 (1995): 227–247.
- 19 The Apocalypse resounds with "the objective decisive victory of the Lamb over the powers of darkness which He won when He shed His blood on the Cross"—assuring all "that Christ has defeated Satan and will one day destroy him altogether" (John R. W. Stott, *The Cross of Christ* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1986], 250, 251).
- 20 "Instead of defeating the followers of Christ by accusing them, Satan suffers his own defeat. Their victory over him comes by virtue of what Christ has accomplished on the cross. Christ's blood produces the victory. . . . In the Lamb's blood we find sure victory. Christ's death in the Apocalypse is an event of the past as well as a present reality that every believer in Him can experience."

- Lichtenwaller, *Revelation's Great Love Story*, 106, 107.
- 21 Akpa, "The Identity and Role of Michael," 239; Lichtenwaller, *Revelation's Great Love Story*, 106, 107, 109.
- 22 Lichtenwaller, *Revelation's Great Love Story*, 107.
- 23 Ibid.; Akpa, 239, 240; Ikechukwu Michael Oluikpe, *Armageddon as Divine War in the Apocalypse: An Exegetical-Theological Study on Popular Biblical Eschatology* (Saarbrücken, Germany: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2011), 90–92.
- 24 Oluikpe, *Armageddon*, 127–131.
- 25 Ibid., 95, n. 335.
- 26 Lichtenwaller, *Revelation's Great Love Story*, 109.
- 27 Oluikpe, *Armageddon*, 95, n.337, and 155, n. 548.
- 28 De Waal, "The Downfalls of Satan," 24.
- 29 Rodriguez, "Growing in Christ," 18.
- 30 Ibid.
- 31 Edward Heppenstall, "Subjective and Objective Aspects of the Atonement" in *The Sanctuary and Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Theological Studies*, Richard Leshner, ed. (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1981), 688, 689; Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1950), 503.
- 32 See Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (London: SCM Press, 1951), 81–93; Stefanovic, *Revelation*, 396, 397.
- 33 Matthias Rissi, "The Future of the World: An Exegetical Study of Rev 19:11–22:15," *Studies in Biblical Theology*, 2nd series, no. 23 (London: SCM Press, 1972), 9.
- 34 Mario Veloso, "The Doctrine of the Sanctuary and Atonement as Reflected in the Book of Revelation," in *The Sanctuary and Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Theological Studies*, ed. Arnold Wallenkampf (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1981), 411.

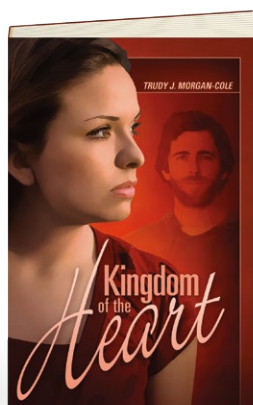
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Adventists:

Why are we really here?

I was born and raised in the United States. From the time I can remember, I was an atheist. Science was my god. A quest for knowledge was my passion. All that changed one summer day when someone handed me *The Great Controversy* by Ellen G. White.

I began reading the chapter titled “The Origin of Evil,” and for the first time, Christianity made sense. Before the summer was over, I accepted Jesus Christ as my Savior and was baptized into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Before reading *The Great Controversy* and understanding the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, the Bible just did not seem real. My Christian friends in high school often told me, “Jesus bore your sins and died for you on the cross. Don’t you want to accept Him as your Savior and go to heaven? Otherwise you’ll go to hell!”

Now, I had *heard* about Jesus, heaven, and hell, but it was as if my friends were speaking to me in a foreign language. They made no sense. Once I learned the truth as it is in Jesus, not only did it make sense—my life has never been the same.

I understood that God raised up the Advent movement at a particular time for a particular purpose in earth’s history: to give a prophetic message to the world and to proclaim Christ’s soon return. I am glad to be a Seventh-day Adventist—spiritually, intellectually, emotionally, and socially.

Built to last

From small and insignificant beginnings in the mid-nineteenth century, Seventh-day Adventists have grown into an 18-million-member movement in more than 200 countries of the world. And we continue to grow.

These facts are surprising when we compare them with another product of the Millerite movement—the Advent Christian Church, which has just 125,600 members in 35 countries.¹

Why has the Seventh-day Adventist Church been so successful? It is not just that we have a better understanding of truth than other faith-systems. The vast majority of our doctrines are shared with other Christian denominations. The Seventh Day Baptists, for example, discovered the Bible Sabbath back in the early 1600s, but they number just 50,000 members in 22 countries.

In trying to find out why the Adventist Church has been so successful, it may be worth looking at a best-selling book titled *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, by Jim Collins and Jerry Porras. In it, they describe companies that were “built to last.” The authors studied 18 companies, such as Boeing, Sony, and American Express, and compared them with their rivals to find out “What makes these truly exceptional companies different?”² Centering on core values, adapting to change while never abandoning their

foundation, and setting “big, hairy, audacious goals” are some of the qualities that have enabled them to endure and prosper.

While we are not a company, Seventh-day Adventists, as a people, are built to last. We are built to last far longer than any of the companies Collins and Porras describe because the Advent movement is built by God, not man. The Advent movement built to last not just for generations but for eternity. It is built to endure through the last great conflict!

To help us understand and remember better, I am using the following acronym to study how the Adventist church is built:

Bible-based faith: We go by the Bible—the one thing that lasts forever (Isa. 40:8).

Understanding of the prophecies, as Daniel predicted (Dan. 12:8–10; Rev. 10).

Inside information: the great controversy, how it began and ends (Rev. 11:19; 12).

Law and gospel, perfectly blended for the antitypical day of atonement (Rev. 14:6–12).

Timely: Adventism arose at the exact time specified by prophecy (Rev. 12:17).

Bible-based faith

“God’s Word is the foundation upon which our hopes of heaven must be built.”³

Once I realized that the Bible comprises God's inspired Word, I knew that the most important thing was to understand this book. Though written by many different authors over a period of 1,500 years, I found not only divine wisdom but also accounts of history and creation unrivaled in their directness and elegance. I also discovered that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has a mission similar to that of John the Baptist, based on Isaiah 40. Interestingly, the passage concentrates more on the Second Coming than on the first.⁴ This passage also emphasizes the priority of Scripture over human ideas that are likened to the grass: "The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa. 40:8, NKJV). Along the same lines, the words of Ellen White bear repeating: "God will have a people upon the earth to maintain the Bible, and the Bible only, as the standard of all doctrines and the basis of all reforms. The opinions of learned men,

the deductions of science, the creeds or decisions of ecclesiastical councils, as numerous and discordant as are the churches which they represent, the voice of the majority—not one nor all of these should be regarded as evidence for or against any point of religious faith. Before accepting any doctrine or precept, we should demand a plain 'Thus saith the Lord' in its support."⁵

Understanding of the prophecies

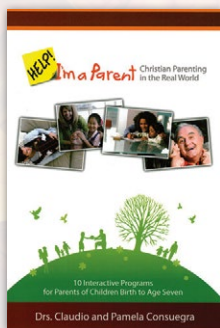
We have an understanding of the prophecies stretching to the end of time, just as Daniel predicted.

Daniel 12:8–10 predicts an end-time people who would understand clearly things that even Daniel himself did not then understand. Revelation 10 describes this time in terms of a little book, once closed and sealed but now open. God raised up the Advent movement at a particular time for a particular purpose in this earth's

history. We are not just another church but have been raised up by God to warn people against receiving the mark of the beast. As a young person, I was surprised that other churches seemed unable to explain what that mark is.

The historicist view of interpreting prophecy leads logically to Seventh-day Adventism, which may be one reason why Protestants by and large now consider most of Revelation to be fulfilled either in the distant past (preterism) or as still future (futurism). Amazingly, for many Protestants, reunification with Rome is looking more and more attractive. Sadly, even some Adventists seem to have begun valuing unity with other Christians more highly than proclaiming the message for this time.

Thirty-six years ago, many of the things I read about in *The Great Controversy* did not seem possible. I had to accept them by faith. How things have changed!



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At that time I could not imagine how the United States, described in Revelation 13 as looking like a lamb, could ever speak like a dragon. The separation of church and state was strong and wide. Religion and politics stayed politely apart. Furthermore, Big Brother, watching people's every move, might exist in totalitarian regimes, but this could never happen in the United States.

That was then. How far we have come in so short a time. Now, in the interests of national security, the United States is prepared to use every means, even at the expense of its own principles and ideals, to spy on its citizens. Additionally, three decades ago I could not have imagined the degree to which so many Protestants would now be ready to abandon their Bible-based beliefs.

Inside information

We have an incredible source of inside information through our understanding of the great controversy.

As I read *The Great Controversy*, I found that evil was an intruder in God's universe, though it was no surprise to God. Rather, the possibility of sin was the risk that a God of love was willing to take so that there could be true freedom. I realized that God will not force anyone to be saved—but also that He will not wait forever! The prophecies of the Bible were sealed only until the “time of the end,” and they show where we are in earth's history. The prophecy of Daniel 9 impressed upon me the trustworthiness of the Bible with its accurate depiction of historical events hundreds of years in advance and fulfillment right on time. Especially impressive to me was the 2,300-day/year prophecy pointing to the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary in 1844.

Revelation 11:19 points to this time: “the temple of God was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple” (NKJV). Talk about inside information! We have insight from the inner sanctum of the heavenly temple and from the ark of the covenant itself. This verse marks a

significant turning point in the book of Revelation.⁶ It signals the beginning of God's dramatic work near the close of earth's history. It introduces the great controversy between Christ and Satan and the devastating impact of the devil's attacks, as God's true people were forced into obscurity while an apostate form of Christianity held the reigns of power. Suddenly, I realized that the atrocities of Christian history were not chargeable to God and that, at the end of the 1,260-year period in 1798, a remnant people would be raised up by Him as a clear contrast with the fallen churches of Babylon.

Law and gospel

We proclaim the gospel message for the end time, which perfectly blends law and gospel, justice and mercy.

The first angel's message, found in Revelation 14:6, 7, proclaims the “everlasting gospel” in terms of “the hour of [God's] judgment.” This is not a new gospel, because it is called “everlasting.” But like the “new” covenant on which the gospel is based, there is something new—this new element is urgency. Urgency because, as the angel of Revelation 10:6 says, there will be “time no longer” (KJV). The end is near.

This declaration, connected with the heavenly announcement in chapter 14, announces that God's judgment hour has arrived. Many Christians think of Judgment Day as the day Jesus comes. And, of course, that was the understanding of the Millerite Adventists too—until they found the key to unlock the mystery of Daniel 8:14. Through an understanding of Christ's work in the heavenly sanctuary as our High Priest, they realized an important fact. Since Jesus says that, when He comes, His reward will be with Him “to give to every one according to his work” (Rev. 22:12, NKJV), the judgment must precede His second coming.

Furthermore, Adventists understood that this heavenly judgment was symbolized in the “cleansing of the sanctuary” in the ministry of the earthly sanctuary on the Day of

Atonement. That was the one day in the religious calendar when *every Israelite* was to participate. Ignoring the day was unthinkable because it meant being “cut off” from Israel, excluded from the people of God. This day was also the only day of the year that was observed like the weekly Sabbath. There were ceremonial sabbaths, which meant a day off work, a holiday. The Day of Atonement, however, was the only one that was to be kept like the seventh-day Sabbath—total rest. No work at all. It is no coincidence that, in the antitypical day of atonement going on now, the seventh-day Sabbath takes on more importance than ever before.

Perhaps surprising to some is that, even though the gospel of the end time is connected with the judgment, the gospel is still good news! It is good news because Jesus is coming soon. It is good news because He is coming to bring justice, to right all wrongs, and reward His faithful people. It is good news because sin and sinners will be no more—no more suffering, temptation, or pain. Even the time of trouble is good news. Why? Because we are told that, as a result of the judgment, our sins have been “borne away into the land of forgetfulness” and we will not be able to “bring them to remembrance.”⁷ What better news could there be?

When the final crisis is over, John sees a people: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12). That is what the third angel's message does. The third angel's message continues as a message of good news, a message of hope, and a message of faith to prepare a people for the coming of the Lord.

Timely

Adventism is timely—it arose at the predicted time.

Adventism is a movement of prophecy, more specifically, of *time* prophecy. It was through an understanding of the 2,300-day/year prophecy that we came into existence.

But we also arose at the time predicted in Bible prophecy. The end-time remnant was to arise after the 1,260 day/year period of Christian apostasy predicted in Daniel 7:25 and ending in 1798.⁸ As if to make sure we would not misunderstand, this period is mentioned twice in Revelation 12 in the space of nine verses (vv. 6, 14). Then the end-time remnant emerges (Rev. 12:17). John's vision into the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary and seeing the ark underscore the centrality of the law for the end times, as does the fact that the remnant is identified as those "who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ" (Rev. 12:17, NKJV).


That the time had come for the remnant to arise was confirmed by God through signs in the heavens (Matt. 24:29; Rev. 6:12, 13). Seemingly by design, these signs were visible in the very part of the world where God was

calling into existence a special people to do a special work.

Conclusion

As Seventh-day Adventists, our prophetic movement is built to last. We are:

- B**—a *Bible-based* movement; we go by the Bible (Isa. 40:8);
- U**—a people with an *understanding of the time prophecies* unsealed for the time of the end, just as Daniel predicted (Dan. 12:8–10; Rev. 10);
- I**—a movement having *inside information* about the great controversy between Christ and Satan—how it began and how it ends (Rev. 11:19; 12);
- L**—proclaiming a perfect blend of *law and gospel* (Rev. 14:6–12); and
- T**—*timely*: Adventism arose at the time specified by prophecy, just after the 1,260- and 2,300-year periods (Rev. 12:17).

God raised up the Seventh-day Adventist Church for a reason. The prophecies of Daniel and Revelation form a compelling picture of a God in control of history, and He has raised up a remnant to finish His work on earth. May God give us grace to humbly accept and fulfill this humanly impossible task. 

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- 2 Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: Harper, 1994).
- 3 Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1967), 106.
- 4 See especially Isa. 40:3–5, 9–10. Thus John's message of purging and his surprise when Jesus did not fit his messianic expectations (Matt. 3:7–12; 11:2, 3).
- 5 Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1911), 595; emphasis added.
- 6 See Kenneth A. Strand, "'Victorious-Introductory' Scenes," *Symposium on Revelation: Introductory and Exegetical Studies*, Daniel and Revelation Committee Series 6, ed. Frank B. Holbrook (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 1992), 57, 58.
- 7 Ellen G. White, *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1 (Battle Creek, MI: Seventh-day Adventist Pub. Assn., 1969 facsimile), 124.
- 8 On the dates for the beginning and end of this and other time prophecies, see Heinz Schaidinger, *Historical Confirmation of Prophetic Periods*, Biblical Research Institute Release 7 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2010).

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"Come and see"

Religion can be stifling and counterproductive. Such was the case in the days of Jesus, yet He was not deterred even by those who were slow of heart. Jesus initiated a revival by offering Himself; and every revival since then has always happened when He became the center. The Gospel of John begins the same way as does the book of Genesis: "In the beginning God," or in the case of John, "In the beginning was the Word." God always initiates the beginning of any revival. Such beginnings will ultimately involve a choice.

The ministry of John the Baptist climaxed with the words, "Look, the Lamb of God." When Jesus saw that some had questions, He simply said,

"'Come . . . and you will see'" (John 1:39, NIV). Later, Andrew went to his own brother and told him what he had seen and then brought him to Jesus.

The story does not end there. Philip found Nathanael, but Nathanael asked, "Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?" Once again, John records Philip as simply saying, "Come and see." When he did, Nathanael dropped his prejudice about Nazareth when he, too, saw Jesus. Nathanael was transformed. His thinking, perspectives, and life were changed by what he saw. This is confirmed by Jesus' own words, "'You shall see greater things. . . . You shall see

heaven open'" (John 1:50, 51, NIV). What Jesus saw far exceeded anything Nathanael was able to comprehend at the time.

We are reminded that true revival begins with God's initiative that is always centered in Jesus. "Come and see" yourself and hear Jesus say, "Follow Me."

—REVIEWED BY LARRY R. EVANS, EDITOR OF DYNAMIC STEWARD AND ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF STEWARDSHIP MINISTRIES, GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS, SILVER SPRING, MARYLAND, UNITED STATES.

Revival
and
REFORMATION

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Signs, wonders, *and the* Adventist Church (Part 1 of 2)

A quick reading of *The Acts of the Apostles* is enough to make one ask, “Whatever happened to the church?” for Ellen White shows a marked contrast that exists between the church of the apostolic era and the Adventist Church today. This great disparity has led some to inquire whether there is a place for signs and wonders in the Adventist Church today. Some people get very uncomfortable each time miracles, signs, and wonders are mentioned. Can signs and wonders still occur today? What purpose do they serve? Do the Scriptures suggest that signs and wonders are a thing of the past? Uneasy as these questions may sound, we should reexamine the evidence as the church engages cultures that have missiological issues identical with those encountered by the early church.

As the Adventist Church extends its worldwide mission, two major missiological issues confront and affect the church’s spiritual vitality: secularism and syncretism. Secularism is the bane of Western churches, which once lit the world with the blazing flames of the Reformation, followed by the great century of missions.¹ Presently, the state of many Adventist churches in the West reveals stagnation or decline, except perhaps among immigrant congregations. The reverse scenario is the case with the rest of the world, now referred to by some as the “majority

world,”² where its teeming membership explosion is blighted by growing reports of syncretism (a combination of different beliefs)³ and resurgence of other faith systems.

With the Western churches, secularism is a by-product of rationalism from the Enlightenment era. This has resulted in a mechanistic worldview that robs the gospel of its power. The issue of syncretism seems particularly pertinent for churches in Africa where significant growth has occurred. As a result, in many parts of Africa, two kinds of religious faith are practiced: a formal religious worship of God and a folk religion that embraces the spirit world. This emerging situation, according to mission scholars, is because the worldview concerns of the people have not been thoroughly engaged. In other words, the churches are not responding to the most important questions confronting the people.⁴

Gailyn van Rheen, a missiologist, states that an interesting parallel between secularism and animism exists. He explains that both philosophies are rooted in power.⁵ While secularism employs modern science to meet its power needs, animism utilizes primal science. Careful study of the Scriptures and the history of missions reveals that a theology of signs and wonders is fundamental in responding to the power needs of both Western and majority world contexts.

This article on the relevance of signs and wonders will be limited to the study of the Scriptures, Spirit of Prophecy, and select relevant references. The article will examine the issue (1) in the books of Luke and Acts, (2) in early church history, (3) as a possible mission strategy, and (4) in the Adventist Church.

Signs and wonders in Luke and Acts

The New Testament (NT) uses four Greek words to refer to signs and wonders: *ergon*, *dunamis*, *semieion*, and *teras*. *Ergon* means an act, deed, or work—especially a good or evil work. This word could also refer to a supernatural work. *Dunamis* depicts a manifestation of divine power. *Semieion* emphasizes miracles as a proof of divine authority. *Teras* refers to an awe-inspiring or terrifying act manifesting supernatural powers and is always used in connection with *semeion*, signs and wonders.⁶

Luke uses the expression *signs and wonders* more than any other writer. Although this expression alludes to Joel’s promise of “signs” that will take place in the latter days, “wonders” is believed to be an addition made by Luke. As one scholar has observed, in the NT *terata* (signs) is never found without *semeia* (wonders).⁷

Signs and wonders include the supernatural works of God in miracles, healings, dreams, visions, divine

visitations, prophetic revelations, spiritual discernment, spiritual deliverance, and exorcism. It is important to remember that they are not limited to miracles alone but also demonstrate the presence and power of God and the advancement of His kingdom. Most interpreters, such as Sobhi Malek, regard signs, wonders, and miracles as synonyms that do not necessarily describe three categories of miraculous acts but three aspects of mighty deeds: (1) as signs they authenticate the message; (2) as wonders they evoke a sense of awe and astonishment; and (3) as miracles they display divine supernatural power in extraordinarily marvelous acts.⁸

The purpose of the accounts of signs and wonders are several. One author sees them as confirming the claims of the prophets, disciples, and apostles as messengers of God.⁹ Another deems them as authenticating the Word and leading to faith in the Word of God.¹⁰ In Luke and Acts, scholars agree that these signs and wonders are mission-oriented (Luke 24:46–49; Acts 1:8).¹¹ Luke's gospel is considered as providing a curriculum for dealing with power-oriented cultures long before the contemporary signs and wonders movement of the Pentecostal or Evangelical genre began.¹²

Important functions that signs and wonders perform in Scripture include serving as “door openers” for the proclamation of the gospel (Acts 3, 4); signal markers of divine presence and power (Acts 19:17–19); affirming the working of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:18–20); displaying the kingdom of God breaking in among humanity (Acts 4:29–31; 7:35–37; 14:2–4); setting people free from spiritual bondage (Acts 16:16–18); and, leading people to having faith in God (Acts 9:40–42; 13:6–12).

Robert Menzies shows an interesting linkage between the miraculous events associated with Jesus and the disciples and the cosmic portents listed by Joel. From these accounts he posits that “these last days—that period inaugurated with Jesus’ birth and leading up to the day of the Lord—represents an epoch marked by signs and wonders,”¹³ which would continue to characterize

the ministry of the church in the last days. The implication centering on the cessationist view, which maintains that signs and wonders ended with Jesus and the apostles, may not prove tenable.

Christianity is a supernatural religion, from beginning to end.¹⁴ From the story of Creation to the Exodus, Incarnation, and Resurrection—these all demonstrate the mighty acts of God. Each of these mighty acts has the unmistakable signature of God. The church from the time of ancient Israel to the New Testament also witnessed the display of the mighty power of God in its inauguration, sustenance, and propagation. Against a backdrop of great opposition and warfare posed by God's enemy (Rev. 12), only by the power of God has His church been preserved through the ages. Also, without the mighty display of God's power, the spread of the gospel would have been affected in regions steeped in idolatry, animism, and even secularism. The apostle Paul confronted such situations as he took the gospel message into the great cities of Europe. Consequently, his epistles address the critical nature a gospel of power plays in the life of the church.

Signs and wonders in early church history

Early church history is far from devoid of signs and wonders as the gospel advanced into the major centers of civilization. As one writer puts it, “miracles, mainly of healing, and dreams, such as Arnobius's, share an important place in the Christianization of the Greco-Roman world.”¹⁵ Some of the early church fathers who affirmed the working of signs and wonders in diverse ways in their times include Eusebius, Hilary, Cyril, and Justin. So, also, was the Montanist movement in Asia Minor.¹⁶ The gifts of the Holy Spirit evidenced during the first four centuries of church history debunk claims that signs and wonders ended with the apostles: healing, exorcism, and prophecy.¹⁷ Hence, scholars conclude: “Church history and the testimony of contemporary missionaries suggest

that when the gospel first breaks into a people group or geographic area, the miraculous is frequently present.”¹⁸

The logical question that comes to mind next is, if signs and wonders were present, then why can they not happen now? One explanation offered is the church's alliance with the state, beginning from the time of Constantine—a shrewd politician who used the church to hold his empire together.¹⁹ David Pytches proffers five reasons why signs and wonders are not witnessed today: (1) materialism and rationalism of the Western worldview tend to reject the possibility of signs and wonders; (2) the idea of ministering in signs and wonders sounds presumptuous to many; (3) general confusion over the phenomenon; (4) our own sense of powerlessness and the difficulty to think of the supernatural; and (5) the absence of any idea as to how to minister in power.²⁰

Signs and wonders as a possible mission strategy?

Since the nineteenth century, a period considered in mission circles as the “golden age of missions,” mission strategy has become a predominant concern for the Christian church. Men like William Carey and Hudson Taylor are considered pace-setting pioneers in this endeavor, articulating coherent plans to mobilize the church for the task of missions.²¹ Another significant contributor to this subject was Ralph Winter, whose speech at the International Congress on World Evangelization at Lausanne in 1974 witnessed another landmark in mission strategy.²² What Winter said was a shocker: even if every Christian was mobilized for effective witnessing, there still would be nearly two billion persons without access to the gospel.²³ If this were true back then, how much worse the situation today because, clearly, the rate of accession to the faith has not kept pace with world population growth. His study underscored the significant challenge Christians face in taking the gospel to regions with the world's largest religions—Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other faith communities.

Granted, reports indicate insider movements are beginning to achieve heart-cheering success in recent times. Nevertheless, the pace is far from earthshaking among peoples that we often have labeled “resistant”²⁴ to the gospel. It is apparent that if the church has to succeed among those people groups, it will not happen without supernatural intervention. The good news is that this has already begun occurring. There are constant reports from Muslim-dominated communities indicating that visions and dreams of Isa (Jesus) have led people to Christ in dramatic stories of conversion.²⁵ Other factors listed in the survey, carried out by the reputed scholar Dudley Woodberry and his associates, include divine healing and miraculous answers to prayer.²⁶ Malek also strongly considers miracles a viable missiological strategy to overcome resistance because (1) they witness to God’s love; (2) they confirm the claims of Christ; (3) they prove the truth proclaimed; (4) they are a weapon for spiritual warfare; (5) they manifest the kingdom coming in power; and (6) they provide a live encounter with Christ.²⁷

As with the early church in *The Acts of the Apostles*, God seems to be taking the initiative while the church struggles to catch up. Kwame Bediako, an African missiologist, states, “The early chapters of Acts indicate that the Jerusalem Church was often overtaken by events, and the whole book can be read as a process whereby the early Christian leaders, predominantly Jewish, were brought to understand the mind of Christ which they initially failed to grasp, as they inquired ‘‘Lord, will you at this time give the kingdom back to Israel?’’ (Acts 1:6). Within the life span of that early apostolic leadership, Jerusalem became periphery.”²⁸

Is there a lesson for us to learn as we review mission initiatives directed by God in the early church? We may need to cautiously pray and ponder the workings of this “unpredictable God” lest we be found fighting against Him (Acts 11:18).

For, as Adventist scholar Jon Paulien has astutely observed, “no matter how familiar we may be with scriptures, we cannot totally predict how God will act in any given circumstance.”²⁹

Another noteworthy factor that provides a window of opportunity for witnessing to billions to whom Christian witness seems almost impossible is the realization that the majority of these people practice folk religion. It is reported that about two-thirds of Muslims in Africa are involved in a blend of formal Islam and pre-Islamic animistic beliefs and practices.³⁰ People involved in such folk religious practices “are primarily concerned with existential problems like healing for their children, guidance for decisions, and protection from a world perceived to be dominated by evil spirits and forces.”³¹ What these people are interested in is not a gospel simply of words but one amply demonstrating the power of God (1 Thess. 1:5) and heralding the coming of the kingdom among them.

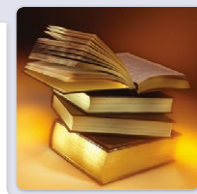
Recognition of the existential needs confronting Christian witness should call for a new paradigm of ministry that responds to these issues from a biblical standpoint. Perhaps this may be what Peter Roennfeldt meant when he advocated for a “Holy Spirit praxis” for doing ministry in our age. This radical model, he avers, would challenge the institutional church “to acknowledge that the mission activity and power of the Spirit must always define God’s people and redefine their eschatological identity.”³² For, he concludes, “being bound to historical precedent may in fact blind the church to God’s eschatological plans, and preferences, producing stagnation in institutionalization.”³³

(Part 2 will appear in the December 2014 issue). ❖

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- 3 Charles H. Kraft, *Worldview for Christian Witness* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008), 488.
- 4 Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 254.
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- 7 Robert Sloan, “Signs and Wonders: A Rhetorical Clue to the Pentecost Discourse,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (1991): 233.
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Viral: How Social Networking Is Poised to Ignite Revival

by Leonard Sweet, Colorado Springs, CO:
WaterBrook Press, 2012.

The ideas in *Viral* are about two years old now and are already out of date in policy but not in principle, because social media changes quickly. In fact, things have changed so much with tools like Facebook, iPhones, Google, and Twitter that you might be better off buying guides on those subjects.

But you will not find those books bent on inspiring you to navigate the digital landscape as a rescue pastor. Social media allows us to get into our van and drive the electronic highways with an eye to those in distress. We pull over because we can, and change flat tires, clean battery posts, and help the stranded motorist get connected with the tow truck Operator.

Viral excels at inspiring you to take the tools of social media and the larger Internet and incorporate them into your ministry. The tools described in the book, Facebook, iPhones, Google, and Twitter, will probably still be around in a few years, but you can be certain that they will look and operate very differently. So banish the idea that this book comes as a guidebook to such.

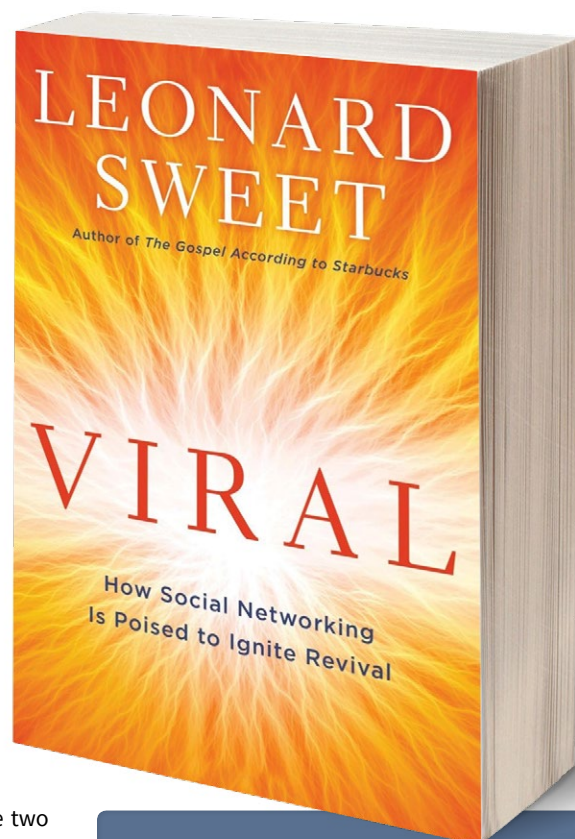
If your heart burns with passion to share the gospel and you expect to be on this earth for any length of time, go buy this book. You may say, “I don’t care about having a smartphone.” I say, “Do you care about people?” If your answer is what I think it is, then you will get into their world, and in many cases, that means using social media.

But social media can be confusing, like a shark tricked into chasing a

whole school of shiny fish and missing out on its prey. Because there are too many twisting, flashing, darting targets, the shark gets confused as it tries to zero in on one bite-size meal. Sometimes I feel like there are too many things to get involved with. Life has become a digital Babylon—confusion.

Man still builds towers, brick and mortar, computers and code, yet God calls for missionaries to digital Babylon—some part time, some full time, all learning enough to get connected and move seamlessly between our real world and our digital world. In fact, the boundaries between the two are fast disappearing. They are coming together, and we are struggling to navigate them as one, much less two, separate worlds. Sweet’s book has become a primer on this navigation, a compass to carry into the digital world to help us find our bearings when we swipe our smartphone, lift the covers on our laptops, or clean the screens of our tablets. Once that is done, where do you go from there? And where do your church members go? They are very connected already; who helps them navigate the connected world? Get Sweet’s book and find out as he offers travel advice and adventure. 📖

—Reviewed by Marty Thurber, pastor of New Creation and Capital View Seventh-day Adventist Churches, Lincoln, Nebraska, United States.



Sometimes I feel like there are too many things to get involved with. Life has become a digital Babylon—confusion.

► Modeling Jesus' caring compassion at the Great Commission and Laity Festival in Hungary

Lake Balaton, Hungary—More than 320 Seventh-day Adventist members representing 17 countries converged on the shores of beautiful Lake Balaton in Hungary for the Trans-European Division's (TED) first joint Great Commission and Laity Festival July 15–20, 2014.

The aim was to motivate and empower church members for greater service with focus on Mission to the Cities within its region. Following the theme of “Modelling Jesus’ Loving Caring Compassion,” guest presenters inspired and challenged delegates to follow the example of Jesus in practically demonstrating compassion in their communities. Pastors **Maureen Rock** and **Simon Martin**, both from the British Union Conference, opened and closed each day with thoughtful and inspirational Christ-centered devotions. Plenary and workshop presenters included **Gary Krause**, Adventist Missions director of the General Conference, who challenged attendees to become more concerned for the increasing urban population of the European cities.

A welcome reminder of God’s creativity was presented by renowned musician and choir director **Ken Burton**. His inspirational style lifted the spirits of all. A beautiful complement to this music was the creative use of drama in presenting the gospel. This was very professionally presented by Pastor

Geert Tap from the Netherlands, who currently pastors in Central London.

Guest presenters from TED included Communications and Media director **Miroslav Pujić**, addressing the subject of cultural intelligence and evangelism; Women’s and Children’s Ministries director **Clair Sanches-Schutte**, dealing with women and children

in mission; and Youth director **Paul Tompkins**, who reinforced the urgent need to involve more youth in outreach. The congregation joyfully acknowledged the large number of youth who were present and directly involved in ministry in their local churches.

Learning was enhanced by a variety of workshops including topics such

Lay pastor and church planter Mfakazi Ndebele inspired many to take the challenge of being deliberate in planting lay-led churches.



as beginning and advanced church planting; the use of music and drama in witnessing; involving lay members; the use of social media; involving youth, women, and children in witnessing; how to use the Bible in evangelism; and instruction on establishing Centers of Influence.

Attendees expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet and learn with other Seventh-day Adventist members who share the same passion for involvement in the mission of God. The spirit of unity and commitment was very evident throughout the five days of meetings, and delegates left with keen anticipation of further such meetings in the future. [Michael Hamilton/*tedNEWS*]

► Vanuatu Mission launches first feature film

Port Vila, Vanuatu—Australian High Commission first secretary **David Momcilovic** joined ADRA and Adventist church representatives at Port Vila seafont on July 20, 2014, to launch Vanuatu Mission's first feature film, *Nogat Taem*.

Produced by the church's Communication department, in partnership with Local Bread Media Production, the film highlights the common social issues facing families in Vanuatu.

The Australian government provided funding for the project through the Vanuatu Church Partnership Program—an initiative that seeks to “[improve] governance and service delivery at national and local levels.” [Adventist Media: Vanuatu]

► White Estate to feature enhanced visitor center

Silver Spring, Maryland, United States—The estate of Seventh-day Adventist Church cofounder Ellen G. White is scheduled for an eight-month remodeling project that will result in an enhanced visitor center. The renovations should be completed by mid-April 2015.

Upon reopening, the estate will offer a tour that teaches visitors about the beginnings of the church with exhibits, a timeline of White's life, information about her overseas missionary experiences in Europe and Australia, and a mural with narration in five languages.

One exhibit will highlight her ministry as a writer. Nix said the display will include copies of White's book *Steps to Christ* in more than 100 languages. Also,




The Ellen G. White Estate temporarily closed August 15 and will reopen mid-April 2015 as part of a renovation project to provide an enhanced visitor center. The estate is located on the lower level of the Adventist Church's world headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States. [photo: Ansel Oliver]

The estate currently features a research library, many of White's original manuscripts, and art specifically created for the estate. Leaders said the redesign will offer more interactive displays and exhibits. “We want people to have an enhanced museum experience and come away from it knowing something they didn't already know about Ellen White,” said estate director **James Nix**. “We also hope it will motivate people to read more of her writings,” he said of White, who is still widely published nearly 100 years after her death in 1915.

a room will be re-created to demonstrate the way that many Adventists in former Communist countries translated her books in secret to avoid detection by police who often listened for typewriters.

The final stop on the tour will feature a small chapel with a video that challenges visitors to be a part White's mission of spreading the gospel.

“We're also hoping people see themselves as part of this movement that God sent a messenger to,” Nix said. “She was a real blessing to this church.” [Ansel Oliver/ANN] 

Miroslav Pujic, DMin, is director of Ministry to Postmoderns in the Trans-European Division, St. Albans, United Kingdom.



Reaching postmoderns: The discipleship model

Though they turn away from authoritarianism, organizational structures, and creedal formulas, postmoderns remain fascinated by the person of Jesus Christ. In fact, openness to authentic spiritual leaders who encourage personal learning marks the postmodern mind-set.

If we define a Christian as a “disciple of Jesus Christ, one who is growing in an authentic relationship with God and others,” this model becomes attractive to those who may totally reject the usual “systems” of religion. Spiritual development remains a key goal for many postmoderns, and discipleship is designed to help achieve that. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer observed, “Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ.”¹

Discipleship is not a command but an invitation. It is not an imposition; it is a delight. It is experiencing the embracing love and acceptance of Jesus when He says, “‘I do not call you servants any longer, because servants do not know what their master is doing. Instead, I call you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father’ ” (John 15:15).²

The challenge of our world, says Jerry Bridges, is that “many Christians have what we might call a ‘cultural holiness.’ They adapt to the character and behavior pattern of Christians around them. . . . But God has not called us to be like those around us. He has called us to be like himself. Holiness is nothing less than conformity to the character of God.”³

Nor can discipleship be reduced to some programmatic rule book or self-help scheme. “It is the Father’s life, and Father’s life alone, which will live the Christian life in you,” writes Gene Edwards. “Embrace a formula or a list in order to ‘live the Christian life,’ and you are doomed to frustration.”⁴

As we demonstrate discipleship rather than turn it into a church program, we focus on five key concepts.

1. We connect. The connection is, of course, with God. We all need to experience God individually. The church should be not merely a place for people to connect but an association of those who have personally experienced that connection with God. Then we try to connect with those around us who proclaim, “‘We have found the Messiah’ ” (John 1:41).

2. We share. Being a disciple of Jesus means we want to share our experience of Him. At its heart, the gospel message makes us instinctively think of others, wishing that they, too, could share in the joy of knowing God and His transforming, healing power. We tell others, “‘Come and see’ ” (John 1:39).

3. We worship. We see Jesus as our all—falling at His feet not in fear but in loving admiration. We understand that “perfect love casts out fear” and that we love because “he first loved us.” As a result, together we worship and adore this crucified Lord who came to save us, letting others know that Jesus promised, “‘When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to me’ ” (John 12:32).

4. We nurture. It is not enough simply to help others find Jesus. True disciples encourage one another on the way, talking things through, sharing experiences, discovering the way together. We nurture one another as Jesus nurtures us, telling us, “‘Remember, I am with you always, even to the end of the world’ ” (Matt. 28:20, Phillips).

5. We equip. Discipleship means training, teaching, developing. We work together to help each other in this. However, the Teacher is the Spirit, and the instruction book is Scripture: “All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living, so that the person who serves God may be fully qualified and equipped to do every kind of good deed” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

As we share the joy of being Jesus’ disciples with our postmodern friends, we should remember this from Søren Kierkegaard: “Christ did not appoint professors, but followers. If Christianity . . . is not reduplicated in the life of the person expounding it, then he does not expound Christianity, for Christianity is a message about living and can only be expounded by being realized in men’s lives.”⁵

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 59.

² Unless otherwise noted, scripture is from Today’s English Version, also known as the Good News Translation.

³ Christian.com, “Jerry Bridges Quotes,” <http://christian-quotes.christian.com/Jerry-Bridges-Quotes/page-2.shtml>

⁴ Tentmaker, “Discipleship Quotes,” <http://www.tentmaker.org/Quotes/discipleshipquotes.htm>

⁵ Ibid.

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For more information, visit southern.edu/archaeology.

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