

INCULTURATION HERMENEUTICS IN AFRICA: APPROACHES, IMPLICATIONS AND GUIDING BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR ADVENTIST MISSION

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Abstract

This paper examines inculturation hermeneutics as a biblically grounded and missionally vital approach for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Africa. It begins by defining inculturation and related concepts (contextualization, acculturation, syncretism), emphasizing that Scripture remains the ultimate norm in evaluating culture. Biblical precedents for cultural engagement are surveyed: the Incarnation of Christ (John 1:14), the early church's cultural decisions (Acts 15), and Paul's adaptive ministry (1 Cor 9) all model how the gospel can inhabit diverse cultural forms without losing its essence. The paper then reviews classic models of the Christian-culture relationship (Niebuhr's fivefold typology) and missiological approaches (Hiebert's critical contextualization, Kraft's cultural "bridges") as tools for faithful inculturation. Building on these foundations, a five-step model of inculturation hermeneutics is articulated, emphasizing deep cultural study, careful biblical exegesis, communal discernment, functional substitution of symbols, and transformational discipleship. Practical implications for Adventist mission in Africa are discussed, including culturally sensitive evangelism, leadership training in local worldviews, contextualized worship and family ministries, and safeguards against syncretism (through shared hermeneutical accountability). The conclusion argues that when the gospel is allowed to dwell within particular cultural groups as authentically as Christ dwelt in Nazareth, African Adventists can remain both true to Scripture and true to their cultures – thus fulfilling the mission to be a light to all nations.

Keywords: inculturation, contextualization, syncretism, hermeneutics, African church, Adventist mission, Scripture and culture.

1. Introduction

As historian Philip Jenkins has observed, "over the past century ... the center of gravity in the Christian world has shifted inexorably southward, to Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Already today, the largest Christian communities on the planet are to be found in Africa and Latin America" (Jenkins, 2002, as cited in Strauss, 2002). This demographic reality poses urgent

questions for mission: how can the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church, while maintaining unity in its core doctrines, become culturally intelligible and relevant across Africa's diverse contexts? African Adventist scholars and leaders are increasingly aware that the Gospel must be inculturated – expressed in terms proper to local cultures – without compromising biblical truth.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church affirms that it “has a global identity based on its fundamental beliefs... yet seeks to contextualize the Adventist message to make it understandable and relevant to the local context” (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2024). Additionally, Adventist mission theology holds that unity in essential beliefs must coexist with relevant cultural engagement in diverse contexts (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists, 2024).

Conversely, cultural isolationism or Western cultural imposition can become “counterproductive to mission” (cf. Bevans, 2002, p. 3). In this context, inculturation hermeneutics – the disciplined, dialogical approach of reading Scripture through the lens of a particular culture – emerges as a priority. It is not optional but essential for Adventist theology and praxis in Africa, calling the church to allow the gospel to transform African cultures rather than being submerged by them.

This paper proceeds as follows. First, it clarifies key terms and concerns (inculturation vs. contextualization vs. syncretism) and outlines theological foundations in Scripture for the Gospel-culture dialogue. Next, it reviews various hermeneutical approaches to culture – from Christological models (Niebuhr's typology) to missiological methods (Hiebert, Kraft) – as tools for inculturation. Building on these, it presents a five-step model of inculturation hermeneutics for African contexts, emphasizing local participation at every stage. Finally, the paper discusses implications for Adventist mission strategy, worship, and education in Africa, including creative applications and necessary safeguards against syncretism. In conclusion, it argues that a biblically grounded inculturation approach will enable the Word of God to dwell within particular cultural groups as authentically as Jesus once dwelled among His own Jewish kinfolk, leading to vibrant African churches true to Scripture and to African identity.

2. Defining Inculturation, Contextualization, and Culture

The term inculturation in Christian theology refers to the process by which the Gospel is expressed and lived out in cultural forms proper to a people. In practice, inculturation involves the creative reinterpretation of the Gospel and of cultural traditions together, so that neither is betrayed. As Ukpong (1995) notes, this means seeking “hooks” or points of contact in the culture on which to hang the Good News. In Catholic usage, inculturation often emphasizes a two-way encounter between Gospel and culture (Shorter, 1988, p. 4) – the Gospel “taking flesh” in new cultural garments – whereas many Protestant missiologists prefer the term contextualization. Yet both terms share the goal of communicating the unchanging Gospel in culturally intelligible, authentic forms (Hesselgrave & Rommen, 1989). Adventist mission documents likewise define contextualization as “the intentional and discriminating attempt to

communicate the gospel message in a culturally meaningful way” (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2021).

Importantly, inculturation is not cultural relativism. Rather, it assumes that Scripture is the ultimate norm, and that cultural forms must be judged by the Bible, not the reverse. In other words, the Gospel does not submit to culture; instead, it judges culture. Thus, emergent African churches are encouraged to affirm cultural values (e.g., respect for elders, community solidarity, hospitality) that harmonize with Christian ethics, while boldly critiquing and rejecting any practices that conflict with biblical teaching (e.g., ancestor worship, divination, or polygamy). This approach steers between the twin errors of ethnocentrism (imposing foreign forms) and syncretism (diluting the Gospel by uncritically blending incompatible elements).

Syncretism is often defined as the reshaping of Christian beliefs and practices through accommodation to a surrounding worldview, thereby losing its distinctiveness. By contrast, contextualization/inculturation preserves the gospel’s identity while finding appropriate cultural expressions for it. In short, inculturation hermeneutics is contextual theology applied to Scripture: it recognizes that every reader brings a cultural lens to the text, and thus calls for critical self-awareness and open dialogue between God’s Word and the local culture.

Culture itself can be defined as the lens through which a society views and orders its entire experience – a shared system of symbols, meanings, and practices learned through enculturation. It gives identity to a people, controlling their perceptions of reality and social life. In theology, culture is often seen as more specific than the term context, allowing deeper nuance. Any hermeneutical approach must account for both the positive and negative potential of culture. For example, syncretism may arise when a people “domesticate” the Gospel, distorting biblical truth by cultural assumptions. Therefore, inculturation theology always involves both openness to what is genuinely good in culture (God’s common grace) and a readiness to call sin by its name in local customs (Walls, 2002).

Can inculturation provide fertile ground for the Gospel without ignoring the Bible’s universal principles? Scriptural examples affirm that it can, if done faithfully. Historically, whenever the Gospel has crossed cultural lines, early Christians have grappled with adapting its forms. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) decided that Gentile believers need not adopt all Jewish ceremonial laws, recognizing that some cultural practices were nonessential to faith. Likewise, the Apostle Paul famously became “all things to all people” (1 Cor 9:19–22) to win some, neither imposing Jewish *halakhah* on Gentiles nor fully embracing pagan superstitions, but instead reinterpreting shared ideas (e.g., quoting Greek poets in Athens) in light of Christ. These biblical precedents (along with Christ’s own incarnation) provide a solid foundation: the eternal Word became flesh (John 1:14) in a particular culture, and Paul’s cross-cultural engagement anticipated what Hiebert (1987) would call critical contextualization – teaching truth sympathetically, reforming cultural practice, and letting Scripture judge all things. In this framework, inculturation is not a break from orthodoxy but a continuation of the incarnational logic of the Gospel.

3. Biblical Foundations for Cultural Engagement

From Genesis to the New Testament, Scripture consistently portrays God as actively engaging human cultures to reveal His redemptive purposes. Rather than bypassing cultural realities, the biblical narrative demonstrates that divine truth is communicated within concrete historical, linguistic, and social contexts. The following biblical foundations Christ's incarnation, the discernment of the early church, and Paul's missionary practice establish a theological framework for faithful and discerning cultural engagement.

3.1 Incarnation as Paradigm

The doctrine of the Incarnation is the ultimate theological justification for inculturation. John's Gospel declares that the eternal Word "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14, ESV). By this act, God affirmed that cultural embodiment is part of His redemptive plan. Jesus of Nazareth lived fully in a Jewish, Middle Eastern context: He spoke Aramaic, taught in terms of local metaphors (shepherds, vineyards, harvest), observed Jewish festivals, ate meals in family and synagogue settings, and entered into the life rhythms of His neighbors. In every way, He adapted Himself to the peculiar ideas of the people so that divine truth would "do them good". This pattern reveals a "principle of reverence for persons and cultures" in which the Gospel is consistently incarnated in the concrete realities of human life (Stott, 1975). Thus, the very identity of Jesus — divine, yet enfleshed in history — guarantees that absolute truth can be expressed through particular cultural forms without losing its essence (Philippians 2:5–8). In short, God Himself engaged culture in the person of Christ; Christians today are called to do likewise, trusting that the eternal Gospel can bear human cultural clothing.

3.2 Early Church Example (Acts 15)

The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) provides an instructive case of faithful cultural discernment. Here, Jewish and Gentile believers clashed over whether non-Jewish converts must adopt Jewish ceremonial law (circumcision, food regulations, etc.). Under the Spirit's guidance, the council concluded that the core of the Law (morality and faith in Christ) would be preserved, while releasing Gentile Christians from burdensome ethnic customs. In James's words (Acts 15:19), it was "not difficult for us . . . to choose men who will go with us" and read the demands correctly (v. 22).

This decision reflects key principles of inculturation: (1) not all cultural forms are eternal (Acts 15:15–18), (2) the community must discern which traditions are essential versus culturally bound, and (3) unity in faith does not require uniform cultural practice. In practice, Acts 15 broke down a major cultural barrier without betraying core revelation — Gentile believers were not forced to become Jews, showing that the gospel can transcend specific cultural forms. The Apostle Paul later treated this as normative: when crossing cultures, he sought "the voices of the indigenous" (1 Cor 9:20–22) and used every cultural avenue (from food laws to pagan poetry) to proclaim Christ, but always letting Scripture judge.

3.3 Paul's Cultural Strategy

Throughout his ministry, Paul modeled an incarnational method. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul states: "To those under the law I became as one under the law . . . to those outside the law I became as one outside the law . . . to the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak" (v. 20–22). In Acts, he is careful to "obey the law of the Lord in Jerusalem" while simultaneously preaching in Gentile terms in Athens and elsewhere. He did not reject pagan culture outright nor uncritically affirm it; rather, he engaged with it, "redeeming the time" by reframing local concepts (e.g., the Athenian altar "To an unknown God") with biblical meaning. This balance anticipates modern critical contextualization: a sympathetic, anthropological entry into culture combined with rigorous biblical analysis (Hiebert, 1987). Likewise, even Jesus' use of parables often drew on everyday life in first-century Palestine (the Good Samaritan, the wedding feast, the harvest, etc.), showing how the kingdom story inhabits particular contexts. The pattern of Scripture is clear: biblical faith intends to inhabit human cultures authentically, speaking God's truth into them.

4. Inculturation as a Missiological Approach

Scholars have offered various frameworks for understanding how Christ and the church relate to culture. Perhaps the most famous is Niebuhr's Christ and Culture typology (1951), which describes five ways Christians have engaged cultural systems. These categories are: (1) Christ against Culture, where Christianity rejects society almost entirely (culture as enemy); (2) Christ of Culture, where the church assimilates fully to society (culture as friend); (3) Christ above Culture, where the church affirms positive cultural elements but retains distance (culture is neutral but needs reinterpretation); (4) Christ and Culture in Paradox, where culture remains ambiguous and believers live with tension; and (5) Christ the Transformer of Culture, where culture is fundamentally good but needs the Gospel to be perfected. Niebuhr's typology illuminates that inculturation aligns most with "Christ the Transformer" – culture is redeemed and "permeated" by the Gospel (Niebuhr, 1951). Unlike the "Christ against culture" or purely assimilationist models, this view sees culture's basic constructs as God's doing, to be reclaimed by Christ rather than entirely condemned. It thus provides a theological justification for adopting cultural forms that express eternal truths, while rejecting those that oppose them.

Building on such insights, modern missiologists propose models more explicitly geared to cultural engagement. Hiebert (1987) introduced Critical Contextualization, a three-stage method for mission: (1) Anthropological Analysis – studying the local culture sympathetically (open, nonjudgmental, searching for meaning); (2) Biblical/Theological Analysis – examining Scripture afresh with the local culture in view; and (3) Strategic Planning – formulating plans that bring the two analyses into dialogue. The hallmark of Hiebert's model is communal discernment: local Christians reflect together on what to keep, reject, or change, recognizing their "priesthood" in interpretation. This ensures that the Bible judges culture (not vice versa) while affording indigenous people ownership of their faith expression. Similarly, Kraft's concept of bridges of meaning (1979) advises missionaries to find cultural

analogies for Gospel concepts, using local languages, metaphors, and music to make Christ intelligible, yet always with critical discernment. In essence, Krafft warned against imposing foreign forms where local ones suffice, echoing the incarnational approach of Acts 15 and Paul.

Wrogemann (2002) further analyzes the incarnational as the constitutive model of inculturation, identifying five aspects: (a) inculturation involves cultural transformation; (b) transformation occurs from within, requiring cultural proximity; (c) it inherently combines cultural and countercultural elements; (d) it is characterized by self-emptying (*kénōsis*); and (e) it is often accompanied by conflict and suffering. These insights resonate with Philippians 2:5–8 and Jesus' own ministry of self-giving. In practice, Christ's life was counter-cultural (challenging Jewish elitism, embracing the marginalized, redefining Sabbath law) so that God's Kingdom could reshape Israel's traditions from within. Wrogemann (2002) argues that Jesus Christ's entire life on earth was "one sustained act of inculturation".

From this perspective, the church's mission is the continuation of Christ's mission: just as Christ incarnated the Gospel in a specific culture, the church incarnates it globally. This has key consequences: (1) Inculturation is integral to the church's mission. (2) Through Christ, cultures are meant to be restored in the church (not destroyed). (3) Inculturation does not threaten the universality of the church; rather, by welcoming cultural plurality, it realizes the church's transcultural identity. (4) Indeed, as Wrogemann suggests, the Gospel's transculturality expresses itself in the church's ability to dwell authentically in many cultures (the church is itself "pilgrim and indigenous"). Wrogemann (2002), affirms:

Indeed, the personal life-style of Jesus Christ was largely counter-cultural, with respect to his attitude towards riches wealth and greatness; towards women, the poor and sinners...; towards the Sabbath, that very revered of Jewish religious institutions.... In all this, and similar instances, Jesus Christ concretely and effectively challenged his Jewish culture, in order to purify and transform it. (p. 410)

Building on an incarnational understanding of mission, Okure (presents the church as the living continuation of Christ's redemptive engagement with culture. For her, the whole earthly life of Jesus—culminating in His passion and resurrection—constitutes a sustained act of inculturation, through which humanity and culture are transformed and drawn into the reality of the new creation (Col 1:15–20).

Overall, these approaches establish that faithful inculturation is neither blind culturalism nor isolationism, but the dynamic process of imparting biblical truth into local forms, requiring humility, courage, and communal discernment (Hiebert, 1987; Kraft, 1979; Bevans, 2002).

5. A Five-Step Model of Inculturation Hermeneutics

Drawing on the above foundations, we propose a five-step inculturation hermeneutics for Adventist mission in Africa, synthesizing critical contextualization with practical methodology:

5.1 Cultural Exploration (Anthropological Exegesis)

The church enters the culture sympathetically. Anthropological and historical study of local traditions, symbols, and worldviews is undertaken without immediate judgment. Leaders and lay members collaborate to describe the community's practices, identifying "cultural hooks" or points of contact for the Gospel. For example, they might note that funeral songs already express hope or that cleansing rituals signify renewal. The goal is to understand the culture from within, recognizing its worldview and spiritual values rather than dismissing it. This aligns with Kraft's "exegesis of culture" and Hiebert's first step of anthropological analysis (Bevans, 2002; Kraft, 1979; Hiebert, 1987).

5.2 Biblical Exegesis

Next, Scripture is studied intensively on the issue at hand, with the local context taken into account. Pastors and teachers examine relevant Bible passages in their historical and theological context, translating them into cultural categories familiar to the people. They clarify the biblical meaning of any analogous Old Testament practices (e.g., sacrifice, Sabbath) and present New Testament teachings. In this stage, cultural practices are weighed against biblical ethics and doctrine. Cultural elements found neutral or beneficial are affirmed and retained (or even reinterpreted positively), while those in conflict with Scripture are identified as problematic. The Bible judges that which is bad (Acts 15:15) by setting the standard. This stage often employs metacultural tools (history, language studies) to bridge concepts between the Bible and the people's worldview (Hesselgrave & Rommen, 1989; Bevans, 2002).

5.3 Communal Reflection and Discernment

Rather than outsiders imposing change, local believers engage in thoughtful dialogue about which traditions to keep, reject, or transform. This exercise realizes the priesthood of all believers in the hermeneutical process (Hiebert, 1987). The church community examines each cultural element in light of the newly studied Bible passages and their convictions in Christ. Typically, they will retain elements that are harmless or positive (e.g., hospitality rituals, proverbs), reject elements tied to "evil beliefs" (e.g., divination rites or magic practices), and modify certain customs by reassigning them explicitly biblical meaning. For instance, a local funeral song might be rewritten to celebrate the hope of resurrection; a cleansing ceremony might be reframed as symbolism for spiritual renewal in Christ. By making these decisions together, the church prevents "underground syncretism" – hidden mixtures of beliefs – because the people have ownership of the outcomes.

5.4 Functional Substitution (Symbolic Replacement)

When a cultural practice is rejected, the church must address the "vacuum" it leaves. In this step, Christians identify new practices or symbols that serve the same social or spiritual function, but within a Christian worldview. For example, if ancestor sacrifices are abandoned, the community might institute a Christian memorial service in their place, honoring families with prayers or Scripture readings (Heb 11; 1 Cor 10:14) instead of idol worship. Alternatively, Christian rites can be adopted: baptism or communion might fill

roles similar to fertility or purification rituals. The idea is to offer positive, biblical alternatives.

5.5 Transformational Discipleship (Implementation and Redemptive Formation)

The final step is ongoing conversion of life: discipleship. The new, contextualized practices and teachings are introduced through committed formation. Church leaders and mentors guide believers over time as they embody the changes. This includes preaching, Bible study, prayer, pastoral counseling, and, if necessary, “redeeming discipline” to help the community internalize and live out the new meanings. Transformational discipleship acknowledges that inculturation is a lifelong process: it reiterates to the community that the Gospel is reforming both individual hearts and cultural habits (Rom 12:2). This stage also underscores that Scripture remains the final authority at every step – nothing is prescriptively adopted without biblical support. In sum, these five steps create a respectful, dialogue-based cycle of study – reflection – decision – reform, ensuring that inculturation is both faithful to the Bible and owned by the local church.

In practice, these steps may overlap or recur (for example, discipleship may prompt further cultural reflection), but they provide concrete guidance. In all steps, outside experts (missionaries or translators) should act as facilitators, not imperialists: true inculturation requires that the people themselves live with their decisions in the long term (Doss, 2018).

6. Implications for Adventist Mission in Africa

The above model has significant implications for Adventist strategy and practice in Africa. Inculturation hermeneutics calls Adventist leaders to work through local frameworks rather than parachuting in Western templates. Practical applications include:

6.1 Evangelism and Outreach

Evangelistic programs should use culturally familiar forms. Radio broadcasts and literature, for example, ought to be in local languages and dialects, employing analogies drawn from everyday African life (farming, kinship, health, nature) to illustrate biblical truths. Public meetings can incorporate indigenous music, dance, proverbs, or storytelling alongside Gospel messages, so that Adventist teaching is clothed in African artistic expression rather than foreign styles. For instance, using traditional drums, call-and-response patterns, or local poetic meters can make Adventist worship more resonant. Health and community programs should similarly respect local perspectives on illness and family. Instead of totally dismissing folk medicine or spiritual beliefs, Adventist health ministries can combine prayer with permissible traditional remedies, such as teas, hydrotherapy, blessing rituals, or exorcism, thereby building trust with communities. Such contextualization does not water down Adventist doctrine but rather uses all positive “bridges” in culture to convey it.

6.2 Leadership and Education

Seminary and missionary training must equip workers for inculturated ministry. Seminaries (in Africa and globally) should include courses in cultural anthropology, African history, and world religions alongside theology. Church curriculum (Sabbath School lessons, etc.) should feature African biblical scholars and cultural case studies. In classrooms, instructors ought to model listening to students' worldviews: for example, discussing how to apply biblical Sabbath principles within an African communal time-cycle system. Faculty can use role-plays to practice negotiating cultural differences. All this ensures future African leaders do not view Western norms as the only "first principles," but as one contextual expression among many.

6.3 Worship and Daily Life

Inculturation should permeate church life. Where appropriate, congregations might use indigenous instruments (drums, kalimbas, xylophones) and musical styles for Adventist hymns or praise songs. Adventist hymns could be translated into local languages and poetic forms. Non-liturgical expressions (dramatic skits, dance, oral testimonies) can be incorporated if they convey biblical meaning. Marriage and family ministries might honor customary practices (bride price, extended kinship roles) while re-framing them in a Christian covenant context (e.g., emphasizing mutual respect and monogamy). Health and healing ministries should adapt to spiritual worldviews: Africans often perceive illness holistically, so Adventist health workers can partner prayerfully with community elders or pastors to address both medical and spiritual needs, instead of insisting on purely Western treatment models.

Throughout these changes, Adventist leaders must vigilantly guard core doctrine. Some African customs (e.g., ancestor veneration, polygamy, fetish rituals) directly conflict with biblical revelation. In the inculturation process, such practices are not merely banned by fiat but confronted through education and witness. Pastors teach why certain customs are abandoned – for example, by showing scriptural analogies of honoring ancestors (Luke 3:23–38) without idol worship. When a community relinquishes a practice, leaders ensure the new Christian practice is well-understood (e.g., group Bible studies on monogamy or New Testament ethics). The church's role is not to erase identity but to redeem identity – cleansing it of syncretistic distortions.

6.4 Policy Support

Denominational guidelines already allow cultural adaptation of forms "making clear that adaptation must remain faithful to Scripture and not compromise the core message of the gospel" (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2003). In practice, this means a youth rally in Nigeria may legitimately look very different from one in Kenya, yet the message of salvation remains identical. Adventist mission boards should incorporate inculturation principles into training manuals and missionary handbooks (Bevans, 2002). For example, missionary orientation might include basic cross-cultural skills and case studies of both successes and failures in contextualization.

6.5 Safeguards and Unity

Inculturation does carry risks if unguarded. Syncretism can creep in if new forms are adopted without a clear biblical meaning. A useful safeguard is Hiebert's concept of the hermeneutical community: involving multiple church groups or denominations to review contextual initiatives provides accountability. For instance, if a liturgy includes a traditional rain-making chant (common in some African contexts), leaders should repurpose its lyrics explicitly for prayer to the Creator, not leave any ambivalent pagan meaning. Training programs should include case studies of past syncretism failures (e.g., communities that lapsed into occultism by uncritically mixing rituals), sharpening discernment. Scripture itself warns against the fusion of God's worship with pagan rites (Lev 18:30; Col 2:8), emphasizing that freedom to contextualize comes with the responsibility to test every form against Scripture. Thus, any contextualized practice must be accompanied by clear Bible teaching, and local pastors should have access to denominational studies or guidelines on contextualization to mark boundaries.

At the same time, inculturation reinforces the Adventist principle of unity in diversity. The SDA Church maintains one global identity of fundamental beliefs, yet seeks to adapt its message in culturally relevant ways (de Melo, 2018; Martin, 2021). This implies that African Conferences and Unions should feel free to vary worship styles, program emphases, and scheduling (e.g., aligning evangelism with harvest seasons) so long as cardinal doctrines (Sabbath, Scripture, Christ's atonement) remain upheld. In missionary partnership, African voices must be heard not only to report needs but to contribute to theology and mission strategy. As Walls (2002) reminds us, the church is both "pilgrim and indigenous": it transcends culture but also becomes at home wherever it goes. Likewise, Newbiggin (1989) emphasizes that the Gospel is "public truth" meant to cross cultures (not a private narrative). An analogy can be drawn to Acts 15, where Gentile representatives spoke at Jerusalem; in the same way, African delegates in general conferences should articulate how the Spirit is guiding mission in Africa. Such a dialogue ensures Adventism truly becomes a "rainbow coalition" of peoples (Africans, Arabs, Americans, Filipinos, etc.) united by doctrine but enriched by diverse cultural expression.

7. Conclusion

Inculturation hermeneutics is not an optional "add-on" but a core missiological task for Adventism in Africa. Grounded in biblical precedent (Incarnation, Jerusalem Council, apostolic practice) and in the historic Adventist commitment to global mission, it enables fruitful encounters between biblical teachings and cultural traditions. When the church faithfully immerses the Word of God in Africa's cultures, the result can be churches where Africans are both authentic Adventists and authentic Africans. This means abandoning the assumption that Western forms are inherently superior and trusting that Scripture, like yeast, can permeate any cultural "dough."

The proposed five-step model offers concrete guidance: immerse in the culture, study the Word deeply, let the people apply the Word to their lives, and create new symbols that honor Christ. By doing so with humility, scriptural

fidelity, and communal discernment, Adventist missions in Africa can fulfill the Great Commission in an inculturated way. As Isaiah 49:6 and Matthew 5:14 envision, the church truly becomes “a light to all nations” when the unchanging gospel is woven into the rich tapestry of African life. In such a future, believers in Africa will live with Scripture as their authority and African culture as their identity – a faithful, dynamic synthesis long exemplified by Christ Himself.

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