

THE SABBATH AS MISSIOLOGICAL BRIDGE: A CASE FOR THE ADVENTIST CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

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1. Background of Study

The importance of the seventh-day Sabbath is for the Seventh-day Adventist Church is reflected in the name of the Church, making it an integral part of the organization's very identity.¹ The Church understands itself as a remnant living in the last days of earth's history, a time characterized by widespread spiritual apostasy.² As such, the Church understands itself as having a mission that calls the world to worship the Creator at a time when the devil is also employing deceptive machinations to receive worship from the world.³ In this scenario, the Sabbath is understood as the ultimate test of loyalty between those who truly worship the Creator

¹ "SDA Church," *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, Revised Edition in Commentary Reference Series, Vol. 10 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1976), 1325; Nancy J. Vyhmeister, "Who are Seventh-day Adventists?" in *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*. Commentary Reference Series, Vol. 10 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2000), 1, 2; George R. Knight, *A Brief History of the Seventh-day Adventists*, 3rd edition. Adventist Heritage Series. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2012), 63; Emma E. Howell, *The Great Advent Movement* (Takoma Park, Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1935); C. Mervyn Maxwell, *Tell it to the World: The Story of the Seventh-day Adventists*, revised edition (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1977), 145. For a more elaborate discussion on this, see "Seventh-day Adventist," *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, 1324; J.N. Loughborough, *The Great Second Advent Movement* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1909), 351.

² Hans K. LaRondelle, "The Remnant and the Three Angels' Messages" *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* Roul Dederen (Editor), in *Commentary reference Series* (General Editor, George W. Reid) Vol. 12. (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000), 866 – 880.

³ Hans K. LaRondelle, 872 – 880; "SDA Church," *The Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, 1325. Knight points out that the special significance of the Sabbath in the context of prophecy and eschatology represent some of Joseph Bates' lasting theological contributions to the Adventist Church. Knight, 39 – 42. See also Rich and W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers to the Remnant: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Revised and updated edition (Nampa, ID: 2000), 164 – 166.

God and those who do not.⁴ This is especially expressed by Ellen White, a co-founding member of the Adventist Church....⁵ The Sabbath is also understood to be linked to many other faith aspects as well as just about all dimensions of a believer's life.⁶

In spite of such compelling holistic and eschatological understandings of the Sabbath alluded to above, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Southern Africa seems to have largely remained indifferent if not altogether oblivious to large Sabbath-keeping communities prevalent in their sphere of influence. These faith communities believe and practice seventh-day Sabbath observance as an integral part of their worship experience. Almost all of them do so exclusively on the basis of a 'thus says the Lord,' according to their reading of the Old Testament. In most instances however, they are without elaborate theological expositions in the way the Adventist Church has a theology of the Sabbath.⁷ This paper seeks to proffer some approaches the Church in Southern Africa could take to enhance its outreach to and among non-Adventist Sabbath-keeping people groups and faith communities

⁴ Kenneth A. Strand, "The Sabbath," *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 513; Hans K. LaRondelle, "The Remnant and the Three Angels' Messages" *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology*, 878, 887, 888; Donald Ernst Mansell, *The Shape of the Coming Crisis: A sequence of end-time events based in the writings of Ellen G. White* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 58 – 82.

⁵ Ellen White states that "The Sabbath will be the greatest test of loyalty, for it is the point of truth especially controverted. When the final test shall be brought to bear upon men, then the line of distinction will be drawn between those who serve God and those who serve him not....the keeping of the true Sabbath, in obedience to God's law, is an evidence of loyalty to the Creator." (*Great Controversy*, 605).

⁶ Kwabena Donkor, "Sabbath, the Doctrine of the" in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopaedia*, 2nd ed. Ed. Dennis Fortin and Jerry Moon, (Hager's Town, Maryland: Review & Herald, 2013), 1115–1118.

⁷ "They emphasize and practice Sabbath keeping, but this results in little if any academic Sabbath theology." Stefan Hörschele "On Sabbath Keeping and Sabbath Theology among Younger African Churches" *Spes Christiana* 18–19, 2007–2008, 39.

2. The Sabbath-keepers

To begin with, there are numerous Sabbath-keeping African Initiated Churches (AICs) in Africa.⁸ Some of these churches were founded in Zimbabwe and others in South Africa.⁹ In 2000, AICs were estimated to constitute 36% of Zimbabwe's population. The significance of this statistic is perhaps best appreciated when compared to the 24% statistic for all other Christians (Catholics, Protestants and Anglicans).¹⁰ The largest of the AICs and perhaps the second or third largest Christian denomination in Zimbabwe is African Apostolic Church of Johane Marange (AACJM), whose membership was, in 1999, estimated at one million, in Zimbabwe alone.¹¹ The denomination established by Johane Marange (1912 – 1963), has a presence in many countries in the region and beyond.¹²

Marange had numerous dreams and visions from the time he was six years old. In 1932 he reported that a voice (presumably God's) had spoken

⁸ Stefan Hörschele, After noting that Sabbath observance has remained marginal in the western world, Hörschele goes on to point out that "Interestingly, a reverse situation is found in Africa. On this continent, the greatest concentration of Saturday keeping Christians is found today with more than 15 million Sabbatarians in denominations founded in the last one and a half centuries... Among the Sabbatarian churches of Kenya are the following: Roho Israel Church of God, Nomiya Fueny Maler, Nomiya Luo Sabbato, Roho Revelation Church, Luong Mogik (God's Last Appeal Church), Roho Singruok, Roho Mowal, and Musanda Christian Church of Kenya" (cf. Kuhn, Marko: *From African Consciousness to Sub-Conscious Enculturation: A Study into African Independent Churches (AICs) in Nyanzal/Kenya*. Diploma thesis, University of Freiburg, 2001.), 39 - 41.

⁹ A 1945 count showed that there were 800 AICs of which 25 had names that showed they were seventh-day Sabbath observers. Many others who also observed the Sabbath did not however use the word 'Sabbath' in their organizational names according to Sundkler, Bengt: *Bantu Prophets in South Africa*. London: Oxford University Press, 1961, 354 – 374, as quoted in Stefan Hörschele, 41.

¹⁰ Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Africa World Press, 2001), 114.

¹¹ Allan Anderson, *African Reformation*, 116; Stefan Hörschele, 41; Jules-Rosette, Bennetta: *African Apostles: Ritual and Conversion in the Church of John Maranke*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975; Mazambara, Phillip Denhe: *The Self-Understanding of African Instituted Churches: A Study Based on the Church of Apostles Founded by John of Marange in Zimbabwe*. Aachen: Mainz, 1999.

¹² The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Zionist church: South African Religion," <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/657514/Zionist-church> (Accessed April 10, 2015).

to him, identifying him as a new "John the Baptist, an Apostle." As such he was ordered to preach the gospel to all peoples. In obedience to this voice, Marange preached, baptizing those who accepted his message and taught them to observe the Pentateuchal laws¹³, including the seventh-day Sabbath.¹⁴ On the basis of these revelations, the AACJM was founded in that year, with an initial baptism of 150 people in his home area in Eastern Zimbabwe. In the thirty years of his ministry, he preached in Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi and central Congo.¹⁵ His followers can be found as far afield as "Uganda and even Ghana."¹⁶

A contemporary and religious twin of Marange was Johane Masowe (John of the wilderness), formerly Shonhiwa (c.1915 – 1973) who, in the 1930s, founded the Apostolic Sabbath Church of God.¹⁷ As the name suggests, this church too, was a Sabbath-keeping movement. The difference they had with AACJM Church was in their Ethiopianism which advocated for black people's complete separation from all activities that have to do with white people, who at the time, were the face of colonialism.¹⁸ As such, this church did not, and still does not, as many others after it, allow members to go to schools, hospitals or to be in formal employment. Members were to have no formal registration and identification. All these being sectors and activities that were dominated and controlled by the colonial government at the time the church was founded. As such, the members learnt some crafts which made them self-sustaining.

A similarly Sabbath-observing church is the Apostolic Mission of Africa (AMA) started and led by Paul Mwazha. These seem to feel some affinity with the Adventist Church, from whom they got the Sabbath message

¹³ Marange, as did other AIC leaders, had early contacts with some Apostolic Faith Mission preachers who had emphasis in these same aspects as well as others that were later practiced in his movement (see Allan Anderson, 116).

¹⁴ Allan Anderson, *African Reformation*, 116.

¹⁵ Ibid. 117, in 1964, 10, 000 people in southern Congo attended the church's special festival.

¹⁶ Ibid. 116.

¹⁷ Ibid. 118.

¹⁸ According to The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Ethiopianism: African Religion." Ethiopianism was a "religious movement among sub-Saharan Africans that embodied the earliest stirrings toward religious and political freedom in the modern political period." <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/194224/Ethiopianism>. (Accessed, April 10, 2015).

anyway.¹⁹ These regularly buy Adventist literature such as hymnals, Sabbath school study guides among others. Some among their leaders have in the past sent their children to Adventist schools.

In the same way, there are indigenous Sabbath-keeping churches in South Africa as well. Two are especially notable by their membership size. The first one is the Nazareth Baptist Church, better known as “amaNazareth” (the Nazarites)²⁰ or “isonto lamanazareth” (Church of the Nazarites) and “Shembe Church.” This is the largest AIC among the Zulu people. The church was founded “by Mdlwamafa Mloyisa (Isaiah) Shembe (c. 1869 – 1935).”²¹ Shembe started out as a Methodist, before getting baptised into an African Baptist Church c.1900. He eventually left this church also, owing to irreconcilable differences between him and the leadership of this church, arising from his unique understanding of the Pentateuchal laws on the Nazarites which he believed were supposed to be adhered to.²²

After his departure from the African Baptist Church, Shembe went on to found a Sabbath-keeping church.²³ Among other things, the church’s

¹⁹ The writer was reliably informed by Pr. Lovemore Chitura who was instrumental in having prophet Paul Mwazha’s eldest son accept the seventh-day Sabbath. Pr. Chitura was working as a literature evangelist at the time. Mr. Mwazha jnr. Challenged his father, until the later adopted Sabbath as the day of worship for their church, in a bid to retain his son in his church. Mr. Mwazha jnr. went on to join the Adventist Church anyway where, owing to his charisma and means, he went on to be an influential member, becoming a delegate to the GC session at one time. Mr. Mwazha jnr. Since re-joined his father’s church, in circumstances dominated by faltering financial fortunes as well as issues related to polygamy. This narrative was independently confirmed by Pr. Solomon Bundo, who previously worked with Pr. L. Chitura, as a colporteur. The writer visited Mr. Mwazha Jnr in the company of Pr. Bundo, at one time.

²⁰ Based on the Nazarite vows of Numbers 6. Browne, *Shembeism and the Rainbow Nation*, 99.

²¹ Allan Anderson, *African Reformation*, 106.

²² Ibid. 106.

²³ Absalom Vilakazi, *Shembe: The Revitalization of African Society* (Johannesburg: Skotaville, 1986), 86. Browne, *Shembeism and the Rainbow Nation*, “Saturday is the main day of worship for Shembeites because they claim that this was the day that God told people to worship in the Old Testament of the Bible, which is what they follow rather than the New Testament like most Christians,” 102; According to Wikipedia “Isaiah Shembe,” “He advocated worship of the biblical Sabbath rather than Sunday. Associating Sunday worship with the Jesus of the white missionaries, he chose to identify instead with the Sabbath of God, Jehovah. He saw the Sabbath as essential to the wholeness and well-being of Africans.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaiah_Shembe, accessed, 10 January 2016.

liturgy is characterised by such things as removing shoes when in a place of worship, leaving hair uncut and observing kosher laws of the Old Testament, including avoiding the consumption of pork.²⁴ They also practice circumcision, as the Sotho, contrary to Zulu customs.²⁵ The sacraments of amaNazaretha are baptism by immersion, night Lord's Supper services with foot-washing, and seventh-day Sabbath observance.²⁶ These are observed along with the *hlonipa* (respectful avoidance) rules of Zulu tradition, as the church represents "a unique blend of Christianity with the best of Zulu culture."²⁷ Shembe was also a prolific hymn writer and a naturalist. As late as 2005, it could still be said that "The Shembe religion is the fastest growing religion in South Africa."²⁸

The second is the International Pentecostal Church (IPC). This church was founded by the late charismatic cleric, Rev. Fredrick S. Modise (1914 - 1998). Modise started out as a leading minister in the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) a Sunday-keeping church. He eventually, in a situation of personal financial misfortunes and severe illness, claimed to have received a series of divine revelations in September, 1962 while hospitalized in Johannesburg. In these special revelatory encounters, Modise claims that a voice announced to him just when exactly he would be healed and thereafter get discharged from the hospital. He subsequently received his healing and discharge from the hospital on a Saturday, October 3, 1962.²⁹ The voice which spoke with him informed him that that day was the Lord's Sabbath, to be observed as the holy day that it is. As confirmation for authenticity of what the voice told him, Modise was instructed to pray for fifteen people from among those admitted together with him in the

24 Browne, "Shembeires adhere to culinary injunctions of the Old Testament that define followers of Judaism, the Eastern Coptic Church and Islam," 103. Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Africa World Press, 2001), 106.

25 Allan Anderson, *African Reformation*, 108.

26 Browne, "They do not work on Saturday, nor will they eat hot food prepared on Saturday. They only eat cold food prepared on Friday for the Saturday meal. They do not light fires on Saturday, nor do they cook or bathe," 91. Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the 20th Century* (Africa World Press, 2001), 106, 108.

27 Allan Anderson, 108; Dallas L. Browne, "Shembe is a syncretic religion. It blends Christianity with acceptance of selected aspects of traditional African Culture..." 97, 98.

28 Allan Anderson, *African Reformation*, 91.

29 IPHC, s.a. International Pentecost Holiness Church. Johannesburg: IPHC.

same hospital.³⁰ When this was done, they all got miraculously healed. He gained fame as a faith healer. It may be worthwhile to point out that here are similarities between Modise's experiences and the circumstances surrounding the elder C. D. Brooks mother's conversion and acceptance of the Sabbath.³¹

In 1964, Modise went on to establish the IPC that rapidly grew in membership. Sabbath observance has been the practice of that church to this day, as evinced by the fact that "the main activities of the church take place from Friday night throughout Saturday."³² Some years ago, the IPC popular choir produced a music album titled *Sabata* (Sabbath).³³ The title track is popular with other Sabbath-keeping AICs in the region.

In spite of its name, Modise did not only abandon such things and speaking in tongues and prophecies, which are characteristic of Pentecostalism and most AICs, but was also heavily critical of the same.³⁴ For instance, there is no talking in tongues in the church he founded. Though an AIC, it is quite different from the rest of them as it looks westernised in many forms. The combined membership of the Shembe followers and the IPC is computed in millions in South Africa alone.³⁵

³⁰ Allan Anderson, "Frederick Modise and the International Pentecost Church: A Modern African Messianic Movement?" (Institute of Theological Research: UNISA, 1992), 5.

³¹ His mother Mattie Brooks, then a in the Methodist Church, received direct special revelation, pointing out the need for her to observe the Sabbath. At the time, she was seriously ill, in St. Louis Catholic Hospital, Greensboro, North Carolina, USA. This was in December 1930. Shortly afterwards, she recovered from her illness. Although she immediately began observing the Sabbath, it would be years later that she would make contact with the Adventist Church. Charles D. Brooks, in "Heritage Series Interview" with C. A. Murray and Jim Gilley (3 Angels Broadcasting Network, TLB008529) at 13 Minutes; cf. Stephen Chavez, "Charles D. Brooks: Gospel Herald" in *Adventist Review* (2016). <http://archives.adventistreview.org/article/2413/archives/issue-2009-1506/charles-d-brooks-gospel-herald>

³² Allan Anderson, *African Reformation*, 111.

³³ The lyrics are *iSabata namhla Nkosi/Bayavuya abantu bakhol/bakethwa baya vuya/Ncinani iSabata*. (Oh Lord, it is Sabbath today/your people are rejoicing/the chosen ones are rejoicing/(oh people) keep the Sabbath).

³⁴ Allan Anderson, *African Reformation*, 111.

³⁵ Stefan Höschele, 41.

3. Cultural 'Sabbath'

Besides the overt knowledge of the seventh-day Sabbath among AICs, there seems to be a covert awareness of the same too in local religious traditions. In Zimbabwe for instance, Shona people have the concept of one special weekly day called *Chisi*. This is a day during which no work is allowed in a community, especially work in the fields.³⁶ It is "a mandatory day of rest."³⁷ The day is understood to be sacred and it thus enforced as such by chiefs and other traditional leaders within any given community. It is believed that if work is done on that day, misfortunes, especially lack of rain, will befall the offending community. Offending in this point is thus considered as posing a threat to the very existence of the whole community.³⁸ Such offenses are punishable by penalties.³⁹ If repeated, a person is expelled from the given locality.⁴⁰ This day however, falls on different days of the working week in different communities throughout the country. Whichever day it may fall on, its being understood as a sacred day is uniform and so is its enforcement.

Among the peoples of southern Zimbabwe is a unique ethnic group, the BaLemba. These claim to have Semitic, in particular, Jewish origins. This claim seems to be authenticated by a number of similarities of practices they apparently share with those found in Judaism.⁴¹ This particular ethnic group has been studied closely in recent years. Repeated scientific studies seem to authenticate their claim to Jewish ancestry.⁴²

³⁶ Zachaeus Mathema, "Towards an Understanding of the African Worldview," in *The Church, Culture and Spirits: Adventism in Africa*, edited by Kwabena Donkor. (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2011), 41.

³⁷ Netsayi Noris Mudenge, "Knowledge Production and Dissemination in Land Resettlement Areas in Zimbabwe: The Case of Mupfurudzi" Graduate Research School for Resource Studies for Development, October, 2005, 162.

³⁸ Stefan Höschele, "In traditional cultures, specific prohibitions commonly mean security; if such safety measures are disrupted, the whole system can disintegrate," 49.

³⁹ Anita Jacobson-Widding, "Pits, Pots and Snakes – An Anthropological Approach to Ancient African Symbols," in *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 1 (1): 5-26 (1992), 6.

⁴⁰ Ndzimu-unami Emmanuel, *The Rebirth of Bukalanga: A Manifesto for the Liberation of Great People with a Proud History*, Part 1 (Maphungubwe News Corporation, 2012), 186.

⁴¹ Ndzimu-unami Emmanuel, 196 – 200.

⁴² *Ibid.* 208, 209.

The Chisi concept is found among the Shona people of Zimbabwe as well as the BaKalanga of whom the Vendas are thought to have been a part. The Mwali religion of the Vendas “seems to have links with that of the Jews in Israel.”⁴³ To pre-colonial Zimbabwe, they were what the house of Levi was to Israel. A family of priests, according to Pathisa Nyathi.⁴⁴ Both northern and southern Zimbabwe traditions seem to concur that the religion came from Great Zimbabwe.⁴⁵ The central shrine manned by these priests at Njelele within Matobo Hills, where they functioned from a big cave. “This is the equivalent of the holy of holies”.⁴⁶ Pathisa Nyathi points out that “Njelele is associated with the strict observance of the seventh day.”⁴⁷ The identity of the seventh day as the Sabbath clearly seems to have been lost, perhaps due to societal disruptions in history. The idea, however, of the sacredness of one day in seven has endured, since “even to this day all the agriculturalists under the influence of Njelele observe the Wednesday - *Chisi* as it is called in Mashonaland.”⁴⁸

Many Adventist church members who have not appreciated this concept have antagonized their communities by blatantly violating the *Chisi* sanctity with a claim that only the Sabbath is sacred.⁴⁹ By so doing, the voice of their witness is drowned in the ensuing controversies. A winsome approach is one adopted by other church members who do not necessari-

⁴³ Pathisa Nyathi, “BaKalanga: Any Links with the Semitic World?” in *Cultural Heritage*, Bulawayo24, June 15, 2014; Ndzimu-unami Emmanuel, 186.

⁴⁴ Pathisa Nyathi, “Seeking to Understand the Njelele Shrine” in *Cultural Heritage*, Bulawayo24, June 15, 2014 (<http://bulawayo24.com/index-id-opinion-sc-columnist-byo-42201.html>).

⁴⁵ The southern traditions emphasize the relocation of the Venda people to South Africa first before moving to Njelele. To this end, the Vendas are thought to have come from across the Limpopo in the northern provinces of modern South Africa during the time of the Torwa State. The Rozvi Empire and the Ndebele state adopted their religion.

⁴⁶ Pathisa Nyathi, “Njelele Shrine.”

⁴⁷ Pathisa Nyathi, “BaKalanga.”

⁴⁸ Pathisa Nyathi, “Njelele Shrine.”

⁴⁹ David Nedziwa Mbiriri (grandfather to the writer. 1910 – 2008) is one example. He would not even pay the fines that the community leaders imposed upon him when he was found to have repeatedly worked on Chisi. Though his children begged him for his permission to settle the required fines, he would not allow them. His argument at the chief’s court was that only the seventh-day Sabbath, not chisi was ever mandated by God.

ly believe in the sacredness of the day, but rather, seek to do their household chores which are not prohibited under *Chisi* regulations. Many pastors and lay preachers have driven home the message of the Sabbath by capitalizing on the *Chisi* concept with great success.⁵⁰

For the Sabbath to be a missiological bridge, the Adventist Church will have to be intentionally focused in its evangelistic thrust. The Church should perhaps, in addition to personal evangelism, seek especially to work also with the said and some such other faith communities. To this end, there is need to capitalize on the commonality of Sabbath observance between the Church and the people they seek to reach. It is especially significant when one considers that according to Adventist eschatology, the Sabbath will be the most definitive testing truth in the final spiritual showdown of this world's history.⁵¹ With this in mind, it is all the more the reason the Adventist Church in Southern Africa should take special interest in Sabbath-observing groups in their territory. In doing this, the Church will not be innovating, but rather reverting to a tried and tested model used several times in the New Testament and other periods of Christian history.

4. The Bible Model

Jesus' mission was obviously the salvation of the whole world (Gen 3:15; John 3:16). However, he was strategic about his mission in ways that should be exemplary to all who carry out his Gospel commission to the whole world. His strategy involved reaching out to Jews first and he was clear about it. This could explain his declaration to the Canaanite woman in the region of Tyre and Sidon, to whom he categorically stated that "I was sent to the lost sheep of Israel," (Matt 15:24). It was his custom to attend worship services in the synagogues on Sabbath days (Luke 4:16).⁵² In this way, the Sabbath, among other reasons for his observance of the

⁵⁰ Stefan Hörschle, 42, highlights the importance of 'rituality' in the way the Sabbath is observed. It is probably this sense of 'rituality' that makes a natural link to be made between the *Chisi* and the Sabbath (cf. Theo Sundermeier, *Nur gemeinsam können wir leben: Das Menschenbild schwarzafrikanischer Religionen*. Gütersloh: Mohn, 1990, 67; Jules-Rosette, Bennetta. *African Apostles: Ritual and Conversion in the Church of John Maranke*. Ithaca: Cornell University, 1975, 156). An example is the now retired Pr. E.C. Ishewekunze of East Zimbabwe Conference who specialized in reaching out to traditional leaders in the different communities he worked in.

⁵¹ M. L. Andreason, *The Sabbath: Which Day and Why?* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 2002), 90.

⁵² Robert H. Gundry, *Commentary on the New Testament: Verse-by-Verse Explanations with a Literal Translation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2010), 239.

same, became a missiological bridge by which he connected with those he sought to reach with his message.⁵³

Consistent with this strategy, when he sent out his disciples on outreach mission, he specifically charged them to go neither to Samaritan towns nor to Gentiles, but “rather to the lost sheep of Israel” (Matt 10:5, 6). Even when Jesus gave the gospel commission, he told his disciples they were to begin in Jerusalem and move outward to the rest of the world (Acts 1:8, cf. Matt 24:19, 20). For this reason, he also told his disciples to wait for the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem, where a mere ten days later, the church was launched to a predominantly Jewish audience at Pentecost (Acts 2). The early Church followed this model in its evangelistic outreach. Reaching out to Jews and then to the gentiles, in that order (Rom 1:16; 2:9; 2:10).

Perhaps there is no better exemplification of this in the early Church, than the ministry of Paul, who followed this model, as he always sought to establish the church through contact with synagogue congregations in the cities he ministered (Acts 13:14,⁵⁴ 14:1, 17:1ff,⁵⁵ Acts 18, Acts 19:8). The Sabbath provided the perfect opportunity for such ministry, as such it was of strategic importance in Paul’s missiology.⁵⁶ This model seeks the path

53 “It seems that Jesus often made use of the opportunity afforded by the assembling at the synagogues of Judea and Galilee, to teach them (see Matt. 4:23; 12:9; 13:54; Mark 1:21; 6:2; John 18:20; e.t.c) even as Paul later did in foreign lands (Acts 13:14, 15, 42). Francis D. Nichol (editor), *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary in Seven Volumes*, vol. 5 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1980), 727.

54 “As often, Luke points to a continuance of Jewish piety on the part of Christians. They represent an old religion come to flower, not a suspiciously new religion only coming to bud,” Gundry, 515.

55 William MacDonald, *Believer’s Bible Commentary*, edited by Art Farstad (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1995), 1637.

56 According to Stott, “Paul on his missionary journeys seized the opportunity to preach the gospel as opportunity arose in the synagogues on the Sabbath day and this was his custom (Acts 13:5, 14, 44; 14:1; 16:13; 17:2, 17; 18:4; 19:8).” W. Stott, “Sabbath” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Edited by Collin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1971), 410. Darrell L. Bock, Acts in *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2007), 469; cf. Barret C. K. A *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, vol. 1: Preliminary Introduction and Commentary on Acts 1–XIV (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 667; David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles in The Pillar New Testament Commentary*, General editor, D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 403; “Like his Lord (see Luke 4:16), Paul was habitually present at the Synagogue services on the Sabbath day...The Apostle Paul obviously had a double purpose for this – he wished to make effective spiritual contact with the Jews, and to keep holy the Sabbath day “according to

of least resistance by capitalising on the commonalities first. It was not until the Jews had categorically rejected Paul and his teachings that he eventually was directed to turn to the Gentiles (Acts 13:46 – 48, cf. 22:21).

Even when Paul turned to the gentiles, he always sought ways to establish common ground between himself and those he sought to reach. By narrowing this gap, he hoped to gain a much more favourable audience. Paul employed this strategy at Athens when he quoted one of the Greek poets to his listeners (Acts 17:28).⁵⁷ This is probably summed up by his statement “I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible” (I Cor 9:19 – 23, NIV).⁵⁸ Similarly then, the commonality of the Sabbath between Adventists and other faith communities in Southern Africa could be valuable point of missiological contact to the later by the former.

5. Historical Example

In the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Sabbath has always had a very special place in the church’s missionary outreach, especially with regards to relations with other faith communities. One group that has had a special relationship with the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the Seventh Day Baptist Church (SDB). To begin with, one will easily see how the names are almost identical. Since the latter of the two is by far older, it is not impossible to imagine how the one who suggested this name and those who seconded it in 1860 may have been influenced by their admiration of this special group of Baptists’ which though few in number, maintain a principled stand on the Sabbath question. Needless to say, though the Seventh-day Adventists have become the leading proponents of this sacred institution, James White never forgot that they had learnt this from the SDBs, through Rachel Oaks (1809 – 1868).⁵⁹

the commandment” (Luke 23:56), Francis D. Nichol (editor), *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary in Seven Volumes*, vol. 6. (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1980), 285.

57 Francis D. Nichol, *Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, 353.

58 Ibid. “God’s ministers must be ready at all times to adapt themselves and their ministry to the nature of those for whom they labour...Paul did not unnecessarily violate the law of the Jews...nor did he refuse to conform to that law when he could do so without compromising principle...he was anxious to do everything possible to create a favourable impression and so be in a better position to convince those ‘under the law’ of the truth of the gospel (see Acts 15:24-29), and thus ‘gain’ them,” 733, 734.

59 “Preston, Rachel (Harris) Oakes” in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, Commentary Reference Series*, vol. 10. Edited by Don Neufeld (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976), 1149 – 150.

Owing to this confluence of convictions with regards to the Sabbath, relations between the two churches was cordial for many years. The cordiality is seen in that the two churches would, for many years, send each their clergy to attend and fully participate in deliberations in official meetings each of the other church.⁶⁰ The Adventist Church has perhaps never enjoyed such cordial relations with any other Christian organization, let alone any other religious body. In this case, the initiative was taken by the SDBs. Ellen White who highly esteemed SDBs called for harmonization and closer cooperation between the Adventist Church and the SDBs.⁶¹

The relationship between the two churches eventually succumbed to a number of onslaughts from Adventist preachers who took full advantage of the Sabbath bridge to reach out to SDBs members in winsome ways. The result was that it often divided or even ruined whole SDB congregations, especially where fault lines were already present.⁶² Sensing the impropriety of such an approach to our mission, James White was prompted to counsel SDA Church members to be more courteous, especially when relating with SDBs. Another challenge however related to irreconcilable differences on other doctrinal points.⁶³

Apparently, the link between SDBs and their counterparts in Sabbath proclamation, the SDB, is also attested in Africa. The Church main missionary centre and hub of operations in Malawi is the famous Malamulo mission, previously Plainfield Mission of the SDB.⁶⁴ Well known for its hospital, publishing house and other schools. This mission station was sold to the Adventist Church by the SDB Church in 1902. Perhaps even more remarkable is the fact that Joseph Booth, who had established that mission station, also converted to the Adventist Church and was assigned as one of the first two Adventist Missionaries to Malawi. The other one being Thomas H. Branch and his family.⁶⁵ It is possible that the SDB Church preferred to sell to the SDA Church, perhaps ahead of other po-

⁶⁰ Jerry Moon, "Seventh Day Baptists," in *The Ellen G. White Encyclopaedia*, 2nd edition, edited by Dennis Fortin and Jerry Moon (Hagerstown, MD: 2013), 1153.

⁶¹ Jerry Moon, "Seventh Day Baptists," 1153, (cf. SSW, Oct. 1, 1886).

⁶² Such would probably have been the approach of Jesus' disciples if he had not counselled them to leave alone those they had seen, preaching a message similar to theirs (Mark 9:38–41; Luke 9:49, 50).

⁶³ Jerry Moon, "Seventh Day Baptists," 1153.

⁶⁴ Don F. Neufeld, (Editor), *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, Revised Edition. Reference Series, Vol. 10 (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1976), 839.

⁶⁵ *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, vol. 10, 839.

tential buyers. Charles Bradford's words would suggest so.⁶⁶ In such a scenario, it is not difficult to see how the Sabbath consideration would have played a role in such a decision, that alone being instructive of the potential inherent in commonality of belief and practice with regards to the Sabbath.

The Adventist Church in the Southern African region owes its very existence to Sabbath as a missiological bridge. It was the Sabbath that brought the Adventist Church to Southern Africa, through the Republic of South Africa (RSA). A Dutch farmer, Pieter Wessels, who by 1885 had been convicted about the Sabbath after reading the Bible, came into contact with a few other Sabbath observers at the diamond diggings in his town, Kimberly. One of these was J.G. Van Druten. Together they met John Hunt, a recent convert to Adventism who had then just arrived from California.⁶⁷

Having learnt of the existence of a whole church that kept the Sabbath in America, they wrote to the church and in the letter enclosed enough money to send two missionaries to come. Wessels had previously thought he was the only Sabbath-keeper in the whole world. The Wessels family went on to immensely support the work of the Adventist Church in Africa, America and Australia, through their unique connection with Ellen White.⁶⁸ All this boils down to the first common denominator. The Sabbath.⁶⁹ Likewise, in Ethiopia, many early converts to Adventism came from a religious group originally founded and led by Sheikh Zaccharias. He had converted to Christianity and had had visions and dreams in

⁶⁶ Charles E. Bradford, *Sabbath Roots: The African Connection* (Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1999). "Seventh-day Adventists and Seventh day Baptists are the only mission churches that insisted on the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath as a day of rest binding on all Christians in perpetuity. But the Seventh day Baptist mission to Africa did not continue for very long. They turned over to the Seventh-day Adventists at least one of their mission stations, Malamulo, or Ten Commandments, mission station in Nyasaland (Malawi). So the Seventh-day Adventists are the only Euro-American-based Sabbath-keeping Church in Africa" 191, 192.

⁶⁷ Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers to the Remnant*, 217, 218; Arthur W. Spalding, *Origin and History of Seventh-day Adventists*, vol. two (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1962), Gary Land, "South Africa," in *Historical Dictionary of the Seventh-day Adventists*, second edition (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 311; "South Africa," in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, 1209.

⁶⁸ See. Watson Mbiriri, "Ellen White's Position on the 1894 Solusi Land Grant: A Biblical/Historical Evaluation" (Unpublished paper presented at the AIIAS Theological Forum, 2015), 18, 19.

⁶⁹ Loughborough, 424.

which he had learnt about the coming of white missionaries and the Sabbath among other things. When Adventist missionaries arrived, many of his followers who already knew these things, converted to Adventism.⁷⁰

From the Kasai province of Congo (formerly Zaire) comes another illustrative example of how the Sabbath has been a missiological bridge in the Church's history. In 1972 and 1973, being perturbed by the uncontrolled proliferation of unregistered (Independent) churches, the national government ordered all unregistered churches to either close and disband, or align themselves to existing registered churches. Registration stipulations were stringent and unattainable for many AICs.⁷¹

At that time, many Sabbath-keeping Christians from AICs (Masowe, Marange and Kimbanguists) applied to join the Adventist Church in unprecedented numbers. "Seventh-day Adventist Church journals report that between 1972 and 1975, 75,000 to 300 000 members of Independent and other churches requested affiliation with the Adventist Church in the Kasai. By 1985, some 44,000 had actually joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Kasai."⁷² In Bradford's words, "multiplied thousands of Zireans reached out to their Sabbath-keeping brethren for fellowship and mutual support."⁷³ The Adventist Church did their best while responding to this unforeseen situation. One can only imagine the benefit that could accompany intentional effort by the Church in reaching out to Sabbath-keeping AICs.

6. Proffered Model

The Adventist Church, has, perhaps most likely, more than any other of the Sabbath-keeping faith communities in Southern Africa, explored the Sabbath in its multifaceted-dimensions. As such, the Church could take

⁷⁰ "Ethiopia," in *Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia*, vol. 10, 384.

⁷¹ F. Duane MacKey, *History And Analysis Of The Relationship Between The Seventh-Day Adventist Church And Several Independent Churches In The Kasai Province Of Zaire, 1972 To 1985* (Andrews University, 1989), 68, 69.

⁷² Bradford, basing on SDA Statistical report, 1996.

⁷³ Bradford, 193 – 197; their identity with the Adventist Church could possibly, in addition to the commonality of Sabbath observance, have been encouraged by a perception of the Adventist Church in Africa as an African Church indeed. In this regard, Stefan Hörschle, argues that "The Comparison of African Instituted Churches and African Adventists reveals striking similarities....indicates that it is as much African as churches that trace their origin to African prophets," *Sabbath Keeping Among African Churches*, 41.

initiatives to lead out in 'Sabbath Conferences' that seek to explore these dimensions in ways that enrich members of other faith communities.

One of these dimensions relates to Sabbath and family. The family and the Sabbath, are the only two institutions that came from the Garden of Eden (Gen 1:27, 28; 1:31 – 2:1 – 3). The unit between these two institutions is also seen in the Ten Commandments when God gives the Sabbath commandment in the context of the family (Ex 20:8 – 11; Deut. 5:12 – 15). The potential social benefits of the Sabbath could be of great interest to many in Southern Africa, a region greatly affected by disintegration of family and other social ties. This could be helpful especially if implemented from the Family Ministries dimension.

Similarly important can be the impact of Sabbath on health for individuals, families and communities. The Adventist Church is distinguished as the only world-wide community constituting a blue-zone.⁷⁴ All others are local, such as the Sardinians of Italy, the Hunza of Parkistan, the Okinawas of Japan and others. Alongside diet, exercise and other lifestyle factors, the Sabbath has been repeatedly singled out as important in fostering good health. Drawing on this, the Church has much to draw from and share with other members of the Sabbath-keeping community. This could make a special effect especially if implemented through the Health Ministries department of the Church. Millions of persons in this region could be encouraged to live healthier and happier lives, drawing from the Sabbath, which they already hold in high regard.

Most of the Sabbath-keeping faith communities in this region, as in other parts of Africa, are not strong in the study of the history of the Christian Church. The Adventist Church could capitalize on its strong resources in this area to hold meetings that teach history of the Sabbath in Scripture and history. The history of the Sabbath cannot be given outside of the general context of church history. As such, people get to have an understanding of the story of Christianity in the context of the great controversy. A knowledge of the history of Christianity opens up people to understand the great prophecies of Daniel and Revelation, especially the eschatological role of the Sabbath. This then brings one to the heart of the three angels' message (Rev 14:6 – 14),⁷⁵ a message which defines the very mission of the Adventist Church.

⁷⁴ Dan Beuttner, "An American Blue Zone" in *The Blue Zones: Lessons for Living Longer From the People Who've Lived the Longest* (Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Society, 2008), 117 – 162.

⁷⁵ "At the same time, such practices also reinforce a sense of separation between worshippers and non-worshippers. Sabbath theology may therefore also be understood as both contributing to constituting a community and as dynamics of

The examples above are by no means intended to be exhaustive, but just illustrative. Many similar connections could be made between the Sabbath and other Adventist doctrines. All this could be shared through, 'Sabbath Conferences,' literature, multimedia resources and other channels such as radio, internet and television. Without this intentionality and focus, it may be easy to present the Sabbath in a way that either only remains confined to theological abstractions or worse still, emphasise areas of disagreement more than areas of agreement.

An important component in all this is a paradigm shift in the way the Church is carrying out its mission in this region of the world. Characteristically, the approach is the standard one of apologetics and polemics. This approach seems perfect in the context of the western world where, due to the historical role of the Roman Catholic Church in that civilization where the majority of the people are culturally oriented toward Sunday observance. Contextualization of the message should help the Church to adopt more of a cooperative rather than a confrontational approach currently used in evangelistic campaigns, mainly aiming to convince attendees of the identity and perpetual validity of the Sabbath. Surely this approach is still needed, but the tragedy comes when it becomes the only approach, while there are numerous Sabbath-keeping faith communities, far larger than the Adventist Church in this region, completely overlooked.⁷⁶

The needed paradigm shift would need to be supported by policy provisions and changes in the way pastors are being trained. Currently, Adventist pastors trained in this region are likely to learn more about Girolamo Savonarola and never so much as hear about Isaiah Shembe or Johane Marange in their classes.⁷⁷ This kind of training remains not only

disassociation from the environment. This observation can be derived from both African Instituted Churches and African Adventists," 45.

76 It has been severally observed that African Instituted Churches have been found to defend the Sabbath as much as the African Adventists, according to Stefan Höschele, 45 (cf. Shorter, Aylward: "Recent Developments in African Christian Spirituality." Edward Fasholé-Luke et al. (ed.): *Christianity in Independent Africa* (London: Rex Collings, 1978) 531–544; Sundkler, Bengt: *Bantu Prophets in South Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), 188–189.

77 Perhaps instructive in this regard is the way Ellen White gave considerable attention to Sabbath-keeping Ethiopians, alongside her discussion of the Waldenses, some of whom she mentions were Sabbath-keepers. For more in this, see Benjamin J. Baker, "Africa's Sabbath Heroes" (May 2011) <http://blacksdahistory.org/africa-s-sabbath-heroes.html>.

inadequate, but also irrelevant in many instances.⁷⁸ The result is that the church carries out its missionary endeavours without giving due regard to the need for contextualization of its message. As such then, one of the most important aspects of this approach would be sponsoring of researches that inform policy-making.⁷⁹ Such focused research is a missing dimension to the Adventist Church's missionary endeavours in Southern Africa.

7. Conclusion

The Adventist Church in Southern Africa is faced with a great opportunity for missionary outreach to members of numerous AICs and other Sabbath-keeping faith communities in that region. This missionary potential is yet to be unlocked, as there has yet been intentional efforts to study and reach out to these faith communities in mutually respectful and winsome ways. Such outreach would require using inter-departmental linkages that can work together to bring out the multi-faceted dimensions of the Sabbath in ways that perhaps many even in the Church have never seen or known. An approach like this would represent a paradigm shift that begins with awareness and the training of Adventist pastors to work with such intentionality. The groundwork could be done through public affairs and religious liberty department. The Church may not faithfully carry out its task, while ignoring such a large and significant constituency. In this regard, the Church's current approaches may be at variance with the missiological approaches of both Jesus and Paul.

⁷⁸ Allan Tippet, *Introduction to Missiology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1987), 106.

⁷⁹ In this regard, notes perceptively points out that "In contrast to African Instituted Churches, relatively little research has been devoted to African Adventism so far, which may be explained by the fact that it does not emphasize its Africanness very much," Stefan Höschele, 41.