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## URBAN MISSION—THE FORGOTTEN FRONTIER

G. T. NG, Ph.D.

Dean, Theological Seminary<sup>1</sup>

AIAS

### Urbanization

For centuries human society was largely rural. As late as 1900, about 85 percent of the world's population was rural,<sup>2</sup> but the trend has been reversing. Millions are drawn by the magnetism of urban life and are caught up in the process of rapid urbanization.

For centuries the progress of civilization has been defined by the inexorable growth of cities. Experts maintain that the year 2000 ushers in a new phenomenon—more people now live in urban areas than in the countryside. Driven by explosive economic and population growth, as well as irrevocable migration from the countryside, today's cities dwarf urban centers of the past. In fact, they are growing to sizes unprecedented in human history. The urbanization of the world's population appears to be an irreversible trend.

The new century will have twenty-two "megacities" with populations of ten million or more.<sup>3</sup> In 1990 there were only thirteen cities in the world with a

<sup>1</sup>When this paper was prepared. At present he is the Secretary of the Southern Asia-Pacific Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, located in Silang, Cavite, Philippines.

<sup>2</sup>This was specially true before the industrial revolution. Benjamin Tonna, *A Gospel for the Cities: A Socio-theology of Urban Ministry* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1985), 5.

<sup>3</sup>John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, *Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990's* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), 307.

population of more than ten million, and seven of them were in Asia.<sup>4</sup> Tokyo already has a population approaching thirty million. Shanghai and Bombay will each soon reach twenty million. Beijing, Dhaka, Jakarta, Manila, Tianjin, Calcutta, and Delhi will each likely have populations exceeding fifteen million.<sup>5</sup> It is estimated that by the year 2050 approximately 79 percent of the world's population will live in metropolitan regions.<sup>6</sup>

The emergence of megacities has brought about sociological problems of mega proportion. Overpopulation has created slums with poor sanitation, and epidemics and starvation follow. Joblessness and homelessness go hand in hand. Urban centers are known for their vices, ranging from prostitution to drug trafficking.

Yet cities remain cradles of civilization's ingenuity and aspiration. Cities are the souls of human societies. They determine the destiny of nations. Urban anthropologist David Claerbaut believes that to understand the city is to understand the future.<sup>7</sup> A city is the crystal ball, as it were, through which the future may be viewed and understood.

Despite the significance of cities in understanding civilizations, Adventists traditionally are leery of cities. Their apprehension stems from the often-held perception that Ellen G. White regarded cities in a negative light.<sup>8</sup> After all, she indicated that cities are Satan's abode where he is busy at work.<sup>9</sup> Cities are the "hotbeds of iniquity,"<sup>10</sup> a "peril to health," and therefore not fit for habitation.<sup>11</sup> The awareness has been that somehow mission and cities do not mix. Could this perception be the reason why cities appear to have lost their allure for Adventist mission?

Urban missiologist Roger Greenway bemoans that "by their locations, their architecture, their liturgy, their sermons, and their entire program, urban Protestant churches have conveyed the message to the masses that these churches are not for them."<sup>12</sup> Could the same thinking affect the Adventist Church? Theologically, has

<sup>4</sup>"Asia's Choking Cities," *Newsweek*, 9 May 1994, 17. See also "Megacities," *Time*, 11 January 1993, 32-42.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup>Roger S. Greenway and Timothy M. Monsma, *Cities: Missions' New Frontier* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 44.

<sup>7</sup>David Claerbaut, *Urban Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 16.

<sup>8</sup>Ellen G. White was a cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; her writings are held in high esteem, as she is believed to have had prophetic revelations which provide guidance for the church in many vital areas.

<sup>9</sup>Ellen G. White, *Evangelism as Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1946), 26.

<sup>10</sup>Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home: Counsels to Seventh-day Adventist Families As Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1952), 136.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, 135-36

<sup>12</sup>Roger S. Greenway, *Calling Our Cities to Christ* (Nutley, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1973), 27.

the church abandoned the cities? If it has, could this theological abandonment contribute to the neglect of urban mission?

### Satan's Abode

While Ellen White advocated urban mission, she was under no illusion of the dangers involved. She pulled no punches in her depiction of cities. In 1903 she peered behind the scene and described the nature of cities: "Satan is busily at work in our crowded cities. His work is to be seen in the confusion, the strife and discord between labor and capital, and the hypocrisy that has come into the churches."<sup>13</sup>

In 1909 she wrote again of the conditions existing in cities:

The cities of today are fast becoming like Sodom and Gomorrah. . . . The whirl of excitement and pleasure attracts thousands from the sober duties of life. The exciting sports—theatergoing, horse racing, gambling, liquor drinking and reveling—stimulate every passion to activity.<sup>14</sup>

Ellen White recognized Satan's ultimate scheme. To control the cities was to control the minds of city dwellers. "The record of crime and iniquity in the large cities of the land is appalling. . . . The enemy of souls is working in a masterful manner to gain full control the human mind"<sup>15</sup> by tempting them to the cities. The means of this control is evil in many forms and ways. It includes indulgence in appetite<sup>16</sup> and the pursuit of pleasure and amusement centers.<sup>17</sup> Other hazards of city life that assail the youth and others with almost irresistible power are the thirst for display, extravagance,<sup>18</sup> and sensuality.<sup>19</sup> Violence such as robberies, murders, and suicides are part and parcel of city living.<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the physical aspects of cities are often a peril to health. One is liable to diseases due to foul air, impure water, impure food, and unhealthy dwellings.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>13</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 26.

<sup>14</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:89.

<sup>15</sup>Ellen G. White, "Warning the Cities," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 7 April 1910, 3.

<sup>16</sup>Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance: Counsels to Seventh-day Adventist Parents As Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1954), 395.

<sup>17</sup>Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1941), 54.

<sup>18</sup>White, *Adventist Home*, 135.

<sup>19</sup>Ellen G. White, *Country Living: An Aid to Moral and Social Security* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1946), 6.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>21</sup>White, *Adventist Home*, 135.

Inasmuch as city living is detrimental to one's physical and spiritual health, Ellen White's counsel is unequivocal—get out of the cities. Children and young people especially should be kept out of the temptation and contamination of cities. Leaving the cities will become a necessity. It is not God's will that people should settle in cities. In fact, White's counsel is "get out of the cities as fast as possible."<sup>22</sup>

One reason for the urgency to leave the cities is their impending doom. As ungodly cities become like cities before the Flood,<sup>23</sup> they will be destroyed by earthquakes, fire, and flood.<sup>24</sup> The scene of impending devastation is indescribable.<sup>25</sup>

In a little while, these cities will be terribly shaken. No matter how large or how strong their buildings, no matter how many safeguards against fire may have been provided, let God touch these buildings, and in a few minutes or a few hours they are in ruins.<sup>26</sup>

### God's People in Cities

Yet the winds of strife are being held back for a little while for the sake of the honest in heart. Even though cities are hotbeds of vice and centers of iniquity, God loves the cities. "There are in our cities thousands who have the fear of God before them, who have not bowed the knee to Baal."<sup>27</sup> Ellen White assured the church that gospel workers in cities should not be discouraged because of the wickedness and depravity. The message given to Paul in Corinth is the same message for gospel workers in cities today: "Do not be afraid, but speak, and do not keep silent; for I am with you, and no one will attack you to hurt you; for I have many people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10 NKJV). Likewise in today's cities, "Thousands are hungering and thirsting for the Word of Truth . . . There have been presented to me many in the cities who are praying for light, and a knowledge

<sup>22</sup>Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diet and Foods* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1946), 400.

<sup>23</sup>Ellen G. White, *Conflict and Courage* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1970), 48. See also *idem*, *Evangelism*, 25.

<sup>24</sup>White, *Country Living*, 7.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>26</sup>Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Health and Instruction to Medical Missionary Workers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1951), 268.

<sup>27</sup>"Many Have Not Bowed to Baal [1 Kgs 19:18]," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 2:1035.

of gospel truth.”<sup>28</sup> The assurance is that “in every city will be found those who will appreciate the truths of the third angel’s message.”<sup>29</sup>

Cities are paradoxical in that gospel workers find in them both the greatest impenitence and the greatest need.<sup>30</sup> In the midst of wickedness, however, many long for light and for purity of heart. “Even among the careless and indifferent there are not a few whose attention may be arrested by a revelation of God’s love for the human soul.”<sup>31</sup> Many of these are praying with tears for greater light.<sup>32</sup> Even as cities are visited with God’s judgment, the full force of God’s wrath does not apply because some will repent and be converted.<sup>33</sup>

In every city, filled though it may be with violence and crime, there are many who with proper teaching may learn to become followers of Jesus. Thousands may thus be reached with saving truth and be led to receive Christ as a personal Savior.<sup>34</sup>

Ellen White considers these precious souls as “lost pearls.” To find them, she wishes that “there might be one hundred workers where there is but one seeking diligently, prayerfully, and with intense interest to find the pearls that are buried in the rubbish of these cities.”<sup>35</sup>

Ellen White presents a balanced approach in urban mission. She counsels that we labor for the rich as well as for the poor.<sup>36</sup> God’s people are made up mostly of the poor, and in cities are found “many who are humble and yet trustful.”<sup>37</sup> Interest should also be created among the rich.

There are many wealthy men who are susceptible to the influences and impressions of the gospel message, and who, when the Bible and the Bible alone is presented to them as the expositor of Christian faith and practice, will be moved by the Spirit of God to open doors for the advancement of the gospel. They will reveal a living

<sup>28</sup>Ellen G. White, “Making Wills,” *Gospel Herald*, 1 December 1901, 99.

<sup>29</sup>White, *Counsels on Health*, 556.

<sup>30</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 25.

<sup>31</sup>White, “Warning the Cities,” 3.

<sup>32</sup>White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 234.

<sup>33</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 27.

<sup>34</sup>Ellen G. White, *The Story of Prophets and Kings As Illustrated in the Captivity and the Restoration of Israel*, Conflict of the Ages Series, vol. 2 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 277. See also idem, *Evangelism*, 33: “There are others who, if they were given an opportunity, might hear and accept the message of salvation.”

<sup>35</sup>Ellen G. White, “Redeem the Time, Because the Days Are Evil,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 21 April 1896, 241.

<sup>36</sup>Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers: Instruction for All Who Are “Laborers together with God”* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1915), 348.

<sup>37</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 565, 74.

faith in the word of God, and will use their entrusted means to prepare the way of the Lord, to make straight in the desert a highway for our God.<sup>38</sup>

### Reasons of Neglect

Ellen White cited several reasons why God's people did not pay enough attention to urban mission. Many of these reasons are related to leaders who had been shown how to play a pivotal role in urban mission.

First, their faith was too small. As early as 1874, Ellen White received explicit instruction on urban mission. She dreamed of her husband, together with a group of Adventist leaders, discussing future plans. Some considered avoiding large cities and concentrating on smaller places instead. James White urged the group to go forward in faith and lay broader plans. Then an angel appeared and counseled the group that "cities and villages constitute a part of the Lord's vineyard. They must hear the messages of warning."<sup>39</sup> The angel said that large cities in the United States should be warned; so should the cities around the world. He urged the leaders to go forward with courage, implying that their faith was too small.<sup>40</sup>

Ellen White's counsel to city workers is that they should carefully read Heb 10-11 and "appropriate to themselves the instruction that this scripture contains."<sup>41</sup> Referring to the great cities in England, she affirms that "if the people of God would only exercise faith, He would work in a wonderful manner to accomplish this work."<sup>42</sup>

Second, there was too much preaching.

I have been shown that in our labor for the enlightenment of the people in the large cities the work has not been as well organized or the methods of labor as efficient as in other churches that have not the great light we regard as so essential. Why is this? Because so many of our laborers have been those who love to preach (and many who were not thoroughly qualified to preach were set at work), and a large share of the labor has been put forth in preaching.<sup>43</sup>

Obviously, urban mission is more than the sum total of preaching. Much more is involved. For example, Ellen White mentioned that in large cities, people of

<sup>38</sup>White, *Gospel Workers*, 348. See also *idem*, *Evangelism*, 567.

<sup>39</sup>Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915), 208.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup>Ellen G. White, *Testimonies*, 7:41.

<sup>42</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 414.

<sup>43</sup>Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry: A Treatise on Medical Missionary Work in the Gospel*, 2d ed. (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1963), 301.

certain classes cannot be reached by public meetings alone, but by personal efforts.<sup>44</sup>

Third, there were insufficient workers. As mentioned earlier, Ellen White expressed her desire that there might be one hundred workers where now there is only one working in the cities. Many prayers are needed in this regard. The promise is that “in our large cities the message is to go forth as a lamp that burneth. God will raise up laborers for this work, and His angels will go before them.”<sup>45</sup>

Fourth, workers were not sufficiently trained.

More attention should be given to training and educating missionaries with a special reference to work in the cities. Each company of workers should be under the direction of a competent leader, and it should ever be kept before them that they are to be missionaries in the highest sense of the term. Such systematic labor, wisely conducted, would produce blessed results.<sup>46</sup>

Ellen White attests that the challenge and complexity of city work are so great that it takes the cooperative efforts of “many agencies”<sup>47</sup> to bring about results. Ministerial workers cannot do it alone. “The ordained ministers alone are not equal to the task of warning the great cities. God is calling not only upon ministers, but also upon physicians, nurses, colporteurs, Bible workers, and other consecrated laymen of varied talent.”<sup>48</sup> In fact, she repeatedly underscored the relationship between pastors and medical personnel. “In our large cities the medical missionary work must go hand in hand with the gospel ministry. It will open doors for the entrance of truth.”<sup>49</sup>

Lay people are also featured prominently in urban mission. Christians living in large cities are “depositories of truth.”<sup>50</sup> They are to impart this truth to others. “While it is in the order of God that chosen workers of consecration and talent should be stationed in important centers of population to lead out in public efforts, it is also His purpose that the church members living in these cities shall use their God-given talents in working for souls.”<sup>51</sup> There will be lay people who will move into new towns and cities, and some of these are prepared to die for the gospel.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>44</sup>Ellen G. White, *Instruction for Effective Christian Service* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1947), 113.

<sup>45</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 70.

<sup>46</sup>White, *Medical Ministry*, 301.

<sup>47</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 86.

<sup>48</sup>Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles in the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ*, Conflict of the Ages Series, vol. 4 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 158.

<sup>49</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 387. See also *idem*, *Counsels on Health*, 545.

<sup>50</sup>Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry: Instruction in Christian Neighborhood Service* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1952), 95.

<sup>51</sup>White, *Acts of the Apostles*, 158.

<sup>52</sup>White, *Christian Service*, 180.

Fifth, there were insufficient funds. Obviously urban mission involves great expense. Our leaders knew it, and that was one reason for their hesitancy.<sup>53</sup> Writing to a conference leader, Ellen White took the position, however, that “there is enough wealth in your conference to carry forward this work successfully; and shall the prince of darkness be left in undisputed possession of our great cities because it costs something to sustain missions?”<sup>54</sup>

Ellen White assured the church that as the work in the cities progresses, sufficient funds will flow into the treasuries. “As we advance, the means will come.”<sup>55</sup> “As surely as honest souls will be converted, their means will be consecrated to the Lord’s service, and we shall see an increase of our resources.”<sup>56</sup> Moreover, wealthy individuals will be moved by the Spirit to give their means to support urban mission.<sup>57</sup>

Sixth, there was bureaucratic hindrance.

For years the work in the cities has been presented before me, and has been urged upon our people. Instruction has been given to open new fields. There has sometimes been a jealous fear lest someone who wished to enter new fields should receive means from the people that they supposed was wanted for another work. Some in responsible positions have felt that nothing should be done without their personal knowledge and approval. Therefore efficient workers have been sometimes delayed and hindered, and the carriage wheels of progress in entering new fields have been made to move heavily.<sup>58</sup>

Seventh, city work is challenging. Ellen White does not give the false impression that urban mission is smooth and easy. “Some have been fearful of undertaking work in the cities, because this would mean hard and continuous labor and the investment of considerable means.”<sup>59</sup> “It has been a difficult problem to know how to reach the people in the great centers of population. We are not allowed entrance to the churches. In the cities the large halls are expensive, and in most cases but few will come out to the best halls.”<sup>60</sup> The impediment is due in part to Satan taking control of the human mind.<sup>61</sup> Ellen White asserts that we can scarcely understand the extent to which Satanic agencies are at work in the large

<sup>53</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 41.

<sup>54</sup>White, *Testimonies*, 5:370.

<sup>55</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 63.

<sup>56</sup>*Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>58</sup>White, *Medical Ministry*, 302.

<sup>59</sup>White, “Warning the Cities,” 4.

<sup>60</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 38.

<sup>61</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.



cities.<sup>62</sup> “As we begin active work for the multitudes in the cities, the enemy will work mightily to bring in confusion, hoping thus to break up the working forces.”<sup>63</sup>

Challenges notwithstanding, God’s people are to move forward. Ellen White writes, “In visions of the night I was shown the difficulties that must be met in the work of warning the people in the cities, but in spite of difficulties and discouragement, efforts should be made to preach the truth to all classes.”<sup>64</sup> It is the duty of the church not to criticize, but to pray for workers in the cities and give them encouragement and support.<sup>65</sup> “The work which the church has failed to do in a time of peace and prosperity, she will have to do in a terrible crisis, under most discouraging, forbidding circumstances.”<sup>66</sup>

### Outpost Missions

Ellen White makes a distinction between living and working in cities. The counsel to get out of the cities as residential localities is explicit. How then to do urban mission when God’s people are not living in cities? The solution lies in outpost centers. Cities should be warned, not by God’s people living in them, but by their visiting them.<sup>67</sup> “As did Enoch, we must work in the cities but not dwell in them.”<sup>68</sup>

Repeatedly the Lord has instructed us that we are to work the cities from outpost centers. In these cities we are to have houses of worship as memorials for God; but institutions for the publication of our literature, for the healing of the sick, and for the training of workers, are to be established outside the cities.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, it appears that Ellen White’s counsel about God’s people establishing homes in the country does not negate nor excuse urban mission. Living in the country and evangelizing cities are not mutually exclusive. Mission and residence are not inseparable. Indeed, the responsibility of the church to warn cities will never stop until the last fugitives are saved.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>64</sup>White, *Medical Ministry*, 313.

<sup>65</sup>White, *Testimonies*, 9:119.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 5:463.

<sup>67</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 77.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 78-79.

<sup>69</sup>Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages from the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1958), 2:358. See also idem, *Evangelism*, 77.

### Foreign Mission versus Urban Mission

The Adventist church has prided itself as a missionary movement, and rightly so. J. N. Andrews captured the imagination of the church when he left for Europe in 1874. Thousands have followed his footsteps ever since. Each year the General Conference sends scores of missionaries to different parts of the world. Supporting ministries such as Adventist Frontier Missions also contribute their share. Thanks to its foreign mission, the church has become a global movement.

The danger has been, however, an emphasis on foreign mission to the exclusion of home mission.

The third angel's message is now to be proclaimed, not only in far-off lands, but in neglected places close by, where multitudes dwell unwarned and unsaved. Our cities everywhere are calling for earnest, whole-hearted labor from the servants of God.<sup>70</sup>

"We see the great need of missionary work to carry the truth not only to foreign countries, but to those who are near us. Close around us are cities and towns in which no efforts are made to save souls."<sup>71</sup> A case in point was Copenhagen, where Ellen White visited. She said, "Copenhagen is sending missionaries to convert the heathen in far-off lands, when there are multitudes of her people who are as truly ignorant of God and his word."<sup>72</sup> Along the same line of thought, she comments on the work in the United States:

Among Seventh-day Adventists there is a great zeal—and I am not saying there is any too much—to work in foreign countries; but it would be pleasing to God if a proportionate zeal were manifested to work the cities close by. His people need to move sensibly. They need to set about this work in the cities with serious earnestness.<sup>73</sup>

Ellen White's point is well taken. While missionary spirit should be lauded, some of this spirit should be channeled to urban mission on the home front, which seems less glamorous but is no less significant.

### Urgency of the Matter

Ellen White's messages to the church pertaining to urban mission are characterized by a sense of urgency. For one reason, the approaching calamities

<sup>70</sup>Ellen G. White, "Preach the Gospel," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 17 November 1910, 6-7.

<sup>71</sup>White, *Christian Service*, 180.

<sup>72</sup>Ellen G. White, *Historical Sketches of the Foreign Missions of the Seventh-day Adventists* (Basle: Imprimerie Polyglot, 1886), 185.

<sup>73</sup>White, *Christian Service*, 199.

serve as a warning. In 1909 she warned, “The message that I am bidden to bear to our people at this time is, Work the cities without delay, for time is short.”<sup>74</sup> The following year she wrote,

The inhabitants of the ungodly cities so soon to be visited by calamities have been cruelly neglected. The time is near when large cities will be swept away, and all should be warned of these coming judgments. But who is giving to the accomplishment of this work the wholehearted service that God requires?<sup>75</sup>

The sense of urgency is also reflected in this 1910 statement:

The increasing wickedness is such that multitudes are rapidly approaching a point in their personal experience beyond which it will be exceedingly difficult to reach them with a saving knowledge of the third angel’s message. The enemy of souls is working in a masterful manner to gain full control of the human mind; and what God’s servants do to warn and prepare men for the day of judgment, must be done quickly.<sup>76</sup>

While city dwellers are still savable, God’s people should move in quickly. “God is now calling upon His messengers in no uncertain terms, to warn the cities while mercy still lingers, and while multitudes are yet susceptible to the converting influence of Bible truth.”<sup>77</sup> In fact, we are already late. Ellen White wrote in 1903,

I am moved by the Spirit of God to say to those engaged in the Lord’s work, that the favorable time for our message to be carried to the cities has passed by, and this work has not been done. I feel a heavy burden that we shall now redeem the time.<sup>78</sup>

Ellen White was optimistic of success in urban mission. She assured the church that heavenly agencies stand ready to cooperate with the church in this important task. In an address to the General Conference Session in 1913, she disclosed that Christ was preparing the hearts of city dwellers for the gospel.

Christ is opening the hearts and minds of many in our large cities. These need the truths of God’s Word; and if we will come into a sacred nearness with Christ, and will seek to draw near to these people, impressions for good will be made. We need to wake up and enter into sympathy with Christ and with our fellow men. The large and small cities, and places nigh and afar off, are to be worked, and worked

<sup>74</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 33 (Letter 168, to the officers of the General Conference, 1 December 1909.)

<sup>75</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 29 (MS 53, 1910).

<sup>76</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 25.

<sup>77</sup>*Ibid.*, 25-26. See also *idem*, “Warning the Cities,” 3.

<sup>78</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 31 (MS 62, 1903).

intelligently. Never draw back. The Lord will make the right impressions upon hearts, if we will work in unison with His Spirit.<sup>79</sup>

### Indictment of the Church

In 1908 Ellen White expressed her regret that the church had not been expeditious in heeding her counsel.

Often we have been told that our cities are to hear the message, but how slow we are to heed the instruction. I saw One standing on a high platform with arms extended. He turned and pointed in every direction, saying, "A world perishing in ignorance of God's holy law, and Seventh-day Adventists are asleep." . . .

We are far behind in following the light God has given regarding the working of our large cities. The time is coming when laws will be framed that will close doors now open to the message. We need to arouse to earnest effort now, while the angels of God are waiting to give their wonderful aid to all who will labor to arouse the consciences of men and women regarding righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come.<sup>80</sup>

The burden of city work continued to weigh on Ellen White such that she appealed to the leaders assembled at the General Conference Session in June 1909, "The work to be done in the warning of our cities has been presented to me over and over again, yet very little has been accomplished in the warning of these cities."<sup>81</sup> Later the same year, she wrote, "When I think of the many cities yet unwarned, I cannot rest."<sup>82</sup>

In September of 1909, part of her sermon relating to the urgency of urban mission was included in *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 9, under the title "The Work in the Cities." She lamented the lack of attention among God's people in urban mission:

Behold the cities, and their need of the gospel! The need of earnest laborers among the multitudes of the cities has been kept before me for more than twenty years. Who are carrying a burden for the large cities? A few have felt the burden, but in comparison with the great need and the many opportunities but little attention has been given to this work.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup>White, *Selected Messages*, 2:404.

<sup>80</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 32 (MS 7, 1908).

<sup>81</sup>Ellen G. White, "A Call to Service," *General Conference Bulletin*, 18 May 1909, 57.

<sup>82</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 33.

<sup>83</sup>White, *Testimonies*, 9:97-98.

In 1910 Ellen White lamented that she was personally grieved by the church's inattention to urban mission: "The burden of the needs of our cities has rested so heavily upon me that it has sometimes seemed that I should die."<sup>84</sup>

The following year, on 12 January 1911, Ellen White described how she had been suffering from sleepless nights because of the scenes that were presented before her that God's people were not doing the work for cities despite her repeated appeals.<sup>85</sup> Six months later, on 21 June, she added that the work in the cities should be regarded as of special importance. Because God's people had long delayed entering the cities, they would have to redeem the time to catch up.<sup>86</sup>

To Ellen White, urban mission was a divine mandate for the church. She felt it was her responsibility to keep encouraging the church to do something about it. She said, "My duty is to say that God is earnestly calling for a great work to be done in the cities."<sup>87</sup> "The importance of making our way in the great cities is still kept before me. For many years the Lord has been urging upon us this duty, and yet we see but comparatively little accomplished in our great centers of population."<sup>88</sup> "The Spirit of the Lord is still urging men to undertake this work with new courage and zeal, and never cease the effort until a thorough work is done."<sup>89</sup>

At the time of Ellen White, probably only two or three percent of the world's population lived in cities. With more than fifty percent of the world's population living in cities at the turn of a new millennium, her call for urban mission appears more pressing than ever before.

### Arthur Daniells's Conversion

Ellen White's recurrent appeal to church leaders to evangelize the cities failed to arouse them to action. She continued to urge unprecedented effort to reach the cities. In December 1909, Ellen White sent three letters to Arthur G. Daniells, General Conference president, calling him to action. He took the message to heart, but found two obstacles: a lack of qualified personnel and a limitation of funds. In his letter to Ellen White's son William C. White on 3 January 1910, Daniells

<sup>84</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 34 (MS 13, 1910).

<sup>85</sup>Ellen G. White, "A Visit from Ellen G. White," *Pacific Union Recorder*, 12 January 1911, 5.

<sup>86</sup>Ellen G. White, "Extracts from Recent Special Testimonies," *Lake Union Herald*, 21 June 1911, 1.

<sup>87</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 37 (Letter 150, 1909).

<sup>88</sup>White, *Medical Ministry*, 304 (Letter 148, 1909).

<sup>89</sup>White, "Warning the Cities," 3.

said, "You must help us to get laborers, or we shall not be able to do but little more than we are now doing."<sup>90</sup>

In his reply, W. C. White reiterated his mother's disquiet about the lack of plans for city work:

Mother's burden for the cities continues. It is pressed upon her mind night after night that we are not doing what we ought. . . . This morning Mother said to me that while our brethren have done a little here and there, they have not instituted that thoroughly organized work which must be carried forward if we shall give our cities a proper warning.<sup>91</sup>

On his part, Daniells conducted a five-day evangelistic meeting in New York City. He was confident that his effort would have Ellen White's approval. When he attempted to see Ellen White, however, she refused to see him. She sent word "to the effect that when the president of the General Conference was ready to carry out the work that needed to be done, then she would talk with him."<sup>92</sup>

Daniells was in Australia in 1928 and related how Ellen White had sent him counsel:

She sent messages to me regarding the work in the cities in the Eastern States. I seemed unable to understand them fully. Consequently I did not do all that these messages indicated should be done.

Finally I received a message in which she said, "When the president of the General Conference is converted, he will know what to do with the messages God has sent him."

I did not then have as much light on the matter of conversion as I now have. I thought I had been converted fifty years before, and so I had; but I have since learned that we need to be reconverted now and then. . . . That message, telling me that I needed to be converted, cut me severely at the time, but I did not reject it. I began to pray for the conversion I needed to give me understanding I seemed to lack.<sup>93</sup>

On 15 June 1910, Ellen White wrote an eight-page letter of reproof and counsel in which she called for seven men to be chosen to work with the president for the people in the cities. "Had the president of the General Conference been thoroughly aroused, he might have seen the situation. But he has not understood the message that God has given."<sup>94</sup> Daniells took the message seriously and discussed the matter with the members of the General Conference Committee. It

<sup>90</sup>Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White*, vol. 6, *The Later Elmshaven Years: 1905-1915* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1982), 222-23.

<sup>91</sup>*Ibid.*, 222-23.

<sup>92</sup>*Ibid.*, 223.

<sup>93</sup>*Ibid.*, 224-25.

<sup>94</sup>*Ibid.*, 225.

was voted that city work must receive first priority, and a committee of seventeen was appointed for this work. Daniells was relieved of all his administrative responsibilities for a year to devote full time to city evangelism.<sup>95</sup>

Ellen White had earlier suggested that if the president failed to see the significance of urban mission and did not act upon it, perhaps he should step aside and let another person take over. Having seen Daniells' commitment and conversion, however, she counseled him through her son William that it was not best for him now to resign as the president of the General Conference, but that he should "redeem the lost time of the past nine years by going ahead now with the work in our cities."<sup>96</sup>

### Conclusion

Since the inception of the Adventist Church, missionary work has tended to focus more on rural than on urban areas, and the fact has been that we have been successful in rural mission. Understandably, "the people who live in the country are often more easily reached than are those who dwell in the thickly populated cities."<sup>97</sup> Obviously urban mission presents a greater challenge. How to address the imbalance is a major challenge in the third millennium.

Thankfully, the neglect or loss in urban mission is not fully irretrievable or irreparable. Much can be done, and success is already assured. Urban mission should form part of the Adventist mission strategy. A hit-and-miss affair will no longer suffice. A paradigm shift is needed to make it a part of the official agenda of the church. When we embark upon urban mission as we should, a mighty movement will ensue. "The work in the cities is the essential work for this time. When the cities are worked as God would have them, the result will be the setting in operation of a mighty movement such as we have not yet witnessed."<sup>98</sup>

In Christ's ministry on earth, His footprints could be found everywhere where human hearts were in need of consolation, including the "crowded alleys of the great city."<sup>99</sup> "But He said to them, 'I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent'" (Luke 4:43-44 NKJV). Christ wept over the city of Jerusalem. Today, the sin and pain of cities are still crying out. "In the great day of final reckoning what answer can be given for neglecting to enter these cities now?"<sup>100</sup>

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 227-28.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 229.

<sup>97</sup>White, *Evangelism*, 46.

<sup>98</sup>White, *Medical Ministry*, 304.

<sup>99</sup>White, *Christian Service*, 186.

<sup>100</sup>White, *Testimonies*, 8:32.

General William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, used to tell potential recruits, "If you can't cry over the city, we can't use you."<sup>101</sup> Can God use us? He used Arthur G. Daniells, and He can use the rest of us in the forgotten frontier of urban mission, if we are willing to be used.

<sup>101</sup>Quoted in Roger S. Greenway, "How to Succeed in the City," *Urban Mission* 5, no. 3 (1988): 3.