



# Asia Adventist Seminary Studies

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## PREFACE

Our apologies first for being very late in getting this issue to press. Extended absence of some of our personnel is the primary reason. We hope to do better in the future. We value your interest in our publication, and we aim to please. We trust that the quality of the contents of this issue will make up for the delay in getting it out to you.

We would like to introduce the authors of our main articles to you once again. These are all AIIAS faculty this year, mostly from the Theological Seminary, with one representative from the School of Graduate Studies.

Reuel U. Almocera, D.P.S., is currently the chair of the Applied Theology department and Associate Professor of Church Ministries. He also serves as director of the Doctor of Ministry program. He hails from Mindanao in the southern Philippines and has served at AIIAS since 1987.

Hyunsok Doh, Ph.D., has been Assistant Professor of New Testament and Biblical Languages since 1998, but has just accepted a call to serve as a church pastor in New Jersey. We are very sorry to be losing him so soon. He comes from Korea.

Kenneth Mulzac, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Languages. He is one of our newer faculty members, having come to AIIAS only within the last year. He is from Bequia, part of St. Vincent and the Grenadines in the West Indies.

John Wesley Taylor V, Ph.D., Ed.D., is Associate Dean and Professor of Education and Research in the School of Graduate Studies. He also serves as director of the Division of Online Learning, which is just getting underway at AIIAS. He is from the United States and has been serving at AIIAS since 1995.

Besides the major articles, we again are proud to present a variety of papers selected from the AIIAS Theological Forum 2000, held at AIIAS on 9-12 August 2000. Some of these are from AIIAS professors, while others are from specialists in their respective areas from around the world. The theme of the Forum 2000 was Adventist Mission in Non-Christian Contexts. No matter what your denominational affiliation, we believe you will find valuable principles for the practice of mission in the papers presented.

We continue to publish abstracts of the theses and dissertations accepted for degree programs at the AIIAS Theological Seminary. We hope these may serve notice of the academic work being done by our students here. Critical book reviews submitted by our faculty are also included. We continue to solicit books

for review from publishers who would like their books to be highlighted in those parts of the world reached by our journal, which means every part.

We continue to solicit also your regular subscription to the journal as a way of enabling us to continue producing it as more than just an academic exercise. If you are still receiving this on a complimentary basis, please consider subscribing. We only continue to send a number of complimentary subscriptions because we value your readership and hate to remove names from our mailing list. Every year, however, we have to remove more names from our mailing list because of failure to subscribe. Do not let this year be the last for you.

We continue also to offer exchange agreements with other journals that specialize in biblical studies, theology, church history, church ministries, and world mission. We have entered into many such agreements already and are willing to consider other offers as well.

We regret that we have to raise the subscription price. Last year we published a price hike in the journal, but in fact we continued the same rate as before. This year we have to implement the price increase due to the increased cost of publishing and mailing. The subscription price has been less than the actual cost per journal. If we can increase readership, we can help to keep per-copy costs down.

With this issue we regret that we are losing not only Dr. Hyunsok Doh, one of our consulting editors, but also our editorial assistant and circulation manager, Joy Ondap, who has faithfully served as the backbone of the paperwork and computer work for getting out this journal since its inception. Joy has been reassigned as the assistant to Dr. John Wesley Taylor V in the Division of Online Learning. She is also now a full-time student in the Master of Arts program in Education, majoring in Curriculum and Instruction. We will miss her, but we wish her God's blessing as she improves her opportunities for service.

We want to say special word of appreciation also to Dr. Kenneth Mulzac, who has volunteered to help when we were caught short-handed, in getting this issue ready, although he was not on the staff. He has lent his expertise to helping with peer review of articles as well as contributing material where we were short. Thanks, Ken, for going beyond the call of duty.

The Editor

## POPULAR FILIPINO SPIRIT-WORLD BELIEFS, WITH A PROPOSED THEOLOGICAL RESPONSE

REUEL U. ALMOCERA

Filipinos had a worldview and a religion of their own even before Spanish-Catholic Christianity came to the Philippines in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>1</sup> They believed in the existence of a supreme creator being, whom they called *Bathala*.<sup>2</sup> Aside from their own social structure, they also believed in an invisible society coexisting with their own. This society was believed to be inhabited by spirits which included dead ancestors, deities, and lesser gods. Pre-Hispanic Filipinos respected these spirits with rituals and feast days, because these supernatural beings were considered able to preside over the whole gamut of life, including birth, sickness, death, courtship, marriage, planting, harvesting, and death. Some of these spirits were considered friendly; others were viewed as tyrannical enemies.<sup>3</sup>

The encounter with Spanish-Catholic Christianity did little to change the worldview held by pre-Hispanic Filipinos.<sup>4</sup> It resulted in the formation of a folk religion, namely Filipino "Folk Catholicism."<sup>5</sup> This syncretistic form of Christianity continues until the present. Catholic scholar, Father Vitaliano R. Gorospe, admits that "even today, especially in the rural areas, we find merely the

<sup>1</sup>For a larger treatment of the fundamental Filipino worldview, see T. Valentino Sito, Jr., *A History of Christianity in the Philippines*, vol. 1, *The Initial Encounter* (Quezon City: New Day, 1985), 1-22.

<sup>2</sup>Teodoro Agoncillo and Milagros C. Guerrero, *History of the Filipino People* (Quezon City: Garcia, 1977), 50.

<sup>3</sup>Jose Vicente Braganza, *The Encounter* (Manila: Catholic Trade School, 1965), 51-52.

<sup>4</sup>F. Landa Jocano, ed., *The Philippines at the Spanish Contact* (Manila: MCS Enterprises, 1975), 2.

<sup>5</sup>F. Landa Jocano, "Filipino Folk Catholicism," *Philippine Educational Forum* 15 (November 1966): 41-60.

external trappings of Catholic belief and practice superimposed on the original pattern of pre-Christian superstitions and rituals."<sup>6</sup>

The age of Enlightenment added another dimension to the Filipino's encounter with Christianity. This happened almost exclusively with the introduction of Protestant Christianity, which came to the Philippines in the context of a scientifically influenced worldview of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rationalism. This type of Christianity, with its heavy dependence on scientific explanations,<sup>7</sup> usually conflicts with or ignores the Filipino traditional beliefs about the spirit world. As a matter of fact, this type of Christianity essentially denies the spirit world as Filipinos know it.<sup>8</sup>

The result of the confrontation between Filipino "anitism,"<sup>9</sup> Philippine Folk Catholicism, and rationalistic Protestantism is confusing and even alarming. Filipinos with more exposure to western education tend to supplant the traditional spirit-worldview with one that explains everything by natural and scientific means. In certain aspects of Filipino life and among some small segments of Filipino society, scientific explanations are rejected altogether in favor of the spirit-worldview explanations. But the majority of Filipinos seem to accept scientific explanations as a supplement to traditional animistic beliefs. Many observers find this stance disturbing because, as Jaime Bulatao puts it, "We have two theological systems, side by side the Christian and the pagan existing within one man."<sup>10</sup> It is also disturbing because "the notion of split-level Christianity is uncomfortably close to the theory of split-level Filipino personality or a nation of schizophrenic people."<sup>11</sup>

Hence, if the Christian gospel is to be successfully transplanted into the hearts of Filipinos, the foregoing dynamics should not be ignored. If Christianity seeks

<sup>6</sup>Vitaliano R. Gorospe, *Christian Renewal of Filipino Values* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University, 1966), 37.

<sup>7</sup>For a brief survey of Christian theologies under the heavy influence of rationalism, see Morton T. Kalsey, *The Christian and the Supernatural* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 17-21.

<sup>8</sup>Rodney L. Henry, *Filipino Spirit World: A Challenge to the Church* (Manila: OMF, 1986), 17-35.

<sup>9</sup>The term is Stephen Hislop's adaptation into English of the Hispano-Filipino word *anitismo*. Hislop argues that the word "anitism" is appropriate to describe the original religious system of primitive Filipinos. Stephen K. Hislop, "Anitism: A Survey of Religious Beliefs Native to the Philippines," *Asian Studies* 9 (August 1971): 144-56.

<sup>10</sup>Jaime Bulatao, *Split-Level Christianity* (Manila: Ateneo de Manila University, 1966),

7.

<sup>11</sup>Fe Susan Go, "Mothers, Maids, and the Creatures of the Night: The Persistence of Philippine Folk Religion," *Philippine Quarterly Journal of Culture and Society* 3 (1979): 186-203.

to provide Filipinos with a “contextualized”<sup>12</sup> Christian experience, a legitimate theological response to the persistent spirit-world component of Philippine “popular religiosity”<sup>13</sup> not only is a necessity but is mandatory.

### **The Popular Filipino Understanding of the Spirit World**

The contemporary Filipino understanding of the spirit world may be defined by a brief discussion of the influence of pre-Hispanic animism and Filipino Folk Catholicism.

#### **Pre-Hispanic Animism**

As mentioned earlier, the religious system practiced by pre-Hispanic Filipinos has been identified as “animism.” Animism was defined by Fernando Blumentritt as a “continued invocation and adoration of the *anitos*—the souls or spirits of the ancestors.”<sup>14</sup> But animism is more than adoration and fear of ancestral spirits. Some major components of this religious belief include the concept of a supreme but inaccessible God, the fear of other gods, and the fear and worship of spirits.

#### **A Supreme but Inaccessible God**

Pre-Hispanic animism involves a belief in a supreme God. The best proof of this is found in the records of Ferdinand Magellan’s discovery of the Philippine

<sup>12</sup>The term “contextualization” is a subject of much theological debate. However, in this study the term reflects the “context-indigenization” model introduced by Bruce Fleming in his book *Contextualization of Theology*. Contextualization in this sense is a theological concept or process which is characterized by a healthy application of God’s revelation to the modern situation. The “implementation of this approach utilizes God’s word, the Bible, as the source of all theologizing. The practice of historical-grammatical exegesis in conjunction with context-indigenization allows the Bible to speak for itself, guarding against the imposition of certain motifs which contradict the teachings of the whole Scripture.” It must be made clear that this “approach also uses insights gained from anthropology and related social sciences and missiology” to indigenize the gospel in the modern context. See Bruce C. E. Fleming, *Contextualization of Theology* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1980), 78.

<sup>13</sup>Filipino historians Teodoro Agoncillo and Milagros Guerrero observe that Western civilization failed to eradicate pagan beliefs from among the Filipinos. In fact, they note that paganism “penetrated Philippine Christianity” (Agoncillo and Guerrero, 53). The co-existence of Christian theology and animistic beliefs in the same Filipino Christian has been described by Bulatao as “split-level Christianity.” Jaime Bulatao, “When Roman Theology Meets an Animistic Culture: Mysticism in Present-Day Philippines,” *Kinaadman* 6 (First Semester 1984), 103.

<sup>14</sup>Fernando Blumentritt, *Diccionario Mitologico de Filipinos*, 2d ed. (1895), s.v. “*Anitismo*.” (Translation mine.)

Islands on 17 March 1521. The record shows that while Magellan's retinue celebrated Easter on the island of Limasawa on 31 March 1521, Magellan asked the natives about their religious beliefs. Antonio Pigafetta, a chronicler of Magellan's expedition, recorded the following account:

The Captain General [Magellan] also had them asked whether they were Moros or heathen, or what was their belief. They replied that they worshiped nothing, but that they raised their clasped hands and their face to the sky, and they called their God "Abba."<sup>15</sup>

This God called *Abba* by the Filipinos in Limasawa was called *Bathala* by the Tagalogs; those in the Western Visayas called the supreme God *Laon*.<sup>16</sup> However, "there is no clue given to the form or appearance by which this supreme being was represented. The people, it would seem, troubled themselves very little about his worship."<sup>17</sup> Sacrifices were offered not to *Bathala* but instead to the *anitos*. Miguel de Loarca writes that

when the natives were asked why the sacrifices were offered to the *anitos* and not to *Bathala*, they answered that the *Bathala* was a great Lord and no one could speak to Him. He lived in the sky, but the *anito* . . . came down here to talk with men, was to *Bathala* a minister and interceded for them.<sup>18</sup>

### Fear of Other Gods

Anitism also recognizes the existence of other gods. Writing in June of 1582, de Loarca mentioned nature gods such as *Kaptan*, who dwelt in the sky and was believed to be the lord of thunder that caused man's diseases and plagues of nature. Then there is *Sisiburandin*, who punished the souls presented to him unless the living offered a sacrifice on their behalf.<sup>19</sup> De Loarca also mentioned the goddess *Lalahon*, who ruled over the harvest. She was believed to be able to provide a

<sup>15</sup>Antonio Pigafetta, "First Voyage Around the World," in *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, ed. Emma Blair and James A. Robertson (Mandaluyong, Rizal: Cacho Hermaños, 1973 reprint), 33:127.

<sup>16</sup>Peter G. Gowing, *Islands Under the Cross: The Story of the Church in the Philippines* (Manila: National Council of Churches in the Philippines, 1967), 9.

<sup>17</sup>Robert Silliman, "Religious Beliefs and Life at the Beginning of the Spanish Regime in the Philippines," *Class Readings, College of Theology, Silliman University, Dumaguete City*, 1967, 92.

<sup>18</sup>Miguel de Loarca, "Relation of the Filipinas Islands," in *The Philippine Islands 1493-1898*, ed. Emma Blair and James A. Robertson (Mandaluyong, Rizal: Cacho Hermaños, 1973 reprint), 5:173.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*



good harvest to farmers, but could also send locusts to destroy crops when displeased.<sup>20</sup>

Generally, the gods were cruel and vindictive. They were appeased only by sacrificial gifts and offerings.<sup>21</sup> But there were gods who were able to deliver benefits if their favors were won. These gods protected the people on expeditions of plunder or when they went to war.<sup>22</sup> Pre-Hispanic Filipinos considered these divinities as not purely spirits. They were believed to be able to appear in human form.<sup>23</sup>

### **Fear of Spirits**

Anitism as a religion derives its name from its fundamental belief about the spirits, called *anitos* by the Tagalogs and *diwatas* by the inhabitants of the Southern Philippines. The spirits were classified as good and evil spirits. The good spirits provided good fortune, and the evil spirits brought maladies or death. Both were venerated and invoked: the former were served to win their goodwill and for the good that might be given; the latter were served out of a feeling of fear. Evil spirits were invoked to placate their anger so that they might do no harm.<sup>24</sup>

These spirits were thought to participate actively in all aspects of life. Further, the spirits were believed to dwell anywhere; they inhabited both animals and objects. Hence, Hislop concludes that to the anitists there is no such thing as an inanimate object.<sup>25</sup>

To summarize, the Filipino anitist believes in a supreme Being, God. But this God is remote and inaccessible. He is not worshiped, nor is He involved in the day-to-day affairs of human life. What are real and active in the daily affairs are the lesser gods and spirits. These are to be respected and feared. These spirits may be appeased or manipulated by appropriate rituals and ceremonies for favors and protection.

### **Filipino Folk Catholicism**

The pre-Hispanic era is far removed from our times. Hence, it does not make sense to conclude that the spirit-world beliefs of present-day Filipinos are the same with those of anitism. It is therefore necessary to discuss the Filipino spirit-world

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 5:135.

<sup>21</sup>Pablo Fernandez, *History of the Church in the Philippines: 1521-1898* (Manila: National Book Store, 1979), 3.

<sup>22</sup>De Loarca, 5:133.

<sup>23</sup>Fernandez, 3.

<sup>24</sup>Hislop, 149.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 148.

beliefs in the contemporary religious movements in the Philippines, which are predominantly influenced by Catholic faith.

Catholicism, as it exists today in the Philippines, has two major variant forms.

One is rural catholicism, in which Catholic beliefs are attenuated in terms of locally sanctioned practices. The other is urban Catholicism, in which indigenous beliefs are attenuated in terms of church-allowed-though-not-sanctioned rites.<sup>26</sup>

“Catholic concepts in the rural areas are often articulated with the people’s way of life, in urban areas with ritual performances.”<sup>27</sup> To understand these dynamics better, a brief historical background in the Christianization process of the Philippines is necessary.

The Spanish conquerors and Catholic missionaries found a scattered population in the Philippines in the mid-sixteenth century. This situation made the initial conquest relatively easy. Yet, it was not ideal for the governance and control of the newly conquered people. “In order to facilitate the process of conversion and to effect administrative control over the people, a policy of regrouping scattered settlements into compact villages, known as *cabeceras*, was adopted.”<sup>28</sup> In these resettlements the church became the center of socio-religious activities.

Initially, the people resisted this scheme. However, the missionaries initiated elaborate religious festivals to attract the people into the *cabeceras*.<sup>29</sup> This plan was partially effective. People began building houses in the *cabeceras*, which they occupied mostly during the numerous religious festivals. But since their farms were located far from the *cabeceras*, many of them vacated these houses after the festival seasons were over.

The missionaries recognized this problem. To solve it, they introduced the *cabecera-visita* system. The *cabecera* remained the center of religious activities. Religious functions were frequent and regular in the *cabeceras*. On the other hand, religious functions were occasionally performed in the *ermita* (chapel) built near the farm settlements of the people who were reluctant to move to the *cabecera*.

In later years, the *cabeceras* became the towns and the *visitas* became the *barangays* (villages). The *cabecera-visita* system became the pattern of modern community Filipino organization. It also became the ancestor of rural and urban Catholicism.

<sup>26</sup>Jocano, 43.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 44.

<sup>28</sup>F. Landa Jocano, *Folk Christianity* (Quezon City: Trinity Research Institute, 1981), 18.

<sup>29</sup>Gowing, 40.

The urban Catholics are of the *cabecera* strain. Since religious education and other ecclesiastical functions have been readily accessible to them, urban Catholics are more informed about Catholic beliefs. Urban Catholics "can argue intelligently about the doctrine, ritual, and administrative organization of the church."<sup>30</sup> They are well instructed through elaborate liturgical symbolism. But as Landa Jocano explains, although the form of expressing faith in urban areas differs from the 'touch of magic'<sup>31</sup> that characterizes rural Catholicism, the underlying principle that guided the ritual drama in both cases is the same.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, a careful analysis of either of the variant forms may give substantial understanding of the religious dynamics of folk Catholicism. We will analyze the rural Catholicism strain, as this is the Catholicism that is practiced by most Filipinos.<sup>33</sup>

Rural Catholicism has been heavily influenced by animism. Jocano admits that the official doctrine and practices of the Catholic Church have been modified heavily in rural areas to suit local cultural practices.<sup>34</sup> Peter Gowing adds that the "pre-Christian belief in magic and superstition is carried over into the popular Catholicism of the Philippines."<sup>35</sup> Worse yet, the traditional, pre-Christian belief system has been enlarged more than modified through its contact with Christianity. In fact, rural Filipinos "more often than not, still feel it more important to pay one's respect to the inhabitants of the spirit world, rather than to the spiritual Father of all."<sup>36</sup>

Many theories have been offered to explain these phenomena. One explains that the repressive authoritarian approach of the Spaniards in converting Filipinos into Christians resulted in folk Catholicism. Vicente Braganza seems to support this theory. He writes:

In the period of strongest repression under the beneficent rule of the *Pax Hispanica*, there was complete ritual and institutional adoption of the new religion. But in the dark, lower regions of the Filipino people, there still ruled the

<sup>30</sup>Jocano, "Filipino Folk Catholicism," 53.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>The majority of Filipinos reside in rural areas, not to mention those who have migrated to urban areas yet have maintained a rural community orientation. See *1997 Philippine Yearbook* (Manila: Republic of the Philippines, National Statistics Office, 1997), 302.

<sup>34</sup>F. Landa Jocano, "Conversion and the Patterning of Christian Experience in Malitbog, Central Panay, Philippines," in *Acculturation in the Philippines: Essays in Changing Society*, ed. Peter G. Gowing and William Henry Scott (Quezon City: New Day, 1971), 54.

<sup>35</sup>Gowing, 55.

<sup>36</sup>Hislop, 154.

"*aswang*" [evil spirits] and the pagan gods, the superstitious lore of the grandmother, the value system of the old familiar barangays.<sup>37</sup>

Another theory suggests that the adulterated quality of Christianity brought by the Spaniards in the mid-sixteenth century is itself the root cause of the folk Catholicism that still exists in the Philippines today. Douglas Elwood contends that the Christianity introduced by the Spaniards to the Philippines was itself a type of folk Christianity. He argues that the domination of Spain by the Moors for nearly eight hundred years (711-1492) had resulted in the incorporation of many North African animistic beliefs into Spanish Catholicism.<sup>38</sup> The fact that Magellan arrived in the Philippines only twenty-nine years after Spain freed itself completely from the Moors makes this theory quite plausible.

The most common explanation identifies the cause of folk Catholicism as poor instruction on the tenets of Christianity received by the Filipinos from early Christian missionaries.<sup>39</sup>

Identifying the real cause of folk Catholicism in the Philippines is not very important for this study. What concerns us most in this analysis are the beliefs and practices of rural Catholicism.

Except for minor differences, rural Catholicism is largely similar to animism. We may even call it a Christianized version of animism. Its belief system includes the concept of a faraway God, the worship of saints, and the fear of evil spirits.

### The Faraway God

No doubt, rural Catholics believe in a supreme Being, or God. But like the God of the animists, their God is far removed. One needs intermediaries to reach Him.

The ability to establish a relationship with God acquires added and favorable dimensions if prayers are first addressed to intermediaries rather than directly to the Almighty. This implies a belief that God is too removed from worldly affairs to take any specific interest in men, but saints are almost human. They are close to the world. To God only saints can speak better.<sup>40</sup>

Theoretically, the God of rural Catholics is recognized as omnipotent. But in real practice, especially in the daily affairs of life, God is of little importance. He is too remote to be involved. He is associated with the big cathedral in the

<sup>37</sup>Braganza, 203.

<sup>38</sup>Douglas Elwood, *Christ in Philippine Context* (Quezon City: New Day, 1971), 2.

<sup>39</sup>Gowing, 234-35.

<sup>40</sup>Jocano, "Filipino Folk Catholicism," 46.

*poblacion*, which the *barangay* people rarely enter.<sup>41</sup> What are real and active in the daily surroundings of rural people are the spirits of the field, of the stream, and so forth.

Closely related to the belief in a remote God is the rural people's view of themselves in relation to the world and the universe. Rural folks tend to believe that the world of man is an extension of the spiritual and saintly world.<sup>42</sup> "The individual human being is but a small part of a wider natural-social universe inhabited largely by spirits and saints."<sup>43</sup>

The most striking similarity to animism in rural Catholicism, however, is manifested in its beliefs and practices related to the existence of good and evil spirits. This is not surprising to those who know Filipinos well, because "belief in good and evil spirits is a value orientation in Filipino culture."<sup>44</sup> What is disturbing, however, is how rural Catholics adapt the church's teachings to their animistic mentality. Let us take the Roman Catholic teaching of the veneration of saints as a case in point.

### Veneration of the Saints

To rural Catholics, saints are just other personalities of the spirit world. "Saints in many rural areas are conceived by farmers not as church personalities who have been canonized because of their good works and virtuous living, but as supernatural beings with powers similar to those of the environmental spirits or *engkantu*."<sup>45</sup> Thus, the veneration of saints has become equivalent to the worship of *anitos* for rural Catholics. Saints have somehow served as a "substitute for the old pagan idolatry and polytheism."<sup>46</sup>

Animists consider those who control the daily affairs of men on earth to be gods and spirits. Rural Catholics consider saints as spiritual partners in the pursuit of life's goals. Saints are not adored, but are appealed to for health, good harvests, long life, or safe voyages. The images of saints in rural homes have replaced the statues of the *anitos* of the pre-Hispanic era, but their function in relation to human existence is practically the same.

Even the value given to religious festivals, rituals, and ceremonies has not changed. Although the sacrificial offering of animals characteristic of animism's

<sup>41</sup>John Carroll et al., *Philippine Institutions* (Manila: Solidaridad, 1970), 42.

<sup>42</sup>Jocano, "Conversion," 53.

<sup>43</sup>Jocano, "Filipino Folk Catholicism," 59.

<sup>44</sup>Douglas Elwood, "Varieties of Christianity in the Philippines," in *Society, Culture and the Filipino*, ed. Mary Hollnsteiner (Quezon City: Institute of Philippine Culture, Ateneo de Manila University, 1976), 385.

<sup>45</sup>Jocano, "Filipino Folk Catholicism," 46.

<sup>46</sup>Gowing, 55.

festivals is not prominently featured, the motive and methods of performing the ceremonies are relatively similar. Perhaps a few examples will make this clear.

Donn Hart relates an incident in which a replica of a patron saint was washed in the sea to insure abundant rain.<sup>47</sup> Jocano also mentions the *caracol* festival in Bacoor, Cavite; the fluvial parade of San Vicente in Agono, Rizal; and the river voyage of the image of San Pedro in Apalit, Pampanga, as festivals designed to manipulate the saints to give fishermen an abundant catch.<sup>48</sup>

From the examples given above, it is clear that the saints have been considered by rural Catholics as good spirits. But there is another group of spirits that are not saints. These are the dead ancestors. In fact, as it was in animism, there is a form of ancestor worship among rural Catholics. Regarding this, Jocano comments:

Spirits are not remote and alien beings, but rather they are grandparents and great-grandparents of the people; local rituals therefore are not demonic performances of a superstitious people but forms of respect, of paying homage to older kinsmen, of interacting with relatives.

Most of the spirits invoked by the people during ceremonies—be it a ceremony connected with planting, harvesting or building a house—are spirits of their departed ancestors.<sup>49</sup>

The practice of ancestor worship is very evident in Cebuano-speaking areas, especially in Northern Mindanao. Nid Anima mentions a special festival called the *Kalag-kalag* (literally, Soul-soul or Ghost-ghost). On All Souls Day (November 1) and All Saints Day (November 2) many Catholics of Northeastern Mindanao hold the *Kalag-kalag* festival.<sup>50</sup> People go to the graves of their relatives and offer food and drink, while the whole atmosphere in the community is filled with merrymaking. This festival is in honor of the dead ancestors, who are believed to have come back to the world of human beings during this season.

### Fear of Evil Spirits

The point on which pre-Hispanic Filipinos and rural Catholics agree completely, however, involves the belief and practices regarding evil spirits. There seems to be no modification of this belief. What was written four centuries ago is practically the same today, except in the names given to evil spirits.

Like the animists, rural Catholics are fearful of evil spirits and their human agents. Rural Catholics believe that evil spirits are of many varieties, but all of

<sup>47</sup>Donn Hart, "The Filipino Villager and His Spirits," *Solidarity* 1 (October-December 1966): 67.

<sup>48</sup>Jocano, *Folk Christianity*, 24-25.

<sup>49</sup>Jocano, "Conversion," 67.

<sup>50</sup>Nid Anima, *Childbirth and Burial Practices among Philippine Tribes* (Quezon City: Omar, 1978), 60.

them are generally considered harmful. Detailed description of the spirits is beyond the scope of this study, but a brief discussion of at least one should be made.<sup>51</sup>

The *engkanto* is one of the most common forms of evil spirits. It is recognized as *dili ingon nato* (people not like us) or *dili ta parehas* (people not similar to us). Their dwelling places appear to most people as mere boulders, holes in the ground, mounds of earth, or trees like the *balete*. But to the human friends of the *engkanto*, these dwelling places are magnificent palaces and mansions.<sup>52</sup>

The *engkantos* are said to be beautiful and fair skinned, and are romantically attracted to brown-skinned boys or girls. They are sometimes associated with souls of dead ancestors, and are therefore dreaded. They are also believed to possess power to inflict diseases.<sup>53</sup>

Rural Catholics also believe that evil spirits have human agents. The most prominent of these agents is the *barangan*.<sup>54</sup> The *barangan's* magical powers were originally transmitted by cave or mountain spirits. The *barangan* has the ability to kill anyone by mere words of the so-called *oracion*, or curse. He can also cause deformation of the body. When this happens, the person afflicted usually loses either his nose or another part of his face.<sup>55</sup> The *barangan* usually makes services available to persons who want to harm their enemies. He or she has a supply of "invisible destroyers" in the form of germs or insects that may be commanded to attack intended victims. However, the *barangan* also possesses power to cure sickness caused by fairies and evil spirits.<sup>56</sup>

To protect against evil spirits or their human agents, one should possess amulets or charms that counteract the spirits' magic and power. These charms are generally called *anting-anting*. *Anting-anting* come in many forms, most commonly in the form of sacred coconut oil. It is prepared with specific rituals accompanied by solemn prayers. This oil is prepared and distributed only by *barangans* or *tambalans*.<sup>57</sup> The oil is placed in tiny bottles together with a small piece of paper on which a sentence or paragraph is inscribed in Latin. The *anting-*

<sup>51</sup>The other forms of the so-called evil spirits include the *aswang*, *ungo* or *unglu*, witch, *momo*, *multo*, *abat*, *manananggal*, ghost (usually of a known deceased person), *kapre*, *agta*, etc. Evil spirits also come in various kinds of supernatural animals and monsters such as *kalaskas*, *impakto*, *mantiyanak*, *sigbin*, *balbal*, *wakwak*, *kikik*, etc. For more details, see Richard Arens, "Witches and Witchcraft in Leyte and Samar Islands, Philippines," *Philippine Journal of Science* 85 (December 1956): 451-65; Richard Lieban, *Cebuano Sorcery* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1967), 65-79; and Go, "Mothers, Maids," 186-203.

<sup>52</sup>Arens, 451-65.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., 453.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 439.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid.

<sup>57</sup>*Tambalans* are the medicine men in the rural Philippines.

*anting* will only be effective if this is tied to the user's body and if he recites the daily prayers prescribed by the *tambalan*.

For less religious persons, the *anting-anting* could come in the form of a bullet casing or a crocodile's tooth. The tooth or empty bullet casing is filled with a certain concoction made by boiling roots of trees or herbs in the blood of a white chicken. These are sealed with melted lead and tied around the neck or waist.

For rural, uneducated Catholics, *anting-anting* may also come in the form of religious objects, such as a crucifix<sup>58</sup> or *Agnus Dei* medal. In fact, almost all *anting-anting* have to be prepared on Good Friday. Many Catholics who own *anting-anting* pray Christian prayers to give more power to the *anting-anting*.

This assessment reveals that, although most are Catholic Christians, Filipinos still believe in the existence of unseen spirits. One writer's conclusion expresses this truth emphatically: "One thing cannot be denied: the belief in this spirit world persists among most Filipinos."<sup>59</sup> What, then, is the best theological response to this phenomenon?

### A Proposed Theological Response

Three basic responses have been proposed. The first would be to deny the reality of the spirits and categorically condemn the Filipino spirit-world beliefs as mere superstitions. This approach would assume that a spirit-worldview is totally incompatible with Christian theology. It would then be the duty of a Christian to liberate Filipinos not from the spirits themselves but from their belief in the existence of the spirits.<sup>60</sup>

Many Christian scholars who have tried to address problems related to the Filipino spirit-world beliefs argue that this is not the best response. Rodney Henry, one of the many who have studied the Filipino spirit-world beliefs, observes that, "when a person believes that he is being troubled by a spirit, a condemning word from a church leader will not stop him. Such a person will seek relief from his spirit problem in one way or another."<sup>61</sup> Ralph Toliver, in his discussion of syncretism in Filipino Protestant Christianity, concludes that "Western missionaries must realize that merely to deny the existence of the spirit world will

<sup>58</sup>Catholic symbols such as the crucifix carry the same function as that of the talisman. See William and Corrine Nydegger, *Tarong: An Ilocos Barrio in the Philippines* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), 67-68.

<sup>59</sup>Go, 195.

<sup>60</sup>Maria G. Villegas, "Superstitious Beliefs and Practices in the Coastal Towns of Eastern Leyte," *Leyte-Samar Studies* 2 (1968): 232.

<sup>61</sup>Henry, 94.



neither commend him to the national church nor help to solve some of its nagging problems.”<sup>62</sup> He further observes,

The belief in *aswang* is deep-rooted, so much so in fact that a frontal attack against the belief would appear to be neither honest nor good tactics on the part of the missionary—not honest, for the missionary might not know all that is involved in the *aswang* beliefs, and not good tactics, since the attack on the belief per se would be negative and not positive.<sup>63</sup>

The second response would be to be theologically tolerant of the spirit-world beliefs, hoping that they will eventually fade away. No theological value is given to spirit-world beliefs, but they are not to be discarded altogether, for they have socio-psychological significance. Elwood, a Protestant scholar who does not believe in spirits as part of the real world, opines that the Filipino spirit-world beliefs belong to the traditional man’s conceptual view. It is part of the pre-scientific explanation of how the forces of nature are expressed through man’s beliefs in spirits or personal supernatural beings.<sup>64</sup> For this reason he advises, “Spirit belief should not be treated as heresy to be condemned, but as an early stage in man’s awareness, which can be nurtured and enlightened through increased scientific knowledge and maturing religious faith.”<sup>65</sup> He admits, however, that belief in and fear of spirits threatens the Christian teaching of God’s absolute sovereignty.

If man can relate to God only through subordinates or intermediaries, God himself becomes less directly relevant to the life of man; and spirits, saints, demons and angels become more ultimate than God. The conviction of the biblical writers is that God is in the very midst of life and that we encounter him when we respond to the way life is. The mysterious power that surrounds us and that gives us life is none other than the spiritual presence and purposive activity of the one living God who, for us, was in Jesus as Christ and who deigns to dwell in our lives as well.

The supposed capacity of other anthropomorphic but supernatural beings to bless and to curse, to inflict injury, sickness or death and otherwise interfere with the on-going movement of human life, without the limitations of space and time, clearly detracts from the sovereignty of the one living God whose presence and activity are all-pervasive and who is the ultimate source of all power in the universe.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>62</sup>Ralph Toliver, “Syncretism, a Specter among Philippine Protestants,” *Practical Anthropology* 17 (September-October 1970): 214.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Douglas Elwood, “Are the Spirits Part of the Real World?” *Church and Community* 10 (March-April 1970): 16.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 22.

Responding to the question of how the documented manifestations of the spirits should be explained, Elwood argues that they may be explained in terms of psychological and sociological imperatives. He suggests that these beliefs are mere products of wish fulfillment, suggestibility, unfulfilled sexual desire on the individual level, checks on anti-social behavior, the influence of the home environment at the social level, or mere coincidence.<sup>67</sup> Elwood seems to agree with social scientists that the main value of the spirit-world beliefs is related to social control or expressions of superior mental powers.<sup>68</sup>

The view that Filipino spirit-world beliefs are to be tolerated for their inherent value is also advocated by the Catholic scholar Francisco Demetrio. To him, belief in the spirits has some value in that it supplies the people with satisfaction of their "existential needs both material and psychic."<sup>69</sup> Thus, he says,

One cannot fully agree with the early Christian chroniclers who claimed that the religion of the early Filipinos was altogether diabolical. What had served the needs of the people for long centuries before the advent of Christianity cannot in fairness and truth be called the work of the devil pure and simple.<sup>70</sup>

Valuing a religious belief for its psychological and sociological significance alone does not make good sense. Thus the second response is not acceptable.

The third response, the one which is supported by this paper, holds that some aspects of the Filipino spirit-worldview are compatible with biblical teachings. Further, it sees that the Filipino spirit-worldview has the potential of becoming a springboard, a vehicle in developing authentic Filipino Christianity without necessarily corrupting the gospel. How shall this be accomplished?

The general strategy of how to deal with the Filipino spirit-world beliefs may be provided in two stages. The first involves Christian teachings related to the spirit world. This is necessary because, as Gowing observes, "poor instruction in the tenets of the Christian faith accounts in part for the traces of animism, belief in demons or evil spirits and other aspects of pre-Christian paganism which linger in the thinking and even devotional practices of many Filipino Christians, Protestants as well as Roman Catholics."<sup>71</sup>

The second stage involves structuring concrete pastoral-missiological rituals or practices. Rodney L. Henry insists that the two stages should go hand in hand:

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>For an example of a social and psychological discussion of spirit-world beliefs, see Jaime Bulatao, "Altered States of Consciousness in Philippine Religion," in *Filipino Religious Psychology*, ed. Leonardo N. Marcado (Tacloban City: Divine Word University Publications, 1977), xx.

<sup>69</sup>Francisco Demetrio, "The *Engkanto* Belief: An Essay in Interpretation," *Philippine Studies* 17 (July 1969): 591.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid.

<sup>71</sup>Gowing, 34.

“Unless the church provides clear teaching on the subject of the spirit world and its practitioners, as well as providing alternatives to going to such practitioners, the problem will continue as it has in the past.”<sup>72</sup>

Constructing a pastoral-missiological response is outside the scope of this paper and will have to be left for a future study. This study will address only the first stage, that of Christian teachings. At the same time, a comprehensive Christian teaching that would adequately address the Filipino spirit-worldview would also necessarily go beyond the scope of this study. The following discussion of the basic themes should be regarded as only a preliminary outline. Some themes emerge as essential for a contextualized Christian teaching that would directly relate to Filipino spirit-world beliefs. These themes include the existence of the spirit world; the immanence, jealousy, and sovereignty of God; the *Christus Victor* motif; and the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

### The Existence of the Spirit World

Filipinos in general, whether primitive or contemporary, are supernaturalistic. They believe in God (*Bathala*), as the Lord of the universe. They also believe that this Lord is the creator of the world. The name *Laon* also suggests that Filipinos know God as the Eternal one. This concept should be affirmed and reinforced. According to Tomas Quintin Andres, “The ethics of rationality, of questioning, of independent thinking . . . is one of the most positive contributions of American Protestants to the Filipino mind.”<sup>73</sup> However, if this rationalism is carried to the extreme in such manner that it boldly denies the existence of supernatural spirit beings, then it has to be condemned.

A rationalistic Protestant Christian who is confronted by the traditional spirit-worldview of a struggling Filipino Christian could follow the advice of Ralph Toliver:

We have found that a more pragmatic approach—and one more fruitful of result—is to say “Well, the Bible speaks of evil spirits, and what God had power to do in the past we can also do today.”<sup>74</sup>

A biblical approach affirms the belief in both good and evil spirits. There is no reason why Christians in the Philippines cannot use biblical cosmology to reach the roots of the Filipino soul with the gospel. If placed in the right perspective, this approach will preserve the religious fervor of the Filipinos while maintaining a biblical theology.

<sup>72</sup>Henry, 94.

<sup>73</sup>Tomas Quintin Andres, *Understanding Filipino Values: A Management Approach* (Quezon City: New Day, 1981), 8.

<sup>74</sup>Toliver, 214.

The existence of spirit beings is an established biblical fact. The integrity of the Bible would be diminished if this concept as presented in the Bible is to be discounted. Speaking about the account of angels in the NT, Fred Dickason admits that

if there are no such beings as angels, then we must doubt some direct revelations and attestations of truth presented as coming through angels in the New Testament. We must then also doubt the miraculous deliverance and interventions by angels in Acts and consider that the Epistles are pure imagination or accommodation to ignorance when they speak of Christ's superiority and victory over angels. We must ignore any reference to supernatural enemies and spiritual warfare in Christian life. We must also regard the book of Revelation as either a fictional masterpiece of deception or a figurative mass of incoherent revelations.<sup>75</sup>

A detailed description of the biblical arguments that prove the existence of spirit beings is beyond the scope of this study. Mention of a few cases is necessary, however.

### Angels

The Scriptures teach that God created angels (Ps 148:2-5). Angels are described as creatures more elevated than humans (Ps 8:5; Heb 2:6,7,9; 2 Pet 2:11), yet different from and much inferior to God (Heb 2:13-14; Rev 19:10; 22:9). They are spirits, immaterial and incorporeal (Heb 1:14).<sup>76</sup> Thus, angels are generally considered invisible to humans. Yet angels can and do appear to people in human form (e.g., Gen 18:1-16; 19:1-21; Mark 16:5; Luke 24:4; Acts 1:10).

Angels are personal beings and possess intelligence, emotion, and will (e.g., 1 Pet 1:12; Matt 28:5-7). They also possess great power (2 Chr 32:21; Ps 103:20; 2 Kgs 19:35; Acts 12:7-11; 2 Thess 1:7). The Bible also indicates that angels may inflict bodily harm (2 Kgs 19:35; Acts 12:23), or may even control elements of nature (Rev 7:2-3).

Through the angels' personal choice the angelic world was divided into two major categories. The first group are called the angels of God (John 1:51), holy angels (Mark 8:38), angels of light (2 Cor 11:14), or the "elect angels" (1 Tim 5:21). The second group are called fallen angels, or the angels who sinned (2 Pet

<sup>75</sup>C. Fred Dickason, *Angels: Elect and Evil* (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 19.

<sup>76</sup>A great deal of discussion has gone on for centuries as to whether they are purely spirits or whether they have bodies different from that of human beings. At the Second Council of Niceaea in A.D. 784, it was decided that angels had bodies either of ether or light. This idea seems to prevail until the present. Louis Berkhof observes that even after the church of the Middle Ages came to the conclusion that angels are pure spiritual beings, some theologians continued to assign some corporeity to angels. See Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1941), 144.

2:4; Jude 6). These are the angels loyal to Satan, the devil (Matt 25:41; Rev 12:7-9).

Angels, both good and evil, exist. They are pictured by the Bible as powerful and personal spirit beings. Thus the Filipino belief in spirit beings has a solid biblical basis. Now let us specifically discuss demons and evil spirits to see if the Filipino spirit-world beliefs find additional biblical support.

### **Demons and Evil Spirits**

Old Testament teachings about demons and evil spirits are not well developed. Yet OT writers never questioned the existence of demons and evil spirits. In fact, some writers suggest that malevolent spirits even came directly from God (1 Sam 16:14-15,23; 18:10; 19:9; 2 Chr 18:20-23; 1 Kgs 22:21-22). The clearest understanding of the reality and activities of evil spirits, however, is found in the NT. In fact, all NT writers mention demons or evil angels. The most important record provided by the NT regarding demons and evil spirits deals with Jesus' encounter with them.<sup>77</sup> Yet even if the records about demons in the Gospels are excluded, the NT teaching about them is still clear. The apostles recognized the existence of evil spirits (Acts 10:38; 1 Cor 10:20-22; Gal 4:3,9; Rev 9:20) and added that these spirits work diligently against the followers of Christ (Rom 8:38-39; Eph 6:12).

The Bible clearly supports the existence of demons and spirit beings. Therefore, the Filipino belief in the reality of such spirits should be respected instead of denied.

One aspect of the Filipino belief in the existence of spirits should be handled with special biblical attention. This concerns the belief that spirits of ancestors are alive and can do favors. This belief should be gently and firmly corrected because, although it is in accord with Platonic philosophy, it has no biblical support. The Bible clearly indicates that at death, man's body returns to dust, from which it came, and the breath returns to God who gave it (Gen 2:7; 3:19; Job 34:14-15; Ps 104:29; Eccl 3:19-21; 12:7). At death, man, the living soul, ceases to exist (Ps 146:3-4; Ezek 18:4). The Scriptures clearly teach that the soul does not survive as a conscious entity after the body returns to dust. Eccl 9:5-6 says,

For the living know that they will die,  
but the dead know nothing;  
they have no further reward,  
and even the memory of them is forgotten.  
Their love, their hate and their jealousy  
have long since vanished;

<sup>77</sup>See Matt 8:28-34; Mark 1:21-28; 5:1-20; Luke 4:31-37; 8:26-39; etc.

never again will they have a part  
in anything that happens under the sun.<sup>78</sup>

This reality made the author of Ecclesiastes add a very important piece of advice. He says, "Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom" (9:10). In view of this biblical truth, therefore, a contextualized biblical teaching on the nature of man is also necessary. Otherwise Filipino Christianity, still adhering to belief in the existence of dead ancestors, would be susceptible to the errors of animism or to the dangers of spiritism, against which God has given strict warning (Lev 19:31; 20:6,27; Deut 18:10-12; Isa 8:19).

But the reality and power of the spirits should not be over-emphasized. Christianity is not a religion concerned with spirits; rather, it is concerned with the sovereign God and His Son, Jesus Christ, before whom spirits tremble and flee. Hence, teachings on the sovereignty of God and the proper place of Christ in relation to the spirits should be prominent.

#### The Immanence, Jealousy, and Sovereignty of God

One important Christian doctrine that should be emphasized to provide the necessary link between Christianity and Filipino spirit-world beliefs is the doctrine of God. The Filipino concept of God as remote and distant must be addressed. Christian theology admits that God is transcendent. But He is also an immanent God. Filipinos should be taught that there is no dichotomy between the natural and the supernatural. God and Satan are actively interacting in all that goes on in this world. Filipinos must be made aware of and sensitive to the divine powers, not just the powers of evil spirits. In this way trust in God may be developed.

God should also be presented to the Filipinos as a jealous God. It should be made clear that God does not allow His people to share loyalty with other spirits. This truth is clearly stated in Exod 20:2-5:

I am the LORD your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.

Further, a Filipinized Christian teaching about God should also emphasize God's sovereignty. This is important because the above analysis indicates that the

<sup>78</sup>All Bible quotations in this article are from the NIV.

“immature” religious orientation of the Filipinos includes the concept that God can be manipulated, used, or controlled. For example, Gorospe observes that

some Filipino Catholics use God or religion as a means to their own personal satisfaction or ends, such as to gain social acceptance or prestige, to enhance their business or their political ambitions. They are religiously immature.<sup>79</sup>

In another statement Gorospe is even more specific:

The immature Filipino Catholic tends to treat God as a *compadre* from whom he can obtain favors or as a policeman whom he can bribe by means of a novena. . . . Many Filipino Catholics make novenas to obtain favors from God. They feel that they have done something for God and expect Him in turn to reciprocate by granting their request. They feel that God is indebted to them and therefore if God does not answer their prayer, they sulk or make *tampo*.<sup>80</sup>

In view of this, God should be introduced as sovereign over nature, over the spirit world, and over man. Filipinos should be taught that submission to God’s will, not attempting to control God through religious rituals or devotions is the proper way of approaching God. In this connection, practical teachings on the proper attitude toward prayer and worship must also be provided. In this way the egocentric religious personality of the Filipinos may be corrected.

#### *The Christus Victor Motif*

Another Christian teaching that should be emphasized in dealing with Filipino spirit-world beliefs is the theme of the victorious Christ. There is too much emphasis on the *Santo Niño* (Holy Child) and the *Santo Entierro* (the tragic Victim on the cross or in the tomb) views of Christ. Most Filipinos think of Christ either as a baby or as a martyr, not so much as a living person. But Christ lived a victorious life. He was a liberator. He was victorious over evil spirits (Matt 8:16; Mark 3:11). His kingdom prevails over the kingdoms and powers of this world (Rev 11:15). In fact, the NT views Him as the destroyer of demons (Heb 2:14-15). Christ has decisively defeated the demonic powers (Col 2:15), and has given believers authority over demons (Luke 9:1; 10:17). Demons have residual dominion over humans only because mankind is still waiting for the consummation of redemption. Thus, Filipinos should be taught that all spirits are subservient to Christ (1 Pet 3:22) and can be overcome by the power of God (Eph 6:10-13). Therefore, any reverence, worship, or excessive fear of spirits must be deemed unchristian and misdirected (Rom 8:15-17; Col 2:18; 1Pet 5:8-9).

<sup>79</sup>Gorospe, 27.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 37.

This emphasis would make Christianity more attractive to Filipinos. It would show that Christianity is superior to spirit-world beliefs. This strategy was successful in the NT era. It is also successful in modern times. One modern Christian worker who found this emphasis successful in Africa gives this advice:

Christians ought to recognize that there is witchcraft and that it is both a subjective and objective reality emanating from the Devil. But having recognized this, like Paul when combating the Colossian error, they must also proclaim the pre-eminence and uniqueness of Christ. His all-embracing love is able to draw all men to Himself and His infinite power can liberate all who are held in bondage of sin and Satan.<sup>81</sup>

There is a danger, however, that Christian symbols such as the crucifix, holy water, or candles may be used as *anting-anting* because of the emphasis on the power of the victorious Christ. Thus, Christian teachers should avoid encouraging their use, lest Christianity become just another way of exercising magic. This is affirmed by Henry, who notes that, "if the spirit world is not placed in the context of all Christian doctrine and practices, the church will become the place for 'Christian magic' and be obsessed with the spirit world."<sup>82</sup>

#### Ministry of the Holy Spirit

Emphasis on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is also important. Filipinos must be taught that through the ministry of various divine agencies, especially through the Holy Spirit, man's needs in life can be provided by God (Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 12:7-11; 2 Pet 1:3). It must also be made clear that the gifts of the Holy Spirit are sufficient for the church to carry out its gospel commission (Eph 4:7-8, 11-13). Hence, there is no reason why people who profess to be Christians should go to spirit-world practitioners. It seems that the lack of emphasis on teachings about the Holy Spirit contributes to the absence of concrete alternatives to spirit-world beliefs and practices.

It must be made clear that the power of the Holy Spirit may not always be demonstrated in spectacular ways. It should be remembered also that the scientific way of doing things does not at all eliminate the influence of divine forces. To expect that the Holy Spirit will operate only in spectacular ways is dangerous, because evil spirits may also perform perceived miracles (1 Tim 4:1; Rev 16:14). Hence, the biblical advice of testing every spirit (1 John 4:1-3) should be observed.

<sup>81</sup>Sam Eriwwo, "Christian Attitude to Witchcraft," *The African Ecclesial Review* 1 (1975): 31.

<sup>82</sup>Henry, 136.



### Summary

Filipinos are supernaturalists. They believe that supernatural beings coexist with them in an invisible society similar to their own. They also believe that these beings are able to affect the whole gamut of their lives, including birth, sickness, business, planting, harvesting, and death.

The persistence of these spirit-world beliefs creates a theological problem for Philippine Christianity. The situation can easily lead to less authentic Christianity or syncretistic religion. As has been pointed out in this article, Folk Catholicism teaches that God is a far-away God. Thus, there is a need for dead saints to care for the day-to-day affairs of human beings. Besides, there is a constant fear of evil spirits which moves people to rely on spirit mediums or talismans when trouble comes. What is the best theological response to this phenomenon?

The theological response that can relate properly to the Filipino spirit-world beliefs should teach the following themes: (1) The God of the universe is a God who is involved in the day-to-day affairs of humanity. He is a jealous God and demands loyalty. He is sovereign, so he can meet all human needs. (2) Invisible supernatural forces, both good and evil, exist and have power to affect one's life, depending on his/her choices. (3) Spirits of ancestors do not exist, but evil angels are able to deceptively impersonate them. (4) Through the power of Jesus Christ, Christians can have not only eternal life in the hereafter but also freedom from the forces of evil in this present temporal existence. (5) Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, man's needs in life may be sufficiently provided.

The theological response stated above should be the basis for pastoral-missiological practice. Constructing a pastoral-missiological response to Filipino spirit-world beliefs remains a subject for a future study.



## PAROIMIAI IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL<sup>1</sup>

HYUNSOK DOH

As a teacher, Jesus is known for His prolific use of parables. In the Synoptic Gospels, so-called parables (sg. *parabolē*, pl. *parabolai*) formed the media for His proclamation of the kingdom message.

With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything. (Mark 4:33)<sup>2</sup>

It is generally believed that the Synoptic *parabolai* include several literary forms, such as similitude, example story, parable, and allegory.

In the Fourth Gospel (FG), however, the term *parabolē* is not employed. Instead, we see Jesus using *paroimiai* (sg. *paroimia*) as His media of instruction. The Greek noun *paroimia* is found only four times in this Gospel:

This figure (*tautēn tēn paroimian*) Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them. (10:6)

"I have said this (*tauta*) to you in figures (*en paroimiais*); the hour is coming when I shall no longer speak to you in figures (*en paroimiais*) but tell you plainly of the Father." (16:25)

His disciples said, "Ah, now you are speaking plainly, not in any figure (*paroimian*)!" (16:29)

The only other occurrence of the term in the NT is found in 2 Pet 2:22, where the term refers to a saying in Prov 26:11 as well as to a proverb which finds no parallel

<sup>1</sup>This article is based on my doctoral dissertation, *The Johannine Paroimia*, Ph.D. diss., Andrews University, 1992.

<sup>2</sup>All Scripture quotations are from the RSV unless noted otherwise.

in Scripture.<sup>3</sup> Peter uses this term in a classical way, meaning a proverb. The vast difference Johannine use of the term makes can be easily detected by the three Johannine texts given above.

A question arises from this situation: What is a *paroimia* in the FG? How shall we define the term? Does this refer to a particular literary form? What can we learn from the examples of *paroimiai* in the FG? I shall attempt to answer these questions in this article.

According to Greek lexicons we may list a number of possible meanings for the term *paroimia*: (1) proverb, maxim; (2) figure, comparison, dark saying; and (3) digression, incidental remark.<sup>4</sup> Standard lexicons do not fully agree in regard to Johannine use of the term. This situation creates a need to investigate the text to see what the term refers to in the text. At least the consensus between two major lexicons is that Johannine use does not refer to proverbs.<sup>5</sup> I agree with this.

First, I shall pay special attention to John 16 to find out the meaning of the prepositional phrase *en paroimiais*, which will lead us to the proper understanding of the term *paroimia* in the FG. Then, I shall look into the *paroimia* of 10:1-5. Lastly, applying the definitions and other information which emerges, I shall give examples of other *paroimiai* from the FG. I will not describe the functions of *paroimiai* in this paper.

### *En Paroimiais* in John 16

The saying in 16:25 and its immediate context provides more clues as to the meaning of *paroimia* than the aside in 10:6 and its literary context. We may list four clues for the meaning of *en paroimiais*. The first one is found in the same verse. It is the use of the Greek word *parrhēsia*, which means "plainly"; here it is used in contrast with *en paroimiais*. This tells us that by speaking *en paroimiais* Jesus did not speak plainly. Either His language or His manner did not make His speech plain.

The second clue is found in 16:17-18, where the disciples asked questions among themselves. They did not understand certain sayings of Jesus. Jesus' saying of 16:25 was spoken in response to these questions.

<sup>3</sup>J. N. D. Kelly, *The Epistles of Peter and of Jude* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1969), 350, finds this proverb "well illustrated from the widely popular *Story of Ahikar*."

<sup>4</sup>Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, comps., *A Greek-English Lexicon*, new (9th) ed., rev. and augmented by Henry Stuart Jones with the assistance of Roderick McKenzie (1948), s.v. "Paroimia"; Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, trans. and adapted by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, 2d ed., rev. and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker (1979), s.v. "Paroimia."

<sup>5</sup>Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "Paroimia"; Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. "Paroimia."

Some of the disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us, 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me'; and, 'because I go to the Father'?" They said, "What does he mean by 'a little while'? We do not know what he means."

The third clue is also found in the questions above regarding Jesus' use of an ambiguous word, *mikron* in Greek, translated "a little while." The ambiguity of the word created misunderstanding.

The fourth clue is that the idea of "going to the Father" was a difficult concept for them to grasp. A mysterious idea was involved.

What emerges from this picture is that some sayings of Jesus were difficult to understand due to His use of an ambiguous word or a mysterious idea. The disciples failed to understand His *paroimiai*, which were hard sayings. The audience was to identify the meaning of certain words in the sayings, which were like riddles. We therefore define *paroimia* as a "riddle" in the sense of a difficult saying.

Riddles are statements of truth(s) that are not readily understood. They are given to reveal the truth, but in veiled language. One OT example may illustrate this point.<sup>6</sup> Samson told a riddle based on his experience, but he did not tell anyone about the incident on which the riddle was based. Without his revelation, no one could get the meaning. His bride's friends threatened her, she importuned Samson, he revealed the meaning to her, and she betrayed him (Judg 14:12-20). Jesus' riddles in John are not exactly like Samson's; they were less difficult, and Jesus revealed much about Himself on many occasions.

Based on the questions found in 16:17-18 we can identify three *paroimiai* in chap. 16:

"But now I am going to him who sent me." (v. 5a)

"You will see me no more." (v. 10b)

"A little while, and you will see me no more; again a little while, and you will see me." (v. 16)

These sayings were enigmatic to the disciples. They are important truth statements about His destiny and His relationship to them. Not only the enigmatic nature of the sayings but also the audience's limited grasp of spiritual knowledge caused difficulty.

There is a scholarly tendency to include all the sayings of Jesus in the category of *paroimia*. Detailed study of *tauta* in John, however, has shown that it refers to what is immediately preceding but not to all the sayings of Jesus uttered in the FG up to 16:25.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>See my dissertation, 123-26, for riddles in the OT and in the Greco-Roman world.

<sup>7</sup>See my dissertation, 99-116.

A note of clarification is necessary here. Many scholars believe that *en paroimiais* refers in part to the saying in 16:21 about a woman in childbirth. They may be influenced by the proximity of v. 21 and v. 25. This is unfortunate. The saying of v. 21 is parabolic when focused on the function of comparison. It can also be proverbial when focused on gnomic content. It was spoken to emphasize the contrast of situations—sorrowful and joyful—which Jesus described in vv. 20,22. It was not given to introduce a truth statement, but only for purposes of comparison. It can be a figure of speech. Nevertheless, it should not be included in the list of *paroimiai*, because v. 25 is not referring to the saying of v. 21; rather, it was a response to the reactions of the disciples in vv. 17-19. We may say, however, that Jesus used a proverbial-parabolic saying in v. 21 as He led the audience to a deeper understanding of His words, especially His riddles. We would like to describe the process thus: *paroimiai* given, misunderstanding occurred, expansions of *paroimiai* given, parabolic-proverbial saying employed in the expansion, riddle solved (partly).

### The *Paroimia* of John 10:1-5

In John 10:1-5 Jesus describes situations connected with a sheepfold. In v. 6 the Evangelist labels this cluster of sayings as a *paroimia*, and he adds that the hearers did not understand it. We need to classify this *paroimia*. It is neither a similitude nor an example story, as commonly found in the Synoptic Gospels. At first glance it looks like a parable or an allegory. However, including it either in the category of parable or allegory is difficult on several accounts. First, one thing is very clear from the aside in v. 6, namely, that the audience did not understand it. From 16:25, we also know Jesus did not always speak plainly. Generally, a parable or allegory is not meant to confound the understanding. One may quote Mark 4:11-12 to refute this, but I am not referring to Jesus' use of *parabolai* in that context; I am referring to a parable or allegory as a literary form. And there are many *parabolai* readily understood by the audience in the Synoptics, as Mark 4:33 notes: "With many such parables he spoke the word to them, as they were able to hear it."

Second, by this *paroimia* Jesus intended to reveal a solemn truth, but not plainly. *Ekeinoi* in v. 6 must refer to some of the Pharisees mentioned in 9:40-41, where Jesus condemned them because they claimed that they were not blind. Jesus not only revealed truths about Himself, but he wanted to reveal the audience's true nature as well. He chose to do it "not plainly" instead of doing it openly. He was extremely careful not to incite their opposition. While he identified the sheep gate and the Good Shepherd, he did not explicitly identify the thieves, robbers, and hirelings. This identification the Pharisees themselves were to make. Jesus wanted to say to them: "I am the Good Shepherd, and the Gate for the sheep, but you are robbers, thieves, hirelings, and, at best, strangers." Jesus seems to speak

to them: "Since I have identified the Good Shepherd, it is your turn to identify the thieves, robbers, and hirelings."

Third, an expansion of the riddle follows immediately. In the Synoptics the explanation of the parables came later in the private circle (Mark 4:34). Here, identification followed immediately in the expansion of the *paroimia*, but not all the important information was given. The role of the Good Shepherd was described in detail in this expansion. Since, the information was not complete about the identification of the robbers and thieves, the audience was left to seek the solution to the riddle.

Fourth, the reaction after the expansion in vv. 7-18 reveals that they did not understand what He was saying. Had they understood what He was saying, they would have been unable to accept His identification of Himself with the Good Shepherd and the Gate for the sheep.

There was again a division among the Jews because of these words. Many of them said, "He has a demon, and he is mad; why listen to him?" Others said, "These are not the sayings of one who has a demon. Can a demon open the eyes of the blind?" (vv. 19-21)

Still, there is no indication that the people understood Jesus' sayings. Even those who denied that Jesus had a demon and were positively inclined toward Him do not seem to have understood His words. Later, in vv. 26-28, another expansion is seen.

In general, we would identify this cluster of sayings in 10:1-5 as hard sayings, but specifically, they constitute a riddle. The hearers should do their own part in identifying the negative characters in the riddle. When they find the solution, they find themselves severely condemned: "You are thieves, robbers, hirelings, and strangers!" Perhaps it was better for Jesus not to be too direct and explicit in what He was trying to convey.

I will not list here those many scholars who believe that this *paroimia* is a parable, nor the reasons why I do not agree.<sup>8</sup> Also, I will not delineate here the many scholars who accept this as an allegory, or my arguments against such an idea.<sup>9</sup> I would like to mention, however, a number of scholars who call a *paroimia* a riddle. They include W. B. Stanford, Johannes Schneider, C. K. Barrett, O. Kiefer, E. Haenchen, Wilbert F. Howard, Kenneth Grayston, John D. Turner, and Rudolf Schnackenburg.<sup>10</sup> Schnackenburg is prominent among these because he discussed this with precision. He concludes that the *paroimia* in 10:1-6 "is a real riddle—and, in fact, is the only figurative discourse to be characterized as

<sup>8</sup>See my dissertation, 142-44.

<sup>9</sup>See my dissertation, 145-53.

<sup>10</sup>See my dissertation, 153-57, for relevant biographic data.

such. . . . It constitutes a way of speaking that is *sui generis*.”<sup>11</sup> I would accept this conclusion, except that I see other riddles in the FG, including the ones in chap. 16.

### Examples of Johannine Riddles

I would like to locate as many riddles as possible in the FG, applying what we have found in the previous sections. I believe we can identify twenty-one riddles. They are the sayings found in the following verses: 2:19; 3:3; 4:10,13-14,32; 6:32-33,35,51,53; 7:33-34; 8:21,31-32,51,56,58; 12:32; 13:8,10,33,36b; 14:19. I will discuss several examples, namely, 3:3; 4:10,13-14; and the riddles of chap. 6.

The first example of a Johannine riddle we are going to look into is one given to Nicodemus. When he came to see Jesus in the night, Jesus said: “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus did not understand this saying. There are three ways of interpreting the Greek word *anāthen*: “again,” “from the beginning,” or “from above.” Nicodemus understood *anāthen* as “again” or “anew,” taking the idea of birth in a strictly literal sense, namely, a physical rebirth, not a supernatural and spiritual rebirth. The saying was a riddle for him. The Jewish view of spiritual life was based on being born of Jewish parents. Jesus offered a corrective and expanded the riddle (3:5-8):

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, ‘you must be born anew.’ The wind blows where it wills, . . . but you do not know whence it comes or whither it goes; so it is with every one who is born of the Spirit.”

Here Jesus not only interpreted the word *anāthen* by “of water and the Spirit” but expanded the idea of being born of the Spirit. A parable about wind was employed to illustrate spiritual birth. Still, Nicodemus failed to understand (v. 9). At that point Jesus rebuked him for his failure and gave him the reason for the failure (vv. 11-12):

“Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of what we know, and bear witness to what we have seen; but you do not receive our testimony. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe, how can you believe if I tell you heavenly things?”

Then Jesus expanded on the theme of salvation (vv. 13-15):

<sup>11</sup>Rudolf Schnackenburg, *The Gospel According to St. John* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 2:285.



“No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.”

The new birth begins by believing in Jesus, who is lifted up on the cross. The riddle is related to the death of Jesus. The double *amēn* formula is found three times in Jesus’ pronouncements (vv. 3,5,11). This testifies to the solemnity of the truth of these sayings.

To summarize, Jesus gave a riddle, and it was misunderstood. He expanded the riddle, and Nicodemus failed to understand. Then Jesus again expanded the riddle. The riddle and its expansions are linked together.

The second example of a Johannine riddle we will consider is found in chap. 4, where Jesus dialogued with the Samaritan woman. He said to her,

“If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water.” (v. 10)

The woman misunderstood the expression “living water” because of its ambiguity and the place of their conversation. They were talking at the well. This saying is a Johannine riddle. She responded, “Sir, you have nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; where do you get that living water?” (v. 11).

The sayings in vv. 13-14 become another riddle because Jesus was not speaking about ordinary water:

Every one who drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst; the water that I shall give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.

This riddle was not understood by the woman. She responded, “Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, nor come here to draw” (v. 15). She apparently misunderstood “living water” as a reference to a well that gives a constant supply of flowing water.<sup>12</sup> Jesus was talking about spiritual things, but her mind was on physical, material things. Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman were in similar situations. Jews were no better before God than Samaritans. Although the woman did not understand Jesus’ sayings, she believed in Him as the Messiah, and having believed, she drank the water as Jesus meant. She, in turn, became a spring of living water for the people in her village.

This idea of living water was later further developed by Jesus, and this time it was given to the Jewish public. In 7:37-38 we read that Jesus stood up at the

<sup>12</sup>This was a common expression used at the time of Jesus for a spring or fountain of flowing water. See, e.g., *Didachē* 7; Rev 7:17; 21:16; cf. Cant 4:15LXX; Jer 2:13; 17:13; Ezek 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech 14:8; John 7:38; Rev 22:1-2.

Feast of Tabernacles and said, "If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water.'" Believing in Jesus is receiving the water and drinking. Jesus proclaimed this truth on the last day of the Feast. The narrator's aside reveals that it was not understood. John observes that Jesus said this about the Spirit who would be given after the glorification of Jesus, which apparently refers to His death, resurrection, and ascension to heaven, especially the latter.

The next set of riddles to be studied is found in 6:32-33,35,51,53. Jesus first said,

"Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven; my Father gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world." (vv. 32-33)

John 6 is the most complicated chapter to deal with, because of many repetitions. It seems that variations of the riddle about bread appear.<sup>13</sup> Not knowing what Jesus meant by the bread of God, His hearers asked Jesus to give them this bread always, just as the woman at the well asked for the water. Jesus identified Himself with this bread and amplified the meaning of having the bread (vv. 35-40):

"*I am the bread of life*; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. *For I have come down from heaven*, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me; and this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up at the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (Emphasis supplied)

In light of v. 41 it is clear that the cause of misunderstanding, which led to their murmuring, was the emphasized parts in the above quotation. The Jews quoted Him as saying, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." Therefore, the difficulty is based on a combination of Jesus' words in v. 35 and v. 38. Verse 38 is an interpretation of v. 33, and v. 33 should be understood together with v. 32. The people's misunderstanding was about the origin of Jesus. They were partly right when they said that Jesus came from Nazareth (v. 42), but Jesus wanted to reveal His true identity. The statement Jesus made of His real origin became a riddle.

A long string of sayings follow in 6:43-51. Verse 51 needs attention:

<sup>13</sup>Variations of the bread riddle include, "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world" (v. 33); "I am the bread of life" (vv. 35,48); and "I am the living bread which came down from heaven" (v. 51; cf. vv. 41,58).

“I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh.”

Identifying Himself with the bread from heaven is one big riddle, and identifying this bread with His own flesh is another riddle. In response to this double riddle the Jews began to debate the question, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” (v. 52). Jesus then expanded the riddle by saying (vv. 53-58),

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. *For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.* As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not such as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live for ever.” (Emphasis supplied)

Here Jesus indicated that eternal life depends on eating His flesh and drinking His blood. This is another riddle. Eternal life includes resurrection life, but it begins in the present with partaking of Jesus’ life and death by faith. Again Jesus’ listeners could not understand. They labeled His words a “hard saying” (v. 60). From that time many disciples drew back and no longer went about with Jesus. For them it remained a riddle. But in v. 63 Jesus unlocked the riddle to those disciples that did not abandon Him: “It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh is of no avail; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.”

To summarize, we see at least four riddles closely linked (6:32-33,35,51,53) showing how the Johannine riddles develop. In the FG, miraculous signs drew people near to Jesus, but His words repelled many away from Him. The bread riddle is central in John 6. Its variations developed in three forms: (1) I am the bread of life; (2) My flesh and blood is bread and drink; and (3) eating Me is crucial for life.

### Summary

Synoptic *parabolai* and Johannine *paroimiai* are different species. *Paroimiai* in John 16 refer to three difficult sayings of Jesus, which we labeled as riddles. Although the *paroimia* of 10:1-5 has similarities with a Synoptic parable or allegory, it is a Johannine riddle. Four riddles explicitly labeled as *paroimiai* become the basis for identifying other *paroimiai* in the FG. Many hard sayings in the FG could be counted as Johannine riddles, but we list only twenty-one. We have discussed several examples.

In the FG riddles are truth statements which were not understood readily. Because of the misunderstanding on the part of the audience, Jesus would explain

some riddles, while others He expanded. When the riddles were expanded, they were not understood immediately. The larger portion remained as riddles until the time of His death and resurrection.

Most Johannine riddles cluster around the grand riddle of the death of Jesus. Thus, the death of the Messiah, the grand riddle, was hidden from the eyes of the characters in the FG, while the readers can understand the riddles, for the Evangelist provides an omniscient perspective.

## THE THEOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF GEN 1-11 (THE PRIMEVAL HISTORY)

KENNETH MULZAC

Genesis 1-11, commonly called the Primeval History, has been given much detailed attention. Some see it as a “‘Prologue’ to the Pentateuch rather than as part of the main body of the work.”<sup>1</sup> Others describe it as “the standard example of the amalgamation of sources” which mark “events . . . set in primeval time or mythological time or in the era ‘before history.’”<sup>2</sup> It has also been described as “a broad introduction to the history, which commences with Abraham.”<sup>3</sup> The narratives have been carved up between the J and P sources,<sup>4</sup> though without any degree of agreement or consensus. Martin Noth describes it as an addition to the Pentateuch, prefixed by the Yahwist who “invested his work with that theological breath and depth that made it one of the most important components of the transmitted Pentateuch.”<sup>5</sup> Rolf Rendtorff contends that the “primal history” is a hodgepodge of sagas dominated by “ideal-typical figures” (chaps. 2, 4, 6-8), “isolated mythological elements” (3:1-24; 6:1-4), “theological outlines” in narrative-like material (1:1-2:3; 9:1-17), and “genealogies” (chap. 5; chap. 10;

<sup>1</sup>R. Norman Whybray, *Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 29. He sees them as “universal stories” which “do not constitute a single narrative sequence.” These stories are legendary and parabolic in nature. *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>2</sup>John J. Scullion, *Genesis: A Commentary for Students, Teachers and Preachers* (St. Paul, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 9.

<sup>3</sup>E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, Anchor Bible, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 9. Cf. Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), xlv, who claims, “Clearly Gen 1-11 serves simply as background to the subsequent story of the patriarchs.”

<sup>4</sup>For example, see Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 16.

<sup>5</sup>Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. with an introduction by Bernhard W. Anderson (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1981), 40.

11:10-32).<sup>6</sup> What has not been investigated, however, is the theological character<sup>7</sup> of these chapters. This paper seeks to fill that gap by discussing five such theological motifs.

### Supernatural Events

First and foremost is the Creation of the heavens and the earth and all therein (Gen 1-2).<sup>8</sup> All of this was created by divine fiat through the word of God. In fact, every creative act of God is introduced with the words, "And God said . . ." (1:3,6,9,11,14,20,24,27,28,29).<sup>9</sup> Because God speaks, the non-existent becomes existent. Indeed,

The way of God with his world is the way of language. God speaks something new that never was before. . . .

Creation by such speech shows God's authority.<sup>10</sup>

E. A. Speiser supports this idea when he comments that here "we are given the barest statement of a sequence of facts resulting *from the fiat of the supreme and absolute master of the universe.*"<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the most captivating account of God's creative activity is the one that details the making of humanity (1:26-29; 2:7,18,21-25). Human beings are

<sup>6</sup>Rolf Rendtorff, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 132. In fact, he disposes of the JEDP sources for the Pentateuch and replaces them with six larger independent units covering: Primeval history, patriarchal history, Exodus story, Sinai experience, wilderness sojourn, and settlement in the land. *Ibid.*, 6-25.

<sup>7</sup>Wenham, xlv-xlvi, provides a fleeting glimpse of "the theological relationship" of chaps. 1-11 with (1) ancient Near Eastern thought, (2) Gen 12-50 and the rest of the Pentateuch, and (3) modern thought.

<sup>8</sup>Our interest here is not to compare and contrast the Genesis account with other ancient cosmologies. For a brief overview of that, see Speiser, 8-11, who believes that the biblical "account goes back to Babylonian prototypes" (10). Cf. Whybray, 35-37; S. G. F. Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1963); G. F. Hasel, "The Significance of the Cosmology in Gen. 1 in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Parallels," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 10 (1972): 1-20; *idem*, "The Polemic Nature of the Genesis Cosmology," *Evangelical Quarterly* (1974): 81-102; W. H. Shea, "A Comparison of Narrative Elements in Ancient Mesopotamian Creation-Flood Stories with Gen. 1-9," *Origins* 11 (1984): 9-29; T. Frymer-Kensky, "The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Gen. 1-9," *Biblical Archaeologist* 40 (1977): 147-55.

<sup>9</sup>Cf. Ps 33:6,9. Susan Niditch, *Ancient Israelite Religion* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 53, describes this as "the magisterial word of God, which is immediate, powerful and unchallenged."

<sup>10</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 25.

<sup>11</sup>Speiser, 8 (emphasis mine).

manifestly superior to the rest of creation because they were “made in the image and likeness of God” (1:26),<sup>12</sup> given dominion over all other living things (1:27), formed by hand of God (2:7), and designed to communicate through intelligent speech (2:23). Walter Brueggemann’s comment is perceptive,

Human creation is treated as superior and non-human as subordinate (1:25-30; 2:15): human creatures are designated to *order, rule, and care for* the other creatures; creatures are to *obey and to be responsive to* human creatures.<sup>13</sup>

Another supernatural event is the talking serpent, which deceives Eve into disobedience (3:1-6). This episode introduces other narratives dealing with evil, which describe factors on a supernatural scale. These include the following: the extreme evil of people that portends the Flood, where it rained for forty days continuously and the water continued to cover the earth for another 150 days (7:24); the death of all living things, except for those who were in the ark (7:21); and the building of the tower of Babel as people exalted themselves (11:1-4).

### Disobedience and Evil

The account of creation is followed immediately by that of the fall of humanity (chap. 3). By not resisting temptation, the woman’s full senses were tantalized (3:6) and she refused to be obedient to the divine command, “You may freely eat of all the trees of the garden. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat” (2:16,17a).<sup>14</sup> Both Adam and Eve made a willful, intelligent decision to act contrary to God’s imperative (3:6). This singular disobedient act opened the floodgates to the consequences of evil. These include: shame—for the first time they realized their nakedness and became ashamed (3:7); hiding from God, as they sensed the loss of their identity (3:8-9); blame, each refusing to accept responsibility for their actions (3:10-13); and eventually, death (5:5). Herein was the fulfillment of the divine pronouncement, “In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die” (2:17b).

From this point onward, the Primeval History catalogues several heinous acts of disobedience and evil. Gen 4 records Cain’s brutal murder of his brother Abel, such that God Himself recoils in horror: “The voice of your brother’s blood cries

<sup>12</sup>For a compact discussion on this, see Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary*, trans. John J. Scullion (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), 147-58. Whybray, 8, is certainly persuasive: “Whatever may be the precise meaning of these terms . . . , they set mankind apart from all the other creatures and put them in a unique relationship with God himself. In none of the other creation stories with which this story can be compared is such a high status attributed to mankind.”

<sup>13</sup>Brueggemann, 11-12 (emphasis his).

<sup>14</sup>Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible quotations are translations by the author, with emphasis indicated by italics.

unto me from the ground" (4:10). In his anger, "Cain assumes to himself power over life and kills his brother, Abel,"<sup>15</sup> who, unlike Cain, was careful to follow the divine prescription in bringing the offering required (4:3-7).

Further, the evil of human beings is described as being beyond the superlative:

And God saw that the wickedness of mankind was great in the earth, and that every *imagination of the thoughts of his heart* was only *evil* continually. And the LORD was very *sorry* that He had made people on the earth, and *he grieved deeply* [lit., to His heart]. (6:5-6)

Again,

The earth was corrupt before God and the earth was filled with *violence*. And God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for everyone had corrupted his way on the earth. (6:11-12)

Two ideas here warrant investigation. The first concerns the "eruption of sin,"<sup>16</sup> which from the Fall "had grown like an avalanche."<sup>17</sup> This is highlighted by the vocabulary of the passage. *Yāser* ("imagination"), from *yṣr*, to "form," "mold," or "fashion" (cf. 2:7,8; Isa 29:16), denotes purpose or frame. In this context it bespeaks a determined purpose or mental framework; that which is molded by the mind. *Mahṣ̄bā* (thoughts) often suggests forethought and premeditation, while *lēb* (heart) signifies the center or seat of emotion, understanding, and the will. All of these were contaminated and corrupted, such that, from inception, every idea was "intrinsically 'evil' (*raʿ*), a comprehensive and general term of condemnation, especially for things disapproved by God."<sup>18</sup> Further, the earth was filled with *ḥāmās* (violence). This word does not refer to the fury and ferocity of natural catastrophes. It speaks of "extreme wickedness."<sup>19</sup> It denotes brute force, the exploitation of the weak by the strong, the poor by the wealthy. It designates the "cold-blooded and unscrupulous infringement of the personal rights of others, motivated by greed and hate and often making use of physical violence and brutality."<sup>20</sup> Living things were to have filled the earth (1:22,28), but now violence fills the earth. Indeed, "Few texts in the Old Testament are so explicit and all-

<sup>15</sup>Michael D. Guinan, *The Pentateuch* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1990), 27.

<sup>16</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, Old Testament Library, rev. and trans. John Bowden (London: SCM, 1972), 117.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup>Wenham, 144.

<sup>19</sup>R. Laird Harris, "*ḥāmās*," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:297.

<sup>20</sup>H. Haag, "*ḥāmās*," *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 4:482.



embracing as this in specifying the extent of human sinfulness and depravity.<sup>21</sup> In short, the people had an insatiable appetite for evil.

The second idea concerns God's sorrow and grief for making mankind. The word *niḥām̄tī* (I am sorry; 6:6,7), translated in the KJV as "it repenteth me,"<sup>22</sup> is better understood in terms of regret. God regretted that He had made mankind. The word *wāyyit 'āṣṣēb* (and he grieved deeply) expresses "the most intense form of human emotion, a mixture of rage and bitter anguish."<sup>23</sup> Gerhard von Rad elucidates,

In daring contrast to what is said about the human heart there follows a word about what takes place in God's heart: grief, affliction, and disappointment in man . . . This strong emotion of God indicates that God did not make the decision to destroy all life in unconcerned, cold indifference.<sup>24</sup>

The evil of paternal disrespect is noted in the closing verses of Gen 9, where it is reported that Ham looked upon the nakedness of his drunken father (v. 22). For this his son Canaan was cursed (v. 25).<sup>25</sup>

Finally, Gen 11:1-9 decries the disobedience and evil of those who, in apparent defiance of God's promise not to destroy the earth (8:21), were determined to build a great city, a great tower (of Babel), and a great name (11:4). By this action, they "attempted to defy God . . . , so making themselves as powerful as God himself (11:6)."<sup>26</sup> Michael Guinan's conclusion merits attention here:

While the modalities vary, the sin in each of these stories is one and the same; as humans we overstep the limits of creaturehood and play God . . . . The snake spells this out clearly for Adam and Eve, "You will become (like) gods!"<sup>27</sup>

<sup>21</sup>Wenham, 144.

<sup>22</sup>The root is used thirty-eight times, mostly with God as subject. The word normally used to denote human repentance, that is, turning from sin to God, is *śub*. God is free of sin, so when He "repents" (cf. Exod 32:14; Judg 2:18; 1 Sam 15:11) it means that "he relents or changes his dealings with men according to his sovereign purposes." Marvin R. Wilson, "*nāḥam*," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 2:571.

<sup>23</sup>Wenham, 144.

<sup>24</sup>Von Rad, 118.

<sup>25</sup>This is the first place where the contrast between honorable and dishonorable conduct of sons toward their father is mentioned. It is also the first place where the role of the sons affects the course of history. See Claus Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, trans. David K. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 69.

<sup>26</sup>Whybray, 3.

<sup>27</sup>Guinan, 27-28.

### Punitive Judgment

The consequence of disobedience and evil was punitive judgment following a “legal process” where God is judge.<sup>28</sup> The Primeval History denotes this in every instance where there is a refusal to obey God. In quick succession, the narrative describes the different punishments placed on all parties involved in the Fall. Gen 3:14-15 denotes the curse placed on the serpent; sorrows are multiplied for the woman, and the perfect unity and equality with her husband is disrupted (3:16); because of his disobedience, the earth is cursed for Adam’s sake. Life becomes a struggle as the earth yields thorns and thistles and mankind will have to sweat to make a living (3:17-19a). The finality of judgment is seen in the declaration of death, “You were made out of soil and you will once again turn into soil” (3:19b Contemporary English Version [CEV]). This is the fulfillment of 2:17b, the divine declaration, “In the day that you eat of it, you shall surely die.”

While Adam and Eve did not collapse that day in a lifeless heap, the process of death had started. Before this first sin, the creation called forth by God was in perfect peace and harmony; everything existed in right relationship. Those relationships were now broken. Indeed, “Death is the breaking and collapse of all these relationships on all their levels. Death is not just a moment at the end, but a whole realm of brokenness that affects our lives on all levels.”<sup>29</sup>

Cain is adjudged guilty and receives a curse for his brother’s murder. The very earth which drank his brother’s blood is now cursed for him (4:11). Indeed, “When you work the land, it will not yield its strength to you. You shall be a *fugitive* and a *wanderer* in the earth” (v. 12). Verses 12 and 14 are the only places in the Hebrew Bible where the expression “*fugitive and wanderer*” is found. As part of the curse formula, it denotes “a driven, hunted existence.”<sup>30</sup> The evil deed demanded divine attention and action.

Certainly the Flood qualifies as punitive judgment. God declared:

“I’ll destroy every living creature on earth! I’ll wipe out people, animals, birds, and reptiles. I’m sorry I even made them. . . . Cruelty and violence have spread everywhere. Now I’m going to destroy the whole earth and all its people.” (6:7,11 CEV)

Retributive justice was meted out to the people because of the magnitude of their evil (6:5). The offenses of humanity were so terrible that God was sorry that He had created them (v. 6). Social order had broken down; the “violence” (*ḥāmās*) of the people was superfluous. This indicates that people had gone beyond

<sup>28</sup>Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, 253.

<sup>29</sup>Guinan, 28.

<sup>30</sup>Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, 34.

repentance. God was justified in destroying them. The totality of the judgment is heard in Gen 7:21-23:

And *all* flesh died that moved on the earth: birds, cattle, beasts, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and *all* humanity; *all* in whose nostrils was the breath of life; *all* that was on the dry land died. And he wiped out *all* living things that were upon the face of the earth: human beings, cattle, creeping things, and the birds of the sky; they were *all* wiped out from the earth.

The cosmic order collapsed. The created order was broken, and there was a virtual return to *tōhū wābōhū* (Gen 1:2). In effect, the Flood reversed creation.

Punitive judgment is also witnessed in the dispersement of the people at the Tower of Babel. In their hubris, they pursued plans to exalt themselves by raising “a city and a tower with its top in the heavens” (11:4). The consequences of this were far-reaching, as God Himself indicates: “These people are working together because they all speak the same language. *This is just the beginning. Soon they will be able to do whatever they want*” (11:6 CEV, emphasis mine).

Therefore, the Lord “came down,” that is, intervened in human history. The builders were intent on making a name of glory for themselves, but God’s will nullified their plans, and the only name they received was an inglorious one, Babel, which bears “a pejorative connotation.”<sup>31</sup> Humanity intended to avoid scattering, but God effected precisely this measure. Even here the curse of death is smelled, for now the people cannot communicate with each other in order to foster good relationships.

In every instance of punishment, God speaks the sentence. But the judgment is not arbitrary or imposed from the outside. Guinan’s comment is persuasive and relevant:

The punishment flows from and expresses the inner nature of sin. We humans are created from the life-giving word of God and breathe with the breath of God (2:7). To reject God is to turn our back on the source of our life; it is to reach out and turn off that air supply. What is the cutting off of life but death? Since we have broken our relationship with God, the source of life, our relationships with ourselves, other persons, the animal world, natural creation itself, all begin to come apart. In place of life, peace and justice, we return to chaos. . . . Our last breath is simply the last step.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>31</sup>U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984), 248.

<sup>32</sup>Guinan, 30.

### Salvation

God provides opportunity for salvation to the disobedient whose actions incur His just punishment. In fact, in the curse placed on the serpent,<sup>33</sup> God introduces the provision for salvation. Gen 3:15 records, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Commonly called the Protouangellion, this underscores the *divine initiative*.<sup>34</sup> God takes the first step to effect this salvation. It is also noteworthy that the promise of salvation is given *before* exacting the judgment on humanity.

The divine initiative is to be noted in Gen 4:9, where God questioned Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" Cain's insolence is seen in his peevish answer, "Am I my brother's keeper?" God certainly knew the answer, as v. 10 indicates. But even as the punishment is given (vv. 11-12) and Cain laments that it is "greater than I can bear" (vv. 13-14), God's mercy is revealed. This is pictured in two ways: (1) Cain is not killed (no *lex talionis*); (2) God puts an identifying mark on him to prevent his slaying and threatens vengeance on anyone who should kill him (vv. 14-15).<sup>35</sup> There are to be no vendettas. "No human being has the right to interfere with the execution of God's punishment."<sup>36</sup>

The Noah cycle (chaps. 6-9)<sup>37</sup> demarcates several points of God's salvific activity. Despite the evil of human beings which caused the forfeiture of their lives, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (6:6). He "was a just man,

<sup>33</sup>Commenting on the fact that the devil, through the medium of the serpent, provoked the fall of mankind, Herbert Lockyer, *All the Messianic Prophecies of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1973), 59, says, "He was the first to learn of a Deliver who would come to destroy his devilish works. To him was given the initial promise and prophecy of redemption from the sin he had brought into God's fair universe."

<sup>34</sup>Contra Whybray, 34, who claims that "God appears to be reacting at every turn to what mankind is doing rather than taking the initiative." See also my article, "The Remnant and the New Covenant in the Book of Jeremiah," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 34 (1996): 242-44. Whybray, 30, is correct, however, when he states, "The most obvious difference between the Israelite 'universal history' and the others is that the Israelite stories . . . are monotheistic. All the others are polytheistic."

<sup>35</sup>Verses 16-17 establish Cain's progeny and the building of a city, implicitly indicating the fulfillment of God's word.

<sup>36</sup>Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, 35. He is also correct in noting "that the mark was placed specifically and only on Cain and cannot be extended to some tribal grouping or by extension, race of people." Indeed, "the form of the mark is unknown, and cannot be inferred from the narrative." *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup>Brueggemann, 15, declares, "This cycle presents the sorry picture of old creation and the beginning of new creation. This cycle is structured in the reverse order from the 'Adam cycle [chaps. 1-5].' That cycle began with affirmation and ended in indictment. This cycle begins in indictment in 6:5-8 and is resolved in 8:20-22. The decision to destroy in 6:11-13 is resolved in 9:1-17."

perfect in his generations, and Noah walked with God" (v. 7). He was found "righteous" before God in that generation (7:10). It is noteworthy that "God's initiative of grace towards Noah is mentioned *before* there is any reference to Noah's faith and righteousness."<sup>38</sup> God determined to destroy the earth but provided for the salvation and safety of the just and also the preservation and continuity of life on the earth (6:17-21; 7:2-4). The instrument of safety was the ark, built according to God's specifications (6:14-16), and guaranteeing protection, for "Noah only remained alive and those that were with him in the ark" (7:23b).

Five points of significance are to be underscored in this narrative with regards to God's salvific activity:

1. *Divine Action.* The absolute destruction caused by the flood is described in Gen 7: 21-24. Gen 8:1, however, explicates salvation, "And God remembered Noah, and every living creature, and all the cattle that were with him in the ark. And God caused a wind to blow over the earth and the waters receded." The root *zkr* (remembers), does not mean simply bringing something back to one's mental attention (as though God had forgotten Noah and the others), but is intentional in speaking of action. It pinpoints "inward mental acts accompanied by appropriate external acts."<sup>39</sup> This is understood in that God "remembered Noah," and immediately he acted by causing a wind<sup>40</sup> to effect the recession of the waters. Gordon Wenham correctly states, "When God remembers, He acts . . . ."<sup>41</sup> Bernhard W. Anderson shows how this idea is depicted in a chiasmic outline or palistrophe, which demonstrates the effect of God's remembering:

<sup>38</sup>David Atkinson, *The Message of Genesis 1-11: The Dawn of Creation* (Leicester, England, and Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1990), 137 (emphasis mine). He adds that in vv. 5-7 the stress is placed on "man . . . man . . . man . . . ." "Noah is part of the world of sinful humanity. It was within this sinful humanity that 'grace found Noah'" (137-38).

<sup>39</sup>Thomas E. McComiskey, "zākar," *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody, 1980), 1:241.

<sup>40</sup>The verb 'br (to blow) is used in the *Hiphil* (causative) form.

<sup>41</sup>Wenham, 184.

## Transitional introduction (6:9-10)

1. Violence in God's creation (6:11-12)
2. First divine address: resolution to destroy (6:13-22)
3. Second divine address: command to enter the ark (7:1-10)
  4. Beginning of the flood (7:11-16)
  5. The rising flood waters (7:17-24)
- GOD'S REMEMBRANCE OF NOAH [8:1a]**
6. The receding flood waters (8:1-5)
7. The drying of the earth (8:6-14)
8. Third divine address: command to leave the ark (8:15-19)
9. God's resolution to preserve order (8:20-22)
10. Fourth divine address: covenant blessing and peace (9:1-17)

Transitional conclusion (9:18-19).<sup>42</sup>

Noah and the others were not saved because of their obedience or ingenuity in constructing the ark (though both were important). They were saved precisely by divine initiative and action. Noah, and those who elected to join with him, had "found grace in the eyes of the LORD" (6:8).

2. *New Creation*. The formulaic expression, "Be fruitful and multiply" (*p<sup>e</sup>rú úr<sup>e</sup>bú*), is issued three times to the survivors of the flood (8:16-17; 9:1,7). This divine imperative undoubtedly points back to the Creation account where the same divine mandate is given (Gen 1:22, 28). This command, with its attendant blessing to repopulate the earth<sup>43</sup> signals a fresh start for humanity, a new opportunity, and a new creation.<sup>44</sup> Also, the governance of humanity over the animal kingdom is reflected in 1:28 and 9:2. Further, God's provision of food for mankind to eat in 9:3 reflects the same idea as does 1:29. Finally, 1:27 and 9:6b parallel each other in that both describe mankind as being made in the image of God. Wenham depicts the creation ideas as paralleled in Gen 1 and 9 as follows:<sup>45</sup>

<sup>42</sup>Bernhard W. Anderson, "From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Gen. 1-11," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97 (1978): 38. Cf. Gordon J. Wenham, "The Coherence of the Flood Narrative," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (1978): 337-39.

<sup>43</sup>Westermann, *Genesis: A Practical Commentary*, 10, believes that this "blessing links the primal events (1:28; 9:1-2; 8:17) with the patriarchal history (35:11; 47:27; 28:3; 48:4) and with the history of the nation (Exod. 1:7)."

<sup>44</sup>Verses 18-19 implicitly advocate the idea of regeneration, since they describe those exiting the ark as being paired: Noah and his wife; their sons and their wives; and every living thing after their kind. This is suggestive that all living things were ready to execute the divine mandate.

<sup>45</sup>Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 192.

9:2 "The fear of you . . . is upon everything"	//	1:28 "rule over every living creature"
9:3 "... yours to eat: as I gave you the green vegetation"	//	1:29 "I have given you . . . for food"
9:6b "in the image of God he made man"	//	1:27 "God created man in his image"

3. *Worship*. Immediately upon exiting the ark, "Noah built an altar to the Lord. And he took from every clean animal and from every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar" (8:20). This act of reverence and worship<sup>46</sup> met with divine approval as God solemnly declared not to annihilate life on earth again (v. 21). It must not be conceived that Noah's worship prompted this divine response; rather, what must be understood is that the promise to maintain life on the earth is part of the covenant ideal which God had initiated even *before* the flood (6:18).

4. *Covenant*. This is central to the Noah cycle. The word *b'rit* (covenant) is found eight times (6:18; 9:9,11,12,13,15,16,17) and is mentioned here for the first time in the Hebrew Bible. Pivotal to this idea is the fact that God initiates the covenant. Once again the *divine initiative* comes into prominence. Further, the covenant in this cycle is used only within the context of salvation. It has a positive intentionality. Finally, it has far-reaching implications. The covenant is made with Noah and his progeny (6:18; 7:9) but is effective for "all living things" (9:10,12), for "perpetual generations" (9:12), and for the entire "earth" (9:13,17); further, it is an "everlasting covenant" (9:17).<sup>47</sup>

5. *Promise*. The essence of the Noahic covenant is God's promise of the continuity and perpetuity of life on the earth. Gen 9:11 records this fact:

"I will establish my *covenant* with you" [Covenant].  
 "All flesh *will not be cut off anymore* by the waters of a flood;  
 and there will not be a flood again to destroy the earth" [Promise].<sup>48</sup>

The ratification of the covenant is seen in the sign of the rainbow (9:12-13). Every time the rainbow appears in the storm cloud, it provides luminescent evidence that God has taken the initiative to save humanity and is honoring His

<sup>46</sup>Worship, as a human response to God's salvation, triumph, and victory on behalf of His people is a celebrated fact in the Hebrew Bible. Cf. Exod 15; Josh 8:30-35; Judg 4-5; 1 Sam 7, especially v. 12; 2 Sam 6:12-18; 2 Chron 20:26-29.

<sup>47</sup>For an understanding of God's covenant with Israel as a central theme in understanding the OT, see Ernest W. Nicholson, *God and His People: Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986).

<sup>48</sup>The CEV puts it well, "I promise every living creature that the earth and those living on it will never again be destroyed by a flood."

covenant promise to preserve life on the earth. It is the assurance that God “remembers [His] covenant” (9:15) and is acting in a decisive manner in keeping His promise. It functions, therefore, as a visible manifestation that human beings can trust God’s covenant commitment.

The sign of the rainbow is of great significance. Usually signs are given to remind humanity of God’s presence and of their obligations to the covenant. For example, circumcision, as the sign of the Abrahamic covenant, functioned to remind Abraham of his responsibilities. However, “The rainbow is a sign that is seen by *man* but serves to remind *God* of His promises.”<sup>49</sup> Anderson’s conclusion about the dramatic movement of the passage is apropos:

Thus the *Urgeschichte* in its final form displays an overall design: a dramatic movement from the original harmony of creation, through the violent disruption of that order and the near return to chaos, and finally to a new creation under the rainbow sign of the everlasting covenant.<sup>50</sup>

Salvation may also be glimpsed in the story of the Tower of Babel. Far from being “a negative and menacing note,”<sup>51</sup> it demonstrates God’s salvific activity. Since “nothing will be restrained from them which they have imagined to do” (11:6), people were increasing their independence from God. He knew that humanity’s hubris, which involved “the whole earth” (11:1),<sup>52</sup> could place their very existence in jeopardy. Therefore, God confused their speech and scattered<sup>53</sup> them abroad, instead of destroying them *in toto* again. This episode, therefore, embraces God’s earlier promise not to decimate the earth (8:21-22; 9:11,15). It affirms His claim and concretizes human trust in Him. And while the scattering indicates judgment, it is also the means by which the people escaped annihilation. Judgment and salvation are, as it were, two sides of the same coin.

On the whole then, we can agree with von Rad’s evaluation that Gen 1-11 demonstrates “the growing power of sin in the world,” which is paralleled by the equally powerful “growth of grace.”<sup>54</sup> “The story of the Fall, the Cain narrative,

<sup>49</sup>Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 195. Cf. M. V. Fox, “The Sign of the Covenant,” *Revue Biblique* 81 (1974): 557-96.

<sup>50</sup>Anderson, 39.

<sup>51</sup>Whybray, 3.

<sup>52</sup>Whybray, 35, is correct “that the Tower of Babel account contains no proper names and mentions no individuals at all,” which is particularly notable after the plethora of proper names in chap. 10. The builders are curiously called “the whole earth” (v. 1) and “they” (v. 2). It is true that 10:9-10 tell us that Nimrod founded Babylon, but it remains true that in the account of the building of the tower, no personal names are given.

<sup>53</sup>The irony here is that “scattering” is precisely what the people were attempting to avoid (11:4).

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*



and the Flood story all show God's redemptive activity, forgiving and sustaining at the same time as he punishes."<sup>55</sup>

### Genealogies

The Primeval History contains four genealogical lists:<sup>56</sup> 4:17-22, the descendants of Cain; 5:1-32, the *toledoth* of Adam; 10:1-32, the *toledoth* of the

<sup>55</sup>Gerhard von Rad, *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, trans. E. W. Trueman Dicken (London: SCM, 1984), 64-65. He adds, "Only in the story of the building of the tower does the divine judgment appear to be the last word, when the nations are scattered and the unity of the human race is lost." Ibid. It is evident that I disagree with this position.

<sup>56</sup>There are two types of genealogies in the OT: ascending genealogies, which usually have a linking formula, "x the son of y" (Gen 10:1-7), and descending genealogies, which commonly follow the formula, "x begat y" (Gen 4:17-22; 5:3-32; 10:8-32; 11:10-29). The first is generally used to trace ancestral links back to an important figure in the past, as in Gen 10:1-7 where Shem, Ham, and Japheth go back to Noah (10:1), the father of the new beginning, the new creation. The latter type generally includes information beyond the ancestral links, such as their ages (5:4-21; 11:10-26) and actions (10:8-11, which deals with Nimrod, who first built in the land of Shinar, the same place where the Tower of Babel was later erected; cf. 11:2-9). See T. C. Mitchell and Alan R. Millard, "Genealogy," *New Bible Dictionary*, 3d ed., ed. I. Howard Marshall, A[llan] R. Millard, J.I. Packer, D.J. Wiseman (Leicester, England, and Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity, 1996), 400.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to deal with the thorny issues of the arrangement and differences in numbers between the MT and other ancient witnesses. For a brief overview, see R. R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Old Testament: A Study of the Form and Function of the Old Testament Genealogies in their Near Eastern Context* (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1972); G. F. Hasel, "The Genealogies of Genesis 5 and 11 and Their Alleged Babylonian Background," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 16 (1978): 361-74; idem, "Genesis 5 and 11: Chronogenealogies in the Biblical History of Beginnings," *Origins* 7 (1980): 23-37; idem, "The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11," *Origins* 7 (1980): 53-70; K. Luke, "The Genealogies in Genesis 5," *Indian Theological Studies* 18 (1981): 223-44; F. H. Cryer, "The Interrelationships of Gen. 5:32; 11:10-11 and the Chronology of the Flood," *Biblica* 66 (1985): 241-61; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 121-25; 248-53.

sons of Noah; and 11:10-29, the *toledoth* of Shem.<sup>57</sup> These genealogical tables serve several functions:

1. They “link the narratives together in a chronological series.”<sup>58</sup>

2. They provide details relevant to the people and culture of that time. For example, in the list of 4:17-22, we find that Cain built a city named after his son, Enoch; Jabal was the progenitor of nomads; Jubal was the father of musicians; and Tubal-Cain was a skilled artisan in bronze and iron. These arts were all beneficial to the sociological make-up of ancient societies.

3. They are “an attempt to account for the origins and geographical locations of the nations of the world”<sup>59</sup> (cf. chap.10).

4. The final list (11:10-29) introduces Abram (later Abraham), the father of the Patriarchal History. He is the founder of the nation whose ancestry consumes Gen 12-50. As such, this genealogical table provides the link that affords a sense of continuity<sup>60</sup> between the Primeval and Patriarchal History. Wenham describes it this way:

However we look at it, 11:10-26 stands very much as a bridge passage between the primeval history and the patriarchal stories. The contents too point in the same direction. It traces the chosen line from Shem, the son of Noah, down to Abram, son of Terah. Like chap. 5, which links Adam and Noah, this chapter runs from Noah’s sons to Abram. Each stands at the head of a new epoch in world history: Adam, the first man; Noah, head of the new post-flood humanity; Abraham, father of Israel the chosen people.<sup>61</sup>

This sense of continuity is important to the structure of the book.<sup>62</sup>

An interesting fact concerning the genealogical tables in Gen 5 and 11 is the extraordinarily long ages of the patriarchs. It may very well be that the singular purpose of mentioning these ages was “to emphasize the mortality in spite of [the]

<sup>57</sup>This introductory formula, “These are the generations of” or “This is the account of” (*’āleh tôl’ dā*), occurs several times in the book of Genesis: 2:4, the only place where it is used without being associated with personal names; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10,27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1,9; and 37:2. Since its usage is fairly equally distributed between both Primeval History (chaps. 1-11) and Patriarchal History (chaps. 12-50), it is argued that this expression is one indicator of the literary unity of the book. Further, since it is used as a connective link in the history of the patriarchs, there is no reason to doubt the historical value of the narratives in chaps. 1-11. See Herbert Wolf, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Pentateuch* (Chicago: Moody, 1991), 82.

<sup>58</sup>Whybray, 3.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>Brueggemann, 15, underscores that “chapters 10-11 occupy a transitional position. . . . They make a shift from *primeval history* to *world history*.”

<sup>61</sup>Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 249.

<sup>62</sup>Whybray, 3.

vigorous longevity of these Patriarchs, thus bearing out one result of the Fall.”<sup>63</sup> Indeed, these genealogies contribute to the picture of death. We may note that initially, these tables list the “long, long lives of people, but then the life-spans get shorter and shorter. In other words, the power of death is getting stronger; it grabs humans sooner and sooner.”<sup>64</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The Primeval History is not to be regarded merely as an introduction to the book of Genesis or to the rest of the Pentateuch. It has sound theological character, as has been explicated in five motifs: supernatural events, disobedience and evil, judgment, salvation, and chronologies. In fact, these same themes are found in the wider context of the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch as a whole. The theological connections, therefore, between the Primeval History and the Patriarchal History (and the rest of the Pentateuch) will make for further fruitful study.

<sup>63</sup>Mitchell and Millard, 400.

<sup>64</sup>Guinan, 29.



## AESTHETICS IN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

JOHN WESLEY TAYLOR V

Concept confusion readily assaults the Christian mind. For certain Christians, “beauty” and “sin” have become synonyms, mirror images of depravity and degradation. Furthermore, these individuals often equate piety with somberness, drabness with holiness. If one experiences delight, such feelings must be inevitably wrong and the source of pleasure inherently evil. By some, the injunction “love not the world” (1 John 2:15) is viewed, in fact, as a grim warning against literature, music, and art. Such aesthetic experiences are viewed as subtle, sinister attempts to sneak worldliness in through the back door.

As committed Christians, however, we must address certain crucial underlying questions:

1. Does God love beauty?
2. Did He place within man both the urge and ability to create things that are original, unique, and lovely? If so, are there divine standards that govern human creation?
3. What is the role of aesthetics in the Christian life, and, by extension, in Christian education?
4. Is a thoughtful acquaintance with literary and artistic masterpieces legitimate for a Christian, or is one playing with fire?
5. Is it permissible for a Christian to enjoy aesthetic experiences that center on the common things of life? Or must one focus exclusively on aesthetic experiences that are religious in nature?
6. Finally, is there a right and wrong in art, in drama, in music, or in literature? If so, how should a Christian make that distinction?

These issues trouble many Christian educators. Scripture teaches that we should be able to give a reason for what we believe (1 Pet 3:15); a rationale based not merely on tradition, prejudice, personal preference, or popular opinion. Clearly, our answers to these questions must not be flippant. Rather, it seems necessary that Christians carefully examine these matters and seek to formulate guiding principles that will enable us to experience, understand, and enjoy what God has intended.

### Core Concepts

As we begin our journey, some working definitions are, perhaps, in order. Let us first consider the overarching concept itself—aesthetics.

Let us suppose that we are considering the purchase of a particular dining room table. One way to look at the table is to see it in purely utilitarian, economic terms—its resale value, for example, or the practicality of its features, such as the number of people it will seat. Another way to see the table is to take a technical, scientific approach and describe it in terms of its height, width, strength, type of wood, and finish. There is a third view of the table, however, and that is to note its warmth of color, proportions, texture, and style. This latter perspective is the aesthetic response.

So what is aesthetics? In essence, it is a persistent attempt to see life appreciatively. It is a bonding of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual factors; a synthesis that seeks to better comprehend all of man's experience that could be called beautiful or expressive.

What then are the qualities that make up the aesthetic experience? There are, undoubtedly, an infinite number of conditions that can enhance the aesthetic nature of an object, idea, or situation. These might include purpose, pattern, proportion, and perspective, as well as originality, dominance, restraint, and unity in diversity. Such aesthetic qualities are formed, in turn, from more fundamental ingredients such as tone, melody, and rhythm; alliteration and climax; line, color, texture, and movement.

We have realized that inherent in the concept of aesthetics are the underlying constructs of beauty and creative expression. What, in the end, is beauty? And what is creativity?

A definition of beauty seems elusive—so intangible that modern writers usually make no attempt to define it. Even Plato, who stressed ultimate meaning in *Greater Hippias*, failed in his attempt to delineate beauty. So perhaps we do have something here that does not fit neatly into a tight package.

For the purpose of our dialogue, however, let us at least attempt an operational definition: To say that something is beautiful implies that we are pleased by whatever it is that we are describing. There is a satisfying relationship between an individual (with his/her capacities, past experience, and training) and an "object" (with its sounds, colors, shapes, and forms). Thus, beauty is found not only in the object nor solely in the "eye of the beholder," but rather in the multifaceted relationship between the two, a relationship that seems appropriate and fitting.

As with many relationships, however, beauty may be transitory. Something deemed beautiful today might lose that quality tomorrow; while that which has not been considered beautiful in the past may suddenly seem to undergo a metamorphosis and acquire innate beauty. The Scripture itself notes, "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Eccl 3:11). Consequently, the assessment of beauty must be an on-going, dynamic process.

Perhaps it is also worth pointing out the difference between that which is beautiful and that which is merely pretty. As we have noted, beauty is a personal aesthetic experience blending spiritual, intellectual, and emotional components. Prettiness, however, seems to be almost exclusively an emotive reaction, and a response that is easily swayed by the emotional norms of the masses.

The third concept, creativity, is the ability to invent or express what has never before existed. It incorporates synergy, in which the end result is more than the sum of its parts. This creative capacity is a divine attribute, given in a measure to man from the very beginning.<sup>1</sup> It is probably significant that there is only one description of God provided prior to the statement that man was formed in His image (Gen 1:26-27). That portrait is of God as the Creator. Thus, whatever else it may mean, to be in the image of the Creator (*imago deo*) must mean to be creative.

Consequently, man has been instructed to bring out of the treasure house not only things that are old, but also those that are new (Matt 13:52). Such freshness and originality imply innovative thought and action. Thus each creation—whether sculpture, architecture, painting, literature, drama, or music—brings with it a crisp new awareness, bursting from the bud of a unique message or an innovative aesthetic form.

### A Christian Perspective

Having at least grappled with some fundamental concepts, we must now ask, as Christians, whether the Bible implies a theory of aesthetics, and whether it is possible to formulate Christian principles that allow us to judge what is beautiful and to establish standards for creative expression.

First of all, it is clear that Christianity involves the whole person—including the intellect and the emotions, as well as one's creative expression and aesthetic relationships. Christ Himself affirmed that to receive eternal life one must love God with all one's heart, soul, strength, and mind; and one's neighbor as himself (Mark 12:30-31). Thus any creative production or expression of beauty must be done to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31) and for the betterment of mankind (Gal 5:13).

Second, while there is clear warning against being "of the world," the Christian is nevertheless "in the world," according to God's plan (John 17:15). And being in the world, one partakes of its pain and pleasure, its hopes and fears, its sorrows and joys. While Christ spoke unequivocally of sacrifice, of taking up one's cross (Matt 16:24), and of walking the straight and narrow path (Matt 7:14),

<sup>1</sup>Cogent presentations of this concept are found in H. M. Best, "God's Creation and Human Creativity," in *The Reality of Christian Learning: Strategies for Faith-Discipline Integration*, ed. H. Heie and D. L. Wolfe (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 249-67, and Arthur Holmes, *Contours of a World View* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), particularly the chapter entitled "Human Creativity" (pp. 199-206).

He also affirmed the concept of an abundant life. "I am come," He said, "that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

Hence it seems significant that Christ attended wedding celebrations and even provided additional refreshments when the supply ran low (John 2:1-11). He called the attention of His listeners to the loveliness of wildflowers (Luke 12:27), and invited His disciples to join Him in singing (Matt 26:30). Although no sanction is given for emotional intoxication, it appears evident that one can follow Christ and still enjoy food, festivities, and the beauties of nature. The Scriptures, in fact, declare, "Thou wilt show me the path of life; in thy presence is fullness of joy; at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Ps 16:11).

A third critical area in a Christian view of aesthetics concerns the formulation of Christian principles to guide creative expression and to provide God-centered criteria for aesthetic evaluation. These are particularly important concerns in Christian education, where we deal directly with the formation of the Christian mind and the development of a Christian lifestyle. Although aesthetics is not limited to the arts, we will take the arts as a case in point, given that it is an aesthetic arena with which most students interact in their educational programs, and with which most of us have had at least some contact at one time or another.

### The Case of the Arts

The arts are forms of aesthetic expression that enlarge our field of experience, stimulate our ability of observation, train our power of reflection, enhance our capacity for discrimination, and help us to empathize with other peoples and cultures. In so doing, they clarify, intensify, and interpret life.<sup>2</sup>

For the sake of our discussion, we will delimit the arts to the following three areas:

1. The *auditory arts* meld sound and silence, pitch, timbre and rhythm, intensity and sometimes words into acoustic productions, such as vocal or instrumental music.

2. The *visual arts* incorporate the prime ingredients of mass, space, light, and shadow, as well as form, proportion, perspective, and hue to produce painting, sculpture, architecture, and the like.

3. The *literary arts*, such as poetry and prose, weave rhyme, rhythm, contrast, metaphor, alliteration, and the meaning of words into written tapestries.

Within these artistic domains, we will seek to delineate Christian principles for aesthetic production and evaluation. Following each principle, a brief rationale is given for its derivation and relevance.

<sup>2</sup>Although there are relatively few works that have examined aesthetics from a Christian perspective, an excellent treatise, focusing on the arts, is Harold B. Hannum, *Christian Search for Beauty* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1975).



## **The Arts Are of Christian Value**

Why, from a Christian perspective, does a work of art have worth? What is the basis for its significance? First and foremost, art acquires merit because it is an expression of creativity. And creativity is of value, as we have seen, because God is the Creator and man was made in the image of God.

A second argument in favor of the Christian value of the arts is found in the fact that the Bible, as God's inspired revelation of His will, specifically enjoins artistic production. Both congregational singing (Exod 15:1-21; Rev 15:3) and instrumental renditions (1 Chr 23:5; 2 Chr 29:25-28) were at various times ordained by God as key components of worship. This implies that it is of value that some people learn composition, that others achieve skill in instrumental performance, and that everyone, no doubt, improve their voices. On another occasion, God directed that simple drama be enacted (Ezek 4:1-3) in order to communicate spiritual lessons. This particular production, in which a representation of the Jerusalem skyline served as a backdrop to ensure that the audience would not miss the point, ran continuously for more than a year.

Perhaps the greatest demonstration of the value that God places on artistic expression, however, is to be found in the design of the sanctuary and of Solomon's temple. In each of these cases, the house of worship was meticulously constructed according to God's blueprint (Exod 25:9; 1 Chr 28:11-12). Following the divine plan, there were to be statuary representations (Exod 25:31-33), carvings in bas relief (2 Chr 3:7), embroidered curtains (Exod 26:1), and artistic depictions of nature—blossoms and almonds (Exod 25:31-33), oxen and lilies (2 Chr 4:3-5). Furthermore, God personally commissioned those who were to prepare these aesthetic components (Exod 35:30-35), altogether providing convincing proof that God values both the artist and the work of art.

### **1. Levels of Understanding Influence an Appreciation of the Arts**

There are at least three levels of understanding—sensation, perception, and valuation. Sensation is the raw data that our sense organs give us; perception adds meaning to sensation; while valuation assesses perception by means of our worldview. Aesthetic knowledge is thus hierarchical in nature.

It is possible, for example, to sense something without really perceiving it, without truly understanding what it is. In His day, Jesus noted that some individuals looked without seeing and listened without understanding (Matt 13:13). Much popular music, for example, has strong sense appeal. It is pleasurable on a physical level. Great music, however, goes beyond the physical response and requires an intellectual component. It calls for an understanding of both the medium and the message. While it is clear that sensation is prerequisite to subsequent stages of knowing, the constant bombardment of the mind with mere

sensuous stimuli can bring about a toxic imbalance between sensation and reflection.

There is an even more important dimension, however, and this relates the aesthetic experience to one's worldview, to a conceptual framework that includes normative principles and evaluative criteria. For the Christian, this valuation process means that an aesthetic work must not be merely something one likes or even comprehends, but something that lifts one to a higher, more spiritual plane. It implies that while sensory delight and experiential pleasure are legitimate components of the Christian life (Isa 35:1-2, 10; Cant 2:11-13), the love for God must supersede the love of pleasure (2 Tim 3:4).

These levels of experiential knowledge result in corresponding groups of individuals. At the first stage are those whose response to art is primarily sensuous. These persons give the greatest importance to feeling and physical enjoyment—whether it is the driving beat of rock or the soothing balm of Mantovani. Although the sensory element is always a necessary aesthetic component, in this group it is the dominant if not the exclusive mode of response.

The second group is comprised of those persons who respond perceptually. Although emotive ingredients are nearly always evident, these individuals also interact with the artistic medium on an intellectual level. This, of course, requires at least a basic understanding of the aesthetic elements—which in music might include such components as rhythm, melody, harmony, structure, expression, and their interrelations.

Finally, there are those who relate the aesthetic experience to the larger parameters of their existence, seeking not only to comprehend the medium and the message but also to relate these to the spiritual quality of life. These are the individuals who appreciate art to its fullest.

## 2. In the Arts, Both Medium and Message Must Be Considered

There are two sides of art: form and content, style and substance, medium and message. We will first address concerns related to the artistic message, examining subsequently matters more specifically associated with artistic style.

Art forms can be used to convey many types of messages—realistic or pure fantasy, true or false, good or evil. But they *always* convey a message. Even the assertion that there is no meaning at all is a message.

When we use art to convey a message, it serves to amplify the impact of that idea. It adds strength to the worldview encapsulated in the proposition, regardless of whether that worldview is Christian or not. Consequently, an artistic message must be examined most carefully. Even when a celebrated artist commits a worldview to an artistic medium, it does not follow that this worldview is true or that it should be accepted unquestioningly. As we will soon discuss in greater detail, the truth of the worldview presented by an artist must be judged on separate

grounds from his or her technical excellence. While both are essential, the worldview is paramount.

A Christian worldview,<sup>3</sup> however, does not imply that the message must always be cheery and bright. Indeed, such a shallow statement runs counter to the Christian understanding of the great controversy between good and evil, and presents a distorted, romanticized view of life. In the Christian worldview there is both a major and a minor theme.<sup>4</sup> The minor theme is the truth about the untruth, the reality of that which is evil, ugly, and immoral. In the arts, there is a place for this minor theme because man is flawed and fallen, society is sinful and in rebellion, and the universe itself is fractured and abnormal.

Nevertheless, one must be careful not to major in minors, as has occurred in certain modern art that dwells on a pessimistic analysis of contemporary man. This position is unbiblical (e.g., John 3:16; 14:1-3). Rather, the aesthetic message must resolve toward the dominant Christian theme, because there is ultimately an optimistic answer. This major theme maintains that there is an infinite, personal God whose character of love is the law of the universe. It also asserts that life is meaningful and purposeful because man was created in God's image. Finally, while recognizing that man is lost, it affirms that he can also be redeemed and restored through Jesus Christ.

We turn now to artistic style. As one converses with believers, it soon becomes apparent that many Christians reject contemporary art forms, not because they are contrary to their worldview, but because they feel threatened by a new medium, jeopardized in some way by a particular style different from that with which they are familiar. Growth and change, however, are characteristics of life. As long as art is an integral part of life, its forms are bound to change across time, place, and culture.

Such modifications in style are not intrinsically evil. Hebrew poetry, for example, hardly ever rhymes. Rather it uses literary devices such as parallelism and alliteration. But does this mean that it is not a viable form of poetry? Certain forms of contemporary music utilize harmonic combinations and sequences that do not appear in music written five hundred years ago. Is this wrong? Or could it be, as with language, that twenty-first century forms and expressions connect more effectively with the postmodern generation. In short, it seems that a Christian must utilize art forms that speak meaningfully to contemporary culture, while

<sup>3</sup>Delineations of the Christian worldview can be found in the following works, among others: B. J. Walsh and J. R. Middleton, *The Transforming Vision: Shaping a Christian World View* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1984), and J. W. Sire, *Discipleship of the Mind: Learning to Love God in the Ways We Think* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1990).

<sup>4</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer has developed this theme quite extensively in his book, *How Should We Then Live?* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1976). This penetrating essay has encouraged many to examine more closely the underlying assumptions in a Christian view of aesthetics.

concurrently contributing to a better understanding of life as seen from the Christian perspective.

Lest someone receive the impression, however, that artistic media are of no great concern, perhaps we should note that artistic style is much like a whetted knife. In the hands of a surgeon, it can save a life, while in the hands of a vicious thug, it can abruptly terminate life. Similarly, while artistic style, in and of itself, is neither good nor evil, we must not be deceived into believing that style is of no real importance.

In any significant work of art, there is always a close link between the medium and the message. In fact, artistic styles often develop as a result of a certain worldview. Furthermore, over time, certain art forms become closely associated in symbolism with particular messages. This implies that one must also consider the real-life linkages of a given style, whether in music, painting, sculpture, literature, or any other art form.

In essence, although the medium of an artistic expression can in a certain sense be considered neutral, it must not be used naively or indiscriminately. Rather, the Christian artist must carefully consider when to adopt a particular style, when to adapt it, or when to reject it altogether and move out in a totally fresh direction. This same thought and care must be undertaken by the Christian consumer of the arts when evaluating aesthetic experiences.

### 3. Excellence in the Arts Can Be Evaluated

We have already noted that the worldview encapsulated in the message of an artistic production must undergo serious scrutiny. In addition to this propositional content of a work of art, Francis Schaeffer, in his book *Art and the Bible*, has identified three further criteria for evaluating the arts. These normative standards are (1) technical excellence, (2) validity, and (3) the integration of artistic content and vehicle.<sup>5</sup>

In any artistic arena, *technical excellence* is evidenced by the artist's expertise as judged by his peers or by other individuals in sustained contact with the art form. In painting, for example, technical excellence may include the use of color, form, texture, composition, and balance, the handling of lines and perspective, and the unity of the canvas. It may also consider accuracy, imagination, thoroughness, and completeness.

By recognizing technical expertise as an indicator of excellence in any artistic expression, we are able to state that while we cannot agree with a certain artist's perspective on life, nevertheless he or she is a great artist. In other words, we do not consider artwork rubbish simply because we disagree with the artist's worldview. On the other hand, if something immoral or untruthful is stated in great

<sup>5</sup>Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible: Two Essays*, L'Abri Special (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1973), 39.

art, it can be far more destructive than if expressed in crude art. Hence, the greater the technical excellence of the work of art, the more carefully we ought to critique its worldview.

*Validity* refers directly to an artist's integrity. It requires that the work of art be frank and honest, with no attempt to deceive. To borrow the sculptor's terminology, it must be *sine cera*—that is, without wax to gloss over imperfections in material or technique. Validity thus requires that the artist be honest with himself and his worldview. If an artist produces his work only with mercenary intent or to secure popularity and praise, he has lost inner integrity. If he makes a work of art merely pandering to a patron—whether the ancient noble, the modern art gallery to which he wants access, or to impress the art critics of the moment—his work does not possess intrinsic validity. He is merely “playing to the audience.”

Finally, there must be a *good fit* between content and style, a strong correlation between the medium and the message. This criterion of appropriateness measures the degree to which the artist has suited the vehicle to the subject matter, as well as assessing the suitability of the work of art to a particular time, place, and function. Such an assessment, however, must take into account both the intent and the end result of the artistic expression.

#### 4. The Purpose and Effect of a Work of Art Must Be Carefully Considered

Art can be created for a wide spectrum of intents. A pragmatist might inquire, “Will it be useful?” A sociologist may wonder, “Will it contribute to civilization?” A hedonist may ask, “Will it bring pleasure?” The Christian, however, thinks, “Does this work of art have spiritual significance? Will it help me to know God better? Will it be a blessing to my fellow men?” For the Christian, the arts can consequently fulfill certain expectations.

First of all, art may be produced as *works of beauty*. This is biblical. In the construction of the temple according to God's plan, Solomon “garnished the house with precious stones for beauty” (2 Chr 3:6). As no utilitarian reason is given, it seems that God simply wanted beauty to be evident. In the temple courtyard, there was a “molten sea” supported by twelve statues of oxen, its brim shaped in the form of a lily (2 Chr 4:3-5). Furthermore, there were two free-standing columns in the courtyard (2 Chr 3:16, 17). These columns supported no architectural weight and thus had no pragmatic significance. They were erected only because God said they should be there as objects of beauty. Artworks may thus be legitimate based solely upon their own intrinsic value as creations of beauty.

Of course, art may have *utilitarian functions*, as well. Organ music may be used to quiet a congregation before a religious service. Excerpts from great literature may effectively illustrate a sermon or teach a moral lesson. And light music, which does not demand much intellectual effort to enjoy, may find a valid role in personal relaxation or as background music in a restaurant or shopping

center. The usefulness of the arts for certain pragmatic purposes, however, should not be equated with aesthetic qualities, which may or may not be present. Just as every sentence one speaks should not be construed as an attempt to produce great oratory, so throughout the arts there may be valid expressions that communicate in practical terms but do not necessarily bear the hallmarks of aesthetic expression.

Art can also serve as an *avenue for the imagination*.<sup>6</sup> Some Christians have maintained that all visual art should be strictly representational—a precise depiction of natural phenomena. But according to Scriptural precedent, art does not have to be photographic. Rather, it can be free to incorporate creative, inventive dimensions. According to divine directive, the hem of the priest's garments was to incorporate representations of pomegranates (Exod 28:33). These were to be scarlet, purple, and blue. In nature, pomegranates are in fact red, and one might even stretch the hue a little and say that they can be purple. But natural pomegranates are never blue. The implication is that there is freedom to be imaginative, and this is acceptable to God.

Finally, a work of art may be created as an *element of worship*. This is holy ground, however, and we must tread carefully. Initially, there seems to be a paradox, at least in terms of the visual arts. The same God who prohibited from Mt. Sinai the creation of "any graven image" (Exod 20:4-5) also commanded Moses to fashion a tabernacle that would incorporate many forms of representational art. The candlestick, for example, included representations of flowers and fruit, while embroidered on the curtains and sculpted on the ark of the testimony were the representations of angelic beings (Exod 25:18-20,31-33; 26:1,31).

This apparent inconsistency is resolved, however, when one reads the affirmation of the commandment given in Lev 26:1. Here it is clarified that the problem is not in the representative quality of the art, but in the use of the work of art as an object of worship. This concept is supported by the words of Christ Himself, who used a representational work of art—the brazen serpent (John 3:14-15)—as a symbol of His crucifixion. This bronze sculpture was originally created by Moses under God's express command (Num 21:8). Many years later, however, King Hezekiah destroyed it (2 Kgs 18:4), not because it was representational, but because people had made it into an idol and were worshipping it.

Today, although we may not bow down and worship works of art in the same manner, perhaps we need to more closely consider our cult of homage rendered to the artist—the producer or performer of the art form. Only God is worthy of worship. While art may occupy a legitimate role as a component of worship and

<sup>6</sup>Leland Ryken discusses in some depth the Christian view of the imagination in his essay "The Creative Arts," in *The Making of a Christian Mind: A Christian World View and the Academic Enterprise*, ed. Arthur Holmes (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 105-31.

serve as a doxology in itself, it should never seek to occupy the place of God. In essence, while art may supplement the worship of God, it must never supplant it.

In addition to its intended purpose, the final effect of an artistic expression must also be considered. As Scripture reminds us, "A good tree always yields good fruit, and a poor tree bad fruit. . . . You will recognize them by their fruits" (Matt 7:17,20 NEB). The results of an art form may be observed, either directly (e.g., its hypnotic effect) or via its associations (e.g., with the bar or brothel). Such conditions merit most careful consideration. For the Christian, the final test is the effect of the artwork on one's spiritual life. Art which helps us to be better persons—more committed to God's plan for our lives, more attuned to the needs of those around us, more desirous of doing all things to the glory of God—is art that is fitting for the Christian.

##### **5. Artistic Expression Should Always Convey an Uplifting Spiritual Message, but It Need Not Be Religious**

Religion is a vital dimension of a Christian's life. It centers on God's work of salvation and man's response to this marvelous gift. Through special encounters, it seeks to cultivate a vibrant personal relationship between man and God. Christianity, however, goes beyond the religious experience and seeks to view all aspects of one's life from a spiritual perspective, following the directives of the Holy Spirit in all facets of life (1 Cor 10:31; 2 Cor 10:5; Col 3:17).

How does this understanding relate to the arts? First, artistic expression may focus on religious themes, and this is proper. One should recognize, however, that religious subject matter is no assurance that a work of art transmits a Christian worldview. On the other hand, it appears that non-religious dimensions of life also constitute appropriate themes for the Christian artist, provided that the totality of life is viewed from a Spirit-filled perspective.

Let us consider the literary arts as a case in point. The Bible, as the written Word of God, not only contains religious poetry, but also non-religious verse. Take, for instance, the ode written by David in praise of Saul and Jonathan as national heroes (2 Sam 1:19-27). Another striking example is the Song of Solomon. While this poem has at times been interpreted as a description of the love of Christ for His church, it is fundamentally a beautiful antiphonal expression of the love between a man and woman—a romantic literary piece placed by God in the Bible. In the arena of dramatic prose, the book of Esther can be considered one of the great masterpieces of all time, yet it never so much as mentions the name of God. Nevertheless, it powerfully portrays significant spiritual themes. If even the Bible can contain non-religious literary works, it stands to reason that non-religious artistic expressions are fitting for the Christian, provided that they transmit spiritual values and elucidate the Christian worldview.

### Educational Issues

Having proposed a basic set of Scriptural principles in the aesthetic field of the arts, we now turn to a number of aesthetic issues within Christian education itself.

#### 1. The Issue of an Attractive Learning Environment

When God created Adam and Eve, He placed them in a garden (Gen 2:8-15). It was a beautiful setting where God made “to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food” (v. 9). There was also a branch of the river in Eden, Pison, which encircled the land of Havilah “where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good; there is also bdellium and the onyx stone” (v. 11). These first human beings were not only to enjoy their aesthetic surroundings, they were commissioned to make the garden even more beautiful. “And the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (v. 15). This garden was man’s first school.

Historically, the place of learning was set amid natural beauty.<sup>7</sup> The word *academy* refers to the grove of trees planted in ancient Athens in honor of Academus. Here Plato and Socrates met with other inquisitive minds in the cool shade of an olive tree to discuss the nature of man, truth, and reality. Today, we refer to the academic grounds as a *campus*, which signifies a field with scattered trees, in essence, a landscape. Unfortunately, many of our contemporary learning environments are far removed from any resemblance of aesthetic beauty. Drab buildings, dingy offices, dull utilitarian classrooms, monotonous surroundings, and concrete-slab play areas coalesce into a dry, dreary learning experience.

If we wish, however, to develop in our students a love for the beautiful, an appreciation of the aesthetic, then we must transform our schools into places of delight. We must create havens of beauty. This, of course, cannot happen without planning and an investment of time, effort, and resources. The master plan for the school must consciously seek to incorporate aesthetic elements—a distinctive architectural theme for the various buildings, horticultural and artistic landscape elements, asymmetrical clustering (rather than rigid symmetry), variation of straight and curved lines, courtyards, and open expanses of green, to mention just a few of the aesthetic possibilities.

In the case of existing facilities, it would be well for the academic community to embark on a continuous program of beautification. Faculty and students should be jointly involved in the project. This is particularly important for the students, for not only will they be engaging in active learning, but they will also seek to preserve that which they have worked to beautify. One such project, which has

<sup>7</sup>Larry W. Boughman, “Campus Beautification: A Factor in the Integration of Faith and Learning,” in *Christ in the Classroom: Adventist Approaches to the Integration of Faith and Learning*, vol. 14, comp. Humberto M. Rasi (Silver Spring, MD: Institute for Christian Teaching, 1994), 39-58.



become an aesthetic epicenter in a number of schools, is to create a prayer garden—a place of meditation that blends the color and fragrance of flowers, the songs of birds, and the sound of running water. Although we have spoken primarily of outdoor beautification, similar projects could be undertaken for classrooms, hallways, and offices, as well as for the cafeteria and student center. In all, a concerted effort should be undertaken to make the school an oasis of beauty, a foretaste of heaven.

## 2. The Issue of the Arts in the Curriculum

Leading citizens and even certain educators have questioned the place of the arts in the academic program.<sup>8</sup> The reasons given usually derive from the view that the arts are mere frills—frivolous and irrelevant to serious learning. Furthermore, with the present emphasis on learning outcomes and quality control, the arts are seen as unmanageable, unmeasurable, and unpredictable. Can a convincing argument be made for the inclusion of the arts in the educational experience? Perhaps one must ask even more basic questions: How do encounters with the arts influence student learning? And conversely, how does the exclusion of the arts from school affect students?

As one converses with students, teachers, and parents, it appears that the aesthetic experiences gained through the arts yield important benefits.<sup>9</sup> The student is encouraged to develop creativity, imagination, reflection, and self-expression. Through a personal engagement with the arts, learners observe with greater sensitivity, recapture lost spontaneity, and resist the tyranny of the technical. Breaking through frames of routine, presupposition, and convention, they lurch out of the familiar—hearing new frequencies, perceiving new perspectives, finding new voices, and experiencing a sudden sense of new possibilities and new beginnings.

The arts speak to the emotions, the intellect, and the spirit. They bring out the learner's inner life. Furthermore, with the demise of the monolithic perspective of intelligence and a better understanding of its multifaceted nature, it seems that students whose intelligences lie in the arts may find an avenue for nurturing their strengths and developing their talents. In essence, the rationale for inclusion of the arts in the curriculum seems educationally sound and is congruent with the Christian concepts of individual freedom, creative expression, and the cultivation of a love of beauty.

<sup>8</sup>A prime example can be seen in the Goals 2000 legislation passed by the United States Congress in 1994.

<sup>9</sup>Maxine Greene, "Art and Imagination: Overcoming a Desperate Stasis," in *Contemporary Issues in Curriculum*, ed. A. C. Ornstein and L. S. Behar-Horenstein (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1999), 45-51.

### 3. The Issue of Culture

In his book *Christ and Culture*, Richard Niebuhr identifies a number of ways in which Christianity and culture can relate.<sup>10</sup> In the “Christ *of* culture” position, the Christian views culture as inherently good and thus accepts unquestioningly whatever is found within culture. In the stance of “Christ *above* culture,” Christianity is held to be superior to culture, but the two can quite comfortably coexist because culture is seen as basically neutral. The “Christ *against* culture” position maintains that culture is inherently evil, the domain of Satan. Consequently the Christian must reject culture, seeking to separate and insulate himself from its immoral influence.

Niebuhr advocates that the biblical approach to culture is not found in any of these attitudes. Culture, as a battlefield of the great controversy, contains both good and evil elements. Consequently, the Christian must carefully evaluate any culture from a biblical basis. He is to affirm those cultural components that are in harmony with God’s character and His plan, while seeking to redirect those conditions that run counter to the divine standard. In this “Christ *transforms* culture” perspective, the world is viewed as fallen, yet redeemable by God’s grace. Evil is opposed, but human culture itself is affirmed.

This is a particularly pertinent matter for Christian education. A prime goal of education is to help students value their cultural heritage and prepare them to successfully interact with the larger society.<sup>11</sup> Unfortunately, Christian schools have often unwittingly led students to either accept culture uncritically or to mindlessly reject culture altogether. This matter is especially crucial when one considers the aesthetic dimension of education, which by its very nature tends to be inseparably bound with cultural norms. The arts, for example, almost invariably incorporate cultural symbols, subjects, and styles. In the Christian worldview, all of culture, including the arts, is to be under the lordship of Christ.

How then should we approach culture when studying the arts? First of all, we should help students understand that interpersonal relationships, including human society and culture, were established by God as a part of the divine plan for this world. Nevertheless, as this world plunged into the conflict between good and evil, elements of culture were distorted and have been subverted for ungodly objectives. Thus the initial task for the Christian is to carefully assess culture according to the Christian worldview. The foremost direction of change must be away from evil and toward that which is good, that which is in harmony with God’s character and revealed will.

<sup>10</sup>H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1st Harper Colophon ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), 40-45.

<sup>11</sup>J. A. Banks, “The Social Construction of Difference and the Quest for Educational Equality,” in *Education in a New Era*, ed. R. S. Brandt (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2000), 21-41.

There is a second important dimension of development, however, and this involves a progression from low to high culture, from mass preference to a more refined taste.<sup>12</sup> Popular culture exists primarily to serve the social and psychological needs of the masses. Its art forms are often sentimental, filled with clichés, and they depict the obvious. Hence, these expressions do not require significant thought; lacking the intellectual dimension, they fall short of a true aesthetic experience. This is not to say that the forms of popular culture are necessarily evil, but rather that they frequently lack aesthetic maturity. Paul observed, “When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me” (1 Cor 13:11 NIV). A goal of education is to help students to develop and mature, both intellectually and socially. Consequently, we must nurture our students in their growth from that which is merely good toward that which is better.

Having encouraged cultural maturation, we should, however, hasten to add that not everything considered to be high culture is acceptable for the Christian. Stravinsky’s “Rite of Spring,” for example, depicts the orgies of a pagan festival that culminates in human sacrifice. In literature, Poe’s “The Pit and the Pendulum” graphically portrays human torture in dark, gripping detail. The Christian’s imperative is to move away from the evil in culture and affirm that which is good. Within that which is good, however, there should also be growth toward cultural refinement.

#### 4. The Issue of the Sacred and the Common

As we have noted, all aspects of life must be viewed from a spiritual perspective. While the Christian worldview is thus holistic, there does seem to be strong scriptural support for differentiating between the sacred and the common. By “sacred,” we mean that which especially belongs to God—either because of His direct presence, His express command, or because it has been specifically dedicated to God.

At the burning bush; Moses was commanded by God to remove his sandals, “for the place where you are standing is holy ground” (Exod 3:5 NIV). It is apparent that Moses commonly wore sandals, and this was not contrary to God’s plan (Exod 12:11). However, at Mount Horeb, Moses was standing on “holy ground” and he must, by actions signifying reverence, distinguish between the sacred and the common. A few years later, Aaron’s inebriated sons, Nadab and Abihu, failed to make this differentiation. These young men presumed to use common fire for a sacred purpose, and suffered swift and fatal consequences (Lev 10:1-2).

<sup>12</sup>Morris Taylor has developed this concept more fully in his essay “Choosing Music in a Christian College,” *Christ in the Classroom: Adventist Approaches to the Integration of Faith and Learning*, vol. 1, comp. Humberto M. Rasi (Silver Spring, MD: Institute for Christian Teaching, 1991), 285-306.

Similarly, Uzza, the son of Abinadab of the tribe of Judah, perished when he reached out and touched the sacred ark (1 Chr 13:9-10). The Kohathites of the tribe of Levi were the only ones expressly commanded to carry the ark. "The sons of Kohath shall come to bear it: but they shall not touch any holy thing, lest they die" (Num 4:15). On the sides of the ark were rings, and gold-gilded staves were to be inserted through these rings in order to carry the ark on the shoulders of the Kohathites. In Uzza's case, divine commands regarding the sacred were ignored.

Even the kings of Israel were not exempt from this divine demarcation. Saul offered a burnt sacrifice at Gilgal and, although the circumstances seemed to personally justify his actions, he received God's disapproval and lost his kingdom (1 Sam 13:9-14). Likewise, King Uzziah arrogantly entered the temple and attempted to officiate as a priest. Terminal leprosy was the tragic consequence (2 Chr 26:16-21).

In the NT (Acts 5:1-11), Ananias and his wife Sapphira made a covenant to dedicate to God the proceeds from the sale of a piece of property. Possibly it was sold for a higher price than they had expected, or perhaps they had a change of heart. In any case, they agreed to present only a part of the proceeds but represent it as the entire amount. They had disregarded the word of God that enjoins, "Pay thy vows unto the Most High" (Ps 50:14), and further admonishes, "It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows" (Prov 20:25 NIV).

What are the implications for Christian education? First of all, we must help our students to realize the difference between the sacred and the common. This is particularly important in aesthetic realms such as the arts. Second, the students must come to understand that as Christians we must be very careful not to mix the sacred and the common in our worship of God. This might occur, for example, in an attempt to blend sacred lyrics with a musical style strongly associated with that which is common.

Students should also be led to recognize that not everything that we presume to dedicate to God is good and acceptable to God. This is especially the case when a divine principle or directive is disregarded. Cain, for example, consulted personal preference and taste, and, rationalizing, ventured to offer to God a form of worship that was at variance with God's instruction. Consequently, his offering could not be accepted (Gen 4:3-7).

Finally, students should be encouraged to experience in their lives both the sacred and the common, within the parameters of God's will. To cloister one's life away in an ascetic cocoon, avoiding all contact with the common affairs of life, is to ignore the divine invitation to become "the salt of the earth" (Matt 5:13). Conversely, to limit one's life only to that which is common deprives one of experiencing the fullness of joy and the abundant life that results from a personal encounter with God.

### Conclusion

Together we have examined certain core concepts in aesthetics and have attempted to formulate a Christian perspective regarding the aesthetic experiences in our lives. We have looked closely at the arena of the arts in an attempt to delineate Scriptural principles for aesthetic production and evaluation. Finally, we have explored certain key aesthetic issues, especially as these relate to Christian education.

Perhaps some concluding thoughts are pertinent. From our journey through the aesthetic landscape, it seems quite clear that aesthetics is not an isolated element of life. Rather, it must be congruent with a Christian understanding of God and man, of truth and reality, of origin and destiny, of principles and values. It also appears evident that while he or she remains actively involved *in* the world, the Christian must avoid anything which is *of* the world, anything which makes the transitory pleasures of this world more attractive than the enduring joy of a life with Christ.

Aesthetic experiences are life changing. Consequently, aesthetic domains, particularly the arts, have become focal points of the great controversy between good and evil, between Christ and Satan. "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places. Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph 6:12-13 NEB). As Christians, we must thus think deeply and spiritually. We must observe carefully and discriminate wisely. We must make our choices and live our lives to the glory of God.

In the final analysis, it seems that the Christian's life must be an expression of joy and beauty in the midst of a dark, despairing world. Perhaps the Christian life itself should be our supreme work of art, our greatest aesthetic masterpiece.



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## ADVENTIST ENCOUNTER WITH FOLK RELIGIONS

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The Seventh-day Adventist Church grew up and honed its evangelistic methods and skills in the Western nations of North America, Europe, and Australia. The targeted audience was largely Christian, usually educated, and many generations removed from the context of tribal religions and animistic practices. An appeal to logic and intellect, and presentations that stressed biblical truths and fulfillment of prophecies found ready acceptance among a large segment of the population in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

But as Adventist mission enters the twenty-first century and begins to focus on the task remaining in the 10/40 window among the unreached peoples of the world, new methods are called for that can convincingly communicate Christ to those living with an animistic worldview. People with such a worldview are found among the tribal peoples of the world, but many are also found among the followers of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity. We call such religious adherents followers of folk Buddhism, folk Islam, and Christo-pagans. When the followers of the New Age movement, Hinduism, and those practicing their traditional Chinese religions are included, it is staggering how widespread animistic and folk beliefs are. In folk religions human beings have been placed in the center of the universe with a view of themselves as omnipotent—having a god within.

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All consult spirits and claim they know how to channel or manipulate spirit power. All believe life can be transformed by techniques applied to mind, body and spirit. All claim that there is no such thing as sin—i.e., offending a righteous God. All seek to dispense with guilt as merely an outside imposition. All would basically ignore the fact that history is moving toward final culmination. And all would claim that spirit involvement produces self-knowledge and awareness of one's identity, issuing in success, happiness and security.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper animism and folk religions will be treated as similar in that both groups hold to animistic worldviews. Animism is defined as

the belief that personal spiritual beings and impersonal spiritual forces have power over human affairs and, consequently, that human beings must discover what beings and forces are influencing them in order to determine future action and, frequently, to manipulate their power.<sup>3</sup>

As Adventists encounter peoples with animistic worldviews, what types of religious experiences will they find? Will the traditional Adventist methods of evangelism reach the followers of the folk religions? What are some of the strongest needs of the animist, and how can the sharer of truth be faithful to the teachings of Scripture while at the same time begin the Gospel presentation from where the followers of folk religions are?

This paper describes some of the basic types of religious experience and common characteristics practiced and followed by folk religionists. The last part of the paper then looks at important issues that must be dealt with when sharing the Good News with animistic peoples.

### **Common Characteristics of Folk Religions**

When members of the Adventist community encounter followers of folk religions, what type of religious experiences will they find? What are some of the typical practices and indications that a person has an animistic worldview?

1. *Folk religions are holistic and spiritualistic.* Life is viewed as larger than the sum of its parts. Holism sees the world as completely interconnected, with sky, spirits, earth, the living and the dead, the material, and the spiritual all working together. Animists view the physical, material, and spiritual aspects of this world as one system, and would have a very difficult time seeing the world with divisions between the material, physical, and spiritual. Animists see no difference between

<sup>2</sup>Philip M. Steyne, *Gods of Power: A Study of the Beliefs and Practices of Animists* (Houston: Touch, 1990), 44.

<sup>3</sup>Gailyn Van Rheenen, *Communicating Christ in Animistic Contexts* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 20.



the sacred and the profane or the secular and the religious. All are one. Holism is a foundational characteristic of animism and leads naturally to pantheism.<sup>4</sup>

Those with an animistic worldview see life as essentially spiritual rather than material. Everything that people do, come in contact with, or interact with is viewed as being under the control of spiritual powers or forces. Nothing happens in life that is not attributable to the influence of the spirit world.<sup>5</sup>

2. *Folk religionists are concerned with the immediate issues of life.* Animists and folk religionists ask questions such as, Why am I sick? Why did my oxen die? How can I find out the best day to get married or the right day to plant and harvest my crops? What must I do to stop the drought? Who is causing the drought? Who or what caused the problem? For example, if a follower of a folk religion had his garden trampled by several of his neighbor's water buffalos he would want to know who directed the buffalos towards his particular garden and why. Or, if a person developed an abdominal pain, the family would go to the village prophet and ask him to reveal which ancestor was upset and what offering was required to appease that particular ancestor. The animist seeks answers in the spiritual realm and views disasters and catastrophes not as having natural causes but as resulting from discord and disharmony in the spiritual areas of life.<sup>6</sup>

Animists are looking for reasons why things happen to them, and they seek out spirits and gods to follow or worship who can satisfy their personal needs. They have little concern for what kind of god or spirit they receive help or power from as long as they are able to sense that they have improved their chances to overcome problems or issues in everyday life.

3. *Folk religionists are concerned with power.* A primary focus of the folk religionist is a constant search for power to protect and to manipulate or control events and activities. Among Taiwanese folk religions, the adherents

ignore the nature of the gods they worship. What is worshipped is the effectiveness or the power of the god to grant petitions. Heavenly beings, spirits, people, stones, old trees, bones, corpses found floating in rivers, all are acceptable as objects of worship or "gods" as long as they are effective in answering the petitions of their devotees. If the god gives the worshipper what he wants, then it will be continually worshipped and pampered. If not, it will be ignored.<sup>7</sup>

Animistic peoples go wherever the power is. They care little for the source or consequences of seeking that power. With no written Word of God to guide them, the animist seeks any power that could possibly solve the immediate issue at hand. It is in this area where followers of Islam, in seeking the powers, become less than

<sup>4</sup>Steyne, 58, 59.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 37.

<sup>6</sup>Van Rheenen, 172.

<sup>7</sup>Gerald P. Kramer and George Wu, *An Introduction to Taiwanese Folk Religions* (Taipei: n.p., 1970), 8.

orthodox; Buddhists in seeking the powers develop a corrupted form of Buddhism; and Christians become known as Christo-pagans. These Muslims, Buddhists, and Christians may continue to follow the teachings of their religion, but they seek additional powers other than those found within the mainstream of their group, creating problems of syncretism and dual allegiance.<sup>8</sup>

A passive approach to religion is not how the animist approaches religious life. Religion must work for him, must provide for his needs and protect him from what he fears. There is no concern to seek or do the will of the gods, rather there is a concentrated effort on entreating or coercing the gods to do what is desired.<sup>9</sup>

4. *Folk religionists have few, if any, written texts or holy writings.* Instead, beliefs and practices are shared through folklore, word of mouth, oral traditions, rituals, dance, and reenacted dramas. With no written record, the practices of folk religionists are dynamic and fluid. Reinterpretations are frequent; new solutions to immediate problems are easily adapted. Animistic people have no problem making radical belief changes as long as they can experience practical help for everyday needs.<sup>10</sup> This fact explains why it is so easy for animists to convert to Christianity when a power encounter is used.

5. *Folk religions are amoral.* The spirit beings worshipped and feared by people might be either good or evil, benevolent or malevolent. There is no moral model such as is provided by the God of Christianity for the followers to imitate, so ethical standards and moral practices remain at the level of what is generally practiced in that particular culture.<sup>11</sup> The gods and spirits are bargained with, manipulated, and appeased, with little thought as to what is right or wrong. Ethics or morality is often not an issue. What matters is getting the desired results.<sup>12</sup>

Neither ethics, integrity nor morality matter to a typical shaman. With few exceptions, he is quite ambivalent in his morality, condoning almost any practice if it will benefit him. Should he be asked to work ill, as in Balaam's case, he will not hesitate to do so. He will cast a spell and so act the part of sorcerer. Or he will divine an illness, prescribing a cure, and so be a good medicine man. At best, good or evil are relative terms in animist morality. Gaining advantage over another is of paramount importance, whether through human or supernatural means.<sup>13</sup>

6. *Folk religions are informally organized.* Animistic practices are usually community based with little far-reaching influence or control even in nearby villages. No hierarchical structures or bureaucracies operate among the folk religions of the world. Rather, leaders are recognized for their ability to perform,

<sup>8</sup>Van Rheenen, 272-73.

<sup>9</sup>Steyne, 38-39.

<sup>10</sup>Van Rheenen, 58-59.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>12</sup>Kramer and Wu, 8.

<sup>13</sup>Steyne, 155.

to appease the spirits, and to deliver the promised benefit. The better the shaman is at doing what the people need and ask for, the greater his or her power in the community.<sup>14</sup>

### Important Issues When Dealing with Folk Religions

When Adventists encounter folk religions, there are a number of issues that need to be dealt with in the course of bringing animists to Jesus Christ. It is quite easy to help people attend church on Sabbath, to stop smoking and drinking, to return tithes, and do those outward things that give the appearance of deep heart change. However, there are too many examples of peoples brought to Christ who never experienced a worldview change. To become a Christian requires that the old core values and principles of life be exchanged for values and principles shaped by the biblical message. What are some of those new values and principles?

1. *The power of Jesus Christ.* Many of those who have come to Christ in Cambodia over the past three years have initially become open to Christianity because Jesus Christ demonstrated that He had more power than the spirits and gods worshiped and feared by the people. The healing of severe illnesses and the casting out of difficult evil spirits has created village-wide interest in the Christian God. There are some within Adventist circles who have cast a disapproving eye on what they term "Power Evangelism,"<sup>15</sup> but among animists it is the NT power of Jesus Christ that initially attracts many to the gospel. It is good news to be healed or set free from fear or bondage of the spirits.

In our initial introductions of Christianity there is no doubt that an approach that uses power encounters is by far the most effective method of bringing the Good News to the people of Cambodia. These power encounters deal with everyday issues of life. Spirit paraphernalia, idols, and items used for ungodly magic must be torn down and destroyed. Those held in bondage through oppression and possession must be set free by the mighty power of Jesus Christ. The grip of Satan on the institutions and cultural customs must be confronted so that the purity of biblical ethics and morality can be established. All this requires a power encounter where a visible demonstration of God's power and might is clearly shown to be superior to that of the spirits worshiped and feared by the people. The announcement of God's kingdom in Matt 10:7-8 was to be accompanied with power encounters as proof that God's kingdom was greater than the kingdom of Satan, and also to set people free.

A power encounter is defined as "a spiritual encounter that exposes and calls to account the powers of darkness in their varied forms by the power of God for

<sup>14</sup>Van Rheenen, 59.

<sup>15</sup>Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "The Power of the Gospel or the Gospel of Power?" *Adventists Affirm* 11, no. 1 (1997): 14-24.

the purpose of revealing the identity of the one true God resulting in an acknowledgment of and/or allegiance to his lordship by those present.”<sup>16</sup> The power encounter is usually the first step leading to a definite break with the traditional sources of power that have held the people in bondage. The demonstration of God’s power often leads to a commitment to follow Jesus Christ (Matt 28:19-20), but it is important to promptly continue with good biblical teaching (v. 20).

Power encounters are only the first step in a lengthy process. Hopefully, the encounter leads to conversion, where people begin to understand the awesomeness of the creator God, are taught how to place themselves under His sovereignty, and who learn to accept Him as Lord of lords and God of gods. They must come to realize that power comes from God, and is to be used for His glory and to set free those held in bondage. Unlike animistic power, the power of God is never to be manipulated or controlled for selfish or personal purposes.

2. *The truth of God’s Word.* Sometimes people become Christians in order to have access to God’s power rather than truly believing in Christ. In such situations they are merely exchanging one system of power for another system. Many animistic people are looking for better power sources rather than searching for God. Thus, while we may use a power encounter as an initial introduction to God, we must quickly move on to an encounter with biblical truth that will safeguard the new believer from an ever-continuing search for new and greater sources of power. Without a truth encounter, believers, during times of crisis, often revert back to their old ways of looking for alternate sources of power, which results in dual allegiance and syncretism.<sup>17</sup>

Many typical Adventist evangelistic strategies begin with topics that stress biblical truths. In animistic settings it is recommended that the starting point be through power encounters, but that people quickly be grounded in biblical truth. Without a biblical anchor it is very likely that the result will only be a Christian veneer.

3. *The sovereignty of God.* When animists seek to manipulate the spirits or force the deities to respond in a prescribed way, they are in direct rebellion against the sovereignty of God. God’s very nature is love; His nature compels Him to give good gifts to His children. He is a seeking God who has provided all that is necessary for relationships with His created beings. God has demonstrated His desire to relate to His creation by sending deliverers to free His people, prophets to proclaim His message, and His Son to be the incarnation of His nature. Since God is sovereign in the world that He created, His creation should give Him glory, honor, and praise. He actively works in His world as He desires and cannot be manipulated or controlled. While prayerful supplications affect His working,

<sup>16</sup>Van Rhee, 84.

<sup>17</sup>Marguerite G. Kraft, *Understanding Spiritual Power* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995),

divination implies a desire to force deity, an impatience to look behind the curtain of time, an arrogance to disbelieve in God's sovereignty. An animist attempts to manipulate the spiritual forces of God's world to find out its secrets and use them for personal benefit. Such motivations, based on greedy self-benefit, are alien to the mind of God. While the Christian way is relational, the animistic way is manipulative.<sup>18</sup> When taking the Good News to animistic peoples, the teaching must be in such a way that God is shown to be fully and completely in control of all of life, the future, and time. Any attempt to manipulate God or force His hand is rebellion against Him. When teaching on the sovereignty of God, we must also include in the discussion God's sovereignty over the spirit world.

4. *Themes from the Great Controversy.* Adventists have been teaching on spiritual warfare for over 150 years, whereas many evangelical churches came aboard fifteen to twenty years ago. The themes of the Great Controversy that clearly explain the conflict between good and evil, the warfare between God and Satan, how fallen angels appear as spirits and demons in this world, and the constant struggle between the people of God and the principalities and powers must be clearly taught. We must teach that Jesus Christ, at the cross, defeated Satan's kingdom. Satan is a fallen foe; Christ was victorious over him when He came from the grave. God's people have nothing to fear "because greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world (1 John 4:4). Teaching about the two sources of power and a warning about the consequences of returning to the old power sources must be clearly taught in animistic societies.

5. *How God deals with everyday issues and problems.* Followers of folk religions seek power and protection because of their fear of the forces of nature and evil spirits. Even faithful Christians, during times of stress or crisis, can revert to the old ways. Many Christians in Cambodia have not been adequately taught how to give their daily troubles and fears over to a loving, caring God. The concepts of God's Spirit dwelling inside believers, of guardian angels, and of the countless promises that God will protect and care for His people are often poorly understood. With poor understanding comes a return of the fears that drive people to seek other sources of power and protection.

We must also teach that the source of trouble is Satan. People in Cambodia relate very well to the story of Job, since it helps them to have patience in dealing with their many problems of evil, suffering, and oppression. They look forward to the judgment day and to a new heaven and a new earth.

Folk religionists use all types of amulets and charms to ward off evil. Objects hanging from strings tied around wrists, bellies, and necks are thought to ward off sickness and evil. Spirit flags in the rafters of houses, tattoos, magic writing on handkerchiefs, and countless other means have been invented to protect from the evil in this world, but all such activity is a denial of God's protection and care.

<sup>18</sup>Van Rheenen, 192.

God, rather than amulets and charms, must be the one relied upon for help and protection.

6. *Functional substitutes.* Adventist mission has often entered animistic societies with the correct goal of destroying everything connected with false systems of worship. However, the Christian witness has not replaced the rituals and practices with Christian functional substitutes. For example, many folk religionists have ceremonies for dedicating houses, fields, harvests, and babies, and for dealing with evil and sickness. Christian house dedications, prayer in the fields before planting, harvest celebrations, baby dedications, naming ceremonies, anointing ceremonies for the sick, group prayer, and singing when evil spirits manifest themselves are not only appreciated but also a must in folk societies. Where a Christian functional substitute for the various ceremonies and rituals has been devised, there the church is strong. Where functional substitutes have not been suggested, reversion to paganism and dual allegiance is extremely high and the church is weak.<sup>19</sup>

People usually do not readily change unless two factors are present: (1) dissatisfaction with the old way, and (2) a demonstration of a better alternate way. God's Spirit is at work in this world creating dissatisfaction with old religious systems and practices. The Christian witness must be informed and available to preach good news to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, and to proclaim freedom for the captives and release for the prisoners. These functions are often accompanied in folk societies with signs and wonders and a manifestation of God's power. The Adventist witness should never shrink from biblical practices of healing and deliverance, for these are the very things that often move the folk religionist to taste and see that the Lord is good. In fact, we should look for opportunities where God can demonstrate His power to heal and deliver, since Luke 10:9-15 is a command.

#### Possible Problem Areas

1. *An evangelistic strategy that emphasizes practicing the power of God can easily become an end in itself.* Jesus warned the Seventy-two when they returned from their first missionary trip and were excited that even the demons submitted to them that they should rather find joy in having their names written in heaven (Luke 10:17,20). Jesus never gave a sign or performed a miracle to satisfy the curiosity of people. His power was used to bless and set free those held captive by Satan. His constant purpose was to draw men and women to the Father. We must be equally clear that the power of Jesus is not for any other purpose than to attract people to the God who saves.

<sup>19</sup>Van Rheenen, 38.

2. *Confusion could result as to whether the power comes from God or from Satan.* Clear teaching is necessary so that those coming out of animism can clearly distinguish between good and evil power (1 John 4:1-6). We must teach about the fruits of the Spirit in God's people and expect that those lifting up the name and power of Jesus Christ will also manifest those fruits in their lives (Gal 5:22-23). All teaching and practice must be in complete harmony with the teachings of Christ and the word of God.

Even with these dangers and possible problem areas, we should never draw back from being instruments in God's hands to set people free. Westerners often see little of the bondage and captivity that Satan imposes on many of the world's unreached peoples. But blind spots in a Western worldview should never be reason to deny or discourage an approach that has started a process of setting thousands free from the debilitating and destructive forces of Satan's kingdom.

### **Conclusion**

It is recommended that Adventist colleges and seminaries in areas of the world where animism is widespread introduce courses in the curriculum that teach future pastors and church leaders about the issues important to the peoples with an animistic worldview. Subjects such as how to pray for the sick, how to deal with demonized people, and the relationship between power encounters and truth encounters must be understood. Administrators and church leaders, as well as those witnessing to folk religionists, must understand the importance of giving former animistic practitioners Christian functional substitutes for their previous important ceremonies. Presently, too much of the theological training in this part of the world is patterned after the needs and problems of the western world. If Adventist mission is to be more successful in the twenty-first century at bringing large numbers of peoples from the folk religions into the Adventist Church, we must look closely at the target audience so our graduates and leaders are able to answer the questions and meet the needs of the people they minister to.





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## MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF BUDDHISM IN A CHANGING WORLD

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### Introduction

Buddhism is the fourth largest religion in the world following, in order, Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism. Sources vary as to the exact number of adherents, but a reasonable figure is about 350 million.<sup>1</sup> If you were to add to the number of Buddhist believers those following Chinese folk religion who practice some elements of Buddhism (about 380 million<sup>2</sup>), the total number of Buddhists more than doubles and nears the 760 million Hindus found worldwide. Along with the renewal of Buddhism in some parts of Asia, Buddhism has a strong missionary presence in Europe and North America. The 2½-3 million Buddhists in North America are more than double the number of Hindus living there and about half the number of Jews.

Too often this vital and important world religion has been misunderstood and neglected by Christians. Probably one reason for this is the formidable challenge the religion presents to the Christian missionary who wants to share the message of Jesus. What are the specific challenges that Buddhism presents to Christian missionaries, and how can we meet them? The remainder of this paper is an attempt to answer these two questions.

<sup>1</sup>*The World Almanac and Book of Facts 2000* (Mahwah, NJ: World Almanac, 2000), 695.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*

### The Practical Challenge

Christianity has converted few Buddhists in any country, with the possible exception of South Korea. Most Buddhist societies have fewer than 1-2 percent of their populations practicing Christianity.<sup>3</sup> For example, there are about twenty thousand Adventists in Myanmar, but fewer than sixty come from the twenty-six million Burman Buddhists, and none from among the one million Shan.<sup>4</sup> The biggest impact of Christianity among Hinayana Buddhists has come in Thailand. Among fifty million Thai Buddhists, we have about two thousand Seventh-day Adventist members converted from Buddhism. We must remember that this is after decades of intensive work, and that most of these converts are from rural areas where Buddhism is mixed with a heavy dose of animism.

Whatever one might say, it seems only honest to agree with Clifton Maberly when he states, "The fact is that disproportionately few Buddhists have become Adventists."<sup>5</sup> Whatever we have been doing has not worked very well. The fact is that in most cases we have not truly focused our attention on specific approaches to Buddhism.

### The Challenge of Understanding

It is not easy for someone from a Christian (and in particular a Western Christian) background to understand Buddhism. One reason is diversity. There are three major branches of Buddhism, which are more diverse in belief and practice than the major branches of Christianity—Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism:

1. Hinayana (or Theravada), found mostly in Southeast Asia
2. Mahayana, practiced mainly in East Asia
3. Vajrayana, or Tantric Buddhism, originating in Tibet

These three main branches of Buddhism are further divided into hundreds of sects. While certain general things can be said about Buddhism, much of what needs to be known to truly understand Buddhists must come from a very careful study of the environment, specific practices, and beliefs of each respective region.

Buddhism as a religion is open to change. It evolves over time with cultural change. At least one scholar argues that a new way of classifying the presently emerging Buddhism is more accurate than the traditional threefold division. This new classification is true particularly for the West, but is becoming so also in

<sup>3</sup>Clifton Maberly, "Buddhism and Adventism: A Myanmar Initiative," in *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century*, ed. Jon L. Dybdahl (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1999), 230.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 233.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

Asia.<sup>6</sup> These three new proposed divisions he calls Global Buddhism, Enlightenment Buddhism, and People's Buddhism. Global Buddhism is the form of Buddhism which rapidly adapts its outward forms to the increasingly homogeneous popular global culture. This Buddhism has weekly religious meetings rather than using the lunar calendar. It uses mass media to market itself. It even has bumper stickers asking, "What would Buddha do?" Enlightenment Buddhism focuses on the here and now and promotes practices and values important to peace and thoughtful everyday living. Personal and social ethics are valuable. People's Buddhism focuses on the grassroots local culture and specific religious practices. It is a counter to the forces of globalization. It focuses on the private devotion of meditation and other religious practices. In short, these differences and changes make it a real challenge to understand Buddhism.<sup>7</sup>

Contributing to the challenge of understanding are the vast differences in basic worldview and outlook. Christianity is at heart about God. Buddhism is agnostic or non-theistic, and in some cases atheistic. Revealed religions begin with an absolute revelation. People are to listen and obey. Buddhism focuses on searching and discussion. Buddhist adherents never expect to find absolute truth, and they could not be sure they found it if they stumbled across it anyway.<sup>8</sup> Historic religions like Islam and Christianity tend to be exclusive, while Buddhism, like its fellow Eastern religions, tends to be inclusive. While historic religions seek to convince and overcome, Buddhism seeks to accommodate and absorb.

While briefly and simply stated, these differences represent a huge barrier to understanding and affect encounters between Christianity and Buddhism at all levels.

### **The Theological Challenge**

I believe that Adventism (and most of Christianity at large) has not taken seriously the theological challenge of Buddhism. The wide recognition that fundamental shifts in outlook and worldview are taking place in Western culture permeate the media and intellectual world. Some of these shifts are clear from religious polls and relate to Christian-Buddhist theological issues. As long ago as 1982 the Gallup poll showed that one in four Americans (25%) believe in re-incarnation. The number was almost the same among Protestants (21%).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>6</sup>Terry C. Muck, "Missiological Issues in the Encounter with Emerging Buddhism," *Missiology* 28 (2000): 35-46.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Maberly, 234.

<sup>9</sup>James C. Stephens, "Looking at Buddhist America: A Key to World Evangelization," *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 10 (July 1993): 106.

A Barna poll points out that 64 percent of Americans agree that Christians, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists pray to the same God. Forty-six percent of evangelicals believe that also!<sup>10</sup>

What these polls make clear in numbers becomes even more obvious as one looks at popular television programs and movies that glorify Eastern religions and promote the philosophy of Buddhism. Os Guinness's words are true when he says that "the subtlety of Eastern religion is that it enters like an odorless poison gas, seeping under the door, through the keyhole, through the open window so that the man in the room is overcome without his ever realizing there was any danger at all."<sup>11</sup>

The concept of God as an all-pervasive impersonal force, of reincarnation as a fact, of meditation as self-culture and a way to discover God inside, and of Buddhist enlightenment, as are seen in movies and on television programs. These concepts are being accepted by more and more people all over our world and present a major challenge to the heart of Christianity and its theology.

### Spiritual Challenge

While Christianity emphasizes doctrine and teaching and puts great stock in creeds, confessions, and statements of belief, Buddhism puts stress on the practice of religion and, in particular, meditation. *The National Catholic Reporter* of 3 December 1999 headlines an article, "Buddhism's Path to Enlightenment Walked by Growing Numbers of Catholic Seekers."<sup>12</sup> The thrust of the article has to do with the large number of Catholics and other Christians who have found meaning in Buddhist methods of meditation, in this case particularly, Zen meditation. In some cases Christians see their faith as overly intellectual and lacking in direct religious experience. They find Buddhism can help them.

In traditional Buddhist countries, sincere Buddhists are at times disturbed by Christians who seem to them irreligious because their lives are void of regular times of worship and devotion. In this sense Buddhism challenges Christianity to not just teach a series of beliefs but lead people to experience the Divine, in a life-changing daily devotional practice. In this case Buddhist devotion can challenge activist Christians to keep their connection with God alive.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Os Guinness, quoted in Stephens, 106.

<sup>12</sup>Pamela Schaeffer, "So Ancient and So New: Buddhism's Path to Enlightenment Walked by Growing Numbers of Catholic Seekers," *National Catholic Reporter*, 3 December 1999, 29.

## **The Social Challenge**

In most countries where Buddhism is strong, the religion is closely connected to social and cultural ties. For many, the power of Buddhism is the strong sense of community which adherents feel as they join with fellow Buddhists in the practice of their religion. The Christian church in their midst is not only often seen as foreign, but its small numbers make the sense of a sharing community hard to create. The strongest challenge in many areas is not strictly religious beliefs but sociological ropes which bind people strongly to traditional ways. This challenge must be taken seriously in any attempt to evangelize Buddhist peoples.

### **Basic Attitudes to Meet the Challenge**

I propose a two-tiered response to the mission challenge of Buddhism. First, I suggest there are three basic attitudes or outlooks that should govern the way we relate to Buddhists. Building on these three basic outlooks, I detail six specific things that I believe should be part of any evangelistic approach to Buddhists. What the individual evangelist in any specific culture should do is let these suggestions mold the strategy designed for the local people group.

**Attitude 1:** While completely committed to the Christian faith, we must have the attitude of learners willing to see good in Buddhism.

A Western proverb says more bees are attracted by honey than by vinegar. People rarely enter a dialogue with one who, from the outset, condemns and emphasizes the negative things in their heritage. Buddhism has been a force in many countries for ethical behavior and for peace. It does not hurt us to recognize that God has used Buddhism to bring order to some societies. Not only is emphasizing the good a valid evangelistic policy, it is important for an even more basic and valuable principle—Jesus emphasizes love. Jesus loves people and wants us to love people, and a negative attitude of criticism is rarely seen as love.

This attitude not only implies seeing the good, it emphasizes knowing and understanding. We have not earned the right to share until we have listened. Listening implies learning all we can about the beliefs and practices of others. It means visiting homes and temples, observing and asking questions. It implies dialogue with Buddhist leaders and people.

**Attitude 2:** While obviously competing with Buddhism, we must also learn to cooperate where we can.

The essence of the gospel is sharing the good news of Jesus. We cannot withhold that from people. That teaching is in essence different from Buddhist Dharma (teaching).

On the other hand, there are areas where we can cooperate. Caring for the needy, feeding the hungry, and working for community development are areas where we can work together. Issues that have to do with good government, the benefit of people, and peace within and between communities are places where cooperation is helpful. Christians who want to love others as Christ urged must show that love in tangible ways, not always asking first who gets credit and what label is on the hand working next to us.

**Attitude 3:** We must work on the promise-fulfillment (Judaism to Christianity) model rather than on a search and destroy (Yahweh vs. Baal) model.

This point is the crux of my paper and perhaps the most controversial. Let me explain. It seems to me that the typical mental model most often used by evangelists in Buddhist areas is what I call the “search and destroy model.” In this model Buddhism is a false religion; people must be taught its error and called to reject it as wrong, if not evil. The biblical model for this would be the OT struggle between Yahweh and Baal. The OT message is that the Canaanite religion represented by idolatrous Baal worship should be sought out and destroyed. It must not contaminate the followers of Yahweh, the people of Israel, with its pagan worship.

The NT furnishes a different model—the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. The Jews are seen as forerunners of Christians. Christianity is the natural outgrowth of Judaism and builds on it. Jews are not taught that their religion is totally evil and must be destroyed, but that their own prophets looked beyond themselves to Jesus.

While this analogy may not fit in every case, I believe the Adventist-Buddhist relationship should follow the fulfillment model rather than the Yahweh-Baal model. Ideal Buddhism has been a contributor to peace, ethics, and good government in many Asian countries. It encourages right behavior and condemns bloodshed. Theologically, I believe, it prepares the way for Jesus.

The basic Buddhist teaching concerning human nature is that all people suffer. This suffering stems from desire, which must be controlled or, better yet, eradicated. For me this Buddhist teaching begins where Christianity can begin—the human condition. Believing, as Buddhists do, that all humans suffer comes very near to the Christian idea that sees all people as sinners. While Buddhism’s solution to suffering is different from the Christian’s answer to sin, the insightful views of Buddhism on human plight clearly open the way for the proclamation of a gospel answer to the human cry for a way of escape.

I do not deny the fact that evil can be present in Buddhism. Adventists have long taught that the clever serpent, the devil, can devilishly warp and mold even Christianity into demonic forms. No religion is entirely devoid of deception and falsehood, but that deception should not blind us to the grace of God which also manifests itself in diverse ways.

If this fulfillment attitude would become prevalent, our approach to Buddhists would not only change, but I believe it would become more Christ-like and more successful.

### **Specific Suggestions**

Based on these three underlying attitudes, I propose six specific suggestions that I believe will prove helpful in Buddhist evangelism.

#### *1. Build on Similarities*

The common analysis of human suffering and brokenness has already been mentioned. Other specifics that could prove helpful are the emphasis on purity and moral behavior. Most sincere Buddhists would agree with Adventists that much of modern entertainment portrays corrupt morals and should be avoided. High ethical standards are something we can agree on.

While most Buddhists do not practice vegetarianism, it is an ideal Buddhist behavior. Again, while a minority of Adventists are vegetarians worldwide, vegetarianism is clearly seen as the better way.

Most Buddhists are also pacifists. They are urged not to kill others. If drafted into the army, many will try to, as far as possible, shoot trees, not people. Our noncombatant stance is well received by Buddhists.

Building rapport with Buddhists on these similarities can foster a relationship of respect, paving the way for deeper discussion.

#### *2. Make Clear the Basics*

The core of Christianity is God's grace freely given, which forgives us and saves us in spite of our sin. The message of salvation by faith alone is very difficult for Buddhists to understand. One Bible study, two sermons, or three conversations is rarely enough. In Thailand a colleague and I spent one whole quarter during Sabbath School lesson time teaching this good news to people who were already Christians, and the light was only just beginning to dawn at the end of those three months.

One reason for this is that Buddhism, like Hinduism and other Eastern religions, is at heart, for most followers, a religion of saving oneself. By discipline, study, kindness, meditation, and ceasing of desire one makes one's own way to salvation.

Most Buddhists understand Christianity as operating the same way that Buddhism does as a religious system. The rules are slightly different, but the system works the same way. Christianity, for them, is just a Western way of self-salvation. To get the unique Christian message across takes time, careful cultivation, and the miracle of the Holy Spirit. Only when this is truly done can we

move on to other things. If this is not understood and practiced in our evangelism, all that happens is that our few converts swap Buddhist rules for Adventist rules, and the whole pre-existing, underlying system of salvation by works/merit remains untouched.

### 3. *Emphasize Prayer and the Spiritual Life*

As mentioned earlier, Buddhist people are often devout and religious. Meditation, offerings at shrines and temples, prayer and worship at special places in nature as well as at holy places are all important. For such people, many forms of Christianity seem dry and secular.

I have never had a Buddhist refuse the offer of prayer for them. From the beginning we must show ourselves as spiritual people of prayer. We must pray for them in person as well as in private intercession. If they agree to have us teach them, teaching them how to pray should be one of our first tasks. Our evangelistic series must not only teach people the importance and method of prayer, but should also offer times when people can receive prayer. Answered prayer is taken by Buddhists as a key argument for the truth or value of Christianity.

### 4. *Be Sensitive to Underlying Spiritual Issues*

Most Buddhism in Asia—especially in rural Asia—is mixed with animism or belief in spirits. While pure, idealistic Buddhism is scandalized by this, many Buddhist temples in Thailand have spirit houses on their compounds which recognize local spirits. In times of crisis many Buddhists still seek out spirit help. I can remember visiting the grounds of Chiang Mai University at exam time. The lovely Buddhist temple at the end of the drive was virtually empty, while the spirit house just in front of it was thronged by students praying and burning candles and incense, seeking help in their time of scholastic need.

In such an atmosphere, the Christian must be sensitive and wise. No fun or jest should be made of their practice, but the simple assurance that Jesus has more power than the spirits must be carefully but clearly proclaimed. Such cultures often have examples of spirit possession as well. Adventists must be willing to deal with such situations and must recognize that spiritual warfare is real and a key part of a ministry to Buddhists who suffer from Satan's oppression.

### 5. *Don't Forget Community*

To win and hold Buddhists, the church must create and maintain a strong sense of community and fellowship. A meal or an afternoon of friendship and conversation is evangelism for a Buddhist youth facing ostracism for a growing interest in Jesus.



A sense of care and community from fellow Christians is not optional for a Buddhist family facing social rejection for their faith in Christ. Doctrine and truth lose their grip quickly if not accompanied by the warmth of real human companionship and support.

The early church was known for the love manifest among believers. If we are not known for that, our evangelistic success rate among Buddhists will be very low.

#### 6. *Contextualize All Elements of the Faith That Are Not Supracultural*

The fancy theological term “contextualize” simply means to *adapt*. The truth is not abandoned, but it is adapted to fit the culture of the people we want to communicate with. Many simple things make a difference; sitting on the floor rather than on pews; allowing men and women to sit on different sides of the church; using a local language other than English.

Some issues become more challenging: singing to a local tune; chanting; using local musical instruments; shaping a church architecturally like a temple. Such things are more difficult for a cultural outsider to accept and promote.

For Adventists, the biggest challenges come when the questions become theological. Must we change the order of subjects in our typical evangelistic series? Should we preach the state of the dead in the same way? How much must a Buddhist understand to be baptized? Easy answers are not always available, but the questions must be asked and discussed and prayed over. Unless they are, we can never say as Paul does: “To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. . . . To those not having the law I became like one not having the law . . . , so as to win those not having the law” (1 Cor 9:20-22 NIV).

### **Conclusion**

The Buddhist challenge to Christianity and to Adventism in all its aspects will increase rather than decrease. In the past we have worked for Buddhists, but generally our methods and materials have been largely borrowed from North American sources. The time has come when, for the sake of God and His kingdom, we must become serious. We need to pour sufficient resources and our best minds and workers into this challenge. Adventism is uniquely positioned to reach Buddhists in large numbers, but that will not happen unless we allow God to lay this burden on us and we passionately and intelligently pursue this mission. My prayer is that God will help us begin to do that today.



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## URBAN MISSION—THE FORGOTTEN FRONTIER

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### 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 unhealthful 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.

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## SERIOUS ABOUT SECULAR SOCIETY? THE CHALLENGE OF SECULARISM FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST MISSION

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On June 11, 1981, the Executive Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists appointed a committee to give study to the challenge of secularism for the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church. That committee comprising representatives of the General Conference and scholars from Church institutions met at least five times between 1981 and 1983, producing papers and gathering data. Selected working papers were assembled and published under the editorial pen of Humberto Rasi and Fritz Guy.<sup>1</sup> Papers were included by such notables as William G. Johnsson, Jon K. Paulien, Gottfried Oosterwal, Mark A. Finley, J. Robert Spangler, Fritz Guy, and Dan G. Matthews. It appeared that the Church was taking its mission to the secular world seriously.

Unfortunately, since that time, mission to secular society appears to have puttered along, not really continuing the initial impetus that was given in the early eighties. Many appear to have relegated consideration of strategies to reach secular people to the "too difficult" basket, content to concentrate on other places where greater and more immediate success can be experienced. The church does not seem to be giving the appearance of being serious about reaching the secular world.

<sup>1</sup>Humberto M. Rasi and Fritz Guy, eds., *Meeting the Secular Mind: Some Adventist Perspectives. Selected Working Papers of the Committee on Secularism of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1981-1985* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1985).

In view of our emphasis on global mission, this situation cannot continue. The Global Mission program was implemented because it was recognized that we cannot be content to coast along where the going is easy, neglecting those people groups and areas of the world which are more challenging. The secular post-Christian world is one such challenge.

This paper will suggest some reasons why SDAs are struggling with mission to the secular world, with a view to making paradigm shifts which will better facilitate the fulfillment of that mission. The paper will also suggest some practical strategies and approaches that may be used in order to reach secular people with the gospel of Jesus Christ in the setting of the three angels' messages of Rev 14:6-12.

The paper is by no means exhaustive. It should be read as a series of vignettes that suggest perspectives on the issue. It implies that success with secular people is more about foundational attitudes and beliefs about the church and its mission than about any particular activity, as essential as that activity may be.

### **Why SDAs Struggle with Mission to the Secular**

Why do SDAs appear to be struggling in our attempts to reach out to the secular world? Has God given up on these people? Have we given up as well?

Of course we are not alone. Christianity is generally having a tough time in this segment of the world's population. While the nations of Europe, North America, Australia, and New Zealand have a strong heritage of Christian faith and values, most people in those countries live as though there were no such heritage and as if there was no way in which God could have any influence or impact in the course of history or in their own lives.

Following are some suggestions which, from an SDA perspective, may help to explain why we are having a struggle to reach out to secular people.

#### **1. The World As the Domain of the Devil**

Seventh-day Adventists have emphasized that the world is the domain of the devil. We have done so on the basis of what we believe to be sound theological reasoning. The Great Controversy theme in Scripture depicts a cosmic struggle resulting in the devil and the fallen angels being cast to the earth, where they have been active throughout history, and in which they will be confined in isolation and desolation during the millennium after the return of Christ.

The clarion call to "come out" and to "be separate" (2 Cor 6:17) clearly denotes an imperative to separate from the world as the domain of the devil and to be "a chosen race, a royal priesthood," "God's own people" (1 Pet 2:9).<sup>2</sup> The root

<sup>2</sup>All biblical quotations are taken from the NRSV, unless otherwise indicated.

meaning of the word “sanctification” is separation, albeit for a holy purpose. And this is how it should be. We are responding to the clear biblical imperative. We have no choice but to continue to sound the same call if we are serious about the commission that the Lord has given.

However, herein lies our dilemma. The world which is the domain of the devil was created by God Himself, and in John 3:16 we are told that He loves the world so much that He was willing to come here Himself and risk eternal loss for the sake of eternal gain. What is more, by virtue of creation, the image of God remains in every human being. Those people who have been brought under the power of the devil are still sons and daughters of God for whom He was willing to give His life.

We have rightly emphasized separation, but there is another theme, equally pervasive in the NT. That theme is integration—integration for the sake of the gospel. Paul clearly recognized the imperative of integration when he reminded the Corinthian believers that he had “become all things to all people” so that he “might by all means save some” (1 Cor 9:22).

The world may be the domain of the devil, but it is still the creation of God, though marred by sin and its effects. And it is still the dwelling place of God. Surely we must believe that when we go into the world in mission we are embarking on God’s mission (*Missio Dei*) and, because it is His mission, that He has gone before us. Surely we believe that when in obedience we go, we meet Him who has gone before us and that together we engage in this great work. Surely we believe that no power is greater than the power of God and that the devil must flee when we work together with God.

Can SDAs shun the secular world because we believe it to be the domain of the devil? For how long will we fail to wake up and realize that it is in that very arena that the power and grace of God must be demonstrated as we witness the great victories of good over evil? For how long are we going to remain content to let the devil maintain the ascendancy over any territory that rightly belongs to God?

## 2. A Narrow Definition of Mission

One of the reasons for the success and growth of the SDA Church has been our consistent emphasis on Christ’s commission to the Church to preach the gospel to every “nation and language and tribe and people” (Rev 14:6). By the grace of God may we never lose this emphasis.

But I am compelled to urge SDAs to relook at what may well be too narrow a definition of mission when it comes to reaching secular people, many of whom are post-Christian. I contend that in order to reach the secular world effectively we need to commence with a much broader view of how we can go about accomplishing the work we believe God has given us. We need a comprehensive definition of mission that is more than simply “preaching the message.”

Earlier this century Ellen White gave the church some profound counsel about the method of our approach to people. She said:

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me."<sup>3</sup>

Notice that He "mingled," "desired their good," "showed His sympathy," "ministered to their needs," and "won their confidence" *before* He asked them to follow Him. These actions on his part—mingling, sympathizing, and winning their confidence—were as much a part of His comprehensive evangelistic strategy as was the invitation to follow Him. If you take nothing else from this paper, I want you to remember that this method—Christ's method—alone will give the success that apparently has eluded the church for so long in so many places.

This kind of evangelism does not depend heavily on fine institutions. Rather, its success depends on the ability of each SDA Christian to relate to the neighborhood, the workplace, the school, the extended family, and the society at large, and, as the Holy Spirit works, to convert that casual relationship into a saving relationship.

Many years of pastoral, evangelistic, teaching, and administrative experience have taught me that there are four primary elements of a comprehensive definition of our mission. Our willingness to take these four aspects of our mission seriously holds the key to the success of the church, particularly in secular societies.

#### *a. Fellowship*

The first aspect of Christ's evangelistic method was to "mingle" with the people. Christ's method of approach was not the method of a John the Baptist, as good as that method may have been. In contrast to John, Christ did not call the people to the desert. Rather, He went to the people. He was one with them. His high ethical standards did not prevent Him from going to where they were. He reached people as diverse as Nicodemus, Mary Magdalene, Levi Matthew, the Samaritan woman at the well, Zacchaeus, the Roman centurion, and Simon Peter.

To His followers He says, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt 28:19); "Go into all the world and proclaim the good news" (Mark 16:15). In His prayer to His Father in John 17:15,18, He said, "I am not asking you to take them out of the world, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one. . . . As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world."

Jesus in His words and deeds is our model for all mission. John 1:14 tells us that He came to dwell with us as one of us. He did not remain distant or aloof. When God conducted the greatest evangelistic campaign of the ages, He did so as

<sup>3</sup>Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905), 143.

Immanuel—God with us. He chose incarnation (fellowship) as the first essential element of His method (Phil 2:5-11). Christ's method is our model.

*b. Service*

The second aspect of our evangelistic approach to the secular world should be service. There is no doubt that Jesus' ministry was a ministry of service. His mission was motivated by His desire to meet the needs of the diverse groups of people that He encountered. In Luke 22:27 Jesus declared, "I am among you as one who serves."

Service should both precede and follow proclamation. Jesus served before He preached. He continued to serve after He preached. Service was the ongoing focus of His ministry and mission. So important was it to Jesus' ministry that He declared that Simon Peter could have no part with Him unless he willingly acknowledged Jesus' service (John 13:8-9).

Secular people are touched by unselfish service. Unselfish service is still acknowledged as a very powerful moral good in secular society. People in the street will listen to people whom they perceive to be unselfish, humble, genuine, and caring. In fact, people who do not see themselves as "religious" will usually be more willing to acknowledge such people as genuine Christians than they will be willing to recognize the person who delivers a premature "sermon" as such.

Are SDAs perceived to be unselfish, humble, genuine and caring? Are we known by our non-SDA neighbors and friends as people who are genuinely interested in them? Or are we considered to be unapproachable, holier-than-thou, out of touch with the real world, and therefore having nothing to say which in any way is relevant to the struggles of life? These are questions we cannot ignore if we want to be serious about our evangelistic work in secular societies.

While we can be justly proud of the very fine service institutions that we have established over the years, and while we must continue to nurture and support these institutions because of the unique and vital role that they play in our interface with the community, we cannot claim to be serious about the quality of our service if we leave the job to them. Seventh-day Adventists will only be taken seriously when we each find our personal service niche.

*c. Justice*

Closely allied to service is the biblical concept of justice. Have you ever read your Bible with an eye for calls to relieve the oppressed, care for the downtrodden, and sustain those who are in poverty, grief, or disadvantage in general? If you do, you will be startled by the repeated calls for the Christian to be responsible in such areas.

Take, for example, a well known text in Mic 6:6-8 (NIV, emphasis supplied):

With what shall I come before the LORD  
 and bow down before the exalted God?  
 Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,  
 with calves a year old?  
 Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,  
 with ten thousand rivers of oil?  
 Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression,  
 the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?  
 He has showed you, O man, what is good.  
 And what does the LORD require of you?  
*To act justly* and to love mercy  
 and to walk humbly with your God.

The calls for acting with justice on the part of God's people are repeated by almost all the major and minor prophets of the OT. Notice the words of Isa 1:15-18 NIV:

When you spread out your hands in prayer,  
 I will hide my eyes from you;  
 even if you offer many prayers,  
 I will not listen.  
 Your hands are full of blood;  
 wash and make yourselves clean,  
 Take your evil deeds  
 out of my sight!  
 Stop doing wrong,  
 learn to do right!  
 Seek justice,  
 encourage the oppressed.  
 Defend the cause of the fatherless,  
 plead the case of the widow.  
 "Come now, let us reason together,"  
 says the LORD.  
 "Though your sins are like scarlet,  
 they shall be as white as snow;  
 Though they are red as crimson,  
 they shall be like wool."

Notice particularly the context of the often-used text which begins, "Come now, let us reason together." There are very strong imperatives in the texts which precede it—imperatives to act with justice, which God's people in OT times neglected to their own peril.

But calls for acting justly are not confined to the OT. Christ's words and actions repeat the same imperative. Notice a familiar passage in Matt 23:23-24 (NIV, emphasis supplied):

"Woe to you teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You give a tenth of your spices—mint, dill and cummin. But you have neglected the more



important matters of the law—*justice, mercy and faithfulness*. You should have practiced the latter, without neglecting the former. You blind guides! You strain out a gnat but swallow a camel.”

We have read this text repeatedly. We have learned from it that Jesus supported the tithing principle. Rightly so. But have we failed to understand the focus of Jesus’ message in this text? He is calling His church to act justly. He is calling His people individually to strive for justice—not for themselves, but for those who deserve it—the oppressed (Isa 58:6-12; Jer 7:1-8), the fatherless (Hos 14:3; Mal 3:5; Jas 1:27), the widow (Zech 7:10), and the lost (Matt 25:31-46). In the context of mercy and faithfulness we will be more like Christ if we “desire their good” in a practical way than if we preach the gospel in a theoretical, irrelevant manner that makes it impossible for a person to hear what we are saying.

#### *d. Proclamation*

The climactic event in mission occurs when the invitation is given and accepted to follow Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Proclamation of the gospel has always been right at the pinnacle of evangelistic endeavor for SDAs. Nothing that has been said here can in any way lead us to think that there is any substitute for the proclamation of the gospel or that there is any other gospel that has to be proclaimed. It is a simple formula which says that “this good news of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the world, as a testimony to all the nations; and then the end will come” (Matt 24:14).

As important as are fellowship, service, and justice, no one will be in the kingdom who has intentionally neglected the opportunity to accept Jesus Christ. Taking the gospel to the world calls the church to communicate in word as well as in deed the specific good news about the crucified and risen Lord. This message has content. It must be communicated verbally. The Bible, God’s word, is the source and authority for that message. There must be a point in the evangelistic process where there is a specific call for commitment to Christ. Notice Jesus’ own words:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.” (John 3:16)

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life, and does not come under judgment, but has passed from death to life.” (5:24)

“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (14:6)

By looking at a more comprehensive definition of mission, however, we have been considering how we can prepare a secular person to hear and accept this specific call for commitment. It should be obvious that in order to arrive at the

place where we can make that invitation and where it can be understood and accepted we must do as Christ did. We must first mingle, desire the good of people, show sympathy for them, meet their needs, and win their confidence. Finding and implementing strategies which give attention to fellowship, service, and justice will enable us to do that, both individually and corporately.

What has been needed and what will always be needed is for every SDA Christian to act as Christ in the world. Then our institutional methods will better complement our personal interface with the world in order to bring the world to Christ.

### **3. Struggle with an Incarnational Paradigm for Mission**

The earliest major issue that was debated by the NT church was the question of whether or not a Gentile had to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. Peter and Paul strongly disagreed on the matter. The Jerusalem Conference, as recorded in Acts 15, was called to debate the issue. A decision was reached that a Gentile did not need to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. Apparently, despite the decision, the church continued to struggle with the issue for some time.

In the year 2000 the SDA Church is called to answer a complementary question which has crucial implications for the accomplishment of our mission. To what extent does a "Jew" have to become a "Gentile" in order to lead the Gentile to Christian faith? Just as the struggle of the early Jewish Christians was intense and at times heated, so will be the struggle of contemporary SDAs to address and answer this difficult question. Indeed I believe it will be one of the weighty issues for the Adventist Church as we enter this new millennium.

Why is this so? It is so because we have emphasized a centripetal rather than a centrifugal theology of mission. We have, in obedience to God, called the people of God out of the world to come and see what great things God can do for His people. We have stressed the importance of obedience, sanctification, and separation. We have insisted on a lifestyle and ethic that is appropriate for one who honors Christ as Savior and Lord. And so it should be, because to do so is biblical.

But in so doing we may have failed to realize that there is another imperative in the writings of Holy Writ. That imperative is to infiltrate the world. "Go into all the world." "Go therefore and make disciples." "[Go] to every nation and tribe and language and people." We have no option but to incarnate ourselves in the world for the sake of the world, and for the sake of the gospel, just like Jesus.

We have not sufficiently explored nor implemented an incarnational paradigm of mission as described in powerful and compelling language by Paul:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,  
who, though he was in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God

as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness.  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of  
death—  
even death on a cross. (Phil 2:5-8)

God's ministry through the church is done in the world just as Christ's ministry in His incarnation was done in the world. God is at work in the world. If He were not at work in the world the ministry of the church on behalf of the world would be futile. He is at work reconciling the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:17-19). The world is the object of the plan of salvation (John 3:16). It is to be the object of the church's activity. It is to be the recipient of God's gift of grace. The church is the channel for that gift.

#### **4. Struggle with the Revelation/Inspiration Process**

Perhaps one reason why we struggle with the incarnational paradigm for mission is that we struggle with our understanding of God's self-revelation through the process of inspiration. While it is true that when it comes to revelation and inspiration there will always remain for us elements of mystery and a lack of understanding, it is clear that God did not choose to remain isolated, separated, and hidden from His creation, despite the ravages of sin. Rather He chose to take a risk and submit the eternal gospel to the variants of time, culture, language, personality, education, and so forth, and to work through the prophet in order to communicate Himself to man.

Our doctrine of inspiration tells us that through the words, images, and customs of man God communicated Himself, the gospel, and His intention to save. He decided what He wanted to communicate, but He did not obliterate the language, personality, or culture of the chosen instrument. Each biblical writer used his faculties freely but did not distort the divine message or intent.

Then, when "the Word became flesh"—the climax of God's self-communication—the same process occurred. Christ became little, weak, poor, vulnerable—a first-century Palestinian Jew who experienced pain, hunger, and exposure. Yet when He became one of us, He did not cease to be Himself. He remained forever the eternal Word—God Himself—yet incarnated in human form. Christ's incarnation enabled Him to identify with us in our humanity while at the same time He retained His identity as God (John 1:1-3).

## **5. Evangelistic Practice**

We cannot assume that secular people are able to grasp our message just because we use methods which have worked very well when there is a consciousness and recognition of Christian values and norms in a society. Most of our evangelistic strategies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries assumed such. The fact that increasingly we have recognized the need to contextualize our message in Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and animistic contexts indicates that we are moving away from the presupposition that governed our missionary and evangelistic endeavor for so long.

In a secular context we need to commence our interaction with people much earlier in what James Engel has described as the decision-making process.<sup>4</sup> Like Jesus, we need to meet them where they are and utilize strategies and methods that render the gospel hearable for them. If we fail to do this, we may as well be talking a foreign language. Rather than facilitating the work of the Holy Spirit, we will be inhibiting His work.

## **6. Ecclesiocentric rather than Theocentric Focus**

Seventh-day Adventists take very seriously our conviction that we have been commissioned by God to proclaim the everlasting gospel in the setting of the three angels' messages of Rev 14. First and foremost, the imperative of those messages is to "fear God and give him glory" (v. 7). While we acknowledge this imperative, too often our evangelistic agenda is cluttered with other important issues and doctrines that are more focused on making people SDAs than on giving glory to God. As such, our evangelistic focus is too often ecclesiocentric rather than theocentric.

### **Some Practical Suggestions for Reaching the Secular**

The Church cannot remain satisfied that it is being faithful to the Lord and His commission to us if it continues to neglect the secular world. Rather, it must see mission to the secular world as an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to perform the kind of miracles that we read of in the Acts of the Apostles. There may be chaos in the lives of many people, but chaos leads to a longing for good news—and we have good news. There may appear to be emptiness in the hearts of secular people, but a longing for the transcendent will always triumph over nihilism. When everything else breaks down, a vacuum of meaning develops which can be fertile ground for the gospel.

<sup>4</sup>For an insightful discussion of the decision-making process see James F. Engel, *Contemporary Christian Communication* (Nashville: Nelson, 1979), 63-87.

How then should we reach out to secular people? Following are some practical suggestions which supplement the attitudes implied above. I invite each person to consider what God would have us be and what He would have us do in order to reach these people. Along the way, we may just need to be prepared to stretch our comfort zones—like Paul (he became all things to all people for the sake of the gospel), and like Jesus (identification without loss of identity).

**1. “Go . . . and Make Disciples”:<sup>5</sup> Incarnational Mission**

In order to be incarnational in a secular context there are many things we can do:

a. *We may need to start our interaction otherwise than with objective truth.*

With secular people we need to show how Christianity meets their deepest needs. This does not mean that we give up our commitment to objective truth. It means that we must work back to it from another starting point. Alister McGrath has suggested two primary factors apart from the work of the Holy Spirit that will work to woo the secular person. The first he calls the “attractiveness” of God.<sup>6</sup> He has detailed this attractiveness in terms of the ability of God to satisfy the deepest fundamental needs of the individual; the overwhelming love of God demonstrated in Christ’s death; and the stability and purpose which we can have as faith in God develops within. In contrast the secular relativist can have no such stability or purpose.

The other factor McGrath has labeled as “the relevance of Christianity to life.” He has pointed out that all human beings need a basis for morality; they need to have a framework to make sense of experience; and they need a vision to guide and inspire people.<sup>7</sup>

b. We need to remember that most people learn through a narrative/inductive approach rather than through a propositional/deductive approach.

<sup>5</sup>Matt 28:19.

<sup>6</sup>Alister E. McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1992), 226-27.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

Peter Corney has said it well:

Post-modern people are less linear in their approach to communication and knowledge than the previous generation. Less deductive, more inductive. Less word-oriented, more visual. Less cerebral, more experiential. Less propositional, more story-related. . . .

The questions in their minds will be “Does it work?” and “How will it affect my life?” After an event or service they are more likely to ask “What did you experience?” than “What did you learn?” This does not mean rationality has been abandoned—it simply no longer stands alone; it has been expanded to include experience. The subjective has invaded the objective. This also means that the *context* in which we preach . . . will be as important as the *content*.<sup>8</sup>

- c. *We should cultivate relationships with secular people.*
- d. *We need to express ourselves with humility, maintaining an emphasis on servanthood and Christ's Lordship.*
- e. *We must ensure that an incarnational hermeneutic and practice does not rob the text of its objective meaning, history, and truth.*

## 2. “When I [Christ] Am Lifted Up”:<sup>9</sup> Theocentric Mission

All ministry is God's ministry. It is His intention and by His initiative that the world is saved (2 Cor 5:18,19). His activity in the world, according to the contingency plan that was developed “before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4; 1 Pet 1:19-20) is a ministry of reconciliation. Christ came as the supreme revelation of the person and character of God in order to facilitate that ministry (Heb 1:1-2). He came not to introduce His own brand of ministry, but in order to do the will of the Father (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38). Those who have been created new in Christ Jesus are called by virtue of that creative act to participate with God in that ministry (2 Cor 5:17-21).

God is the sending God (John 20:21; Gal 4:4,6), the giving God (John 3:16), the serving God (Luke 22:27), the loving God (1 John 4:7-11), and the calling God (Acts 16:10). The world does not in the first instance set the agenda for ministry. It is set by the Trinity and then brought to bear on the needs of the world.

But God is more than He who sets the agenda. God is also the focus of our ministry in the world. I cannot help but wonder what would happen if we took more seriously the priority of the very message we believe we are to proclaim to the world and put God first. Jesus made it very plain that if He were lifted up He

<sup>8</sup>Peter Corney, “Have You Got the Right Address? Post-Modernism and the Gospel,” *Grid*, Spring 1995, 2.

<sup>9</sup>John 12:32.

would draw all people to Himself. This includes secular men and women. At a time when most secular people are suspicious of institutions, especially those with a religious or Christian flavor, we would be wise to consider seriously the words of Jesus Himself and the manner in which we share the messages of the Three Angels.

### **3. “The Lord Added to the Church”:<sup>10</sup> The Congregation As Mission**

While this paper has stressed the necessity of the centrifugal force in mission, and while it is true that the church must go out into the world in obedience to Christ, it is also true that the world must be invited and welcomed into the church. This welcome has two necessary components. First, the world must be prepared by the church to join the church. Seventh-day Adventists believe that a careful period of instruction is necessary before a person is ready for baptism and entry into the church. We have generally done comparatively well in that regard.

But we have not done so well with the second component. Not only must the world be prepared for the church, but the church must be prepared for the world. It is when the congregation is able to welcome the world and wrap it into the fellowship of believers in such a way that healing and growth forms a continuum, that, in a special sense, the congregation fulfills its mission. In this sense there is a centripetal function in mission, but it is a centripetal function which stresses the necessity to seek and save the lost through appropriate incarnational attitudes and perspectives within the community of believers as well as in the world.

Another major aspect of the congregation as mission is the manner in which the congregation engages the world. While there must always be a certain element of the haphazard in the interaction of the believer with the world—one never knows when the Holy Spirit is going to lead us in such a way that our paths intersect with a seeker—the congregation must be intentional about planning and providing the resources for a process which will provide opportunities for its members to interact with the world. In order to reach secular people, process should have priority over event. A single event will not usually be sufficient. The congregation must provide a variety of options which will facilitate the movement toward faith on the part of the secular person.

### **4. “Seek First the Kingdom of God”:<sup>11</sup> Values Transmission**

Mission to secular people is not primarily information transmission. While information will be shared in the form of propositional truth, and while SDAs must ensure that they preserve the God-given truth that is our heritage and forms a strong foundation for our hope, we must realize that when reaching out to secular

<sup>10</sup>Acts 2:47 KJV.

<sup>11</sup>Matt 6:33 NKJV.

people we need to be more focused on values transmission than on simply sharing information. Secular people rarely ask, "What is truth?" Their first question generally is "Where is meaning?" Their interest will be aroused when their scale of values is challenged to the extent that they are led to realize that ultimate meaning cannot be derived from their secular scale of values.

Merton Strommen has suggested the following elements that contribute to a values-transmission approach to witnessing and evangelism:<sup>12</sup>

*a. Commitment*

It goes without saying that commitment to the Lord and to the message of faith and hope is foundational if we are to communicate values.

*b. Authenticity*

Aside from a lack of commitment, I believe that nothing is as destructive to our witness as a lack of authenticity. Secular people are particularly suspicious of people whom they perceive to be unauthentic. They are disillusioned with the church for that very reason. They lack trust. They are so accustomed to having their trust shattered that if they sense any hint of sham, there is an immediate and total loss of any opportunity to share values. I cannot overemphasize the importance of authenticity.

*c. Modeling*

There is nothing new here. To be an example of an authentic Christian has always been recognized as a powerful force for good. All people, secular or otherwise, are moved by the witness of one who lives his or her life by the values espoused.

*d. Personal Witness*

Values transmission is best accomplished for most people on the person-to-person level. While history reveals some striking examples of leaders who were able to move their people en masse, both for good and for bad, and inspire in them particular values, values are almost always caught rather than taught.

<sup>12</sup>Merton P. Strommen, "Communicating Values," in *Perspectives on Values*, ed. V. Bailey Gillespie (Riverside, CA: La Sierra University Press, 1993), 21-46.



### **Conclusion**

Far from prompting despair, this paper has suggested that nothing is impossible for our God. Secular people are God's children—people just like us. He loves them so much that He incarnated Himself in the person of Jesus Christ in order to live and to die for them—people just like us. If this is so—and it is—the SDA Church cannot relegate mission to the secular world to the “too difficult” basket. Rather, we must begin to believe Jesus when He promised that “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in *all* the world, as a witness to *all* the nations” (Matt 24: 14, emphasis supplied).

While there may be some reasons why the church appears to be struggling with the issues at stake, it is time that we overcome some of our supposed theological, historical, and sociological roadblocks and stretched our comfort zones in order to see and experience what great things our God can do. We cannot think or speak of impossibility. With God, nothing is impossible.



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## THE SUN OF RIGHTEOUSNESS IS RISING

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William Miller (1782-1849), founder of the Millerite movement, which was the forerunner of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) movement, believed in the popular concept of his time, the concept of the “Gospel Sun”—the gospel being preached first in Asia, then in Africa and Europe, and finally in America, the last quarter of the globe. “The gospel, like the sun, rises in the east, and will set in the west.”<sup>1</sup> He used this analogy to explain the fulfillment of “this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world” (Matt 24:14).<sup>2</sup> In 1842 Miller also elaborated on the term “witness.” He remarked that the text does not tell us that the gospel shall be preached in all the world at one time, or that all men would believe it, but that it would function as a witness among all nations. In his view, the text might mean that the present truth would be given to different racial and national groups who had come to America, or the gospel would be reaching many different countries by various publications. Therefore, the Millerites did not think it necessary that this gospel message be given to every individual. We can now see that this popular concept was wrong.

The Bible says, “The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world” (John 1:9). For centuries, the gospel sun did not seem to appear on the horizon of old China. As the prophet Habakkuk prayed, “LORD, I have heard of your fame; I stand in awe of your deeds, O LORD. Renew them in our day, in our time make them known; in wrath remember mercy” (Hab 3:1). God answered

<sup>1</sup>William Miller, “A Lecture on the Signs of the Present Times,” *Signs of the Times* (Millerite), 20 March 1840, 4.

<sup>2</sup>All Scripture quotations in this paper are from the NIV.

immediately. "His glory covered the heavens and his praise filled the earth. His splendor was like the sunrise; rays flashed from his hand, where his power was hidden" (vv. 3-4).

China is the world's largest country in terms of population, with almost 1.3 billion people (1.259 billion as of February, 2000, by official census, which is about 22 percent of the world's population) composed of eleven major ethnic groups. It has an area of 3,719,751 square miles (9,596, 960 sq. km.), next in size only to the former Soviet Union and Canada. During the past millennia China has not had much of a Christian background, but was strongly influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism. Since 1949, atheism and evolutionism have been dominant forces under the present political regime. But this is not the whole story.

By God's grace and power, and through the work and witness of His faithful children, the Chinese Christian Church (including the SDA church) in the past fifty years has not only survived but thrived in the midst of adversities and in the face of severe trials and persecutions. Church membership has increased dramatically as God's work is spreading by leaps and bounds in modern China. The Sun of righteousness indeed is rising and shining upon the hearts of many truth seekers.

The following report is confined to mainland China, with focus on the mission work in the past, the present situation, and what can be expected in the future.

### **Historical Background**

According to legend, when the apostle Thomas went to India as an evangelist, he also worked in China. If this were true, it would mean that from the very beginning of Christianity, China already was given the gospel light. This, however, cannot be verified. What can be known is that the Nestorian Tablet, unearthed in A.D. 1625, now on exhibit in Beiling, Xian, China, is authentic, and the inscription on the Tablet describes Nestorian Christians from Persia arriving in China in the seventh century. Emperor Tai Zhong of the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-907) sent his officials in 635 to welcome those foreign missionaries. The first group of Christians was permitted to build temples (churches) in many places and to print Scripture and religious literature. Unfortunately, the Christian influence did not last long or leave any deep impression among the common people, as Buddhism and Taoism became popular with the succeeding emperors.

However, a remnant of the Nestorians did survive and surfaced in the Yuan Dynasty (1279-1368) with another name and form. The Catholic Church continued to send missionaries into China during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties. In fact, several missionaries were appointed as high officers and their work was much appreciated by the monarchs. Emperor Kang Xi of the Qing Dynasty almost became a Christian, and he was credited as the author of many religious poems.

The Tai Ping Heavenly Kingdom (1850-63), a patriotic group who unsuccessfully rebelled against the Manchu Qing Dynasty once claimed to have control of two-thirds of the territory of the Qing administration. Interestingly, not only did the leaders of the Tai Ping movement claim to be Christians, but it is said that they also kept the seventh-day Sabbath. But again, their influence faded like fireworks in the night.

In 1911 the Qing dynasty, the last vestige of the long-running Chinese monarchy, was overthrown and replaced by the Republic of China with its founder, Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1867-1925). Dr. Sun was baptized by Dr. Hagar in Hong Kong at age 18. His later successor, Chiang Kai-shek, who was the President of China until 1949, claimed to be a Methodist Christian.

Many of the Chinese emperors, kings, and presidents have shown interest in Christianity and a few of them have even accepted it. Others have appreciated the work and contributions by the missionaries and have supported the Christian Church directly or indirectly. Catholic Father Ricci arrived at Guangdong in 1583. The first modern missionary of the Protestant church, Robert Morrison, arrived in China in 1807, and Timothy Richard, an English Baptist, entered China in 1870. The first Adventist lay worker, the elderly Abram La Rue, started his work first in Hong Kong in 1888, and later also on mainland China. The first official SDA missionary, J. N. Anderson, was sent from the United States to China in 1902.

After a century of Christian mission work in China, with all the hardships and trials endured by many faithful and self-sacrificing missionaries and indigenous Christians, the total membership of all the Protestant churches in 1949, right before the Communist Party takeover of China, was estimated to be 700,000 out of the 500 million Chinese people at that time. And some fifty years of Adventist mission resulted in about 21,000 members (registered on the books). Against such immense spiritual darkness that covered the vast land of China up to 1949, the gospel light indeed was all too inconspicuous.

Then God did a new and strange thing in China. Thanks to our merciful God who takes all the Chinese people to His heart, what could not be done under the blessing and protection of the earthly power was miraculously accomplished during the atheistic administration in China. In the face of sufferings and trials, God has promised that for all who revere His name, the Sun of righteousness will rise with healing in His wings (Mal 4:2). The Holy Spirit has hovered over China. What has God wrought!

## Present Situation

### The Brighter Aspect

While the Chinese population by the year 2000 has doubled that of half a century ago, the Christian church membership has multiplied at least twenty times during the same period. For this we rejoice and praise God. Religious freedom is legally protected in China under Article 36 of the Chinese Constitution, which stipulates:

Citizens of the People's Republic of China enjoy freedom of religious belief. . . . No State organ, public organization or individual may compel a citizen to believe in, or not to believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, in any religion. . . . The State protects normal religious activities. . . . No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens or interfere with the educational system of the State. . . . Religious bodies and religious affairs are not subject to any foreign domination. The legitimate property of religious bodies is subject to legal protection. . . . All citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, enjoy equal educational opportunities in accordance with the law. . . . Citizens shall not be discriminated against in terms of employment. . . . Lawful rights and interests and normal religious activities at the sites shall be protected by law. No organization or individual may violate or interfere with such rights, interests or activities.<sup>3</sup>

According to United Nations documents and conventions on human rights, there are provisions governing the expression of one's religion:

Freedom to manifest one's religion or belief may be subject only to such limitations as are proscribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals of the fundamental rights and freedom of others.<sup>4</sup>

Accordingly, China maintains that

the punishment of criminals by China's judicial organs in accordance with the law has nothing to do with religious belief. No one in China is punished because of his or her religious belief. But no country that practices the rule of law in the world today would tolerate illegal and criminal activities being carried out under the banner of religion.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup>"Freedom of Religious Belief in China," official document, Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, October 1997, 4-5.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 8.

In the same document just quoted from, some incomplete statistical figures include over 100 million followers of various religious faiths, including 4 million Catholics and 10 million Protestants, with 12,000 Protestant churches and more than 25,000 other meeting places throughout China.<sup>6</sup> Unofficial figures put the estimate two or three times above the official tally, yielding a total of 20 to 30 million Protestants, mostly evangelical Christians.

Although the SDA Church has no formal structure in mainland post-denominational China, where all denominational boundaries and distinctives are de-emphasized, the government does recognize those churches that register themselves as SDA Christian churches.

Our own SDA membership has topped 280,000. In 1999 alone, more than 17,000 people were baptized into the Adventist church. Today, there is a total of some 700 formally recognized Adventist churches in addition to more than 2,000 informal churches. Hundreds of new church buildings have been erected in cities, towns, villages, and mountainous areas. The total number of books and pieces of religious literature published since 1980 has already surpassed the accumulated number of volumes from our own Chinese publishing houses in all previous years combined up until 1949.<sup>7</sup> During the so-called Great Cultural Revolution (1966-76), not only were churches closed down, but many preachers were either jailed or sent to the factory or farm for reeducation. All the Bibles, hymn books, and religious literature found were confiscated or burned. But thanks be God, since 1980, 22 million Bibles have been printed inside China, and still the supply cannot keep up with the demand. The gospel light is beginning to shine once again, ever more brightly, in China.

### The Area of Tension

The modern missionary movement in China came largely from America and Europe. The Chinese in general have always had a fondness for America. For many decades, the people of China and the people of America have had a history of friendship and mutual respect. Unfortunately, the Korean War for a while pitted the US against China like adversaries. Thus, it was not hard to understand why the Chinese church was drawn into the political storm and asked to wage the accusation campaign—accusing the foreign missionaries and their mother churches. That was also the beginning of the Church Three-Self Movement—self-propagating, self-governing, self-supporting. In 1950-51 these two events changed

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 1-2.

<sup>7</sup>Recent publications include Ellen White books such as *Steps to Christ*, *Prophets and Kings*, *The Desire of Ages*, and *The Great Controversy*; various pamphlets on repentance, grace, law, Christian life, family, education, and morality; commentaries on different books of the Bible; and a lay training instruction series.

the perception of the Chinese Church by the ordinary people both inside and outside of the church.

Regarding the success and directions of the Three-Self Reform or Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), there has been an up-and-down trend during the past four decades. People who are for the Three-Self Principle justify their position by saying that this only represents the political views of the Chinese clergy and the believers in general. Those who are opposed to the Three-Self Principle complain that this is where the fault of TSPM is—always putting as its top priority the fulfilling of its political mandate. Let us briefly review the history.

During 1951-58, after cutting off its relationship with the Western churches, the Chinese Church set up and consolidated the TSPM to win over or suppress the anti-Three-Self non-conformists. In 1957, the Chinese Catholic Patriotic Association was formed. Between 1959 and 1965, in an effort to coordinate the government's Great Leap Forward Movement in the cities and its People Commune in the rural areas, the Three-Self organization at all levels led or forced the churches into unification in order to save manpower, space, and time for Socialist construction. As a result, only one tenth of churches and workers were left to maintain the religious enterprise. It has been said that since that time the Chinese Church has entered the Post-Denominational period.

From 1966 to 1976, during the chaotic Cultural Revolution, all religious activities were banned, churches were closed, Bibles were burned, and seminaries were shut down. It was like a nightmare for the ordinary citizens as well as for the faithful believers and preachers. Even the Three-Self Christians, many of them sincere followers of Christ, waited for the light at the end of the tunnel.

Beginning in 1978, with the government's more open policy, the whole Chinese society and the Chinese Church entered a new phase. Both the official and the unofficial (home and underground) churches flourished. Christian religious assemblies sprang up like bamboo shoots after a seasonal rain.

In October of 1980 the Chinese Christian Council (CCC) was organized in Nanjing, in order to handle the affairs of the local churches. The Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference was also established in the same year. The Three-Self Committee became the liaison between the government (Bureau of Religious Affairs under the State Council of the Chinese government) and the CCC. Many members of TSPM were also members of CCC. Bishop K. H. Ting has pleaded for love and tolerance between the Three-Self churches and the house churches.

Since 1990 the government's open policy has continued, and the emphasis is for more and more contacts with the outside world, particularly the Western world. The Amity Foundation, affiliated with TSPM, has printed millions of Bibles for distribution. Today, anybody can walk into a church and purchase a good quality Bible or Bibles inexpensively. Two large churches, each seating two thousand, are being built in Beijing with funding of RMB 30 million, or about USD 3.63 million. There is a message from the authorities from the top down that organizations which want to strengthen their work should recruit more support, money, and



personnel to help the community. The sources of support are left to the discretion of the growing organizations. The Chinese Church was asked, on the one hand, to adhere to the Three-Self Principle, but also was encouraged to run the church well in preaching, finance, and management and to be resourceful in its development goals. At the same time, along with enhancing exchange programs and cooperative activities with the outside world, regulations have been issued to require house churches to register as legal entities. The rationale behind this regulation is for monitoring cults, other illegal religious groups, and swindlers which deceive innocent people. Admittedly, there is fear on the part of some house churches who consider such registration as the first step toward rigid control of their activities. Conflicts have risen and tensions remain. The gray line between legal and illegal, between licensed church and home church, is still a problem that has no immediate solution. The truth is that there are God's faithful people inside the Three-Self churches as well as within the unregistered home-church groups. Varying from area to area, there are different degrees of cooperation and mutual dependency between the official and unofficial churches. More tolerance, understanding, and cooperation in the Spirit of Christ are urgently needed.

In theology, there is also an area of tension. Debates have surrounded the publication of Bishop Ting's *Collected Works*, which are intended to promote Chinese theology and Christian ethics in conformance with the Spiritual Construction Campaign among the common people in the face of growing moral decay in society. The social-gospel camp and the evangelicals confront each other on the real purpose of the Christian Church. Some people ask whether the church and theology should always be subordinated to the demands of society and government. The other camp argues that Christians need to adjust their understanding and knowledge of God and the Bible in order to help explain their faith more accurately and relevantly to modern society. Some have gone so far as to depreciate the value of evangelism for fear of being misunderstood or being accused of promoting a particular brand of theology.

Following the recent crackdown on Falun Gong (a mixture of Buddhism, Taoism, traditional Chinese exercises, and meditation) by the government as superstitious, cultic, heretical, illegal, and an evil organization bent on destroying social stability, certain Christians have been mistakenly targeted as objects of political repression by some uninformed local cadres. On the other hand, some CCC church officials and congregations consider the suppression of Falun Gong as a blessing in disguise for the Christian churches because what they themselves could not do in preventing members from being lured away by such non-Christian religions, the government is doing for them.

### **The Serious Aspects**

Our Adventist churches in general are no less confronted with problems similar to those discussed above. Cults, heretical teachings, and perverted religious imposters, whether home-grown or imported, are rampant in China today. Without trained and dedicated pastors as leaders, the churches face enemies from without as well as low spiritual morale from within.

Like other churches throughout history, internal strife among different factions within our own church has hurt the progress of church development and weakened our effective witnessing before the public. Truly there is a spiritual war that is being waged among the rank and file. Often the finger points to egotism and pride.

Another urgent matter is how to nurture thousands of new church members and to train hundreds of local preachers and equip them with administrative skills, financial expertise, and above all, emotional and spiritual strength to do God's work under great pressure and often incredible hardship, so that the work of God can move forward. The age-old problem of lack of effective leadership, disharmony between young and old workers, absence of collective leadership or democratic centralism, improper appropriation of churches as private property, and isolation from the masses are only a few of the serious problems Adventist churches have to contend with.

### **Future Outlook**

#### **The Challenge**

In the face of materialism, individualism, money worship, growing disparity between the rich and poor, rapid economic growth and modernization, widespread superstitions and cults, and the impact of some decadent aspects of Western culture, in addition to all the problems discussed above, some pessimists argue that the golden age of evangelizing China has passed. But is this an accurate assessment?

The renowned British historian Arnold Toynbee said that the twenty-first century would be the Chinese century.<sup>8</sup> Based on the growth statistics of 7 percent annual church growth, it is projected that China will have over 300 million

<sup>8</sup>Arnold Toynbee, quoted in John Chang, "Striving toward the Chinese Century," *China Source* 1, no. 1 (1999): 3. Toynbee was, of course, thinking in terms of geopolitics, economics, and military might, in addition to the cultural and religious aspects of the nation. Dr. Lawrence H. Summers, Professor of Economics at Harvard University, former chief economist of the World Bank, and Secretary of the Treasury under the Clinton administration, stated, "For more than a century, the U.S. has been the world's largest economy. The only nation with a chance of surpassing it in the next generation in absolute scale is China." Lawrence H. Summers, quoted in Gao Wangzi, "Christianity and China's Modernization," *China Horizon*, January-March 1997, 13.

Christians by 2025, comprising the largest Christian community of any ethnic group or nation.<sup>9</sup>

We must think through these developments realistically and confidently in the context of God's promises.

Pat Gustin, director of the Seventh-day Adventist Institute of World Mission, points out in her recent article, "The 10/40 Window: New Mission Opportunities," that China is listed at the top of the list of all countries with the largest non-Christian populations. Also, the main ethnic group in China, the Han race, is the second largest people group least evangelized.<sup>10</sup> We praise the Lord for the 280,000 Adventists and about 30 million Christians in China, but we must realize that this represents only a small fragment of the whole population of China. When we realize that there is only one Adventist in 4,490 Chinese, we clearly feel a heavy responsibility on our shoulder. Besides the Han, there are 55 major and minor ethnic groups that are also waiting for the gospel light.

The Global Mission Department of the Chinese Union Mission reports that there are close to 1,000 cities in China with a quarter of a million people each. There are over 400 medium-size cities with a half million people, and sixty-one large cities of over one million population without the presence of a single Adventist church. Confronted with such statistics, we cannot be unrealistically optimistic nor resting on our laurels.

History and experience tell us that the Chinese, in general, are not a people who diligently seek after religion or look for abstract truth and things in the future. They tend to emphasize reality and concrete things in this world. Hardened by subtle influences from ancient philosophies, conventional religions, ancestor and money worship, official atheism, evolutionism, materialism, and individualism, the Chinese mind is soil in which the gospel seeds take root with difficulty, from a human point of view. But is there anything too hard for the Lord? (Gen 18:14).

### **A View by Faith**

Doubtless the 10/40 Window is a window of reality. It is also a window of urgency, a window of opportunity, a window of recovery from our lukewarm attitude toward the church and evangelization. If we would only follow God's Spirit, who can soften our heart, enlighten our mind, and renew our strength, He will empower us to do His work and He will bless our effort.

China is the greatest mission field in this century. Whether the Apostle Thomas was in China or not, we are not sure. But the Nestorian Tablet which documents the visitation of the gospel light in China some 1,350 years ago is a matter of fact. Likewise, whether Sinim in Isa 49:12 denotes China or not (Bible

<sup>9</sup>Chang, 4.

<sup>10</sup>Pat Gustin, "The 10/40 Window: New Mission Opportunities," *DIALOGUE* 12, no. 2 (2000): 15.

scholars are still in debate), what Jesus Himself says in Luke 13:29 is absolutely certain: "People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God." Is China the largest country in the eastern part of the world? Assuredly yes! As the gospel and present truth for the last generation must be preached to every language, tongue, and nation before the end comes, the masses in China must have a chance to listen to God's message before it is too late. There will be many redeemed in the kingdom of God who will have come from China because, "The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it" (1 Thess 5:24).

The postmodern generation is here. Distrusting faith, reason, or even feeling, subscribing to relativism in beliefs and ethics and to indeterminacy in truth and ultimate answers, people today do emphasize belonging and experience. They are longing for love and justice, which is the essence of the biblical message. The incarnated Jesus, the ever-present Friend, the wonderful Counselor, is the One who can meet people's needs for belonging, for relationship. This is especially true for the Chinese, since all human political systems and ideologies, empty philosophies, man-made religions, and materialism have failed to satisfy them. Everywhere, old and young people are searching for the meaning of life, the hope for the future, and eternal truth. The 18 October 1999 issue of *TIME* says,

Everywhere in China you hear talk of a spiritual vacuum. . . . On Oct., [sic] 1, as China celebrated the 50th anniversary of Mao's revolution, high-tech military jets screamed over Beijing, foreigners arrived in search of new investment opportunities, and the government celebrated a nation transformed. But what was missing is faith.<sup>11</sup>

For such a vacuum, God has already prepared the soil, seeds, sunshine, and rain. He calls for our cooperation in winning souls, in going out to reach the lost and wandering, in teaching the teachable, and in having faith that God will provide faithful workers for the tasks ahead of us. Following are a few illustrations of the way in which God is working in China today.

There are two large churches, one in the north and another in the south part of China, which are located in a poor, mountainous area. Less than ten years ago, only a handful (actually only seven church members) were there. Today, not only does a sizable church building stand there as a witness to God's glory, but more importantly, two thousand believers have joined the SDA Church. In some of the largest cities, such as Shanghai and Beijing, several hundred people are baptized every year. In Xian and Shenyang, more than three thousand people regularly worship on Sabbath. Such attendance was never heard of before 1949, or even 1979. Those who once were confined to the winter of unbelief and hopelessness

<sup>11</sup>Mia Tumer and Edward Barnes, "Inside China's Search for Its Soul," *TIME* (Asian ed.), 18 October 1999, 24; cf. *ibid.* (US ed.), 4 October 1999, 70.

are today yearning for the springtime of faith and hope, truth and joy. Their thirst can only be quenched by the Living Water, Jesus; their stumbling in the dark can only be illumined by Christ, the glorious light that lights every human.

As we think of evangelizing China, we must do so seriously, for the time is short and the tasks monumental. We ought to always pray fervently, plan carefully, learn to adapt and innovate, act lovingly, serve creatively, and organize the ministry integrally.

### What We Are Doing and What Is Being Evaluated

#### Gospel Radio/Video Ministry

The apostle John says in Rev 14:6, "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people." Can this be a symbol of modern audio and video tools? The psalmist says regarding the heavens, "Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. . . . Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (Ps 19:1-4) This is a beautiful description. One of the SDA radio ministry pioneers, J. O. Iverson, says,

For centuries, transportation and communication made but little headway. . . . God designed that in this explosion of communication knowledge His objectives might be achieved. . . . God has placed the tools of radio and television within the grasp of His church to communicate His last warning message of hope and help to a faltering world.<sup>12</sup>

In his article "The Future of China: Communism or Christianity?" David Aikman writes, "One of the greatest messages of the gospel to China is the message of hope. Hope can change a nation."<sup>13</sup> Meaningfully, our shortwave Mandarin gospel radio program is using "Voice of Hope" as the call sign. Ruth Graham, wife of Dr. Billy Graham, and their translator, Dr. Phillip Deng (a theologian who was the dean of the China Theological Graduate School), in their China trip of 1989, both are reported to have identified the broadcast ministry as the best way for outsiders to preach the gospel in mainland China.<sup>14</sup> Even Ellen G. White noted the importance of mass communication like radio: "God directed in the invention of rapid travel, as well as rapid communication, that His work might

<sup>12</sup>J. Orville Iverson, *So You're Going on the Air* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1969), 17.

<sup>13</sup>David Aikman, "The Future of China: Communism or Christianity?" *Religious Broadcasting*, February 1992, 46.

<sup>14</sup>*Far East Broadcasting Association Newsletter*, June 1989.

be done in this generation.”<sup>15</sup> “Means will be devised to reach hearts. Some of the methods used in this work will be different from the methods used in the past.”<sup>16</sup>

Since 1987, our Adventist World Radio/Asia station in Guam has been set up, and through this fast, safe, economic way, we have been able to broadly spread the Good News to a huge population in China, where there is limited religious freedom. This God-given tool has contributed a great deal to winning souls for Christ. As a result of its survey in China, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has twice reported the fact that our program attracted the largest audience in the same categories among other religious stations, estimating of 1,130,000 listeners to the Mandarin “Voice of Hope” program. As a result of a video ministry and through an Internet service which we have made available to the listeners, every month hundreds of letters and E-mail responses rush into our office every month. However much we have attempted to provide in services, demand still outpaces supply. There is, in my opinion, no better substitute for this audio and video gospel ministry in the current situation in China.

### Literature Ministry

The literature ministry is another member of the evangelism trinity. God said to the prophet Habakkuk, “Write down the revelation and make it plain on tablets so that whoever reads it may run with it. For the revelation awaits an appointed time; it speaks of the end and will not prove false” (Hab 2:2-3). This is wonderful instruction. “Like the leaves of autumn” is how Ellen G. White described the way our publications should be distributed.<sup>17</sup> She even said, “I must see the publishing work prosper. It is interwoven with my very existence. If I forget the interests of this work, let my right hand forget her cunning.”<sup>18</sup>

This publishing ministry is in more demand in China as God opens the way, so that our brethren inside and outside of mainland China can cooperate with one another in collecting resources—material, money, manuscripts, and so forth. Praise the Lord! Amidst hardship and sometimes dangers, millions of books, training series, and pamphlets have been distributed as the living bread to feed the

<sup>15</sup>Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education: Instruction for the Home, the School, and the Church* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1932), 409.

<sup>16</sup>Ellen G. White, *Evangelism as Set Forth in the Writings of Ellen G. White* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1946), 105.

<sup>17</sup>Ellen G. White, “A Remarkable Dream,” *Advent Review and Herald of the Sabbath*, 4 November 1875, 1.

<sup>18</sup>Ellen G. White, *Life Sketches of Ellen G. White: Being a Narrative of Her Experience to 1881 As Written by Herself; with a Sketch of Her Subsequent Labors and Her Last Sickness Compiled from Original Sources* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1915, 1943), 248-49.

spiritually hungry people in China. Our brethren consider such literature as the best gifts. If we say the radio ministry is broad in scope, we must say the fruit of this publishing work is long-lasting and its spiritual content leaves a deep impression on human minds and lives. In view of his work experience in the former Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries, Mark Finley says, "What should we expect next? I am not a prophet, but I read prophecy. We should expect China to open in the very near future. If we are wise, we should prepare literature right now for China, and prepare people who understand the language to be able to move quickly."<sup>19</sup> He said this eight years ago! What have we done since then?

### **Cassette/Disk Ministry**

The cassette and disk ministry is another member of the evangelism trinity. It is a supplement to the radio and publishing work. Even the illiterate, or the housewives busy with household chores, can enjoy the tapes. Nowadays the computer discs also appeal to the intellectual class, in particular the young students. We have started something, but there is room for improvement.

### **Church Building**

We, as outsiders, can contribute to the construction projects to help our brethren in economically disadvantaged circumstances. The buildings will not only house our church members, but also serve to enhance our church recognition in the community. Thank God, in the past few years, through our Chinese brethren's willing sacrifice, in addition to the help from the East Asia Committee and the newly organized Chinese Union Mission, scores of new church buildings have been erected in many Chinese provinces. Some larger churches can hold two thousand members, while others, only a few hundred or even less.

All the ministry and services described above cannot replace personal contacts—counsel, admonishment, comfort, and prayers face to face. Along with the open policy endorsed by the current Chinese government and rights guaranteed in the Chinese Constitution, people do have some degree of religious freedom in China. Personal ministry is feasible when done tactfully and discreetly. How excited we are when we can hold the hands of a long-separated or forgotten friend or can greet a stranger, the least of God's children, in the name of Christ, with grace and love and a prayer in our heart.

<sup>19</sup>Mark Finley, "How Near Is Near?" *Adventists Affirm* 6, no. 1 (1992): 22.

### **The Global Pioneers Project**

Pairs of believers go into the unreached areas to start new work by witnessing among their own people. With motives to love and serve, the potential for success only God can measure.

### **Tentmaker Ministries**

Through teaching, healing, serving, and friendship by lay volunteer groups, a formless church is established in many peoples' hearts, preparing them to receive the light from Heaven. Coordination with these groups should be both a learning opportunity as well as a demonstration of Christian courtesy and openness.

### **Campus Ministry**

There has been a lack of a coordinated program of campus ministry for reaching students with the gospel. We should pay more attention and exert more effort in this direction for Chinese students both inside and outside of China.

### **Training**

The last, but not the least, form of ministry is the most urgent and important: training preachers, elders, leaders, lay workers, and church administrators, and as many as possible, by whatever means available. We also need to ordain more and more qualified pastors and elders to take up the heavy load of church functions necessitated by the phenomenal growth of the church. As the Bible says,

How, then, can they call on the one whom they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without some preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? (Rom 10:14-15)

Of course, they need to be equipped before they are sent. To improve the quality and the quantity of our full-time and part-time gospel workers, we need the best of teachers who have sat at the feet of the Great Teacher. This is a recurring demand and an urgent issue! Our church's future in China depends on it.

So far, we have not done much to address this issue. We should have a strategic plan; we need to pray, ponder, plan, practice, and promote more and more. The Bible and the writings of Ellen G. White emphasize this a great deal. "The things you have heard me say . . . entrust to reliable men [and women] who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Tim 2:2). "How can we find language to express our deep interest, to describe our desire that every soul should awake and



go to work in the Master's vineyard? Christ says, 'Occupy till I come.'<sup>20</sup> The highest official leader of the Chinese church, Bishop Ting reportedly has admitted that, because of the aging leadership of the Chinese church, the need for trained younger workers is desperate.<sup>21</sup> Our veteran, Elder David Lin, once was asked: "What is your greatest concern for your church?" He simply answered, "The problem of training successors for the cause of God."<sup>22</sup>

### Conclusion

If we review the history of the church in China and pay attention to our current situation, we may consider all the different kinds of ministry described above as a shaft of light. By God's grace working with our prudent efforts we may combine and amplify these into a powerful laser beam focusing on evangelizing China. Thus God's name will be glorified. Slowly and surely, His church will be fortified, His people blessed, and His kingdom in China will be expanded! The Sun of righteousness will shine forth brighter and brighter upon our suffering Chinese people. The last-day mission is a glorious part of the Great Commission, and the China mission must be an important component of that mission. The future success of evangelism in China is ultimately in God's hands. In humility and thankfulness, we consider the privilege of being called to be coworkers in His cause. We need to keep our minds open to opportunities yet unseen in these fast-moving scenes of the last days. At times we need to link hands with all God's sincere followers, wherever and whoever they may be, in our pilgrimage toward the heavenly land. Dr. John Wong, a surgeon-theologian, states, "God's design for the Chinese church may well be vastly different from the American or European models, and we should not expect societal or church progress in China to be always consistent, uniform, linear, and favorable to us."<sup>23</sup> Let us dedicate ourselves anew to this great task of helping finish God's work on earth by bringing multitudes of God's people to the glorious hope of eternal life. We want to hasten Christ's second coming and bring more Chinese people face to face with the Sun of righteousness in all His fullness of love and grace.

<sup>20</sup>Ellen G. White, "Redeem the Time, because the Days Are Evil," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 21 April 1896, 241.

<sup>21</sup>K. H. Ting, press conference in New York, 19 May 1991.

<sup>22</sup>"Interview with David Lin," *Tian Feng* 3 (1992): 43.

<sup>23</sup>John Wong, in a speech delivered at the Los Angeles Chinese Church, Los Angeles, California, 10 July 1999. Dr. Wong is president of the US-China Christian Institute.

**Supplement**

Taiwan, with her 22 million people, and Hong Kong and Macao, with their 7 million more Chinese people, are surely great mission fields too. God's work in both the Taiwan Mission and Hong Kong-Macao Conference has a fifty-year-long history. Not only do we have churches, we also have hospitals and different levels of schools. Due to secularism, materialism and individualism, church growth is slow, sometimes set back. According to a report in 1999<sup>24</sup> on name lists there are about four thousand and seven thousand members, respectively, in these two regional units. (Unfortunately, the Sabbath church service attendants are less than 50 percent of the membership.) Every year there are only a little over three hundred people being baptized into our church in these areas. Have mercy upon us, Lord! We have seen that thick darkness is over Your people. May the following prophecy be fulfilled before our eyes: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD rises upon you" (Isa 60:1).

<sup>24</sup>James Wu, secretary of the South China Island Union Mission, reported during the Inaugural Session of the Chinese Union Mission, 13-15 June 1999.

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## MISSION STRATEGY: RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT

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### Introduction

At the beginning of the third millennium, the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church can do itself a great service by conducting introspection in the area of mission. How well has the Church carried out the mandate of the gospel commission? What lessons has history, experience, and research, *inter alia*, taught the Church with regards to the methods and strategies through which mission has been done? How seriously has the Church taken its past mistakes as opportunity for change to improve the present as well as the future practice of mission?

Obviously, the SDA Church should take a comprehensive inventory of itself from all possible angles. Other mission analysts will certainly need to address related areas in which the Church ought to carry out self-examination. The aim of this essay is to help the SDA Church to take a candid look at itself in order to map out effective ways of taking the gospel to the billions of people engulfed by secularism and world religions. It would be sheer ambition on my part to attempt to cover all methods that the SDA Church has employed from its inception. Even if such a venture were enthusiastically embarked upon, the range of the methods to be dealt with would render any meaningful depth of analysis impossible. Having said this, allow me to therefore spell out the scope of my current assignment.

Beyond a simple review, this paper intends to examine some tensions surrounding a few selected strategies and methods of mission. The conviction behind this paper is that a rigorous critique and analysis of some of the major

<sup>1</sup>At the time the paper was presented. He has recently returned to the United States.

methods of mission in the context of their accompanying dynamics may hold clues to the most effective ways mission ought to be carried out in the new millennium. Instead of getting entangled with detail, a grasp of cardinal principles from which the details may be drawn should provide the most defensible starting point for a serious search for effective strategies of mission. A systematic reflection on the principles on which strategies of mission are based does not negate the practical aspects of mission. Rather, it gives substance and depth to all that the church does as it tries to make Christ known and loved by all peoples of the world. For, contrary to misconceptions that tend to elevate the practical dimension of mission above the theoretical, the two seem to have equal weight. Exceptional practice should be rooted in solid theory, and reliable theoretical knowledge must nourish the practical vitality of mission strategy. We need to invest time in thinking about mission, since this will improve the way we actually do mission. A preoccupation with the “practical” in mission methodology, to the exclusion of any careful examination of theoretical foundations, is counterproductive, for it short-circuits the practical dimension of mission that we often strive to emphasize. Given the pluriformity and multiplicity of strategies of mission that floods the missiological landscape, one wonders whether anything more in the form of strategies and methods for mission should or could be said.

Our reflection on mission strategy will take the following path. First, I will analyze some key principles that have shaped mission strategy over the years. Second, I will propose methods that the SDA Church should consider in the formulation of fitting and effective mission strategies for the current challenges.

### **Principles of Mission: The Reality Behind Our Practice of Mission**

Over the years, Christians’ involvement in mission has always been guided by some principles. This is true whether or not the practitioners were aware of the basis of their mission practice. Some of the principles that backed the mission efforts were biblical, while others may not have traced their origin to any passage of Scripture, yet they are not necessarily against the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Like culture, some of the principles that we have followed in our mission practice over the years are a result of our response to the challenges that we have had to deal with as we have tried to spread the good news of salvation cross-culturally. Forged in the matrix of practical considerations, some “principles” of mission are a reflex action to the realities of witnessing to our faith in a culturally diverse world. Such “principles,” which are largely human responses to varying situations, may change with the passing of time when the circumstances change. Biblical “principles” of mission, too, though largely emanating from an immutable God may alter on demand of

<sup>2</sup>For a more detailed discussion, see Thomas Thangaraj, *The Common Task* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 127-43.

changed circumstances. The point we are trying to make here is that we, as humans, perceive “principles” of mission because of our reflection on God’s word and humanity. We classify together what we consider to be principles, and this is good because it is God who has given us the capacity to do so. As we identify and craft principles for mission, we also gain a deeper insight into how we can do mission correctly.

### **Mission Methods: Text and Context**

No sooner does one attempt to study methods of mission than one encounters chaos. The many methods that not only clamor for attention, while also enjoying wide endorsement from reputable missiologists, overwhelm any serious student of mission. While the chaos can be intimidating, it can also provide great opportunity for creativity. Some may allow the countless and confusing methods to immobilize them. Yet others may see in the chaotic proliferation of methods a clarion call to create new and more effective approaches to mission.

Success in fulfilling our task of mission will not come from a mere knowledge of the glorious methods that have graced mission in the past. The presence and mastery of information is not enough, for there are many who possess a lot of theoretical knowledge about mission who fail to apply what they claim to know. Is it not a paradox that the Western world that boasts some of the most productive publishing houses, universities, and mission strategies trails behind the non-Western world in church growth? Poor countries of the world which have meager resources are experiencing exponential growth.

The purpose of this section goes beyond the identification of some of the salient approaches to mission, important though that may be. Rather, at issue here is an analysis of the intersection of a selected pair of methods that are diametrically opposed. Among these methods are the metaphysical and empirical, and the deductive and inductive. The point here is that a balanced approach that brings together each pair of diametrically opposed methods has to be context-sensitive in order to remain effective. Fixation to any method, whether the method may have been good or excellent, is counterproductive, since that militates against adaptation to changing circumstances.

### **Metaphysical and Empirical Methods**

Essentially, the metaphysical methods of mission, on the one hand, pertain to those approaches to mission that extol the spiritual and the transcendental. These methods tend to be more qualitative and are difficult to measure. Most of these methods have theology as their base. In other words, they articulate the spiritual and theological components of mission as paramount. The emphasis is on the intangibles that define the essence of the potency of these methods of mission.

On the other hand, we have the empirical methods of mission. These methods are scientific in nature, for they stress the measurable, the quantifiable. Under the empirical aspect of mission are statistics, ethnology, psychology, sociology, linguistics, history, geography, law, and pedagogics of both Christian and non-Christian nations.

Perhaps more than any other passages of Scripture, the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast that are recorded in Matt 13:31-33 and Luke 13:18-21 highlight the need for balance between the empirical and metaphysical understandings of and approaches to the kingdom of God. Since mission is about the actualization and expansion of the kingdom of God, these parables are particularly pertinent. Preliminary observations are quite in place for one to catch the drift of what Christ sought to communicate through these two parables. First, among the parables spoken by Jesus in relation to the kingdom of God, these two are among the shortest. In Luke, for example, each comprises only two verses. In Matthew, the parable of the mustard seed consists of two verses, while the parable of the yeast is condensed into one verse.

An allied point is that Jesus spoke these two parables, in immediate succession, as it were in a single breath. The impression is that before the words of the first parable could even sink into the minds of the hearers, with their echoes still reverberating, Jesus introduced the second parable.

It is also evident that the parables of the mustard seed and the yeast were given impromptu. This is not to say that all the other parables that Jesus told were rehearsed before they were spoken. However, a closer look at these two parables show that Jesus did not conceal the brainstorming that was going on in His mind in an effort to illustrate what the kingdom of God is like. In introducing the parable of the mustard seed, Jesus asked, "What is the kingdom of God like? What shall I compare it to?" (Luke 13:18).<sup>3</sup> Again, he commences the parable of the yeast wondering, "What shall I compare the kingdom of God to?" (v. 20). The significance of drawing some attention to the impromptu aspect of the parables is that, while some people express themselves better with some prior preparation, others seem to bring out their best when placed under impromptu circumstances. Although Jesus would no doubt function equally well under any situation, this impromptu occasion seems to have given Him an opportune moment to reveal brilliantly two dimensions of the kingdom of God—dimensions that must always be kept in tension. These two are the empirical and metaphysical.

Why did Jesus follow up the parable of the mustard seed with that of the yeast? Was the first parable inadequate to illustrate his point about the kingdom of God? In view of the multifaceted nature of the kingdom of God, one metaphor obviously would be incapable of capturing all the dimensions of the kingdom of God. This point is supported by the other parables Jesus gave pertaining to the

<sup>3</sup>Bible quotations in this paper are taken from the NIV.

kingdom of God, for example, Matt 13:24,44,45,47; 18:23. The proximity of the two parables would imply that Jesus might have wanted to highlight the point that they are mutually corrective. Since each parable accentuates an opposite feature of the kingdom of God, a simultaneous focus on both aspects would promote a more balanced view of what the kingdom of God is like.

A comparison of the two parables shows that the parable of the mustard seed is more empirical in emphasis. Jesus points out that the kingdom of God is “like a mustard seed which a man took and planted in his garden. It grew and became a tree, and the birds of the air perched in its branches.” An examination of this parable shows that here we are dealing with things we can count (“a mustard seed”), things we can observe and measure (“it grew and became a tree”), and things we can scientifically verify with ease (“the birds of the air perched in its branches”). Yet when we look at the parable of the yeast, the emphasis shifts. Here Jesus simply notes that the kingdom of God is “like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough” (v. 21). The essence of the second parable is the influence of the yeast, which, though more difficult to quantify, affects the flour, leading to the rising of the dough. The indeterminate amount of yeast (even women with a modicum of baking experience know that all it takes is a small amount of yeast to make a large amount of dough rise) represents the metaphysical dimension of the kingdom of God. Although it is difficult to measure, when this dimension is absent, all can tell because the dough refuses to rise. But when yeast is present, the flour responds and the dough is transformed into palatable bread.

More concretely, our understanding of the kingdom of God is incomplete unless we balance the empirical and the metaphysical methods that we should employ in extending the reign of God through the way in which we do mission. Mission methods that stress the gains for the kingdom along empirical lines (statistics) while ignoring the spiritual, metaphysical, or qualitative aspects of the people we evangelize are lopsided.

The opposite is equally undesirable. Focusing only on the metaphysical at the expense of the empirical produces hermits who become isolated from society. This inward preoccupation with spirituality prevents Christians from functioning as salt in a world that yearns for what Christians have to offer.

Ideally, a rich inner spiritual and metaphysical experience of God’s kingdom should translate into quantitative, empirical experience of God’s kingdom. When the behavior of Christians matches their inner experience of God’s grace, then the methods employed in the actualizing of the kingdom of God in human lives will be commended. On a corporate level, the structures, infrastructure, and numerical size of the church, which represent the empirical dimension of the kingdom of God, should correspond with the quality, devotion, excellence, and spiritual vitality of the members who form the body of Christ. An imbalance in the empirical and metaphysical aspects of the kingdom of God should take us back to the drawing board so we may re-evaluate our mission methods. If our methods place equal

emphasis on the empirical and metaphysical, the resultant quality of the kingdom will correspond to the vision Jesus has for His children.

### Text, Context, and Strategy

As we try to discover ways of doing mission effectively in our time, we also need to understand the relationship between text, context, and strategy. In the deductive approach, the concept of mission as given in God's word becomes the starting point for engagement in mission. An inductive approach, on the other hand, makes the context the point of departure. In other words, instead of imposing a ready-made method, the missionary looks at and listens to the context before he can tailor a method that fits the situation. A more prudent approach is one which shies away from extremes by coming up with a balanced combination of the deductive and inductive aspects that meets the demand of each given situation. It is impossible to provide in one breath comprehensive and brief definitions of the deductive (text-oriented) and inductive (context-oriented) approaches to mission without sounding reductionistic. What needs to be mentioned here is that in real life a pure deductive or inductive approach is an illusion. The truth of the matter is that in any strategy of mission we have a predominance of one of the two basic approaches, either the deductive or the inductive, leaving the nonpredominant approach lurking in the background.

Having taken this precaution, it should be pointed out that contextualization, which refers to the attempt to apply the word of God with sensitivity to a given context, has always characterized the history of mission methodology. There are two basic perspectives from which this phenomenon may be analyzed. First, mission strategies have been contextualized diachronically, that is to say that throughout history strategies of mission have tried to adapt to the changing times. The basic point here is that the mission context has often influenced the strategies that have been employed in the spread of the Christian message.

At the various phases of Christian history, mission methods should also be contextualized synchronically. Whereas diachronic contextualization cuts through time, synchronic contextualization is done within a given period of time and takes into account the various facets of life on which the Christian message should be brought to bear. Synchronic contextualization would try to make the gospel relevant within existing political, economic, and cultural realities, among others. This is like taking a slice of time, say the year A.D. 2000, and then applying the gospel message in light of the various segments within any society.

Any synchronic approach will be sensitive to continuity, discontinuity, and creativity. With regard to continuity, synchronic contextualization will recognize that there are some time-honored methods of mission that are still viable. These do not need to be retired. Such strategies of mission should be perfected and adapted to the ever changing terrain of the missiological landscape to arrest lapses into traditionalism. Preaching, personal evangelism, and prayer, to mention but a few,



are mission methods that are timeless in their effectiveness, and these need no replacement.

In conjunction with discontinuity, synchronic contextualization is conscious of the fact that some methods of mission outlive their usefulness and thus stand in need of substitution. The ephemeral nature of these mission methods is evident when paradigms shift. In the face of new demands resulting from changing circumstances, these methods buckle and give way to more innovative approaches. Insistence on employing archaic strategies—strategies that in their heyday produced phenomenal outcomes—may only mock their former glory. Under such circumstances discontinuity is the right posture. In other words, a synchronic approach to mission will inevitably be eclectic by embracing those methods that are contemporary and effective while rejecting and retiring those which are no longer useful.

Synchronic contextualization sets great store by creativity. An awareness that times have changed should spur all engaged in mission to seek greater insight into the present “chemistry” of the world in order to call into being new and effective methods of reaching contemporary humanity. Creativity is key. Missiology should learn from the past, not in order to blindly imitate it, but to use it in crafting relevant approaches for our day. In addition, a synchronic approach to mission will acquaint itself with all spheres of life, thus rendering mission strategies relevant. Mission cannot be done on the periphery but at the center of human existence and activity. An approach to mission with its hand on the pulse of humanity will seek to have a voice in the market place, relating the eternal message of salvation to the transient issues that consume human time, money, and energy. The task of mission, then, is to identify where people are and find ways of getting their attention in order to convey God’s life-giving word.<sup>4</sup>

### **Mission Strategy: Prospect**

Our current challenges demand strategies for mission that are commensurate with the task. Logically, the past will continue to provide a frame of reference for present and future methods of doing mission. Undoubtedly the greatest need of the church in the present, as well as in the future, is an open and venturing encounter with God in prayer for new and effective strategies that seek to go beyond a mere fixation on and imitation of the past. Mission strategies that will make a difference ought to recapture the biblical concept of mission as both metaphysical and empirical, both deductive and inductive. In addition, mission strategies should be conscious of the need for comprehensive contextualization and a clear insight into what actually constitutes a strategy.

<sup>4</sup>Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 70.

### Balancing the Empirical and Metaphysical

Mission strategies that will make a difference are those that recognize the need to balance the empirical and metaphysical dimensions of mission. While we need to baptize more souls, we also need to nurture them so that the growth of the church is not only numerical but also spiritual. Those that are brought into the church should find within it activities that enhance their spiritual growth. What this means is that our mission strategies will remain partial if they only bring people into the church without ensuring that the same people experience continued growth in their experience with Jesus Christ. The point we wish to stress here is that mission strategy must be bifocal by looking at both the tangible and measurable (empirical) as well as the not-so-easy-to-measure (metaphysical) aspects of mission.

### Balancing the Deductive and the Inductive

Another pair of dynamics that ought to be kept in perspective in our mission strategies is the deductive and inductive polarities. The Adventist message is clear, and nothing should dilute it. As we go into the whole world in response to the Gospel Commission, we should do so with great confidence. In a sense we know that the world needs the gospel in order to be saved, and this can be said to be a deductive approach. Yet we also wish to be sensitive to the circumstances in which the people to whom we bring the gospel find themselves.<sup>5</sup> An awareness of the variety in human culture and situations requires mission strategies that try to communicate the gospel message inductively. Prayerfully, the balance between the deductive and inductive aspects of mission strategy should be upheld to ensure effective communication of the gospel to all the peoples of the world.

### Synchronic and Diachronic Contextualization

Much is being said about contextualization in mission methodology.<sup>6</sup> All that needs to be highlighted at this juncture is that contextualization is multifaceted. For practical purposes, two aspects of it need to be recognized, namely, the synchronic and the diachronic. A mission strategy that will bring fruits must seek to contextualize the Adventist message within given societies in specific periods of time across the different segments of the population. In other words, Adventism must be packaged for the youth, elderly, educated, rich, poor, and so forth, so that each group can resonate and identify with the message. Furthermore, Adventism

<sup>5</sup>Marvin K. Mayers, *Christianity Confronts Culture* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 59-68.

<sup>6</sup>Steven C. Hawthorne, *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1997), 13.

must be contextualized from one generation to the next without becoming outmoded. This balance should be reflected in our mission strategies for the present as well as for the future.

### **Creativity versus Fixation**

Our mission strategies should shun fixation with the past by seeking the fresh guidance of the Holy Spirit in our current situations. The Holy Spirit is not limited in what He can do with a willing and committed church. If we as leaders and members of this church can entreat God on our knees, miracles will happen and many people will respond to our proclamation of the gospel. We should not insist that the Holy Spirit should reduplicate what He did in the past, although this is possible. Rather we should pray for the unction to function in unprecedented ways because the Holy Spirit longs to do much more than we can imagine. Mission strategy should realize the centrality of asking the Spirit to tailor-make approaches commensurate with the task before us as a church.

### **Evaluation of Our Strategies**

Anything we call mission strategy is a distortion unless it includes the evaluation of what we are doing in our endeavors to bring the gospel to the peoples in our world. Most strategies comprise of an analysis of the context, the selection of one method among many, the implementation of the chosen method, and evaluation. Some strategies will have more phases than the four given here, but whatever the case, a strategy must have an evaluative phase in order to fit the current understanding of strategies. Our mission strategies should help us learn from both our successes and our failures.

### **Conclusion**

To engage in mission in these last days is one of the greatest privileges. The same God who invited us into mission is waiting expectantly for men and women and the youth to evoke His wisdom and power as we explore the different strategies for our unique situations. May a reflection on what I have shared in this paper inspire all of us to relentlessly throw ourselves into mission, trusting in the Holy Spirit's guidance and strength. Let us review our strategies for mission, and pray for new possibilities as we try to do our part in spreading the good news of salvation.



## **AIAS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**

### **DISSERTATION AND THESIS ABSTRACTS**

#### **THE IDENTIFICATION OF THE BAKER AND OTHER RELATED TERMS IN HOSEA 6:11B-7:10**

**Researcher: Myline Decilos Asumbrado, M.A., 2000**  
**Adviser: Yoshitaka Kobayashi, Ph.D.**

The identification of the baker and other related terms helps in the understanding of the history of the northern kingdom. This research presents how the social evils and the religious idolatry of the northern kingdom of Israel resulted in their total destruction.

Scholars have proposed diverse identifications of the term “baker” in Hos 6:11b-7:10 which may affect the interpretation of the passage. Questions have been asked: What do the baker and other related terms represent? Is the word “baker” referring to a leader of the nation or to an ordinary person?

After the study, the researcher found out that the word “baker” does not play any significant part in the simile. It only plays a supplementary role, whereas the oven is the focus of the simile. The word “baker” is only referring to the person who heats the oven and bakes the bread in the simile, unlike the conclusion of most scholars.

#### **SIN, GRACE, FREE WILL, AND SALVATION: FOUR MAJOR CLASSICAL VIEWS AND AN ALTERNATIVE**

**Researcher: Chul Wan Kim, Ph.D., 2000**  
**Adviser: Ronald Bissell, Ph.D.**

This research seeks to clarify the relationship between God’s grace and human free will in salvation. To achieve this goal, it investigates and evaluates four major

classical theories concerning sin and the respective roles of grace and free will in salvation, then proposes an alternate view.

Chapter 1 contains the introduction of the study and the background of the problem raised in the early fifth century in Christian history. It includes a review of relevant literature.

Chapter 2 provides preliminary background material about various aspects of sin, grace, and human will which is important for investigation and evaluation of the four classical theories and the proposal of an alternate view.

Chapter 3 explores the concepts of sin and the understandings of the relationship between God's grace and human will in salvation as viewed within the four major theological systems: Augustinianism, Pelagianism, Semi-Pelagianism, and Semi-Augustinianism.

Chapter 4 includes a biblical and theological analysis of the concepts of sin, grace, and human will in salvation held by the four major classical views. It concludes that all four have failed to completely grasp the whole picture of the relationship between God's grace and human free will in the process of human salvation. Augustinianism and Pelagianism seem to overemphasize, respectively, either the redemptive grace of God or the created grace of human will as the primary basis of salvation. Semi-Pelagianism and Semi-Augustinianism provide more balance by maintaining that there must be cooperation between free will and grace, but they are incomplete. The proposed alternative view is that grace and free will cooperate together harmoniously in such a way that cooperation for salvation from a sinful nature is initiated by grace, and cooperation for deliverance from sinful acts is initiated by free will.

Chapter 5 presents the summary of the study and concludes with the proposed alternative view.

## DEVELOPMENT OF A TWELVE-STEP PROCEDURE FOR CHURCH PLANTING IN NORTH KOREA

Researcher: **Kim Won Gon**, D.Min., 2000  
 Adviser: **Francisco Gayoba**, D.Theol.

This project is designed to help the Korean Union Conference (KUC) prepare and implement a church planting strategy for North Korea (NK). Chapter 1 contains the introduction. Chapter 2 explores the procedures and methods of church planting based on biblical and missiological principles. This chapter serves as the theoretical basis for the strategies that are proposed in chapter 4.

Chapter 3 is an analysis of NK in three areas. First, the analysis of the general environment indicates the demographic, ideological, socio-economic, and educational factors to be considered in a church planting strategy. Second, the analysis of the religious situation shows an increasing openness to religion. Third,

the analysis of the political situation explores the possible scenario for the opening of NK.

Chapter 4 is the twelve step church planting procedure that is designed to fit the conditions of the KUC and NK. The procedure is divided into four phases: vision, preparation, evangelism, and reproduction. In the vision phase, all churches and church members in KUC are mobilized for the vision of planting churches in NK. In the preparation phase, all mother churches select members and train them for church planting teams. In the evangelism phase, church planting teams plant new churches through various evangelism activities in NK. In the reproduction phase, the planted churches reproduce themselves. Finally, there is a four-step program for training church planters. This program is needed in most of the steps suggested.

#### EQUIPPING LOCAL CHURCH ELDERS: A STRATEGY FOR ASSIMILATING NEW CONVERTS

Researcher: **Benonie P. Llanto, D.Min., 2000**

Adviser: **Reuel Almocera, D.P.S.**

Assimilating new converts is one of the major challenges of the Seventh-day Adventist church today. The situation in the South Philippines is even more challenging because pastors take care of church districts rather than just a few churches. Each pastor has an average of more than ten churches to shepherd. Hence, assimilating new converts rests largely on the shoulders of local church elders. Unfortunately, the local church elders and leaders are handicapped by lack of formal ministerial training. Thus, the Seventh-day Adventist church leadership is challenged to equip and instruct church elders on how to assimilate new converts more effectively, in order to meet the demands of a rapidly growing membership.

This project attempts to help solve the problem. The project aims to provide approaches and programs for local church elders in an attempt to equip them for the assimilation task.

The process involves two major activities. The first is the gathering of materials that deal with the biblical principles of assimilation and the contemporary approaches of assimilation. The second is the formulation of the manual. The manual is the product of research. It suggests practical guidelines for the assimilation of new converts, and is written with the hope that it will be used by elders and leaders of the local churches.

This project identifies several principles and approaches necessary for an effective assimilation strategy. The principles include that of establishing close relationships; that of calling; that of motivation; and that of immediate nurture, concern, hospitality, instruction, communication, and delegation. The approaches include practical strategies such as friendship, inclusion, identification, initiation

through baptism, participation in small groups, assignment of tasks and roles evangelism, spiritual growth, and social activities.

The manual discusses details such as the ideal program during the baptism of new converts. Perhaps the most practical part of the manual is the appendices, which include sample letters, programs, and even liturgies involved in the assimilation process of new converts.

#### THE MEANING OF *ʾānāw* IN NUMBERS 12:3

Researcher: **Jesse Atiteo Pasiwen, M.A., 2000**

Adviser: **Yoshitaka Kobayashi, Ph.D.**

Num 12:3 poses a problem among Bible scholars searching for some solution. Moses is said to be *ʾānāw* in Num 12:3. The KJV translates *ʾānāw* into “meek”: “(Now the man Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth).” Some scholars say that the translation “meek” or “humble” for the Hebrew word *ʾānāw* in Num 12:3 was added during the Hellenistic period.

Chapter 2 provides the background of Num 12:3. It contains the structure of the book of Numbers, a picture of what is happening behind Num 12:3, and an overview of the life of Moses which relates to Num 12:3.

Chapter 3 presents a word study and an exegesis of Num 12:3. *ʾānāw* in Num 12:3 has multiple meanings such as afflicted, humble, seeking God, long suffering. However, out of the multiple translations, “humble” best portrays *ʾānāw* in Num 12:3. Also, Num 12:3 is important to explain why Moses did justify himself when his sister Miriam and brother Aaron questioned his authority as God’s spokesman.

Chapter 4 is a conclusion to the research. The word study of *ʾānāw* shows that it may mean “humble” like all the six cases in the feminine singular form and a few cases (Pss 25:9; 37:11; Prov 16:19; Zeph 2:3) in the masculine plural form of *ʾānāwim*. From this study, we may say that the Hebrew word *ʾānāw* had the meaning “humble” from the time before the Hellenistic period. Also, from the texts of similar expression, we know that the expressions in Num 12:3 could be as old as the other texts in Num 12, that is, before the Hellenistic period. Thus I find no support for the historical-critical scholars’ opinion that *ʾānāw* means “meek” or “humble” only by the influence of the Greek word *praus* in the Hellenistic period.



## ADVENTIST MISSIOLOGICAL RESPONSES TO CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN JAKARTA

Researcher: **Praban B. A. Saputro**, Ph.D., 2000  
Adviser: **Gan-Theow Ng**, Ph.D.

Rapid urbanization has presented new challenges to Adventist mission in Jakarta. Mission strategies are fast losing their relevance and effectiveness. Coupled with the antiquated mission thinking is the pro-rural perception that relegates urban mission to secondary importance.

The purpose of this study is to examine Jakarta as a city and Jakartans as people. The findings of the study will form the basis of six missiological and theological responses pertaining to urban mission in Jakarta.

The study probes into the sociological makeup of Jakarta as a economic, political, cultural, and population center. The growth and development of the city have made it a mosaic of Indonesia with its various ethnic groups, religious affiliations, and social classes.

The study then analyzes the anthropological constitution of Jakartans. It examines worldview and worldview change as they apply to the urbanites in Jakarta. Various perspectives on worldview serve as a basis for understanding Jakartans in three areas: animism, Islam, and nationalism.

Six missiological and theological responses to the challenges of urban mission in Jakarta are looked at: Jakarta as a mission center, a multi-individual approach to conversion, a homogenous-unit approach to winning various ethnic and social groups, a wholistic approach to the understanding of the gospel message, a contextual approach to proclaim the message, and a social approach to fulfill the basic needs of urbanites in Jakarta.

## A STRATEGY FOR EVANGELIZING STUDENTS OF NON-ADVENTIST COLLEGES IN THE MIDDLE-WEST KOREAN CONFERENCE

Researcher: **Song Chang Ho**, D.Min., 2000  
Adviser: **Reuel Almocera**, D.P.S.

The importance of universities and colleges in modern society cannot be discounted. Colleges and universities produce much needed human resources not only for the future society but also for the church.

The Seventh-day Adventist church in Korea, especially the Middle-West Korean Conference, does not have a program intended specifically for campus ministry for Adventist college students and for evangelizing non-Adventist students on secular campuses. This reality is the main concern of this project;

hence, its basic purpose is to formulate a strategy to evangelize college students attending secular colleges in Korea.

The strategy was formulated with the process listed below. Selected campus ministry groups, which are doing evangelistic activities for college students on Korean college campuses, were analyzed. Then the findings were evaluated by subjecting them to the judgment of the Bible and of the teachings of selected theologians. The merging strategy was subsequently examined and compared with the cases of the schools of the prophets in OT times and the ministries and teachings of Jesus and Paul, the greatest evangelists in Christian history.

This project finds that the small group structure and community life concept are effective methods for evangelizing college students and for training Adventist students attending secular colleges. On the basis of these findings, this project has developed a specific strategy for the Middle-West Korean Conference: small group ministry on campuses and in the lodging-house system outside campuses. It also presents a suggested curriculum and practical schedules for the training of Adventist students for the evangelization of non-Adventist students on secular campuses.

#### A CHURCH-PLANTING STRATEGY FOR THE SUNDANESE PEOPLE IN THE TERRITORY OF THE WEST JAVA CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

Researcher: **Sutrisno Tjakrapawira, D.Min., 2000**

Adviser: **Kyung Ho Song, Ph. D.**

This study seeks to find and develop an effective and workable church planting strategy for the Sundanese people dwelling within the territory of the West Java Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. To reach this goal, it first examines the biblical-theological foundations and contemporary theories of church planting. Then, based on the examination of the cultural, religious, and political backgrounds of the Sundanese people, and the analysis of the surveys answered by Sundanese Adventists, workers, and lay members of the West Java Conference, this study proposes the most effective church planting strategy in the Sundanese area.

The house-church planting method is proposed as the most effective strategy for winning Sundanese. The reasons, advantages, and stages are presented and discussed, and a strategic plan is drawn up.

A summary with conclusions and recommendations for the West Java Conference and for West Indonesia Union Mission is made along with further suggestions for future study.

## BOOK REVIEWS

Doukhan, Jacques B. *Secrets of Daniel: Wisdom and Dreams of a Jewish Prince in Exile*. Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2000. 191 pp.

Jacques B. Doukhan is Professor of Old Testament Interpretation and Jewish Studies at Andrews University. He is editor of two journals, *Shabbat Shalom* and *L'Olivier*, and is a well respected author. His book, *Daniel: Vision of the End* (Andrews University Press, 1987), was favorably received.

In *Secrets of Daniel*, Doukhan establishes the universality of Daniel's message and appeal. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all venerate the book. Philosophers, psychologists, scientists, poets, and artists have been inspired by its great themes. "Indeed, the book of Daniel does not exclusively belong to the religious tradition but also to the secular heritage" (9). Daniel's appeal is appreciated, says Doukhan, not only because of its beautiful poetic devices (echoes, parallelisms, word plays, and rhythms) and languages (Hebrew, Aramaic, and loanwords from Akkadian, Persian, and Greek), but also because of its spirituality. One must "understand" (a key word in the book) not only the interrelatedness of history and prophecy but also the value of prayer, a key component of the book. It is this that roots the book "in the human experience" (10) and dissuades asceticism.

Each of the twelve chapters of Daniel forms a chapter in *Secrets of Daniel*. Doukhan divides each chapter into pericopes, though he does not always provide the grounds for such a division. The pericope is then discussed as a whole rather than by means of a verse-by-verse commentary. Here he pays attention to the elements of exegesis: literary analysis, linguistics, historical background, theological analysis, and interpretation. Each chapter closes with an outline of the structure of that chapter in the book of Daniel, followed by endnotes.

Several notable factors make this book an outstanding contribution to Daniel studies:

1. Doukhan indicates that the Great Controversy theme underscores the entire book of Daniel. He comments, "Behind the confrontation between Babylon and Jerusalem the prophets see a conflict of another dimension. We must read the book of Daniel, then, with this perspective in mind" (14). Doukhan demonstrates this conflict with remarkable consistency. While evil may seem to triumph over good, in the final analysis, good ultimately prevails. Doukhan illustrates this in chapter three where the three Hebrews are vindicated. He concludes, "The

'success' of the Jews teaches us that the grace of God is never expected, but is reserved for *those who have lost everything and who expect nothing in return* (58, emphasis mine).

Doukhan repeatedly demonstrates the relationship between the twin themes of judgment and salvation within the context of the Great Controversy. Speaking of the centrality of the "Son of Man" in this light, he remarks:

This same 'son of man' who had participated in the procedure of judgment reappears to save the multitude of 'saints' in the inauguration of His Kingdom. The 'son of man' has the last word on who will be saved and who will not. He is the link between the judgment and the kingdom. To pass from the judgment to the kingdom we must go through Him. (118)

Finally, the Great Controversy culminates with victory for God and His saints. Certainly, "The victory of Nebuchadnezzar in chapter 1 has its answer in the ultimate victory of Michael . . . . And with His victory, that of His people is assured." (183)

2. The emphasis on the meaning of the passage itself is significant in this volume. Commentators steeped in historico-grammatical exegesis often emphasize historical events to which Daniel refers, at the expense of grappling with the text. Doukhan cannot be accused of this. The text speaks to us, especially as he elucidates key words (e.g., *krt*, p.148) and the internal structure of several pericopes (e.g., the chiasm of the seventy weeks/years of Dan 9, p. 143).

3. Although Doukhan never uses the label "relevance," the reader experiences the personal impact of the biblical passage. For example, the weight of waiting bears heavily in the closing scenes of chap. 12. But "we do not know how to wait" (189). Still, as the eschaton draws close we must learn to wait and walk. Indeed, "Waiting is the only way to survive. It is the last message Daniel hears from the angel: 'Blessed is the one who waits' [Dan. 12:12]" (ibid).

4. Finally, the simplicity of language and vividness of thought captivates the attention and encourages, almost demands, the reader to read on. This is especially valued as Doukhan maintains dynamic dialogue with the rest of the Bible and with other scholars. Yet the book is not peppered with endnotes (although I think that footnotes make for easier reading).

Nevertheless, I think that this book could have been of greater value if attention had been paid to the following factors:

(1) A translation that demonstrates the dynamic quality of the original Hebrew and Aramaic should have been provided. This could have been placed at the beginning of each chapter.

(2) Instead of placing the overall delineation of each chapter from Daniel at the end of each of his chapters, Doukhan should have placed it at the beginning. This would have enabled the reader to get a better grasp of the plot and movement of that particular chapter. Placed at the end, it appears to have been merely tacked on.

(3) A description of the general characteristics of Daniel as an apocalyptic book should have been given. This would have been especially helpful to general readers who are unfamiliar with such issues.

(4) A select bibliography and at least a subject index would have been helpful for the person who wants to pursue further study in this important book.

I think that pastors, teachers, students, and general lay readers will find this book engaging, stimulating, and beneficial. The next time I teach a class on the book of Daniel, *Secrets of Daniel* will be the textbook.

Kenneth Mulzac

Dybdahl, Jon L., ed. *Adventist Mission in the 21st Century: The Joys and Challenges of Presenting Jesus to a Diverse World*. Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 1999. 314 pp.

This book is a compilation of essays written by missionaries from everywhere to everywhere (78, 165, 176, 287). They represent an international group. The Introduction states it aptly,

Africans and Australians, Asians and Europeans, South Americans and North Americans, are here together. So are women and men, scholars and administrators, pastors and teachers, as well as lay people all involved in some way in the cross-cultural mission of the church.

The book is divided into four sections. The first, the Background (17-35), is comprised of two chapters. It presents a brief history of, and traces the major developments in the missionary movement of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church. The details presented indicate that Adventist mission is in a state of malaise. There is need to expend time, energy, effort and resources to rejuvenate SDA missions. Several new initiatives and the establishment of the Office of Global Mission may help in this renewal, but more needs to be done.

Section II, Biblical and Theological Issues (37-113), canvasses several key issues such as the validity of cross-cultural missions, the challenges of world religions, secularism, cultural adaptation, and finance. These chapters provide the biblical foundations which anchor SDA mission. The church's emphasis on remnant theology urges a comprehensive effort to spread the everlasting gospel world mission. This would incur considerable expense, sacrifice, devotion and consecration, but nothing should interfere with its proclamation. This is even more urgent than just a generation ago, because the church now faces a plurality of religions which are themselves highly evangelistic and missionary-minded. Adherents of these religions are not relegated to the mission fields but are everywhere. Further, we can no longer measure the success of missions by counting the countries where there is an Adventist presence. Evaluation must now

be conducted in terms of people groups. The church must continually seek and find appropriate means of communicating its message so that is readily heard, understood, accepted and applied in diverse cultural and social settings (73).

Walter Douglas's contribution, "Vocation as Mission," rightly concludes this section. This stimulating chapter may be summarized in the author's own words,

From the perspective of the reign of God and the teaching of the gospel, the Christian's vocation or work is their mission. In other words, mission is a total affair. It is normative for the believers . . . . Vocation cannot be separated from mission without destroying the life of faith and obedience. (107)

Section III, *Strategies and Methods* (117-221), details those factors that ensure success in missions. These include prayer, healing, research, strategic planning, media resources, contextualization, and the investment in the talents of a wide net of people: women, men, and especially the youth. In my opinion, this emphasis on people power (six chapters are dedicated to this subject in this section) provides the strength and focus of this unit. Bruce Campbell Moyer's contributions on tentmakers (Christians who use their skills and expertise to secure employment and maintain themselves, but whose primary interest is to make disciples) and the urgent need for urban evangelism, make for penetrating and insightful reading. Further, Bruce L. Bauer's discussion, *Structure and Mission*, is indeed persuasive that the SDA church needs to restructure its organization and its monetary and human resources in order to more effectively and efficiently target the unreached peoples of the world.

Section IV, *Case Studies* (225-307), reads like classic mission stories with all their characteristics: God-centered, exciting, even chilling, full of the miraculous and incredible, with great results. The book closes with brief biographies of the contributors (309-14).

I recommend this book as good reading for a general audience and imperative for every missionary and church employee. Its chapters are short and written in highly readable language, with technical terms well defined. However, there is place for improvement. Besides the need for an index and better, more careful editing, one cannot overlook certain pitfalls:

1. Some chapters are not written with convincing clarity. For example, with regard to chapter 3, one has to search hard for the facts which support the author's unequivocal "yes" (41) to his initial question, *Are Cross-Cultural Missions Still Valid?* Again, chapter 6, *The Challenge of Secularism*, describes the phenomenon, but provides only five meager lines on how to meet this challenge, claiming that this belongs to another essay (78).

2. For a book that deals with mission, it is surprising that not even a single chapter is dedicated to a systematic and in-depth treatment of the Great Commission (Matt 28:16-20). The idea is given only occasional glimpses in the book.

3. In a book which laments the need to reach the world's unreached masses,

it is unacceptable that only a few passing remarks are made with respect to the 10-40 window, which has about 90 percent of the unreached populations of the world.

4. Theologically, it is hard to justify one contributor's claim that Christ, therefore, lies at the heart of all religions (51). Further, the author is self-contradictory since, as he rightly claims, Adventists reject the notion that all religions are parallel, or even partial, ways to salvation (51). If Christ is central to all religions then they are all equal and parallel ways to salvation.

5. Finally, as a reference tool, this book would have been greatly enhanced if each chapter or section had been furnished with a bibliography for further reading and research by the interested reader.

Kenneth Mulzac

Green, Joel B., and Max Turner, eds. *Between Two Horizons*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. 246 pp.

Green and Turner, editors of this book, have collected articles of various authors. This work aims at establishing foundations for the Two Horizons Commentary (THC) series. The THC "seeks to reintegrate biblical exegesis with contemporary theology in the service of the church" (2). Its "general concern is with the relationship of biblical studies to the theological enterprise of the Christian church" (1). In the introductory article, "New Testament Commentary and Systematic Theology: Strangers or Friends?" Turner and Green describe the aim of the THC thus: "To address this intellectual setting [post-modernism], providing theological exposition of the text, analysis of its main contribution to biblical theology, and broader contemporary theological reflection" (11). The shift of focus from "behind the text" to "in the text" and "in front of text" approaches provides an important setting for this new task. This current interpretive situation "resists the claim of any approach to arrive at objective/absolute meaning" (8).

In chapter 2, Green describes the relationship between the two disciplines in his article: "Scripture and Theology: Uniting the Two So Long Divided." It is Green's contention that it will take more than technique, but also commitment and intentionality, to connect these two, because the gap is so wide. In chapter 3, Turner discusses the shift from the former focus to the recent focus in his article: "Historical Criticism and Theological Hermeneutics of the New Testament." The former trend in NT studies was historical criticism. Recent changes emphasize theological hermeneutics that can help church theology. To have more understanding of biblical theology, a "behind the text" approach for the study of epistles is significant, while for narratives and apocalyptic an "in the text" approach is more appropriate.

Stephen E. Fowl, in his "The Role of Authorial Intention in the Theological Interpretation of Scripture," lists reasons against limiting a text's meaning to an account of authorial intention. One of them is because this trend will not yield practical results. I would caution that ignoring or going beyond the authorial intention will produce pluralistic interpretations. For him "it is not plausible to argue that an interest in authorial intentions should be the sole or primary interest of theological interpretation" (85).

Robert W. Wall's article, "Reading the Bible from within Our Tradition: The 'Rule of Faith' in Theological Hermeneutics," sounds very similar to "Tradition, Authority, and a Christian Approach to the Bible as Scripture" by Trevor Hart. Wall proposes that "Scripture's performance as a persuasive word and enriching sacrament depends upon interpretation that contains the theological teaching of a biblical text by the church's 'Rule of Faith'" (88). This contention is based on the historical understanding that the church existed first, before the Scriptures were finalized. If we emphasize the fact that "the church has formed Scripture to form the church's theological understanding and Christian living" (95), our focus moves toward tradition. Then Christians will need just beliefs and some stories. The suggestion that "any interpretation of Scripture is now gladly received as truly Christian when it agrees with this same Rule of Faith" (98) opens a door to pluralistic interpretations.

John Christopher Thomas's "Reading the Bible from within Our Tradition: A Pentecostal Hermeneutic as Test Case" is more practical. On the one hand, Pentecostals generally have an extremely high view of Scripture because of their awareness of the immediate and direct ministry of the Holy Spirit. The reason behind this is that their church seems to have begun with a spiritual experience and only later moved to a consideration of Scripture. On the other hand, Pentecostals seem to have marginalized the place of Scripture in decision making. Thomas gives weight to the community as the major element in hermeneutics, based on Acts 15, but he also includes the role of the Holy Spirit and the biblical text. Acts 15, however, forms a poor basis for a hermeneutic by which to interpret the text, because it does not provide a case of interpreting the text. It rather provides the rules for decision making in the church. The Jerusalem Council employed a number of things, including Scripture. We cannot use Acts 15 as the basis for biblical hermeneutics. Of course, "the community can offer balance accountability, and support" (119). I believe the community can guard against rampant individualism and uncontrolled subjectivism.

In chapter 7, John Goldingay discusses "Biblical Narrative and Systematic Theology." He points out clearly that doing theology on the basis of biblical narrative requires special attention to scenes (for insights), plots (for theology), characters (God and Israel), and themes. He is right in his observation that "with biblical narrative, theological issues are the text's major concern" (127). His point is well taken when he states that "the primary concern of biblical narrative is to expound the gospel, to talk about God and what God has done" (137).



In his article "Two Testaments, One Biblical Theology," Steve Motyer assumes there is a unified "theology" to be discerned and affirmed in the Bible despite the grand variety of biblical texts and themes. He looks at four attempts: biblical theology apart from historical criticism; biblical theology arising out of historical criticism; biblical theology abstracted from history; and biblical theology founded upon a new "history," that is, narrated history (146-56). Motyer's definition of biblical theology is "creative theological discipline whereby the church seeks to hear the integrated voice of the whole Bible addressing us today" (158).

Robert W. Wall's "Canonical Context and Canonical Conversations" points out that the Christian canon is a rule and a sacrament. His contention is that "the interpreter should approach a biblical text at its ecclesial address and in light of its canonical roles for Christian formation" (166). His emphasis on theological understanding over historical reconstruction tends to diminish historical value and the original meaning of the text. If interpretation is based on R. E. Brown's historical-critical construction, as Wall accepts, we open a wide door to endorse any interpretation. Historical construction opens any possibility because it looks at the need of the community, and it allows the community to create messages for their own needs. The statement "No interpretation of Scripture can stand as a truly Christian interpretation unless it coheres to this Rule" (173)—the church's Rule of Faith—is important. But it raises questions. We ask, Which church? Is it the universal church? How do we define the church? That there are so many churches should lead us to put Scripture before the community. Because people are losing sight of the God given revelation more than ever, the present time demands that the Bible should decide Christian beliefs. If once the community decided what was Scripture, now is the time when Scripture should decide the community.

N. T. Wright's article, "The Letter to the Galatians: Exegesis and Theology" is an excellent case for bridging between exegesis and theology. He brings to the fore the relevance of the Epistle to the Galatians. He sees Paul's agenda not as the individual salvation of sinners but rather as promoting fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. In Luther's agenda, however, justification by faith was more important.

Green's afterword, "Rethinking, History (and Theology)," concludes with the idea that, since there is Scripture for Christians, the shape of the Christian church will not change much over time. There can be different ways of understanding Scripture, but the differences will not be too big to manage.

I feel that the attempt of the editors of the THC series to reintegrate exegesis with contemporary theology in the service of the church is what many churches and scholars have already been doing sporadically. Evangelicals especially have been foremost in this endeavor, but without such a manifesto as given in this book. Despite my disagreement on certain points, and because of the determination of these writers to integrate exegesis and theology, I believe the THC series will be

beneficial to the needs of many people who would like to hear God's word anew.

Hyunsok Doh

Gregg, Steve, ed. *Revelation: Four Views: A Parallel Commentary*. Nashville: Nelson, 1997. xvi + 528 pp.

Steve Gregg is director of the Great Commission School and Good News Underground, private ministries that focus on the study of Scripture. He also teaches regularly for Youth With A Mission schools internationally. The current work is the result of his personal struggles with teaching the book of Revelation in as honest and objective a way as possible.

Although initially convinced of a particular view of the interpretation of the book, over time he began to realize that matters were not so simple and straightforward as he had imagined. He finally came to the point where he began to respect the various strengths that each of the different major interpretational methods contributes to an understanding of the book. He began to study widely in the commentaries so that he could share with his students the best arguments in favor of each of the four major approaches which he deems "credible" (1). As he culled materials from the various commentaries, Gregg found a tremendous amount of overlap between commentaries within each of the four approaches. Surprised to find that no one had compiled the four approaches into a single work so where they could be compared passage by passage, he decided to undertake the task himself.

This volume is a compendium of scholarly interpretation selected from a broad range of scholarship, mostly edited into four parallel columns representing the four major interpretational approaches, which he labels "Historicist," "Preterist," "Futurist," and "Spiritual." It does not represent Gregg's own views, but rather he attempts to fairly represent the four approaches by citing the views of scholars whom he believes are representative in each respective area. In Rev 1-3 he does not divide the commentary into parallel columns, since "there are not four distinct opinions among exegetes" (5) in interpreting the seven letters of Christ to the churches of Asia, "Though there are portions of those chapters that lend themselves more to one than to others of the four approaches" (*ibid.*). In Rev 20-22 he exchanges the four columns for three, representing three major millennial viewpoints, the premillennial, the amillennial, and the postmillennial, since the debate in these chapters hinges more on one's millennial perspective than on one of the four approaches used in chapters 4-19.

After his introduction to the commentary, Gregg begins his study with an introduction to the book of Revelation and an analysis of each of the four interpretational approaches. He explains why he selected the four approaches and no others. He also explains how he undertook the difficult task of classifying the

views of the various scholars into one or another of the four camps, especially since some scholars do not fall clearly into any one camp.

The commentary itself is divided into eight parts, each dealing with one or more chapters that he groups into a thematic unit. At the beginning of each part, he includes a summary of the different views of each of the four approaches in regard to some of the larger aspects of the vision or section. Then he goes through the contents of each section a few verses at a time, providing the commentary in parallel columns which include his own summary of the views of scholars representing each respective approach, along with citation and quotations from the scholars themselves.

His selected bibliography (6-8) of sixty-three sources identifies ten as preterist, five as late-date preterist/spiritual, eight as historicist, ten as spiritual, and thirteen as futurist. The other seventeen are not identified. This reflects an attempt to be fair to all sides, though the historicist commentators are slightly under-represented. To his great credit, Gregg has dealt remarkably evenhandedly with the various approaches. This is his stated goal: "My object has not been to advocate any position above another, so I hope that my own opinion will not be evident" (4). "It is not my desire to showcase my own opinions (which have changed a number of times and may do so again in the future) but to present with as much objectivity as possible the classic approaches of expositors more qualified than I am" (ibid.) While one may deduce his leaning by a careful reading of his analysis of the four approaches, he has been as fair and objective as one could reasonably expect. This is the real strength of this work. For the Bible student who wants to descriptively compare the different ways any given passage, or the whole of Revelation, is interpreted by scholars of varying methodological persuasions, this volume is a treasure trove.

Having said that, however, I would note at the same time that Gregg has not been equally representative across the board. The historicist approach, for example, is very complex, having within its scope many varieties of interpretation—one of the reasons why it is so widely criticized by scholarship, which values consensus and an assured result. Yet Gregg cites fewer scholars to represent the historicist approach than for the other approaches, which have less diversity in interpretation. Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) historicism, which has a unique but strong tradition, as he himself observes (34), is represented once in the bibliography but only twice in the whole commentary (104, 280). The one bibliographic source is not a well-known SDA work by a representative Revelation scholar (of which there are not a few), nor are the two citations in the commentary particularly notable or unique to Adventist historicism. Those two points were widely taught before Adventism ever came on the stage of action. This leaves no representation in the book of any uniquely Adventist historicist interpretations, despite the fact that probably no religious denomination has made a greater contribution to the study of the book of Revelation in the last 150 years than has

the SDA Church. In omitting its contributions, there appears to be a bias, though perhaps not intentional.

A Scripture Index and a Subject and Author Index complete this volume and make it useful. I highly recommend this work as an aid to the study of the book of Revelation for students, pastors, and teachers who want to broaden their perspectives and understand views other than those they already cherish. For those who want to be told the answers or to confirm their own presuppositions, this is not the book; they will only be confused and disappointed.

Edwin Reynolds

Matsuoka, Fumitaka. *The Color of Faith: Building Community in a Multiracial Society*. Cleveland, OH: United Church Press, 1998. viii + 143 pp.

Fumitaka Matsuoka is vice-president for academic affairs and dean of the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, CA. He authored *Out of Silence: Emerging Themes in Asian American Churches* (United Church Press, 1995). In *The Color of Faith* he uses an interdisciplinary approach to tackle the raging question of how race shapes people in the USA. His ideal is to explore the “interplay between race and the faith community” (vii). He succeeds in this in the four chapters of this book, each of which requires careful, contemplative reading and re-reading.

Chapter 1, “The Spiritual Pain of Interracial Estrangement and a Yearning for a Different way of Coming Together as a People” (1-24), describes the long, painful history of the lack of communication (silence) among people in the USA. Certain historical realities (e.g., slavery, immigration exclusion laws, and the internment of Japanese-Americans at the start of WWII), cannot be ignored. US society is fragmented along lines of difference such as race, class, culture, and ethnicity. This breeds estrangement. It is characterized by the loss of dialogue “that engages people in relationships. Silence and suspicion of others govern our societal life” (3). Therefore, there is an urgent need for people to come together. Violence, injustice, intolerance, and all those *-isms* that erode trust among people, must be obliterated. They must be replaced with true communion that focuses on peoplehood, justice, mutual respect, the equality of all humanity, and shared value. It is the responsibility and duty of the Christian community to promote these qualities. The church can no longer reflect the flaws of US society, some of which are deeply embedded in the collective memory of several groups. The church must avail itself of the divine mandate to effect healing, human relatedness one to another, disarming rage, and building trusting relationships. This is the goal of communion.

Chapter 2, “How Does Race Shape People? Ways of Speaking about Race” (25-56), deals with precisely these two issues. With regard to the first, Matsuoka contends, “When the identity of racial groups is shaped by opposition to others,

especially in a climate of fear, distrust, rejection, and violence, then a shared peoplehood is extremely difficult to achieve” (25-26).

When one race feels itself dominant above others, it regards itself as absolute, and assigns “infinite significance” (28) to its culture. This ideology of “choseness,” says the author, “is a powerful expression of idolatry” (ibid.). When this happens, it decays the sense of the worth and value of others.

Looking at others as objects, we make them part of an objective world with which we do not enter into relationship. Making an idol of one’s own group ensues. One becomes blind to others’ histories, the gifts they bring to the world of humanity, and the experience of empathy in relationship. (29)

With regard to the second issue, Matsuoka recognizes that “any attempt to provide a comprehensive definition” (42) of race is difficult. Biological sciences claim that race definition is meaningless, but “in the social sense race is indeed a reality” (45). Pursuant to this, he provides a poignant critique of four ways of speaking about race:

(1) Historically, race has been discussed along the lines of the black/white division in the USA (39). But there are so many highly visible, multifaceted groups in the US today that this way of talking is largely defunct.

(2) The idea of a color-blind society that promotes individualism over the group is also outlandish (as was demonstrated in the highly publicized O. J. Simpson trials).

(3) The promotion of “group culture,” which ascertains that a “group’s social behavior” is “an all-embracing explanatory force” (45), fails to reckon with the dynamics and fluidity of human interactions.

(4) Critical Race Theory maintains “that people’s perspectives on events are overwhelmingly determined by their racial background” (48). But this deals primarily with “racial and ethnic separateness” (49), not with bringing people together.

Matsuoka posits another view, “Speaking of People Theologically” (50-56). In this way, we “confess our finitude and the goodness of creation, sin and the promise of redemption rooted in Christian convictions about the nature of God, humanity, and the church” (50). This allows us to denounce sin and announce grace. It enables Christians to welcome all peoples regardless of differences, even as we build “household” (51).

Chapter 3, “Racism as a Monopoly of Imagination” (57-96) is a treatment of evil, defined as “both negation of relationship and absence of direction for a collective human life” (57). It is so pervasive that it dominates institutions, social structures, and the very core (imagination) of both the dominating and dominated. It brings injustices, devaluation and marginalization of people, victimization, and estrangement. This is the nature of the evil of racism. It is “an obstacle to the formation of a common peoplehood” (58), a “sign of unredeemed creation” (61).

Although there may be no discernible end to racism, Christians in churches, families, neighborhoods, and organizations must challenge this systemic evil “not by coercive force but by patient persuasion, exhibiting signs of righteousness and justice in their own being and acting even in the midst of what appears to be a hopeless situation” (60). Wherever racism raises its head, whether in housing, employment, health care (65-76), education (76-88), the criminal justice system (88-94), or any other place, those who challenge it must raise a “cry of protest and anguish [which] is a daring, courageous assertion that this unequal arrangement is not right, will not be accepted or tolerated, and must be changed” (95-96). They must stand with the resolute will and conviction, “We shall not be moved” (94).

Chapter 4, “Signs of Peopling amid the Adversarial Relationships across a Racial Divide” (97-127), gives voice to the stories of those who have the courage to stand against racism. Even as racism changes form but does not loosen its grip, we must take the risk, not merely in reforming the social systems that breed racism but also in introducing self-change. We need to recognize and acknowledge “the presence of evil within us personally and societally” (101). Racism is woven into the fabric of society, and even of the church, which at times has promoted the racial divide. However, we need to address such evil as mature Christians, characterized by honesty, engagement and commitment, action and service, genuine humanity, and love. We must proclaim, “‘Love is the way,’ love without violence, love without reprisals even in the midst of various expressions of human viciousness” (104). While in this age this may seem outrageous, inconceivable, and dream-like, we must be undaunted, knowing that “we are tied together not by our own blood, but by Christ’s blood” (103). This is what gives voice to a “new peoplehood” (109), that develops redemptive traditions which promote reconciliation (109-18), and effect community revitalization (118-21).

Matsuoka concludes (121-27) that “color blindness leads to further color division” (124). It is not a viable option. Christians, who have received the inconceivable love of God (Rom 5:8) must welcome each other as Christ welcomed us. We have to go beyond addressing programmatic social issues of race and elevate the Cross. It is the “symbol of the reality that insists that possibilities are given only through the experience of limits; that the way to victory lies through exposure to decay and perhaps death” (127).

This book is invaluable to anyone who is sensitive to the issue of racism. It is carefully researched (as evidenced by the notes on pp. 128-36), with a good index (137-43). In my opinion, the author has discussed a difficult and sensitive subject in clear tones with a truly warm regard for finding a Christian response to the problem of race in the USA. Nevertheless, I have two concerns:

(1) The author claims in the Preface that he is addressing the question “How does race shape people?” from a theological perspective. But his study is more of a treatise built on sociological, cultural, and anthropological observations.

(2) There is a paucity in the use of biblical data. This leads to the question of the role of the Bible in smashing "the dividing wall of hostility," a task which Matsuoka is convicted (vii) is the duty of the Christian church.

Kenneth Mulzac

McKnight, Scot. *A New Vision for Israel: The Teachings of Jesus in National Context*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. 263 pp.

Scot McKnight is a coeditor for the *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* and the general editor for the Guides to New Testament Exegesis series. He wrote *Interpreting the Synoptic Gospels* and *A Light Among the Gentiles: Jewish Missionary Activity in the Second Temple Period*.

This book is "an exploration of how the teachings of Jesus are to be configured in light of his mission to the nation" (ix). McKnight follows G. B. Caird, Marcus Borg, and N. T. Wright in their approaches, which are focused more on national and political elements than other approaches. He arranged his studies under these headings: "The Vision of Jesus: A Preliminary Sketch," "The God of Jesus," "The Kingdom Now Present," "The Kingdom Yet to Come," "The Ethic of Jesus: Conversion and Cost," and "The Ethic of Jesus: Morality."

In the discussion of "The God of Jesus," McKnight describes the holy God who calls Israel to repentance. Jesus represents God, who is the national God. In "The Kingdom Now Present," he emphasizes that "God's long-awaited and promised plans for the deliverance and restoration of Israel are now being fulfilled" (118). The kingdom was realized, in fact, in Jesus' table fellowship with sinners, in His offer of forgiveness, in His mysterious parables, and in His miracles. Jesus was ushering in the kingdom. He was the Prophet of the last day. Exorcisms and healings revealed the kingdom.

In "The Kingdom Yet to Come," McKnight characterizes the final kingdom as populated by those who associate with Jesus. Jesus was not certain of the time of the fulness of the kingdom. The future would begin with God's judgment in the form of the destruction of Jerusalem. The kingdom of God would be made up of restored national Israel. There would be an endless fellowship with the Father. It would be the consummation of history. Here McKnight excludes Gentile mission and Christianity from his discussion.

In "The Ethic of Jesus: Conversion and Cost," faith and repentance are focused on in the discussion of conversion to Jesus. Vocation, family, possessions, and self-denial were discussed in regard to the cost of conversion to Jesus. "The Ethic of Jesus: Morality" deals with virtues and attitudes under three major headings: righteousness and love in relation to God; humility, trust, transformation of self, and hypocrisy in relation to oneself; and love, forgiveness, mercy, and peace in relation to others.

McKnight believes that Jesus had a single vision for restoring Israel. His vision only concerned Israel as a nation; it did not contemplate founding a new religion. McKnight understands that "Jesus' vision for the nation included an ordeal of tribulation" as a judgment before God (8). Jesus saw His own death as part of that ordeal. McKnight describes Jesus as having been "conscious of his destiny as a vicarious sacrifice for Israel in order to avert the national disaster" (13). Jesus saw that the God of Israel was active in Him for the redemption of Israel. Based on form-critical study, McKnight sees the parable of the Prodigal Son to be a story about Israel's relationship to God, not simply about an individual Israelite. Luke's context tells us a different story. McKnight seems to sanitize much of the Gospel material to fit his scheme that Jesus' vision was only for Israel. He stresses Israel over individual people by saying that the people did not confess their personal sins but instead they confessed the nation's sin (212). It is an arbitrary comment and contrary to the scenes of baptism where confession of sins took place (e.g., Matt 3:6). His conclusion makes Jesus stand in line with the prophets of old, in that Jesus is believed to have had the same vision of hope for the restoration of Israel which appears again and again in the last parts of the Hebrew prophetic books (233).

The emphasis on the corporate repentance and obedience of Israel as a nation cannot be sustained unless repentance and obedience come from individual Israelites. This was why Jesus rendered services on a personal level rather than by going to the kingly court to reform the country on a national level. All His activities and teachings were geared to serve individual Israelites. McKnight's idea of Israel's restoration is a restoration before God. It is only through a spiritual renewal that this restoration may become possible.

McKnight agrees with the majority of scholars that the NT kingdom message tells about the inauguration of the kingdom in the words and deeds of Jesus, and it foretells a consummation of the kingdom in the future. In its consummation there will be judgment and complete restoration (75, 77).

Two things especially concern me: (1) By using only the sayings whose authenticity has been agreed on by scholarly consensus, McKnight is able to present a fairly consistent picture, but it is not the whole picture found in the Gospels. While one tends to feel more comfortable with a logically consistent picture, it is important to remember that not all things are always logically consistent. (2) McKnight's narrow focus on the nation of Israel may distort or ignore other texts that deal with a universal scope.

I would like to commend McKnight's book on two counts: (1) I appreciate his excellent summaries of scholarly trends. (2) His description of the historical Jesus is helpful for readers in that they can see Jesus more in terms of the political context of His day. By reading this book, students may feel the atmosphere of those days when Jesus was teaching along the lakeshores of Galilee.



Newport, Kenneth G. C. *Apocalypse and Millennium: Studies in Biblical Eisegesis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000. x + 252 pp.

Kenneth G. C. Newport is Reader in Christian Thought at Liverpool Hope University College and serves on the board of the Charles Wesley Society. His primary aim in producing this book appears to be a concern about the dangers inherent in certain approaches to the apocalyptic prophecies of the book of Revelation that he characterizes as the use of eisegesis to interpret the text as particularly addressing the situation that exists in the reader's own time as opposed to the historical situation that called forth the text.

Newport's point of departure is the fiery cataclysm that ended the siege of the Mount Carmel headquarters of the Branch Davidian cult led by David Koresh on 19 April 1993. He believes that the deaths of the approximately eighty cult members might have been avoided had there been some attempt made to understand the basis for the cult's apocalyptic theology (151). The book purports to be an attempt to understand this by reviewing the history of apocalyptic interpretation on the part of Koresh's theological forebears.

The review of apocalyptic interpretation begins with British Protestants in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, moves to the Catholic reaction to the Protestant paradigm, then to the Methodist tradition, and finally to nineteenth-century American Millerite interpretation and its lasting influence upon the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its offshoot, the Davidian Seventh-day Adventists, which in turn spawned the Branch Davidian cult headed eventually by David Koresh. His point is that the historicism that was characteristic of Post-Reformation England was the same historicism that guided William Miller's Adventist interpretations and was adopted by Seventh-day Adventist interpreters all the way to David Koresh. He wants to make clear that there is a "direct line of descent from Miller to Koresh" (205). The blame for Koresh's faulty interpretations can thus be placed at the feet not only of Miller but of all historicist Protestant interpreters since the Post-Reformation period.

In reality, the book is a polemic against historicist interpretation of biblical apocalyptic, especially of Daniel and the Revelation. The book of Revelation is "an almost infinitely malleable text" (55). The flexible nature of the complex symbolism used in apocalyptic prophecy makes it wide open to abuse, permitting the reader to use it for either good or bad purposes to address contemporary situations (4, 18-19, 62). This, according to Newport, constitutes 'eisegesis', "the art of reading into a text more or less whatever one wishes to find" (4). The reader controls the process of interpretation so that the text yields to the prejudices and concerns of the reader and his community (19). In fact, "in the process of determined interpretation to suit the reader's ends (and here negative ones are particularly in view), ingenuity knows almost no bounds" (20).

Discussing alternatives to historicism, which he admits "has a long and prestigious pedigree" (11), Newport describes the origins of futurism and preterism

in the seventeenth century as Catholic reactions against anti-Catholic Protestant historicism, showing that they are not entirely objective methods of study, either, since they have an apologetic purpose: "As would be expected, each served its principal exponents well as they sought to use the biblical text to make sense of the world in which they lived" (15; cf. 22, 87-88). He also briefly discusses idealism, but writes it off as "not a major force" (15). The method he apparently prefers is mentioned only in passing when he states that preterism "should not be confused with the modern critical contemporary-historical method of interpretation, though clearly it is a forerunner of it" (16). He explains that, while early "preterists argued that John was given an accurate vision of the course of events over the next several centuries," "according to contemporary-historical analysis, all of Revelation relates to John's own time (he is of course allowed to make some guesses as to the future)" (ibid.).

The historicist approach is criticized not primarily because of a lack of textual evidence for its validity—though Newport states that evidence for its use lacks significant argumentation in the literature (20)—but because of its openness to abuse, of which anti-Catholicism, the Millerite disappointment, and the Waco disaster are primary examples. In fact, it is these negative results of the use of the historicist method, in Newport's view, which are the real issue in a new field of studies that he is pursuing, known as *Wirkungsgeschichte*, concerned with "the history of popular exegesis and the interaction between the biblical text and the non-critical interpreter of it" (3, emphasis his). He holds that texts have their most significant impact in a non-critical context (ibid.). It is this context that he attempts to explore in the book.

In his favor, Newport presents a fair summary of the teachings of the different interpreters and groups which he studies. Aside from his main thesis that eisegesis can be deleterious if not dangerous, this is perhaps his greatest strength, and I learned a lot from his history of interpretation. (Though he denies that he is attempting a history of interpretation [3], he actually gets quite detailed in his reporting of the interpretations of certain historicist interpreters that he wants to use as examples of eisegesis and its causes and effects.)

At the same time, I have a few criticisms:

1. Given the fact that Newport is attempting to explore the impact of the text in a non-critical context, he is very narrow in his research, limiting himself almost exclusively to British and American Protestant historicist interpreters that form a line of continuity from the Reformation to Waco. While he does note the Catholic reaction to Protestant historicism, his primary trajectory (to use his own term) is directed via Millerism and Seventh-day Adventism to David Koresh's Branch Davidian extremism (168, 178-79, 198, 205, 210). Also, he is extremely critical of the "non-critical" methodology of historicist interpreters, which he consistently labels negatively as eisegesis, no matter how carefully some have worked from the text to develop their interpretations. One gets the distinct impression that he is less interested in the socio-religious impact of the text than in using the poor results of

the work of some historicist interpreters—which cannot be denied—to launch an all-out attack on historicism as a legitimate method of interpretation.

2. He reflects a certain bias in his use of sources which is especially evident when he begins to discuss Seventh-day Adventism. For example, he quotes more from Ronald Numbers and Jonathan Butler, disgruntled former Adventists who have written a number of works critical of Adventism, than he does from mainstream Adventist sources. While he does quote from L. E. Froom, a noted Adventist writer, he notes “Froom’s evident bias” (180) but fails to note the bias of those who may be critical of Adventism. He also cites various websites as evidence of Adventist teaching (188-89) which are not sponsored by any official organ of the church but by various individuals who are promoting their own views. These may or may not reflect church teaching, but one wonders why Newport has gone to these sites when there is plenty of evidence for church teaching on official church websites. At the same time, he cites the teachings of the former Eternal Gospel Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church of West Palm Beach, Florida, which is not affiliated with the SDA Church organization, and was ordered by a court to change its name to avoid misrepresenting the SDA Church, as representative of SDA teachings, though he notes that there was “some dispute” between the two (189-91). All of this is poor scholarly practice.

3. He manifests a certain carelessness in his research when he erroneously refers to the Conflict of the Ages Series as “The Great Controversy Series” and lists the works all out of sequence in his footnote (187-88). In addition he refers to the seven-volume *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* as an eight-volume set (188). (The Commentary Reference Series is composed of eleven volumes—formerly ten.) He also misspells the name of John Nevins Andrews (181), one of the important Adventist scholars he reviews. These errors do not build confidence in the quality of the research undertaken. The fact that Newport was formerly an SDA college professor, and should know better, makes these errors especially egregious.

4. He insists on identifying the teachings of David Koresh and the Branch Davidians on the book of Revelation with SDA teachings, saying that any difference “is more one of degree than of kind” (213; cf. 205-6), though he admits that the Davidians and Branch Davidians rejected mainstream Adventism and taught that it was one of the seven branches of apostate Christianity (208) and that Koresh “did diverge from the standard Seventh-day Adventist line on numerous points” (216-17). To consider the Branch Davidians in continuity with the SDA Church is like considering the Protestant churches in continuity with Roman Catholicism. While there may be some carryover of certain doctrinal points because of Scripture or strong church tradition (as in Sunday sacredness), there is a fundamental discontinuity which needs to be noted. To fail to note the discontinuity is to mislead otherwise uninformed readers into believing a falsehood, that David Koresh was just a Seventh-day Adventist with some sexual aberrations, a Christ-complex, and an anti-federalist agenda. To suggest, as

Newport does (199), that it was the SDA interpretation of the second beast of Rev 13 as the United States that was the catalyst for the events at Waco is to subtly imply that all SDAs would fundamentally fall into the same camp and may be similarly a risk to society. This is irresponsible, no matter how respectable the motive. It takes no cognizance of the fact that SDAs have no anti-US sentiments, are taught to be loyal to the established authorities, are pacifists opposed to the use of arms, are taught not to do anything to provoke a time of trouble before the time, and are taught that even when a state passes laws that violate the conscience believers should not fight against the state but should seek out remote places of refuge where they can worship God freely according to the dictates of conscience. There is no theology akin to that of Koresh and the Branch Davidians. With his SDA background, Newport should know this, but perhaps he exaggerates in an effort to make his point.

Newport's book has an interesting line of thought, but it needs to be read critically, not with a gullible mind. He has not himself, in the book, critically evaluated the historicist method of interpreting Daniel and the Revelation. He has evaluated it in the light of some non-critical issues which he perceives to be negative results of historicist interpretation, particularly anti-Catholicism, disappointed Millerite eschatological expectation, and a disaster at Waco, and he has found it wanting. But these things in themselves cannot be used as a critical basis for rejecting the method. The method should be justified or invalidated from within the text, and this requires careful critical study of the text. This book belongs properly to socio-religious studies, not to biblical studies, as Newport himself would no doubt readily agree.

Edwin Reynolds

Wallace, Ronald S. *On the Interpretation and Use of the Bible*. Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1999; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. 137 pp.

Roland S. Wallace is retired from teaching at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. He is the author of numerous books, including *Readings in 1 & 2 Kings*, *The Message of Daniel*, and *Calvin, Geneva, and the Reformation*. He confesses at several points that his experiences with the Bible helped him form the ways in which he understands it. He deals with presuppositions in regard to inspiration, revelation, and salvation history. He stresses the unity of the OT and NT in the light that the OT was a preparation for the NT. His emphasis on the unchanging value of the OT text is apropos when the use of the NT is prominent in the church.

Wallace sees with insight the importance of Gen 1-11 as a theological prelude to the Bible. My difficulty lies in that he sees them as mere "stories" (36). It is disconcerting to observe that, while he does not believe in miracles, he believes in

the Incarnation (119). His modernist view of things makes it difficult for him to accept anything that is not scientifically objective. In spite of his difficulty accepting records of supernatural miracles as facts, he does emphasize, later in his book, his acceptance of the "miracles" of forgiveness and reconciliation (122-23).

Wallace recognizes two factors in the approach to interpretation, namely, the need "to take full account of the human origin of all the texts that make it [the Bible] up" and the need "to take into account the frequency of the signature attached to many of its most important oracles: 'Thus says the Lord'" (43). He believes that the interpretation of the text within the worshipping community is to be guided by a number of factors such as pastoral concern and care, pastoral intercourse, and the voice of the laity.

Wallace believes that the process of interpretation should include not only the analysis and explanation of the text but also listening to the text (63). He uses the word "criticism" positively and understands it to mean "an effort to bring out the merits of a [literary] work" (64). Commentaries written during the last two centuries using a grammatico-historical approach, Wallace says, referring to the historical-critical method, are there "to explain what the words and sentences of the text mean as they occur and lie in their context" (65). He advocates the use of allegorical interpretation due to some limitations of the grammatico-historical approach. He believes that allegorical interpretation makes the text relevant to life. It is also true, however, *pace* Wallace, that frequent use of allegorical interpretation tends to lessen the importance of the original messages contained in the Bible.

Although Calvin is the theologian for Wallace, he cannot accept Calvin's idea of predestination, that God elected "some to damnation" and "some to salvation" (117). In his favor, however, Calvin tried not only to bring out the grammatical and historical sense of the passage but to take "full account of the word that was to be 'heard' and 'seen' within the contemporary Church" (68). Wallace provides an excellent explanation as to why the idea of *sensus plenior* is necessary, although this might open a floodgate for eisegesis. Somehow this approach has prepared the readers for a post-modernist reading. He contends that "'ever new richness of unsuspected meaning' can be unfolded as the tradition of the community expands" (68). New contexts will bring readers into discovery of the meaning which was not "even discernible when it was originally written" (69). He believes that new meaning is of much more importance than the original meaning. His theological approach is using a theology "which we ourselves in our own experience have found to arise out of, and have tested against the widest possible range of Biblical writing" (71).

For Wallace, the Decalogue was not "meant to be regarded as setting out the demand of a universal and absolute law for all nations, but as a revelation of the new and liberating kind of life which they were now to enjoy and witness to as his own people" (80). This view is contradictory to the *sensus plenior* approach he proposes. I believe that the Decalogue should be meaningful both for the Israelites and for the Christians of later generations if the Bible should have relevance for

our lives. It should be a universal law for all nations in order to be relevant and because it is the moral law for people's hearts. Of course, as Wallace maintains, it was "when Jesus Christ came that he revealed in all its fullness the gracious meaning of the commandments as they were originally given" (80-81).

His statement that some portions of the Bible are not inspired is problematic (8). For him, anything that lacks spiritual usefulness is not inspired. By stressing the interdependence of both inspired and uninspired parts of Scripture, however, he tries to avoid possible criticism. His omission of 'salvation history' in describing his experiences is regrettable. I believe it is in this idea that the Bible is made more relevant for our lives. In spite of all these insightful ideas the presence of many typos and inappropriate punctuation marks is disappointing.

Wallace's discussions on the unity of the OT and NT and on typology impressed me most. His explanation of and emphasis on the unity of the two Testaments was apt and excellent. His discussion of typology was also appropriate. Preachers can find this book full of good insights for their sermon making. For those whose background knowledge of interpretive methods is poor, this book can cause confusion. A careful reading of this book will be helpful.

Hyunsok Doh

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