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## JAMS

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This issue of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* contains a variety of thought-provoking articles. Through its contributions from around the globe, the issue demonstrates that the Adventist movement is grappling with what it means to follow God in context. Following God in different contexts leads to unique challenges and questions, such as how should worship take place among ethnic congregations in Brazil or to what extent should the charismatic movement influence and impact the work of the Adventist Church, as two articles discuss. These are fundamental questions that deserve thoughtful responses, which both articles demonstrate.

But in other parts of the world, questions of allegiance and its influence on faith-based practices of those who have recently begun to follow Jesus are paramount. Two articles focusing on different regions of Africa give unique and timely perspectives on these issues. While there are no simple answers, Ray Bida and Temesgen Besha, in their respective articles, provide valuable insights that should inform Adventist mission thinkers on these challenges.

The journal issue also includes a well-researched piece on a family who served the Adventist Church in China for many years. Michael W. Campbell, a leading Adventist historian, describes a fascinating story that has not been told. As with many historical works on mission, it provides thoughts that can and should influence how mission is understood and discussed in the present.

Finally, Petr Cincala provides a fresh look at nature and what it can tell us about the Creator and author of mission. In light of the state of the planet today, this is a timely article that can catalyze what we hope are more articles on the relationship between God, the earth, and mission. If we are to be relevant to the world of the present, this is a topic we cannot afford to ignore.

While all these articles have their own unique contributions, they share in common the desire to foster thinking and creativity in mission rooted in the *Missio Dei*. I pray that you are blessed and challenged by what you read in this issue of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* and that it pushes you to continue to reflect on your own experience of God in whatever context you are currently in.

Andrew Tompkins, *Managing Editor*

PETR ČINČALA

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# Learning from the Wisdom of the Creator to Restore Communities and Churches

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a lockdown to many churches. While the lockdown was mourned by many, it provided an opportunity—a permission, if you will—to implement creative ways for people to enjoy community. For example, during the summer of 2020, my family and I became a part of a backyard fellowship. We fell in love with the community aspect of this group of believers, enjoying multigenerational worship and preaching out in nature, followed by meals and fellowship. However, when the cold weather arrived and the worship was no longer in nature, my wife requested that we not join the house-church meetings. While I did not fully understand her decision, I complied.

When visiting our native country (the Czech Republic) during the summer of 2021, we had the rare chance to spend the weekend with just the two of us because our 10-year-old son was visiting friends for a couple of days. While not having any mission meetings or activities scheduled, I thought we would go to my wife's home church in Prague for Sabbath worship. My wife surprised me on Saturday morning by insisting we go out (not using any other transportation than our feet) and instead spend the whole day in a beautiful botanical garden. It was a wonderful sunny day, so we walked through the garden, chatted, observed, and listened to nature, and just sat reading the Bible on our own or together. Although I had initially felt a little uneasy about breaking away from our usual habit of attending church on a Sabbath morning (which was located in the middle of a concrete jungle) there was something special about the day spent in nature.

For some time, there has been a prompting in my soul to study more and write about ways in which nature can help develop church community and life in a healthier way. These experiences and reading books dealing with nature, well-being, and church life in nature provided a push for that to happen. While researching this topic I realized, to my amazement, that my wife—intuitively—was onto something much bigger than I imagined.

We gray-haired people usually appreciate nature in some way because of the memories from our childhood. We remember Mom and Dad working in a garden, walking to school through a valley, observing the beautiful night sky filled with stars—these are precious memories. Some of us take care of little gardens growing tomatoes, peppers, carrots, herbs, etc. However, I personally never fully realized how important these activities were, not just for our physical, emotional, or spiritual health, but also for gaining a better understanding of God the Creator and relating to the teachings in the Bible.

This realization grew on me as I watched multiple videos and read the newly-acquired books, written by authors of various backgrounds—scientists, pastors, foresters, nature activists, etc. While I could not always identify with the authors' worldview assumptions, I learned that each of them has valuable points worth hearing. These broadened my horizon to begin connecting the dots in my understanding of God, spirituality, and church life in connection with nature.

In this article, I do not necessarily promote ecological activism within the Adventist Church, although it would not be off the grid in view of Adventism's holistic teachings and approach to life. I also do not want to focus on the health benefits of being more closely connected with nature, although there are some exciting scientific findings in this area. Finally, I do not want to push a "nature religion" that cultivates "feelings of belonging and connection to the earth" (Taylor 2009:5), as this direction may cause people to fall into the trap of paganism, animism, and/or pantheism.

In the following pages, I want to present arguments to sensitize people to what God is teaching through creation (i.e., what we can learn from nature). The authors of the Bible drew from and referred to God's nature in their writings; thus, it makes sense that we too continue to learn from nature beyond the pages of Scripture in light of current science (if it does not contradict biblical truths, of course). It is my understanding, however, that even if there was no science and our access to the Creator's wisdom revealed in nature was limited only to the pages of Scripture, there would be plenty of nature topics that beg for our attention such as a theology of wilderness, trees, plants, animals, or the human heart; however, I will leave that task to a new generation of systematic theologians and biblical scholars.

My task, as a missiologist, is to contribute to the topic (lessons from nature) from a multi-disciplinary perspective, as it applies to the mission/ministry of the church. When people dive into the realm of nature through the lenses of scientific discoveries (medical, psychological, biological, neuroscientific, etc.), a number of biblical texts begin to shed new light on various topics. For example, Job's dispute with God, David's nature-focused poems (found in the book of Psalms), and Jesus' teaching about the kingdom all rely heavily on themes from nature.

Since graduate studies at Andrews University, my thinking has been influenced and shaped by the Natural Church Development philosophy. I became convinced that to be able to apply the Bible well and grow a healthy church, it was important to implement a multi-disciplinary approach to the Bible that included more than just what theological analysis, research, or science could provide. Along with Scripture, nature provides a text for learning about God, his will, and his ways. Nature is still relevant for us today, as we seek to grow healthy, wholesome churches.

For many, a connection with nature has become increasingly difficult. Unfortunately, as civilization and technology progress, the gap between people and nature widens. Victoria Loorz points out that "we humans in the Western world have built walls so thick between us and the rest of the world that we can no longer feel the vulnerability that we actually share with all the others" (2021:151). Despite our holistic, biblical understanding, many tend to hold an "old view of nature as a big machine, a soulless system" (Wohlleben 2021:154).

Increased urbanization within the Western world has also taken its toll. Research has shown that people who live in urban settings spend as much as 93% of their time indoors or in vehicles (Williams 2017:3). "Regular—or any—experience of wilderness is missing from most of our modern lives" (Haupt 2021:15). Also, "American and British children today spend half as much time outdoors as their parents did. Instead, they spend up to seven hours a day on screens, not including time in school" (Williams 2017:4). Research shows that people in such conditions even "avoid nearby nature because a chronic disconnection from nature causes them to underestimate its . . . benefits" (3). Even agnostic writer Peter Wohlleben admits that "the artificial world of the city offers all kinds of stimuli for which we were not originally designed" (2021:156).

Our individualistic and hedonistic cultural values only add to the problem. The ever-popular concept of individualism as a basis for achieving the American dream only deepens the disconnect between people themselves, as well as people and nature. "A false belief system of separation and dominance is opposed to every system of life, with disastrous consequences ecologically, spiritually, culturally, socially, economically. . . . These



worldviews are so deeply embedded that it takes a lot of effort to even see them, much less change them” (Loorz 2021:9). Because we are “losing our connection to nature more dramatically than ever before” (Williams 2017:5), we do not experience being in natural environments enough to realize the profound impact that they can have on our restoration, relationships, and thinking. Without a conscious shift, our connection will not get any better.

Loorz writes that a “growing number of ‘nones’ (those without church affiliation) find nature a better church than a building and an institution” (2021:48). The message is clear and not without merit: “spirituality and nature are not separate” (6, 7). For the church to be life-giving and facilitate transformation, experiencing God is needed, not just explaining God.

While there are those who have “erred in worshipping the creation rather than the Creator, replacing God with something less” (Van Dyke, Mahan, Sheldon, and Brand 1996:11), there are those who have long acknowledged God as Creator but who have also failed to care for his creation or benefit from learning about how God designed it to function. “It is to our mutual benefit to reflect on the indissoluble connections between ourselves and the natural world” (Edwards 2001:1). How else can we fully fear or revere God the Creator and “worship him who made heaven and earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Rev 14:6, 7)?

As already noted, nature offers many different lessons that can be applied to church life to make them more vital and healthy. This paper introduces six principles sustained in nature that can return life and vitality into congregational life. These principles are counterintuitive because human nature keeps driving people away from nature and God. It is important to never forget that nature has remained connected to the principles of its Creator.

As an example, look at the forests: “The woods are full of life, above and below the ground” (Arvay 2018:24). In 2016, Suzanne Simard presented her life-long research in a TED talk. After describing the more technical process of scientific research on trees, she delivered the main point of her talk: “trees communicate” (n.p.). She went on to explain: “Through back-and-forth conversations, [trees] increase the resilience of the whole community. It probably reminds you of our own social communities, and our families” (n.p.). She summarized her main point as follows: “Forests aren’t simply collections of trees, they’re complex systems with hubs and networks that overlap and connect trees and allow them to communicate, and they provide avenues for feedback and adaptation, and this makes the forest resilient” (n.p.). Within the forests, there are hub trees and overlapping networks, something like tree families. Simard refers to these as “mother trees” in her book *Finding the Mother Tree*.

Now, if on the third day of Creation, God created such a beautiful, life-giving system in the plant realm—a system that strives on mutual interdependence, symbiosis, and sustainability, where older generations protect and feed younger generations and provide important information for life—how much more can these general laws help humans (created on the sixth day) to thrive? How can we apply these laws, not only to our personal lives but to church bodies and/or communities?

### Six Secrets by Which Nature Thrives

In his book *Natural Church Development: A Guide to Eight Essential Qualities of Healthy Churches*, Christian Schwarz identified six principles found in nature that, when applied to churches, can provide new life and vitality (1996). These principles include (1) interdependence, (2) symbiosis, (3) multiplication, (4) energy transformation, (5) fruitfulness, and (6) sustainability. Each principle will be examined in turn, as well as examples and principles in the Bible.

#### Interdependence

Christoph Schalk writes, “All areas in an organism (whether it be in your body or your environment—family, friends, co-workers, etc.) are connected; this is referred to as *Interdependence*. A change in one area always has consequences for another area, sometimes immediately and sometimes after a period of time” (2020:10). In nature, there is interdependence displayed through the life of ants. Ants understand their current position (for example, “I should be harvesting and storing food now”), as well as having a perspective concerning the seasons (i.e., “The winter is coming, and we will need this food”) (28). They understand that a change in position can create change in their perspective.

Another example of interdependence is the flight patterns of geese. As they fly, they each take turns leading the formation, thereby allowing each goose to take the lead *and* to find rest at the back of the pack, in turn (7a9rian2 2013). Interdependence “directs our attention to our context, the big picture, and the interconnections between the two” (Schalk 2020:27).

Exodus 18 shares a story involving Moses and his father-in-law, Jethro. Jethro had observed all that Moses was doing and suggested that he employ a better method of delegation. Verses 25 and 26 describe how Moses took his advice. “Moses chose able men out of all Israel and made them heads over the people, chiefs of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties, and of tens. And they judged the people at all times. Any hard case they brought to Moses, but any small matter they decided themselves” (ESV). Moses

discovered that employing the principle of interdependence was beneficial not only for himself, but for his people.

### Symbiosis

“The word ‘symbiosis’ originates from the Greek, meaning ‘life together.’ Nature offers many examples of life forms that are fundamentally different but live together in such a way that they mutually complement and support each other” (Schalk 2020:59). The relationships between fungi and decaying matter and sea anemones and hermit crabs are just two examples of symbiosis in nature (Bird 2014).

A biblical example of symbiosis was the relationship between King Solomon and King Hiram (1 Kgs 5). King Hiram had been a long-time ally of King David. When Solomon took over the task of building the Lord’s temple, Hiram agreed to supply Solomon with building materials (vs. 1-10). In exchange, Solomon annually supplied Hiram’s court with wheat and olive oil (v. 11).

### Multiplication

The idea of multiplication involves the passing of knowledge, skills, etc., to the next generation. Schalk writes, “Endless growth would become a drain on existing structures, resulting in systemic malfunction, and ultimately, death. Knowledge and skill are best multiplied by passing them on to others as soon as possible” (2020:10). A good example of the power of multiplication in nature is found in the rabbit. Rabbits multiply their numbers easily and rapidly; a female rabbit can give birth to up to 40 babies a year.

Jesus’s final instructions to his disciples were to multiply: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19, 20a, ESV). Thus, it is not surprising that the early church in Acts (Acts 6:1a, 9:31, 12:24) was passionate about sharing the gospel with new believers who, in turn, passed it on to others. In this way, the early church grew and “multiplied” (Acts 9:31, ESV).

### Energy Transformation

“The principle of *Energy Transformation* takes energy that is already available, as well as an inner desire to move forward, and attempts to divert that energy in a constructive direction” (Schalk 2020:10). One example of energy transformation in nature is the dung beetle. This humble

insect lays its eggs in balls of elephant dung; the dung not only protects the larvae but provides food for it to eat once it hatches.

In the Bible an example of energy transformation can be found in 1 Kings 19:19, when Elijah passed his cloak (a physical symbol for his ministry as one of God's prophets) to Elisha. "So Elijah departed and found Elisha son of Shaphat. He was plowing with twelve teams of oxen, and he was with the twelfth team. Elijah passed by him and threw his cloak around him" (ESV).

### Fruitfulness

"The principle of *Fruitfulness* inquires whether or not a process makes sense and fulfills the goal at hand" (Schalk 2020:10). We see this lived out in the process that a vintner uses to make wine; he must follow specific steps to ensure that the grapes he grows are perfect for the wine which he creates. He carefully prunes each vine, tying up bits that might begin to droop, so that the vine is able to produce optimal fruit.

Mark 11:12-14, 20-25 tells the story of Jesus cursing the fig tree that was not bearing fruit. After learning more about the vast impact of a fig tree on its surroundings in nature, I came to understand that Jesus did not choose the fig tree randomly. Fig trees are, indeed, the queen of trees (Deeble and Stone 2014); they bear fruit four times a year, and a number of plants, insects, and animals depend on the presence of a "mother fig tree." Mother fig trees can also reproduce themselves to have daughter fig trees. Thus, Jesus demonstrated to those who took the fig tree for granted how important fruitfulness is to our Heavenly Father and how he desires that for us.

### Sustainability

"*Sustainability* ensures that over a long period of time, our entire life to be exact, we will continually bear fruit and that this fruit will continue to multiply in other people" (Schalk 2020:10). In nature this principle is illustrated in the life of the alpine dock—a plant that grows where the concentration of nitrogen is too high for other plants. Yet, the Alpine dock does not release nitrogen from the ground into the air, as do most plants. Instead, it releases it back into the ground. Thus, it fertilizes the ground for the next generation, by passing on what it has received (65).

A biblical example of sustainability is exemplified when the apostles became overwhelmed and overloaded. They did not hesitate to find seven godly men from the Greek-speaking community to handle the issue with the widows, so their ministry was not hindered (Acts 6:3-5), illustrating flexibility, wisdom, and empowerment.

## The Six Principles and Church Life

The six life principles identified by Schwarz have been briefly listed with illustrations on how these principles are exemplified in nature and where they are demonstrated in the Bible. Some may be asking, What does this have to do with the church? How can these principles enhance the spiritual wellbeing and health of my congregation? Due to the limited space in this article, I do not focus on each principle in detail but present only a few examples associated with relevant church issues.

Before going any further, it is important to remember that the application of natural laws flows from the character of the Triune God. At the creation of this earth, it was God the Creator who mastered the whole process. Christ the Word was there, providing the DNA information for all living organisms (John 1:3). The Holy Spirit was there as the breath of life (*ruiah*)—literally the Spirit who gives life (John 6:63). From the beginning, the interrelated, communal God who put in place the “interconnected systems that support life on earth” was present (Edwards 2006:59). People were created in God’s image (Gen 1:26, 27, 9:6), were made for interpersonal love “amidst of, and in relation to the rest of creation” (16), reflecting the nature of God.

Some who have been involved for many years in the North American Division congregational life, could possibly explain much better than I ever could, why loving relationships (along with holistic small groups) are the lowest-scored qualities of hundreds of Adventist churches. It seems we are good at explaining but not so good at relating—relating to God, relating to others, relating to the nature.

“The trinitarian insight that God’s very being is relational provides a basis for a vision of the fundamental reality of the universe as relational. The interrelatedness that ecologists find in the biosphere on Earth, and the interrelatedness that science discovers at all levels from quantum physics to cosmology, springs from a God whose being is to be in relationship” (Edwards 2006:121). We are, “from prenatal existence, created in relationship” (151), so relationships are not really a matter of our deliberate choice and yet we often prefer living disconnected in a dim light of religion affected by our sinful rebellious nature. By God’s design, we are influenced by internal and external relations, and our interdependence with others is the basis of our physical and emotional life (151). Looz writes, “*Relationship* is actually a more accurate way to describe the core operating action of reality” (2021:113), and the nature around us is God’s witness.

Many flowering plants produce nectar, which serve as a food for insects and other animals. As bees drink nectar from a flower, they are dusted with tiny grains of pollen and carry these to other flowers of the same

kind. Flowering plants and trees depend on this pollination to reproduce. Bees, plants, animals, and humans all benefit from this relationship and cooperation.

In the depths of the oceans, there are more alliances between different kinds of creatures—some, very unexpected. Groups of large fish gather in areas where smaller fish assist them by removing dead skin and parasites. Under other circumstances, the larger fish might eat the smaller ones; however, at these cleaning stations, the large fish allow themselves to be cleaned.

Most fish avoid the stinging tentacles of the sea anemone; however, the clown fish makes a home among them. A special coating on the clown fish's skin protects it from being stung. In this way, the clown fish is safe from predators. In return, the clown fish shares food with the anemone and provides protection against anemone-eating fish (Solmioneula 2012).

These types of examples of interconnections are all around us when we look closely at the natural world. How do these “instinctively wise” creatures know when and if to form partnerships with others so different from themselves? They follow the laws/information that the Creator himself placed within their DNA, again illustrating that the natural world is about relationships. What are the lessons from this for practical theology? The revitalization of churches depends in many ways on discovering connections and developing relationships. Just as life in the natural world is not merely a random collection of individual creatures but rather a marvelously orchestrated masterpiece, so the church cannot prosper and be alive in silos and/or without organic mentality. A beautiful example of that is Paul's elaboration on church as Christ's body in 1 Corinthians 12.

God's people cannot ignore the gifts of the Holy Spirit bestowed on each believer—including women and youth or children, because if they are not intentionally involved in ministry and their ideas not taken seriously, the consequences are similar as when “forests are clear-cut, heavy rainfall washes the exposed soil into the nearest stream. Salmon cannot survive in sediment-filled streams and the waterways become devoid of life. Now—the grizzly bears can no longer find salmon to feast on in the fall, salmon they need so they can lay on a thick layer of fat to survive their deep winter sleep” (Wohlleben 2021:204).

When the gifts of each member of a system are not recognized, the whole system—from insects to small rodents to bald eagles—falls apart. How then can the church stay healthy and strive for the future if it does not do the same?

In the example mentioned earlier, it was pointed out that scientists have recently discovered trees communicating or sending messages to each other. If trees care about each other, how about us? What can we

learn from the mother tree “teaching” or “mentoring” daughter trees? The lesson about necessity of intergenerational mentoring to stay alive is obvious. “Trees communicate through their interconnected root systems” (Wohlleben 2021:43), but “they can’t talk to each other without help” (*National Geographic* 2018). They live in symbiotic relationship with fungi, or mushrooms who “can interlink practically all trees and other plants in the forest. They turn entire wooded areas into interconnected, highly complex habitats” (Arvay 2018:24). What are the implications for church life?

To succeed in mentoring the next generation, older Christians must communicate with younger Christians to help them grow spiritually and hopefully help them remain as active members. To do this most congregations need help. Members living in silos cannot succeed without symbiotic relationships, without interdependence, energy transformation, multiplication, etc.; therefore, a magic formula would help in solving the issue of those leaving the church but there isn’t one. However, I can say with certainty that there is a way to connect and help bond older members with the younger generations. God provides a way to mentor and involve our daughters and sons in the mission of his kingdom through examples in nature. The question is, Are we willing to seek and respond to the lessons learned from nature?

When thinking about the revitalization of mission and/or evangelism in the Adventist Church, the following example from nature comes to mind. Have you heard about the unusual forest growing in southwest England? It is the life’s work of Martin Crawford, an unconventional gardener who grows 500 edible plants with minimal time spent in maintenance.

What we think of as normal in terms of fruit production is actually not normal at all. Annual plants are very rare in nature, and yet, most of our agriculture or our fields are full of annual plants. It’s not normal. What’s normal is a more forested or semi forested system. Forest gardens in a tempered climate tend to have seven layers or so:—high trees, smaller trees, shrubs, perennials, ground cover layers, root crops and climbers. So, it includes directly used plants . . . [and] there are also plants of indirect use, system plants to help the system function better. (*National Geographic* 2019)

What are the implications of this example for developing sustainable and fruitful evangelism in our fields? How often do we see a focus only on “annual plants” in our ministry? To what degree is there a tendency to get rid of ministries that have only indirect impact on the production so we can preach the Three Angels’ Messages God called the Adventist Church to do?

When considering the damage COVID-19 has caused among many local congregations with the decline in giving and weekly attendance, the COVID-related conflicts over masking, long-term sicknesses, and lost lives, it is important to learn from and find inspiration from trees.

Think of a sprouting willow tree after a clear-cutting. The tree defies its destiny, revitalizes itself even after a radical interference in life, and attempts a new beginning. It grows above and beyond the harm done. Those who are in a similar situation, wanting to leave old wounds behind and to feel revitalized, might find solidarity with this unfaltering willow that rose again and feel inspired to find new energy. (Arvay 2018:81)

This is a beautiful example of energy transformation and symbiosis. As can be seen, even such natural principles do not function in isolation.

Even when trees are dying, there is something to be learned, particularly in view of the increasing number of churches that are closing their doors and running out of life. If you consider this thought an exaggeration, note the aging of membership in North America. A recent study of demographics in the North American Division conducted by the Center for Creative Ministry has pointed out that as “the older portion of the Adventist population has increased,” the median age of church members between 2008 and 2018 shifted from 51 to 61 (Sahlin, Richardson, and Činčala 2018).

Perhaps there is even a purpose in dying churches. Think for a minute about old, dead trees lying on the ground completely rotted on the inside and hollow like stovepipes. “They invite the fungi in and offer them their wood as food. . . . Fungi that enter via a wound in the tree convert the wood into a sort of humus as they eat their way through the tree, creating debris that is soft, crumbly, and moist. Now the tree can grow inner roots into this ‘soil’ and reabsorb nutrients it stored in earlier years in its growing rings” (Wohlleben 2021:204).

Does it make a difference how a church dies? Yes, it does. As a student, I ran into a book called *Death of the Church* by Mark Regele (1995); the subtitle of the book caught my attention immediately. “The Church has a choice: to die as a result of its resistance to change or to die in order to live.”

If the church resists dying for too long, it may get a cancer and end up killing its mission. “Every cell of life must die in order for the whole being to continue to live. Cancer is a cell that refuses to die. It therefore kills the whole system” (Loorz 2021:152). I hope these thoughts and analogies from nature provide an alarming stimulus to (re)think how we run churches.



## Conclusion

Nature, both as described in the Scriptures and that which is all around us, is a touchstone—a means to connect with God and his wisdom. As humans, we have a spiritual yearning which seems to be encoded in our DNA, that is often “fulfilled through contact with [God in] nature” (Lionberger 2007:30). “God appeared to many people, and those appearances were almost always in the wilderness” (31).

I am not sure about you, but it never fully occurred to me until recently how important it is to be intentional about spending time in nature and learning from nature. As Matthew Sleeth says, God speaks to us “through our everyday interactions with his creation” (2019:21). Unless we make a conscious shift in our personal (and church) lives to connect more intentionally and systematically with nature and God, our mission and practical theology in the coming days and years may run out of gas, becoming flat and dry.

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JON L. DYBDAHL

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## A Call for Adventists to Reassess the Charismatic Movement

### Introduction

The rapid rise and spread of the charismatic movement was undoubtedly one of the most significant trends for Christianity in the 20th century. Many date the beginning of the movement to the tongues-speaking students in Charles Parham's Bethel Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, on January 1, 1901—the first day of the new century (Wagner 1988:18). Most see at least three phases or elements in that movement. The first phase or part of the phenomena is the rise of the various Pentecostal and Assembly of God denominations beginning in the early days of the 20th century. The second phase began in 1960 when Dennis Bennett, Rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Van Nuys, California, shared publicly that he had spoken in tongues and believed in the present-day manifestation of the gifts of the Spirit but wanted to remain an Episcopalian. In two short decades charismatic renewal groups were formed in most established Protestant bodies and in Roman Catholic churches as well. Many follow Peter Wagner and suggest there is a third wave to the movement, consisting of the rise of free standing, independent congregations and clusters or fellowships of churches with a general charismatic flavor (Wagner 1988:16-310).

Every year the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* published statistics under the heading "The Status of Global Mission." This was done under the leadership of David Barrett, probably the foremost Christian statistician of mission. Figures for 2010 list under the heading of Pentecostals/charismatics/neocharismatics the number of over 613 million adherents (Anderson 2007:9). Almost 800 million members are

projected for 2025 which means growth of over 12 million per year. If these projections are correct by 2025 almost 50% of church attendees worldwide will be in this category. It is amazing that all this has taken place in only about 100 years. No wonder Birmingham University (UK) professor Allan Anderson can assert:

By the end of the twentieth century, Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity in all its diversity had expanded into almost every country on earth. It had become an extremely significant movement within global Christianity, affecting Catholics, Anglicans, Protestants, evangelicals, and especially the independent churches in China, India, Africa and Latin America. It is probably the fastest expanding religious movement in the world ever, certainly the fastest within Christianity. (2007:9)

No person or institution that seeks to relate to the religious world of today can afford to ignore or treat in a cavalier or superficial way a movement of this magnitude.

### Adventist Response

Seventh-day Adventist reaction to the movement has been generally quite negative. While there have been no official denominational statements (that I know of) concerning the movement and its theology, there is a 50-page, printed report of a special committee meeting in Camp Cumby-Gay, Georgia, that took place January 4-9, 1973. The report includes 38 pages of historical analysis of tongues speaking in two articles, a committee report, a case study, and concludes with counsels and practical helps for pastors (available for the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists). The report, while very cautious about the movement, is overall quite temperate. While it is obvious that the committee's wish is for Adventists to avoid involvement, rash or blanket condemnation is avoided. In much the same tone but with a broader and lengthier scope is the booklet published by the South Pacific Division entitled, "The Ministry of the Holy Spirit" (Pfandle n.d.). While the first three articles deal in general with the Holy Spirit the last seven cover issues that have been raised by the charismatic movement. As near as I can tell neither document has been widely read.

In general, I find grassroots church reaction to be more negative than the two written reports would imply. The finding of a church survey in Australia that Adventists have the most negative response to tongues speaking of any denomination is not surprising (Roefeldt n.d. 32, 33). I think not only North American Adventists, but those in the global church

would mirror the Australian situation. Such a response is understandable when some Adventists and also many Adventist preachers have interpreted scripture and Ellen White in specific ways. Spiritualism, the last of the great three-fold, last-day heretical triumvirate of Roman Catholicism, Apostate Protestantism, and Spiritualism has been interpreted by some as speaking about the charismatic movement. I was warned by a pastor several years ago that the movement was the omega heresy which it was my duty to be warning people against. If the charismatic movement is a last-day heresy, it is to be avoided at all costs. While some only poke fun at the stranger aspects found on the fringe of the movement, others see it as tapping into the demonic so that even a hint of any practice they associate with the movement is letting dangerous heresy slip into the church. I even find in places a strange coming together of conservative and more liberal elements in the church in opposition to the movement. The conservatives on the right are worried about heresy, spiritualism, and the New Age, while the more liberal elements are sometimes nervous about the live sense of God's activity found in the movement and elements of heart religion that are prominent.

The reasons for this negativity would be an interesting topic of study for another paper but I cannot help offering a few suggestions. Adventists have always emphasized truth, and the experiential emphasis of the charismatic movement troubles the Adventist psyche. Our eschatological emphasis leads us to be on guard for deception. Charismatic excesses in some places and doctrinal differences convince many Adventists that the movement is a deception. Last but not least, the charismatic movement has in many places lowered denominational barriers, and such ecumenism scares most Adventists.

While Adventist negativity to the charismatic movement is perhaps understandable, I feel it is important to reassess our response—especially in the light of the present world situation. My reasons for this are many, but I will summarize them under six headings. Two of them are historical and theological, two are experiential and spiritual reasons, and two are missiological. My thesis is that this negative evaluation of the charismatic movement has narrowed our historical understanding, biased our theology, hampered out spiritual life, and lessened the impact of our mission and evangelism.

### Reasons for Reassessment

1. *Opposition is based on an outdated understanding of the movement.* While early Pentecostalism usually saw speaking in tongues as a requirement for entrance into the fullness of the Spirit, later phases of the movement are

different. In many charismatic churches and certainly in the third wave, tongues are optional and non-central to being charismatic. Surveys have shown that as early as 1979 less than one in six who called themselves charismatic actually practiced tongues speaking (Kantzer 1980:23, 26). The figure is undoubtedly even lower now. In spite of this, the major thrust of the Cumby-Gay document is geared to the question of tongues speaking. Most Adventists continue to assume that to be charismatic implies a tongue-speaking experience.

It is also important to remember that Adventist scholars are generally clear that in Acts 2 tongues refers to known languages. On the other hand, the Adventist understanding of tongues in 1 Cor 14 is not so clear-cut. Some scholars clearly see the text as referring to known languages, while others disagree. Gerhard Hasel argued strongly that the tongues in 1 Cor 14 were earthly known languages (1991), while William Richardson (1994:71-94) and Larry Richards saw the Corinthian gift as an ecstatic utterance gift (1997:235, 236). Even the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* is ambiguous on this point (Nichol 1957:16:795, 796). All this suggests that any current serious evaluation of the charismatic movement must go much broader than the issue of tongues. Most charismatics today see their movement as simply one that takes the work of God and the Holy Spirit in the real world seriously and expects to see God in action in human life.

2. *Opposition forgets the close theological kinship of Adventism with Holiness/Pentecostal theology.* Pentecostals emerged mainly from Wesleyan Holiness churches in the broad 19th century Methodist tradition. These groups sought something special or extra in the Christian life. This extra was defined in various ways as “perfect love,” “Christian perfection,” “sanctification,” and finally as a “baptism of the Holy Spirit” (Alexander 1988:134, 135). Adventism, especially through Ellen White, was heavily influenced by this same stream of belief. Adventism has always emphasized holy living, sanctification, and obedience. These basic concerns are shared by Pentecostals and Adventists.

Perhaps of even more importance is the centrality of the belief in the literal premillennial return of Jesus for Pentecostals. In fact, Anderson (2007:8, 9) lists this factor as number one in his article which discusses five main features of Global Pentecostalism. Reception of the Holy Spirit was merely fuel for the mission of spreading a global revival that would lead to the return of Jesus. Matthew 24:14 was taken seriously as a justification and motivation for evangelism world-wide. They were/are Adventists.

What separated early Pentecostals from the more general Holiness Movement was the insistence that speaking in tongues was the necessary initial evidence of the “something more” in Christian life and experience that they sought. This strong emphasis on tongues, along with interest in

healing and prophecy, led to a strong emphasis on spiritual gifts. While, as already noted, this emphasis on tongues as essential has in most charismatic churches faded, the strong emphasis on spiritual gifts as a whole remains. Adventism early came to an acceptance of spiritual gifts. While in many quarters today this is mainly a belief in the prophetic gift as manifested in Ellen G. White, the doctrinal acceptance of spiritual gifts is a given.

In the late 1960s as a seminary student, I read the book *The Cross and the Switchblade* (1963), which tells the story of Pentecostal preacher David Wilkerson and his success in ministry with inner city gangs. When I asked a respected seminary teacher about how to answer the issues raised by the book, he sent me to a small booklet on the work of the Holy Spirit. Written by a well-known evangelical, the volume argued against Pentecostalism on the grounds that spiritual gifts ended with the apostolic era. This cessationism teaching was then common among anti-Pentecostal Evangelicals. I was appalled. While my teacher seemed prepared to sacrifice the prophetic gift for an argument against Pentecostalism, I was not prepared to do so.

What I am arguing is that Adventists agree on three basic theological affirmations of the Pentecostal/Charismatic Movement: (1) that Jesus is literally coming soon premillennially and that this must be preached worldwide, (2) that God through the Holy Spirit has something special for serious Christians in their life and experience, and (3) that spiritual gifts did not cease with the apostolic era, but are available to Christians today. While what the Holy Spirit does in the life, and how the gifts are manifested differs, one cannot erase the similarity of those key theological planks.

3. *Fear of Pentecostalism contributes to the imbalance between cognitive and emotional aspects in Western Adventism.* Religion in general and Christianity in particular always struggle to maintain the balance between the rational and affective elements of religion. Adventism is not different, and pendulum swings do take place. Early accounts of Adventist worship put it squarely in the 19th century Revivalist tradition. Accounts of loud singing and shouted Hallelujahs abound. Hand clapping was normal and even people passing out under “the power” took place. Today’s white North American, European, and Australian Adventist churches are, in most cases, far removed from such displays. Any young adult will tell you that their church is a cognitive “heady” place. Even mild displays of feeling such as a spoken amen can raise eyebrows in many areas. Attempts to change this will often get responses which warn against emotionalism “like the Pentecostals.”

While other factors such as culture and tradition may be involved, I am convinced that much of the hesitancy to let spontaneous emotion or zeal be expressed is fear that it will lead to Pentecostalism. Often attempts to release joy in God's presence are squelched with the death-dealing accusation "sounds like they want to be charismatic." All of this has helped bring about a condition of a church that, in many places, fears valid emotion as an expression of true religion.

4. *Inordinate fear of charismatics has contributed to apprehension about certain manifestations of the Holy Spirit.* Adventists are glad to see the Holy Spirit work ethically and produce the fruits of the Spirit. Missiologically Adventists believe the Spirit guides the evangelist's words and leads people to decisions for Christ. In other areas we have questions. The Holy Spirit actively involved in corporate worship makes us nervous. The Holy Spirit worked in the past in prophecy, but any charismatic gift manifestation now can be a problem. Talk of healings, exorcisms or manifestations are often immediately questioned. Any seemingly supernatural occurrence performed through someone who is not pure doctrinally is often attributed to the demonic rather than the Holy Spirit.

Fear of the charismatic has caused Adventists to limit the area in which the Spirit works. He works calmly and rationally to lead people to live a holy life and follow true religion. Of course, He works that way, but the Holy Spirit does much, much more. He also uses people whose understanding and experience is imperfect. He comes in wind and fire and moves as He wishes, not always according to our plans.

5. *Our views of charismatic Christians makes it difficult to share the Adventist message with them.* While we rejoice in the fact the Adventists are more and more seeing their mission to non-Christians as crucial, we should not forget that we believe we also have something to share with fellow Christians. Figures quoted at the beginning of this article tell us that charismatics are the second largest potential Christian audience in the world after non-charismatic Catholics. How can we share the truth we believe we have in the best way with them? Too many times this has been done by showing them the falsity of their experience. We basically believe they have been deceived by false doctrine and experience and need to come to the truth. I simply suggest that we would get much further by affirming their desire to follow God and the reality of their experience and offering to lead them further along a biblical path. New Testament evangelists did not deny the basic truth of Judaism and condemn it as demonic. They built on Judaism and showed Jews what a fulfilled Judaism with the Messiah Jesus looked like. We would be more successful (and more liked) if we affirmed our charismatic brothers and sisters and the validity of how the Lord has led them so far, and then gently invited them to move further along the path of truth.



6. *Fear of the charismatic hampers evangelism to non-Christians.* Under the impact of Global Mission and the leadership of the General Conference, Adventists have begun, as never before, to reach out to the non-Christian world of Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and primal religions. To do so effectively, Adventists must develop new mission strategies that meet the need of those new audiences.

Traditional Adventist evangelism has been very oriented toward intellectual biblical “proof” of Adventist doctrine. “Truth” is basically seen as rational, cognitive doctrinal truth. It is important to never lose this element but it must be balanced with a clear teaching of the *experience* with God that confirms and demonstrates the cognitive. Today many people are not very interested in learning about God as in meeting and experiencing God. To impact the non-Christian and non-Western world Adventists must be open to a biblical model of evangelism.

I believe that even a cursory, surface reading of the New Testament shows a quite consistent model of evangelism. First, the basic message of the Kingdom is proclaimed. Second, healing, the casting out of demons, and other signs follow that confirm the proclamation. This is seen in Jesus’ example (Matt 4:23-25; Mark 1:21-27, 39). Jesus’ commands (Matt 10:1, Mark 3:13-15, Luke 9:1, 6; 10:8, 9), and the early church (Acts 5:12, 6:8, 8:4-7). While healing and the casting out of demons clearly confirmed the message, they were more than that. They are embodied parables of the message. They themselves show the message in concrete form. This biblical model of proclamation makes some Adventists uneasy because of our reaction to charismatics who attempt to follow it. We hesitate to be identified with them.

Like many of my peers, I also am disturbed by sensationalistic methods of some Pentecostal evangelists I see. Improper models should not keep us, however, from finding appropriate models to attempt to follow the commands of Jesus. I am convinced that any evangelist who attempts to preach the gospel in the non-Christian world and does not find some way to use the New Testament model, is fighting with one arm tied behind his/her back. Non-Christians need to be shown that Christianity is not simply a set of propositions, but is about a living, resurrected Jesus who still acts to save people in their broken world. The tragedy is, of course, that some have been afraid to do evangelism in this way for fear they would be labeled as “charismatic.”

## Conclusions and a Path Forward

I do not deny that there have been excesses in the charismatic movement. Even charismatics themselves would not deny that. Over-emotionalism has been present. Some have taken their experience as norm rather than using Scripture to establish acceptable standards. But is the whole movement a “false revival” or worse, yet a form of “spiritualism” or a “manifestation of the anti-Christ?” Even more, my argument, is that such negative beliefs and attitudes have hurt Seventh-day “Adventists as a church, by impacting our theology, spirituality, and mission much more than they have hampered the charismatic movement. A reassessment is long overdue. The aim is *not* to change our theology, but to help us finish the task of sharing the Three Angels’ Message with the whole world as we have been called to do.

I have a few suggestions for a start on that journey.

1. Cease and desist from broad sweeping evaluations that call the movement heretical or satanic. Deal with specific people or teachings.
2. Admit that historically and theologically that we as Adventists and Charismatics share much common ground.
3. Accept the past experience of sincere charismatics and lead them further along the path of biblical truth.
4. Never allow charismatic phobia to hamper our personal experience of the Holy Spirit, our mode of worship, our spiritual life, or our mission.

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RAY RUKARATA BIDADHUNGA

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# Strategies for Dealing with Folk Practices in Christian Churches in the Democratic Republic of the Congo

## Introduction

The growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Goma City in the Democratic Republic of the Congo is not insignificant. From 2001 to the end of 2019, the number of organized local churches grew from six to twenty-five. Additionally, church districts increased from one to seven, which have recently been regrouped into two stations (data from Centre Kivu Field Executive Secretary). However, this growth has occurred in the midst of other fast growing belief systems including animistic beliefs and practices upheld by traditional healers, Congolese indigenous Christian churches, and many of the expanding Pentecostal churches found on many corners of the city. This is not a new reality in sub-Saharan Africa for it is reported that African Independent Churches and charismatic movements strongly uphold the African traditional worldview in their approach to witchcraft (Sanou 2017:38). In the same way and considering Pentecostalism, it is suggested that African Pentecostalism mirrors many African Traditional Religion beliefs and practices as it highlights pragmatism and whatever works instead of orthodoxy (Onongha 2017:55).

Considering that Seventh-day Adventist church members can be influenced by their own cultures, by their neighborhood, or even by attractive healings in animistic rituals or by syncretistic Christian churches, this article proposes strategies that can be used to bolster Seventh-day Adventist churches amidst the growing folk practices in Goma City. To better understand the issues surrounding the growing folk practices, it is important to have a broad picture of the Democratic Republic of Congo in its political, economic, social, and religious contexts.

According to Dennis Cordell, in 2018, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) had an estimated population of 91,829, 000, comprised of more than 200 African ethnic groups with more than 200 languages spoken. Its urban-rural population in 2015 was 57.5% rural and 42.5% urban. As of 2004, religious affiliation in the country was 50% Roman Catholic, 20% Protestant, 10% Kibanguist (indigenous Christian), 10% Muslim, and 10% traditional beliefs and syncretistic sects (Cordell 2021).

The economy of the Democratic Republic of the Congo is almost entirely based on the extraction of minerals such as diamond, gold, cobalt, and copper. At the beginning of the 21st century, after a long period of economic failure due to corrupt dictatorial leadership, Congo took steps to stabilize its economic situation, shifting toward a more market-oriented economy. However, in spite of its agriculture potential, corruption and a civilian war caused road transportation to collapse. As a consequence, the rural population especially continues to experience much suffering (Cordell 2021).

This misery is mainly due to the triggering events of the past, such as the mutiny of the army in the 1960s, the Congo East-West animosities in the context of the cold war from 1960 to 1965, the weakly articulated patronage system with its brand of leadership from 1970 to 1990, no western monetary aid from 1991, and by the democratization schema (Cordell 2021). Its climax took place with the Rwandan crisis of 1993-1994, followed by recurrent wars from 1996 to 2013, interconnected with civilian war led by numerous rebel ethnical groups from 1998 until today. All these events contributed to the destruction of the economic and social fabric of the DRC (Cordell 2021).

## Problem Statement

As a result of the misery, calamity, and pauperization that took place in the Congo from the 1960s until today, the Congolese people are returning to their traditional beliefs for healing or as a way to improve their unfortunate situations. This return to tradition includes many Christians, and thus even some Seventh-day Adventist church members are adopting folk practices in order to create a better life here and now; this is especially true in the Central Kivu Field. Therefore, it is necessary for the Adventist Church to find healthy strategies that could be applied in order to maintain church member orthodoxy and help them return to an emphasis on a biblical basis for belief rather than on cultural traditions.

## Methodology

Qualitative methods were used for this study, as they provide a way to capture people's subjective attitudes, feelings, and experiences. For this study, workshops and interviews (using purposeful sampling) were conducted with people whose experiences were quite relevant, valuable, and informative.

With the intention of determining if folk practices were practiced by Seventh-day Adventist church members in the Central Kivu Field, interviews were conducted with a sample composed of all 50 district pastors of Central Kivu Field, representing all areas of the studied field, and 15 local church elders who were chosen randomly. An exception was in Goma City, where five were selected—two from the Karisimbi Station and three from the Goma Station—because of the size of the population and number of local churches in those areas.

The interviews were conducted by the researcher himself and were followed by a workshop with all 10 station directors. The collection of data was followed with an analysis and interpretation of results for the formulation of better conclusions.

## Socio-political Context

Goma City is the administrative capital of North Kivu Province with an estimate population of 1.5 million people. It is located in a volcanic region, with the most recent volcanic eruption on January 17, 2002, when the lava from Mt. Nyiragongo covered 13% of the city. This eruption destroyed 400 houses and 10 kilometers of roads. Additionally, it killed 400 people and left approximately 450,000 people displaced (US Agency for International Development 2002). In addition, this city is located in the region with the highest level of insecurity, which continues to destroy the social fabric of the DRC. For example, as of 2018 there were more than 140 armed groups active in the Congo's North Kivu and South Kivu provinces, many of which continue to attack civilians. This on-going war promotes pauperism and misery among those living around Goma City.

Over the past 20 years, Goma has become a regional urban symbol of violent conflict, peace building, and post-conflict reconstruction. The city's position in the conflict-ridden Kivu area with its location on the Congo-Rwanda border, has increased its importance as a city of political power, a destination for internally displaced persons, as well as the headquarters of hundreds of humanitarian developmental aid sites, and peace-building agencies. Goma has developed into a booming economic and humanitarian center with strong political and military positions in the Great Lakes Region (Büscher 2016).

## Religious Context

Because Goma City has become an attractive city in Eastern Congo, it offers a promising environment for many religions and Christian denominations, especially Pentecostal churches, which offer a special place of prayer for healing (Etshindo 2014). However, because of the political anarchy and the socio-economic context, many of those turning to religion—including Christians—are returning to the former traditional African beliefs. One example, according to a medical aid agency, Doctors without Borders (in French, *Médecins Sans Frontières*, MSF), Ebola patients are often taken forcibly from the clinics and hospitals to churches for prayer because many people believe that Ebola is a result of evil spirits (*BBC News* 2018). In addition, many who suffer from this disease, especially children, are wrongly accused of being sorceress or witches, and are thus brought to churches for deliverance or are abandoned on the streets (James 2015).

When people are infected with Ebola, it is increasingly common for people to seek care from church leaders, particularly evangelical priests, and in seeking healing, group prayer is often blended with local divinatory practices and proscribed care can involve seclusion, fasting, and purging. Ebola is often perceived to be caused by witchcraft or curses and it is often believed that it can be healed through prayer at the church, by church leaders who can perform miracles, or by local healers. As a consequence, people move back and forth between the various providers in an attempt to receive a cure for their illness or misfortune (Bedford 2018).

Emma Wild studied the use of witchcraft by Mai-Mai fighters and the Christian concept of evil today among Christians in the DRC. She found that there was a tendency to not only contrast Christianity and African religions, but Christianity and sorcery. Traditional beliefs are often held by Congolese church members that are in conflict with Christian beliefs, in spite of church teachings on this matter. For many, Christianity and sorcery operate side by side with ambiguity between the widely expressed belief that traditional practices are evil and the equally widespread use of these practices. Thus, many individuals move from one to the other as best fits their need at a particular time (1998:459-461).

Moreover, African Initiated Churches more closely align with traditional religious practices and beliefs than with their missionary initiated counterparts, so they are less likely to view these practices and beliefs as evil when they continue to operate outside the church. In addition, theologians like Bujo, quoted by Wild, are appreciated for the fact that many people find more comfort and liberation in the traditional practices than in the practices of Christian churches. However, in many congregations, those who feel the need to participate in both systems, who attend church

regularly and protect their house with fetishes, or who are members of the church choir and seek traditional cures for their sick children, do so with great moral uncertainty (Wild 1998:459-461).

### **Background of Folk Practices in Christian Churches in DR Congo**

According to Damien Etshindo (2014), before the discovery of the Congo by Diego Cao in 1482, people of the Kingdom of Congo practiced a certain form of religiosity common among traditional African religions. They believed in a Supreme Being, an Almighty God. This discovery was the occasion for the first contact between the Congo and the West and it unleashed a wave of evangelization; however, among the many people who turned to Catholicism, very few were true converts. About 1880, a second wave of missionaries linked to Protestant missions took place in East Congo, with the un-avowed intention to stop the Arab sympathizers' invasion in this area.

In recalling the history of religion in the Congo, Simon Kimbangu, a Baptist catechist, played an important role. He is considered today by Catholics as the forerunner of the renewal movement in the Congo. In 1921 he launched a particular reform based on the new Africa Catechism, with singing, dance, and the acceptance of trances against the background of socio-political demands. Later, other movements arose, such as Kitawala and the Ngunguzism (Etshindo 2014).

Following independence, the religious landscape of the Congo underwent some profound changes. In the Catholic Church, the enculturation movement promoted by Cardinal Joseph Malula was eventually successful and adopted a form of religious worship, which included some local cultural elements such as, language, song, and dance, known as Congo rites (Etshindo).

During that time the Protestants of different communities regrouped in the Church of Christ in Congo and welcomed into their organization the very syncretistic church, the Kibanguism, with the name "The Church of Jesus Christ on the Earth" according to their Prophet Simon Kimbangu. Today these very syncretistic religious groupings, which were initially called independent churches (Kibanguism, Kitawala and Ngunguzism) are called Neo-Pentecostalism churches (Etshindo 2014).

Damien Etshindo reports that the leaders of the revival, which took place from the evangelical campaigns in the 1980s led by an American evangelist, Tommy Lee Osborn, and during the height of the monetary crisis in DRC (Zaire) and who performed miraculous cures, announced that they felt that they had been deceived by the established churches.



They reproached the Catholics for having hidden Bible Truth for a long time and the Protestants for being disorganized. They accused both Catholics and Protestants for failing to express charismas or emphasize spiritual gifts.

When the churches were first being established, their followers were regrouped around Shepherds and in groupings called Prayer Groups. These Shepherds claimed that they could lead the church with the help of spiritual gifts rather than proper biblical information. Thus, they did not give much importance to classical theological beliefs and practices as they sought to reach the people in society.

During that time many were living with misfortune due to misery, poverty, illness, and insecurity, which put their faith to the test and drove many people to seek a religious or spiritual solution at all costs. People were attracted by the miracles and healing offered by certain new religious groups, even in spite of their syncretistic tendencies (Etshindo 2014).

### **Literature on Folk Practices in Christian Churches in DR Congo**

From the fourth century and during the Middle Ages the Catholic Church introduced folk practices in its rites and beliefs; therefore, this section will focus on the African Folk practices in the Christian churches in Africa, especially in the DRC. Gailyn Van Rheenen wrote that fears due to animism beliefs pervade life where freedom in Christ should reign. He stresses that even Christians who believe in Christ continue to believe in the power of spirits and impersonal forces over their lives. For instance, Dal Congdon's study of the Zulu demonstrated that 69.6% of all professing Christians believed that ancestral spirits accompany and protect them (in Van Rheenen 1991:98). Jennifer Ziemke states that in the DRC, traditional beliefs pervade nearly every aspect of life, even for churchgoing Christians. Several syncretistic sects have combined traditional ancestral worship and ancient beliefs with Christianity to create new faiths. Most Congolese mix their indigenous practices with Christian beliefs, depending on circumstances and desired outcomes. For instance, when someone falls ill, the whole community works together to help the patient (2019:17-18).

The Pentecostal Church in Africa has incorporated many African rites relating to deliverance in their concepts of witchcraft and sorcery. Deliverance ministries have replaced the anti-witchcraft shrines and the exorcist activities of the early African Independent Churches. According to Opuku Onyinah, this concept of witch demonology is used to describe the beliefs and practices of deliverance ministries in Ghana, which are a synthesis of practices and beliefs of Akan witchcraft and Western Christian concepts of demonology and exorcism (Onyinah 2002:232, 296).

That is why Joseph Quayesi-Amakye in his paper, “This Nonsense Must Stop: Pentecostal Negotiation of Evil,” recommends that it is important that Ghanaian Pentecostals become acquainted with the proper appropriation of Christ’s victory in the battles of life, which is necessary for enjoying a good life. He proposes that Ghanaian Pentecostals return to their foundational practices of individual/corporate prayer and Bible studies/teachings. The leadership must avoid an excessive suspicion of prophetic practices. Rather, they should appreciate the ‘mystery’ and ‘transcendence’ of the Spirit’s workings to avoid down-playing the prophetic (2015:22, 23).

Explaining the success of Pentecostal growth in Tanzania, which also started during times of economic hardship, Faith Lugazia wrote that the churches are not confined by a written liturgy and are more open to spontaneous expressions of faith. They use music both rooted in African tradition and Western modernity and use African drums and dancing. In the case of unidentifiable diseases like demon possession, Tanzanians (even Christians) are still attached to the old traditions (2003:50).

In Nigeria, Olufunke Adeboye suggests that in the Aladula groups, their founding prophets’ activities included fervent prayer and spirit possession, which many observers believed was influenced by traditional religious practices. The indigenous Pentecostal churches also place great emphasis on miracles, healings, glossolalia, and fervent prayers (2006:142). Thus, it seems that in many new emerging churches this kind of syncretism seems to be common in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In the DRC, folk religions have infused some Christian denominations such as the Indigenous Christian churches and many Pentecostal churches. The findings of a study conducted by Asa Maria Wahlstrom on Congolese people indicate that different revival churches attracted a large proportion of the people in the Congolese diaspora, as well as among the population of Kinshasa. The primary motive causing so many young people to join the Pentecostal Church involved their search for spiritual power to gain material wealth, physical health, success in relationships and marriage, and to prevent bad things from happening and evil forces from entering their lives (2009:127). This is no different from the reason why people are attached to animistic beliefs and why they visit a healer or shaman to gain a better life, success, and protection from evil spiritual forces (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou 1999:324-325).

Another troubling situation among the many different Pentecostal churches in London and in many parts of the world is that they compete against each other, with their success measured in terms of how wealthy their worshippers are (Wahlström 2009:137). This competition, based on wealth, between Pentecostal churches, is a sign that their focus on power

and wealth goes against many biblical principles. This is very similar to what happens in African religions, where the healers or shamans are valued based on the power they have in healing, exorcism, and dealing with various kinds of misfortune (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou 1999:374-380). The frequent cases of conflict between revival churches in Kinshasa and throughout the country is in large part due to the gospel of prosperity and the lack of transparency in the management of various offerings from members seeking miracles and wonders in their life. These same factors are also a source of rivalry and schism within Pentecostal churches (Kivu Press 2018).

In the DRC there are thousands of different revival churches (Foka 2018) and one of the reasons for this is that millions of people are attracted by the revival churches' promises of life-changing miracles that are guaranteed to happen as soon as they offer their money—in fact they promise that money given will be multiplied 100 times over. Women are especially seduced by the prosperity gospel claims, which enrich the pastor and plunge his followers into misery (Nekwa 2012).

One of the prime reasons Pentecostal churches are flourishing is the wide-spread poverty, disempowerment, and seeming abandonment (Onongha 2011:68-85) people feel in Goma City, with the result that revival churches are growing like mushrooms. Their primary message is one of deliverance against poverty and malevolent spirits.

Unfortunately, these churches are also the source of many conjugal problems, and many cases of divorce are due to these false pastors. Many pastors in Goma also cause problems among neighbors because of their false prophecies that pit family member against family member and neighbor against neighbor (Alain 2010). One revival church's pastor in Goma, in his quest for signs and wonders and miracles, took his church members for forty days of prayer and fasting in the Kibwe Cave located in the northern part of the city. Fortunately, they were rescued by the police (Alain 2010).

### **Folk Practices in Christian Churches**

According to Damien Etshindo (2014), various syncretistic movements and sects have sprung up in Africa in recent decades and sometimes it is hard to discern whether they are authentically Christian or whether they are simply the fruit of sudden obsessions with a leader claiming to have exceptional gifts. Their nomenclature and vocabulary easily give rise to confusion, causing many to be led astray. These sects and their charismatic leaders take advantage of a deficient social infrastructure, the corrosion of traditional family solidarity, and inadequate Bible teaching in order

to exploit people's naivety. They offer a Christian veneer to a variety of heretical, non-Christian beliefs. They shatter the peace of couples and families through false prophecies and visions.

There is no doubt that folk religious practices are openly followed in many Christian churches. Even witchcraft practices have invaded some of the revival churches. Daniel Tshimuanga on *BBC News* testified that religious leaders in many African countries are brainwashing people with wrong and non-biblical teachings. In the DRC, they are mixing common sense and mythology. They accuse homeless children of being witches. In their business, they manipulate uneducated people to make money by using religion and promises of prosperity (2006). A testimony from Nigeria is very revealing. Lee Grady wrote that the revival churches' rites are mixed with occultism and witchcraft practices. Before the era of Christianity in Nigeria, people visited witch doctors and sacrificed goats or cows to become prosperous. They poured libations on the ground so that the gods would hear their prayers. Similar practices continue in 2022, only "the juju priest" has been replaced by a pastor who drives a Mercedes-Benz. Grady tells of a pastor who buried a live animal under the floor of his church to gain God's favor and power. He also mentioned that another pastor asked his congregants to bring bottles of sand to church so he could anoint them and then ordered his people to sprinkle the sand in their houses to receive God's blessings (2013).

These practices raise serious questions about the source of power the so-called Christian pastors depend on for their miraculous signs and wonders. Just giving witchcraft practices Christian names does not change the fact that they are depending on Satan's power. Even when folk practices are not practiced openly in a church, many Christians live in constant fear of the spirits of ancestors and in fear of impersonal forces. By mixing Christian beliefs with traditional practices Christians will never experience God's power and freedom they so desperately need and seek.

### **Literature on Folk Practices in the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

It is important to ask the question, Is the Seventh-day Adventist Church compromised and infused with folk practices? Are Adventist church members totally committed to the Word of God so as not to be led astray from biblical teaching by seeking protection in folk practices and beliefs?

In response to the first question, it can be affirmed that church doctrines are taught in all the local churches and all teachings are biblically grounded with practices measured by the standard of the Holy Scriptures to make sure people are not believing or acting contrary to the biblical

principles. Ganoune Diop suggested a similar idea in an article he wrote, calling the Seventh-day Adventist Church an eschatological movement that has an uncompromising commitment to Scripture, which testifies of Jesus Christ. According to him, there is no syncretism in Seventh-day Adventist teachings (2010:99).

However, Erich Baumgartner wrote that a review of the history of the Christian Church's mission reveals that the church has always struggled to be faithful to biblical truths in the cultural contexts it finds itself in. He suggests that Adventism is not exempt from this problem. Even though the Adventist Church strives to be faithful to the Scriptures in its teachings and practices, there is no denying the presence of obvious syncretic practices. Anyone can ask themselves why loyal Seventh-day Adventists would willingly engage in any religious practice that is incompatible with the Gospel, such as secretly sacrificing at a shrine of a local deity or visiting the local healer or a priest in time of sickness (Bauer 2006:206-207). Generally speaking, African people are fearful of witchcraft due to a number of cultural assumptions that impact most people in Africa. Bruce Bauer argues that "tragically these cultural assumptions are found not only among African Traditional Religionists, but also among the professed followers of Jesus Christ (2017:7-19). From this observation, it can be deduced that sub-Saharan Adventists are not exempt from engaging in practices that go against biblical principles as they seek protection from witchcraft curses and ancestral threats.

In response to the second question as to whether or not Adventist members are totally committed to the Word of God, the reality is that there are a variety of responses among church members. There are some apparently dedicated Adventists who do go secretly during the night seeking help from witchdoctors and fetish priests when misfortune strikes. Then there are some Adventists who are not really converted and who are swayed by the promise of wealth and health as promoted by traditional healers and the prosperity gospel. Unfortunately some church members are also openly or privately attracted by folk beliefs and rites. Kelvin Onongha wrote that the "Adventist church members with vestiges of traditional worldview are prone to Pentecostal congregations' attraction where the reality of witchcraft is acknowledged and seemingly resolved. Consequently, there is growing documented evidence of dual allegiance in Adventist Churches in Africa" (2017:50-51).

How can a local Seventh-day Adventist Church evaluate whether it is syncretistic? According to Van Rheenen, there are two ways to proceed (1991:98-99). First, by evaluating everything that takes place in the church by the standards found in the Word of God. Many church members in Sub-Saharan Africa remain animistic in their worldview values and assumption

and continue to live in constant fear of spirits and impersonal forces. The antidote to this fear is good biblical teaching on how Christ destroyed the power of Satan and how angels are there to protect and shield from demonic attacks.

Second, the Adventist Church must let the Bible speak to the nature of spiritual beings and their work in the world. African worldview perspective like the limited good, believing that everything is caused by spiritual powers and forces without allowing for cause and affect relationships must be reshaped by biblical principles. Instead of living with dual allegiance with one foot in the church and the other remaining in traditional practices, God's people need to choose to be totally committed to Jesus Christ in their allegiance. This is the greatest need and the answer to those seeking protection from evil forces outside of what God offers in Scripture.

### **The Bible and Folk Practices**

Even though the Bible was written in a cultural context, it is above all cultures and rites, all of which must be evaluated by the principles of Scripture. The Bible was written over a long period of time by different authors, in different places, and in different contexts; however, each author was guided by the Holy Spirit so that there are no contradictory statements. Biblical principles are for all people in all cultures and for all ages.

Abram, the first cross-cultural missionary, was called to be a blessing to all nations (Gen 12:1-4). The Bible was written in various places such as in the desert of Sinai during the time of Moses, in Canaan during the time of Joshua, during the time of the Judges, Samuel, kings, and prophets, in Babylon during the time of the exile, in Souza during the time of Mordecai and Esther, in Rome during the time of Peter and Paul, and in Minor Asia by Paul, Luke, and John.

It is interesting that during both the Old and New Testament eras, the biblical message was not sent only to Israelites or Jews, but also to other kingdoms. In Exodus, the first chapters were directed to Pharaoh in Egypt even if the rest of the Pentateuch was mainly for Israel. Even through most of the prophets focused their message for the Jews, the surrounding kingdoms were also a concern of Yahweh. Jonah and Nahum went to Nineveh, Jeremiah and Ezekiel had messages to the kingdoms of Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Lebanon and the cities of Damascus, Elam, Babylon, Tyre, and Sidon. Zephaniah directed part of his message toward Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Cush, and Assyria. The New Testament has a message for all nations as illustrated in the ministry of Jesus and his disciples. The Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts was directed to Theophilus. Paul's letters to various churches were primarily sent to

Gentile congregations, showing that God has no preference: He is the God for all people, all cultures, and all nations.

However, the Bible allows for no compromise, nor does it allow God's people to be involved in folk practices that rely on power from occult sources. Both the Old and New Testaments have many biblical passages indicating that God's followers are not to compromise their allegiance to God by engaging in pagan folk practices. In Genesis and Exodus God's power was much greater than the Egyptian magicians (Gen 41:8, 24; Exod 7:8-13, 8:18-19, 9:11), and Babylon the magicians and Chaldeans were frustrated when they could not reveal the king's dream (Dan 2), which Daniel's God was able to not only reveal but also interpret.

In the New Testament the difference between God's power and occult powers are again contrasted. Philip performed many signs and wonders in Samaria, arousing jealousy and a covetous spirit in Simon. When he tried to buy the power to do such miracles Peter rebuked him and let him know that God's power was not for sale (Acts 8:1-25). When Paul was in Paphos he labeled a Jewish sorcerer a false prophet, called him a "son of the devil and full of every sort of deceit and fraud, and enemy of all that is good!" and asked, "Will you never stop perverting the true ways of the Lord?" (Acts 13:10 NLT). In Ephesus many "confessed their sinful practices. A number of them who had been practicing sorcery brought their incantation books and burned them at a public bonfire." (Acts 19:18, 19 NLT). The Bible speaks openly against Magic, divination, sorcery, human sacrifices, etc., because these practices are an abomination in the sight of the Lord (Exod 22:18; 2 Kgs 17:17; Deut 18:10; Ps 58:5, 6; Isa 2:6; Jer 27:9; Mic 15:11-12; and Gal 5:20). These sins will be punished as will those who practice divination (1 Sam 15:23; Ezek 21:23, 28; Lev 20:27). For those who trust in Christ, God promises victory over magic, divination, and all kinds of witchcraft (Num 23:23).

The next section looks at some of the spiritual tendencies in the Central Kivu Field among Seventh-day Adventist church members. The analysis and interpretation in the next section are based on the findings of a questionnaire that painted a picture of the involvement in folk practices by those who professed to be committed followers of Jesus Christ.

### **Analysis and Interpretation of the Research**

The following five main questions were asked: Are you aware of folk practices in your midst or neighborhood? If yes, what kind of folk practices? Why are people attracted by these practices? Are Seventh-day Adventist church members attracted also by these folk practices? Why are they attracted and what is the remedy to such a situation?

All the respondents affirmed that they were aware of folk practices in their neighborhoods conducted by traditional healers, but also by folk Pentecostal churches. When asked what kind of folk practices were practiced, fifteen respondents mentioned cleansing in the case of a death or when a person was suspicious of being under a cursing, secret ceremonies relating to the birth to a newborn or weddings. In the case of illness, poverty, or any form of misfortune, all respondents affirmed that people visited traditional healers or went to some a Pentecostal pastor for miraculous healing or to ensure prosperity. When people suspected they were cursed by a malefic person, or sorceress, or under a spell of an evil eye or evil spirit, twenty-eight respondents affirmed that people usually seek traditional healers and Pentecostal pastors for protection.

When asked why people were attracted by folk practices, nineteen respondents suggested it was because of traditions and culture. This seems to be true because in the area covered by the Central Kivu Field, there are more than eight traditional chiefdoms where traditional chiefs are protectors of traditional practices and beliefs and invite their subjects, including Christians, to act accordingly. Twenty-five respondents said that traditional healers are very effective in cases of demon possession and in healing many diseases, which physicians are not able to deal with.

When it came to cases of poverty, spirit possession, or other types of misfortune, traditional healers and witches offer direct and mystical solutions, which brings comfort to the victims and their families. In these situations, Pentecostal churches offer solution to all kinds of misfortune because people in distress think that mystical pastors who fast, pray, and exorcize demons have the right response in these types of misfortune—especially demon possession, family cohesion, poverty, and sorcery.

What I wanted to discover from my research was if Adventist church members were also attracted by folk practices. In answer to that question, all the respondents said that most Adventist church members are not attracted by folk practices because they trust that these practices are empowered by evil spirits and the devil; however, all those who responded also suggested that there is a big challenge to keep church members from participating in traditional folk practices. This was especially true when it came to the tendency for Adventist members to attend Pentecostal churches and witchdoctors when confronted with cases of sorcery or demon possession.

Fifteen respondents told of incidences they were aware of about Adventists who are openly involved in folk practices. According to them, in Goma city there are two Adventist traditional healers who use mystical ways in healing diseases caused by sorcery, witchcraft, and other mystical causes. In Kinshanga town, there is a Seventh-day Adventist who heals



people suffering from sorcery and in Rubaya town there is a group of Seventh-day Adventists who deal with all kinds of misfortunes such as illness and poverty by using mystical ways and a mystical rod they use for healing and leading out in such activities. That group is no longer consider members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In one church in Goma city, from 2006 to 2013, a group of Adventist church members in their zeal for revival and reformation prayed without shoes in their attempt to give glory to God; however, after two years of their intense and devoted activities, they led the members of their group to a cave to practice mysticism. Finally, when they were placed under church discipline, their charismatic leaders left the church and reverted to pagan and traditional practices. In Virunga Station, in one local church, a group of women who had visited the prayer services at one of the Pentecostal churches, formed a prayer group in their Adventist local church. However, after a long period of effective activities, weird things began to happen in that prayer group, such as prophesying, visions, strange languages, trances, and trembling during their prayer sessions. The district pastor and local church elders held many seminars for these women that has resulted in them correcting their practices and helping them practice Christianity in biblical ways.

In one Seventh-day Adventist Church in Goma city, there are two families who are facing a lot of difficulty because they gave their fortunes to a so-called prophet with the intension to become rich; but they were deceived. As a consequence, they are actually in trouble and are under local church discipline.

Finally, all respondents supposed that a small number of Seventh-day Adventist Church members are attracted by folk practices in cases of misfortune and do go secretly to witchdoctors or traditional healers or to Pentecostal pastors for exorcism or other kinds of healing. However, no respondent indicated that there were folk practices promoted in their Seventh-day Adventist local churches. What gives strength to folk practices is that even Seventh-day Adventist pastors, in cases of sorcery or mystical poisoning, go to traditional healers for their healing. I have personally witnessed this.

Concerning the last question, Why are Seventh-day Adventists attracted to folk practices and what is the remedy? Fifteen respondents said that the reason of such behavior is the influence of their neighbors and the non-conversion of some members. Twenty respondents affirmed that some Adventist church members turn to folk practices in case of misfortune or distress due to sorcery, demon possession, and other kinds of witchcraft. From the research it can be concluded that some Adventist church members are attracted to folk practices. Some are doing it openly and others secretly. Thus, the importance of dealing with this reality by clearly teaching what the Bible says concerning evil sources of power and healing.

How can Adventists church members be convinced to no longer look to folk practices for their healing? In other words, what is the remedy to such a situation? All the respondents affirmed that in cases of misfortune such as demon possession or sicknesses caused by curses or witchcraft, many patients are healed or delivered through an effective season of prayer and fasting of the Seventh-day Adventist pastors and church elders. In the case of poverty, Seventh-day Adventist church members are taught how to deal with poverty through stewardship seminars where people are encouraged to work hard, avoid idleness, and remain faithful to God in returning their tithes.

After the interviews with the district pastors and after tabulating the results of the questionnaire from the 15 local church leaders, and then conducting a workshop with the ten directors of stations, it was decided to put an emphasis on the spiritual growth of church members and to increase prayer in small groups in each local church. It was thought that by having a weekly season of prayer for people seeking healing and a time for deliverance for those struggling with demonization would increase the trust of Seventh-day Adventist church members in their leaders. It was further recommended that the church leaders should demonstrate their concern and love through practical and relevant prayer.

### **Biblical Teachings to Help Christians Resist Folk Practices**

In addition to the results from the research it is known that animists live in constant fear of the spirits and impersonal spiritual powers and live in a constant quest for power to provide a better life and protection here and now. Likewise, animists seek to discover what beings and forces are influencing them to determine future action and, if necessary, to manipulate them (Van Rheenen 1991:22, 23). Therefore, it is important for Seventh-day Adventist leaders to develop an understanding of the worldview of each world religion in order to present the gospel in ways that resonate with the local core values and assumptions while preserving the integrity of the biblical message (Diop 2010:90). In view of these findings, the following strategies should be taken into consideration in response to folk practices in the church.

Animists are always seeking better lives and are involved in a quest for blessings here and now. The question is, How can Christians, particularly Seventh-day Adventists live a good life and how should they deal with misfortune when they live in cultures saturated with animistic views and beliefs?

In order to develop strategies that answer such questions, it is important to know why Christians are attracted by folk practices and why some Christian denominations such as revival churches in the DRC and around the world are experiencing rapid church growth. In view of the reasons listed above, it is time to consider biblical strategies which will help Christians and Adventists resist the seduction and attraction of folk practices.

First, God is not against the prosperity of his people; however, God calls his people to perseverance and patience in the face of misfortune or persecution (Rev 14:12). God works for the wellbeing of his people. He wants them to prosper while being faithful to him. In Genesis 12:1-4, God called Abraham to be a blessing for all the families of the earth; however, blessings are conditional on obedience and faithfulness to God (Deut 6:24; 8:10-20). On the other hand, the Bible talks about curse or consequences in Deuteronomy 11:26-28. Blessings come in connection with obedience to the commands of God and curses come because of disobedience. In Malachi 3:8-12 God said that all nations are cursed because of disobedience. But in his mercy God invites his people to live according to biblical principles so that they may be abundantly blessed.

It is also important to remember that all Christians are involved in a cosmic conflict between Christ and Satan, between good and evil (Rev 12:1-17). This means that faithful men and women are under attack by Satan and his evil angels. In Revelation 14:12-13 the saints are persecuted because of their faithfulness to the Lord. The case of Job (Job 1-42) is an expression of the devil's wrath and of God's mercy. In Job's endurance and patience through trials and sickness, the work of the devil behind the scenes was revealed. In the end God healed and blessed Job abundantly (Job 42:10-17). What we learn from this is that when suffering or misfortune comes, God's call is to have patience and perseverance. Bad things do happen to good people.

In the Bible, the concept of a blessing is principally focused on the relationship one has with God. A person who is blessed is one who is the beneficiary of God's protection, pleasure, and grace (Gen 12:2-3). The promise for being blessed beyond measure is for those who are children of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph 1:3-14). God promises treasures in heaven for his faithful followers (Luke 18:22). In Mark 10:28-30, Jesus promised his faithful disciples, not social or material prosperity, but persecution and trouble. However, that must be balanced with the promise of eternal life in the age to come. Furthermore, those who are blessed are expected to be faithful men and women diligently working six days week and resting on Sabbath (Exod 20:8). God does not encourage people to be idle or lazy (2 Thess 3:10).

Paul in 1 Timothy 6:6-11 has some excellent advice for those enamored with the prosperity gospel.

<sup>6</sup>Yet true godliness with contentment is itself great wealth. <sup>7</sup>After all, we brought nothing with us when we came into the world, and we can't take anything with us when we leave it. <sup>8</sup>So if we have enough food and clothing, let us be content.

<sup>9</sup>But people who long to be rich fall into temptation and are trapped by many foolish and harmful desires that plunge them into ruin and destruction. <sup>10</sup>For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. And some people, craving money, have wandered from the true faith and pierced themselves with many sorrows. NLT

Jesus also advised God's people to *take care and be on their guard against covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions* (Luke 12:15).

Rather than teaching Christians to pursue prosperity, the Bible teaches them to be content and to find their contentment in God through Jesus Christ. For that reason, Paul speaks about his trials and hardships in Philippians 4:11, 12 and towards the end he says that he has learned to be content whatever the circumstances. Contentment is being pleased with every perfect gift God has given and finding pleasure in him. By finding pleasure in God, Christians are truly prosperous. So, Jesus advises church members to *"seek first the kingdom of heaven and all these things [food and clothing] will be added to them as well"* (Matt 6:33).

In the case of poverty, Christians must recognize that many faithful men and women passed through trying experiences. Some experienced financial poverty because of their faithfulness to God, like John the Baptist and Paul. Jesus is our model of poverty and suffering. Poverty and suffering and also wealth and prosperity happen to all kinds of people for Jesus taught that God causes the rain to fall on the just and unjust (Matt 5:45). In 1 Samuel 2:7, 8, the Scripture says that the Lord makes the poor and rich, he raised the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap, to set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory. So, in case of poverty Christians are requested to seek the face of God and to walk humbly with God because he can bless them. Jesus himself grew up in poverty but the grace of God was upon him (Luke 2:40, 52; White 1964:44, 47).

Some Christians are attracted to folk religions because of divination and so-called quick responses. The church must be clear in teaching the biblical principles: God calls divination an abomination in the sight of God. God's people in times of need or in times of misfortune, must learn to trust in Christ and call upon him in prayer. He will secure and protect his beloved ones (Isa 43:20) and show mercy to those who seek him (Luke 11:9; Amos 5:4). If faithful Christians need to know God's plan for their future, they should call upon his name (Jer 29:11-13; 33:3; Matt 7:7, 8). In

these passages there is an answer for anyone who would like to know the plan God has for them.

Another thing that can help Adventists resist the seduction of folk beliefs and practices is a personal revival in the areas of Bible study and prayer. Jesus often spent time alone in a quiet place for prayer (Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12). Perhaps church members should be regrouped into small groups for prayer in their homes, for socialization, mutual support, fellowship, and witness as was common in the early church (Acts 2:42; White 1970:48).

It is common for people in animistic societies to live in constant fear of personal and impersonal powers. Therefore, good biblical teaching about Jesus' total domination of those powers is vital. Matthew 28:18 says that Jesus has all authority in heaven and on earth and he uses that power to protect his followers. In addition, Christians today, as co-workers with him, are given that same power and authority that Jesus gave his disciples to cast out evil spirits and heal the sick (Luke 9:1, 2). Therefore, instead of visiting the fetish priest or witchdoctor, Adventists must learn to trust completely in God's power and ways of ministry.

### Recommendations

Considering that most folk religions seek power as the key to prosperity, health, success, and control over life, the Adventist response needs to be in harmony with a biblical theology of power. The Scripture has much to say about the way power is to be used. The use of power by God was demonstrated supremely on the cross. His power is always rooted in love, not pride; redemption, not revenge; concern for the others, not for self. It is humble, not proud, inviting not rejecting, its symbol is the cross, not the sword.

Christians and churches are in desperate need of showing God's power through transformed lives and in Christ likeness in the confrontation of evil. It is also important to guard against any distortion of the biblical view of power. Christians are stewards, called to be faithful in using the power God gives for his glory (Hiebert, Shaw, and Tienou 1999:374).

Recently in Goma City the Pentecostal churches have experienced exponential growth as people seek prosperity, healing, and miracles. That growth often comes from other churches. For example, in 2012 the CBCA (a Baptist community) reported that the number of local church members decreased from 900 to 600, with most of the members moving to Pentecostal churches because of their miracles (Kazi 2015).

This should be a warning for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While Adventist church leaders have a moral obligation to be biblically faithful,

they must also respond to the people's felt need for prayer. Perhaps it is time for prayer meetings to be prayer meetings instead of preaching services. I really believe that if Seventh-day Adventist churches provided spiritual responses to the challenges faced by their members there would not be the incidence of split-level Christianity where members act like an Adventist on Sabbath but visit the diviners during the week.

For attaining these objectives in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, I suggest that pastors and church leaders should proceed with the following strategies. First, church members should seek God's grace for personal spiritual transformation so that God may increase their passion for his work. Spiritual transformation is based on solid grounding in the Word, in prayer, and in seeking guidance from the Holy Spirit.

Second, Adventist church members should share their vision for mission with Revival Pentecostal church members. To attain this objective, the Central Kivu Field should educate and train Adventist members on how to minister to Christians involved in Christian folk practices.

Third, for a healthy mission directed towards Pentecostal church members, it will be necessary for Adventists to consider them as children of God. Thus, humility and Christian love must characterize the daily lifestyle of each member and must be seen through concrete and visible actions in their neighborhoods toward those struggling with misfortune and crisis.

Fourth, members need to understand the biblical principles that clearly show the danger of the prosperity gospel with its entanglement with animistic beliefs. This will necessitate showing how many African worldview values and premises promote an animistic perspective, while contrasting that view with biblical principles and stories.

## Conclusion

All around the world Christian churches face the challenge of folk religions and animistic practices. Even after people make a public commitment in baptism it seems that old ways do not die out but remains largely hidden from public view. Many people who affirm orthodox theologies and attend Christian churches on the weekend still visit witchdoctors, shamans, diviners, and healers during the week, but often in secret for fear of being condemned by church leaders. Some are long-time members, but they still participate in traditional rites in the forest or other secret places.

This split-level Christianity, which is dualistic, is too common in most Christian churches. This mixing of Christianity and animism distorts the truth and the power of the gospel and results in Christians who are unable

to witness to what God can do since they continue to rely on both God and Satan. Christian churches need to call their people to no longer waver between the old ways and biblical principles but take a stand on God's side. "The Church cannot afford to remain silent when the majority of its members live in such contexts" (Sanou 2017:40).

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TEMESGEN B. BESHA

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## Dualistic Worldviews: Implications for Discipleship

### Introduction

A dualistic worldview is a “splitvision worldview . . . that separates reality into two fundamentally distinct categories: holy and profane, sacred and secular” (Walsh and Middleton 1984:95). Dualism permeates the history of human life since time immemorial. It is manifested in philosophy, religion, education, and other areas of life. Christianity was grossly impacted by the Greek dualistic worldviews of Plato and Aristotle. As a result, God and biblical teachings began to be explained in terms of Greek dualistic logic (Bosch 2004:194). Gradually, the holistic biblical worldview was largely displaced by dualistic worldviews. Today, many Christians have a split vision worldview that conceives reality in a material-spiritual, holy-profane, and religious-secular perspective. This has a significant negative impact on Christian discipleship. By defining the concept of dualistic worldview and taking mainly African and particularly Ethiopian examples, this paper purposes to show the impact of a dualistic worldview on Christian discipleship, followed by briefly indicating the process of developing biblically-shaped worldviews.

The notion of dualism (or dualistic worldviews) is recorded at least since the time of the classical Greek philosophers. Plato is known for his dualistic worldview (Zandman 2012:3). He believed that the soul and the body are not only distinct but also opposing entities (Barclay 1975:140). Dualistic worldviews seem to have existed in various forms across much of the history of humanity. This is particularly true in the religious aspect of humanity.<sup>1</sup> The same is true in today’s world, causing Christian discipleship to be significantly affected by the prevalent dualistic worldviews.

## Worldview

Before defining dualistic worldview, the concept of worldview needs to be clarified. According to Paul Hiebert, worldview is “the fundamental cognitive, affective, and evaluative presuppositions a group of people make about the nature of things, and which they use to order their lives” (2008:15). He further explains the concept as “what people in a community take as given realities, the maps they have of reality that they use for living” (15). It is important to note that worldview is the deepest level of a culture.

Scholars have identified various worldviews among the cultures of the world. I will give only two examples. Based on anthropological perspectives, David Burnett divides the worldviews of the whole world into five categories: Secular (Western), Primal (animistic), Hindu, Chinese, and Islamic (2002). Paul Hiebert discusses different worldviews among different communities according to their different stages of “civilization,” religious affiliations, and the era in which they lived. He writes of small-scale oral society worldviews, peasant worldviews, modern worldviews, late modernity or postmodernity worldviews, the post-modern or glocal worldviews, and a biblical worldview (2008). However, in the real world, worldviews overlap. For instance, a moderately educated African Christian could live somewhere between Western and animistic worldviews.

### Dualistic Worldviews and Their Historical Development

From a philosophical perspective, dualism is “the belief that there are two coeternal principles in conflict with each other, such as matter and form (or spirit) or of good and evil” (Geisler 1999:206). Other than Christianity, dualism exists in Platonism, Zoroastrianism, Gnosticism, and Manichaeism (206). It is also observed in world religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. For the purpose of this paper, a dualistic worldview is “a split vision worldview . . . that separates reality into two fundamentally distinct categories: holy and profane, sacred and secular” (Walsh and Middleton 1984:95).

A dualistic worldview is manifested in various forms based on the topic and time-frame under discussion. For instance, in the classical period, Pythagoras “taught a cosmic dualism in which matter and form were two equal and independent ultimate principles. This led to a view of humanity with a dualism between mind and body. The mind or soul is of supreme importance, while the body exists merely as a vehicle to serve the soul” (Zandman 2012:3). Zandman observed that Plato also followed suit. Aristotle was also a dualist. This Greek philosophy was spread across the Graeco-Roman world with the conquest of Alexander the Great.

Unlike the Greek dualistic worldview, the biblical (or the Hebrew) worldview is holistic. It is important to note that the focus is not on numeric categorization. Paul Hiebert writes that “there is a fundamental dualism in Scripture, that of Creator and creation. The Bible is clear—in the beginning there is God. All else is creation” (2008:269). The dualism that Hiebert refers to is different from Platonic dualism. The latter is ontological dualism which predicates independent existence of two entities. In the biblical worldview, “God alone is one and eternal. All creation—angels, humans, animals, plants, matter, and energy—is dependent at every moment on God’s ongoing creation for its very existence” (269). Hiebert calls such dualism “contingent dualism.”

The early church was birthed and grew in a mixed culture of the dualistic and holistic worldviews. Paul and the other apostles were constantly opposing the dualistic worldviews. The fifteenth chapter of the first epistles to the Corinthians was written against the background of the Greek thought that the body is bad and cannot be resurrected. “To the Greek the body could not be consecrated. It was matter, the source of all evil, the prison-house of the soul. But to the Christian the body is not evil. Jesus, the Son of God, has taken this human body upon Him and therefore it is not contemptible because it has been inhabited by God. To the Christian, therefore the life to come involves the total man, body and soul” (Barclay 1975:141). The Apostle John wrote part of his epistles to defend the doctrine of Christ against the Gnostic dualism that was based on the Greek dualistic worldview (see 2 John 7, 9).

The most vivid expression of the dualistic Greek worldview in the life of the church was manifested during the time of the early Church Councils.

The God of the Old Testament and primitive Christianity came to be identified with the general idea of God of Greek metaphysics; God is referred to as Supreme Being, substance, principle, unmoved mover. Ontology (God’s being) became more important to reflect on what God is in Himself than to consider the relationship in which people stand to God. Behind all this lies the notion that the abstract idea is more real than the historical. Therefore, what pagans were really in need of was an adequate doctrine of God. . . . The Holy Spirit became the ‘spirit of truth’ or ‘the spirit of wisdom,’ where one’s primary interest was in the Spirit’s original *being* rather than *activity in history*. God’s revelation was no longer understood as God’s self-communication in events, but as the communication of truths about the *being* of God in three *hypostases* and the *one person* of Christ in two *natures*. The various church councils were intent on producing *definitive* statements of faith. (Bosch 2004:194-195; emphasis in the original)

The patristic era church theologian, Augustine of Hippo, also believed in the dualism of body and soul (Teske 2008:197-202). Following Aristotelian logic and supported by the church, the medieval church scholar, Thomas Aquinas, strongly engaged himself in successfully “combining Greek thought with Christian teaching” (Zandman 2012:4). Since then, dualistic worldviews have moved forward with more success in taking people farther and further away from God. The Renaissance in the Middle Ages was typical of its embodiment. With the 17th century French philosopher, Rene Descartes, came the Cartesian dualism—the distinct mental and physical world dualism—that ushered in Deism (5). However, the Renaissance was only a harbinger of the grand dualistic worldview era yet to be played out on the world stage as modernism.

The Modern era, fueled by the Enlightenment philosophy, triumphed in infusing dualistic values into every aspect of life. God was at the center of the human cosmology until the end of the Medieval era. Modernity pushed God away and put humanity at the center. “God was largely eliminated from society’s validation structure” (Bosch 2004:263). Driven by Francis Bacon’s empiricism and Rene Descartes’ rationalism, “people discovered, somewhat to their surprise at first, that they could ignore God and the church, yet be none the worse for it” (263). A dualistic worldview was no more subtle concerning the matter of shame. God with all his supernatural manifestations and agencies was relegated to the private domain. The material world became the “real” and sensible focus of humanity. The senses, not divine revelation, became the default epistemological facet. “Humanity derived its existence and validity from ‘below’ and no longer from ‘above’” (263). Humanity claimed to be in control of nature, and later came to be viewed as the “object” of analysis.

The genesis of the universe and all creation in it is no longer attributed to a Creator God. Darwinian evolution became the cause of all existence. Individualism took precedence over community, reason over faith. Faith is no more in God but in humanity. Human beings are good in themselves and do not need a Savior. In fact, Bosch observes that, in modernity “God owed His existence to humans. Freud declared religion to be nothing but an illusion. Marx saw it as something evil, the ‘opiate of the people’” (269). Emile Durkheim suggested that every religious community was, really, only worshipping itself. . . . Humans had become mature and no longer needed God” (in Bosch 269).

Then dawned the post-modern era of our age. Greek dualism, though still extant in many parts of the world, is being pushed aside by postmodern relativism and pluralism. The argument is no more if God exists or not. It is that gods exist, and homage is subjective. “Postmodernism rejects exclusive dogma or taste” (Hiebert 2008:223). A unifying grand narrative

is no longer accepted. Diversity is the norm of the day. Truth, including religious truth, is relative and perspectival (224).

### **Implications of Dualistic Worldview for Christian Discipleship**

From the above discussion, two important conclusions could be drawn. First, there are numerous converging and diverging worldviews among the world cultures and within each of them. Second, dualism permeates almost all of the different worldviews of the world, in its different historical epochs, albeit at varying degrees. For instance, Charles Kraft cites Burnett when he suggests that the Western secular worldview operates with Cartesian dualism, which espouses the view that mind and matter are distinctly separate. “Matter is the only valid subject of study. We only know what we can learn through the physical senses. Reason, not revelation, is the final judge of what is true” (2008:110).

In all societies, the dualistic worldview that subtly shapes their perception of the major concerns of life has significant spiritual and socioeconomic implications. The dualism that permeated the Western secular worldview gave rise to secular humanism, deism, atheism, Marxism, and hedonism (110). Morality is viewed as relative. Knowledge is mediated only through scientific data arising from the perception of the senses. Religion is relegated to the private life. “The cosmos is ‘matter only’” (110). Education, politics, and services in the public arena are secular. Individuals take precedence over community. The ultimate goal of businesses is profit making. Marriage rites are secular. A man or a woman can marry either of the sexes. War is justified as long as it brings national and personal security. Paul Hiebert captured this spiritual reality as follows:

Compartmentalization in a more subtle form finds wide acceptance in Christian circles. Many Christians affirm Christian truth with regard to the gospel and supernatural matters such as sin, salvation, miracles, and prophecies, but they use scientific theories to explain and respond to immediate ‘natural events’ such as illness, technology, and business decisions. This leads to an other-worldly Christianity and to the secularization of everyday life. It also produces a distinction between evangelism, which is seen as a spiritual matter, and social ministries such as healing and education, which are left to the sciences. (2008:74)

#### True Discipleship Is Holistic

Unlike dualism, true discipleship encompasses all aspects of a Christian’s life. Christ’s disciples are called upon to “present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Rom 12:1). Dallas Willard views Christian discipleship as a life

of apprenticeship to Jesus (1997:273). “The effect of such continuous study under Jesus would naturally be that we learn how to do everything we do ‘in the name of the Lord Jesus’ (Col 3:17); that is, on His behalf or in His place; that is, once again, as if He Himself were doing it” (273). Jesus did his Father’s will whether he was in the temple, at home, or in the carpenter’s shop (John 6:38). His disciples are called to do the same.

A disciple’s public, family, social, economic, political, and spiritual life should be under the Lordship of Christ. Lee Camp nicely captures how being a disciple of Christ means demonstrating his Lordship in all aspects of life.

Jesus of Nazareth, the Gospel accounts relate, always comes asking disciples to follow Him—not merely ‘accept Him,’ not merely ‘believe in Him,’ not merely ‘worship Him’ but to follow Him: one either follows Christ, or one does not. There is no compartmentalization of the faith, no realm, no sphere, no business, no politic in which the lordship of Christ will be excluded. We either make Him Lord of all lords, or we deny Him as Lord of any. (Camp 2008:27)

### Dualistic Worldview and African Christianity

Africa is heavily influenced by the West in many ways and Africa’s Christianity is not exempt from such influence. First, most of the early missionaries to Africa, similar to those who went to Asia, Micronesia, and the South Pacific, were Westerners. Second, Western Christianity was accompanied by colonialism. Third, and most recently, globalization in the form of multi-national corporations, the internet, cross-boundary mass communication medias (such as satellite televisions and short-wave radio), social media, international non-government organizations (NGOs), and development and aid agencies all exert strong Western cultural influences on the young African population, including Christians.

This does not mean that Africa is only on the receiving end in the socio-economic, cultural, and religious global “markets.” The contribution of Africa is ever increasing. Many Western countries tap significant material resources from Africa. The continent is contributing significant labor forces to the West in the form of visa lotteries and economic or violence-induced migrations. Recently, Africa is also contributing missionaries both to the West and other parts of the World.

My major thrust in this article is to show that African Christianity is being increasingly impacted by modern and post-modern dualism. This does not mean that Africans are free from their own dualistic worldviews. But the African dualistic worldview has its own distinctive characteristics

(I will discuss this below). The Western dualistic worldview divides reality into secular and spiritual, temporal and celestial, and sacred and profane. Traditionally, in the lives of Africans, “religion permeates into all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it. A study of these religious systems is, therefore, ultimately a study of the peoples themselves in all the complexities of both traditional and modern life” (Mbiti 2011:1). John Mbiti adds that, for an African traditional religionist,

there is no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African is, there is his religion: he carries it to the fields where he is sowing seeds or harvesting a new crop; he takes it with him to the beer party or to attend a funeral ceremony; and if he is educated, he takes religion with him to the examination room at school or in the university; if he is a politician he takes it to the house of parliament. (2011:3)

However, the effect of globalization is changing the socio-economic and religious life of Africans. The shift starts with the government systems. African governments are under enormous pressure from the West to accept Western values such as Western forms of democracy. Educated Christians mostly live within the religious-secular, sacred-profane dualistic paradigm. They are torn between their traditional roots and their newly forming identity (2, 3). This has led to dual allegiance in many areas of life for African Christians. An African Christian woman can ask her pastor to pray for the success of her business. However, if she fails to bear children, she can also easily consult the religious leader of her tribe.

In short, Mbiti is rightly warning that the way Christianity (and Islam) does evangelism and discipleship among Africans is seriously deficient and increasingly opening doors for development of Western tainted dualistic worldviews. I have been involved in Ethiopian Adventism for the last two decades. Our main approach was “drilling” propositional truths into the minds of our hearers without giving much attention to matters that affect them on a daily basis. After a few days of doctrinal teachings, we anticipate conversion and then baptism. With an implicit assumption that they now have completed their transformational process, we expect them to demonstrate a mature disciplined life. The church is satisfied by seeing the new believers attending weekly worship services. This often leads to low retention rates and superficial discipleship. We barely know where they live, how they earn their living, or who their family members or neighbors are. For a typical Ethiopian, this is so strange. It is viewed as a passionless religion devoid of relationships. No wonder that we baptize and the charismatic churches “disciple” them. Mbiti advises that



the gospel we share with Africans should be able to permeate all aspects of life (2011:3).

### Dualistic Worldview among Ethiopian Christians

Ethiopia is one of the most ancient Christian nations in the world. Christianity became the state religion in the middle of the fourth century A.D. The Bible was translated into *Geez* (Ethiopic) within the same century (Isaac 2012:59). Protestant Christianity is a recent phenomenon in Ethiopia. Scandinavian Evangelical missionaries arrived in the late 19th century; Seventh-day Adventist Danish missionaries came in the early 20th century; and Pentecostal missionaries after 1950. Both the Orthodox and Protestant Christians of Ethiopia have their distinctive dualistic worldviews.

The Orthodox Church made several invaluable contributions to the culture and Christian identity throughout most parts of the country. At the same time, its secular-spiritual dualistic worldview has greatly contributed to poverty and backwardness in the country. For instance, the ubiquity of holy days keeps most rural Orthodox Christians idle for not less than half of the month. Days are assigned for saints and angels. There are at least three holy days designated to honor Mary in a month. Members of the Holy Trinity have their distinct holy days. Farmers are not allowed to farm on any of those days. Any person involved in laborious work on those days is anathematized and evicted from the local fellowship. Such people cannot be buried in the church graveyard. No wonder why many Ethiopian farmers are poor. This excessive idleness stems from the Church's philosophy that views work as secular.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church also contributed to many syncretistic practices. For instance, the lowest priestly order in the hierarchy of the church called *dabtaras* often involve fetish practices and divination (Isaac 2012:95). The *dabtaras* are known for providing protective amulets against the evil eye and evil spirits. "For protection against these and other spirits, everybody carries amulets, which are magical prayers and formulae written by priests on scrolls or in little booklets and carried in leather cases around the neck and arms, and Muslims will be found wearing these Christian amulets as well as others obtained from their own holy men" (Trimingham 1965:28). A relative of my close friend lost her mother recently. I had the chance to visit the suffering old lady from a protracted debilitating illness. As modern medicine failed to provide the much needed cure, her daughter, I was told, reverted to the syncretistic practice of *dabtaras*. Though a staunch Orthodox Christian, she received some special "medicine" from Gojjam, a distant province. The so called "medicine" is alleged to be a piece of hyena's skin. She burned the "medicine" so that

the smoke would drive out the alleged evil spirits, or reverse the harmful impact of the evil eye. The *dabtaras* also provide amulets that “attract” wealth and success.

Asceticism in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church is an outgrowth of Greek dualism the church adopted long ago. Rich Hansen holds that the Orthodox Church elevates “asceticism as the highest form of spirituality and [esteems] monks and priests as being above ordinary believers” (2015:138). Many of their devout followers “flee the world” and lead monastic lives, with monasteries situated all over the central and northern part of the country. Herm Zandman rightly argues that asceticism is contrary to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, for Christians are called to live in the world, without being of the world, and serve as light and salt of the word (Matt 5:13-14; John 17:15) (2012:3). He also recognizes that the monasteries were used by God providentially to copy the Scriptures and preserve the threatened Christian culture from the Greco-Roman world (4).

Such syncretistic practices that arise from dualistic worldviews are not unique to the Ethiopian Orthodox Christians. Protestant Christians, including Seventh-day Adventists, are victims of the same beliefs that are often manifested in dual allegiance. Hansen (2015:138-141) discusses the Ethiopian Evangelical dualistic worldview, its sources, and impacts with considerable depth. Hansen asserts that “a majority of Ethiopian Evangelicals have a dualistic worldview” (138). He noticed this when he served as a professor of systematic theology at the Evangelical Graduate School of Theology in Addis Ababa. His students came from all over the country. He lists three sources of a dualistic worldview among the Ethiopian Evangelicals (and I believe the same sources have shaped Adventist values) as: the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the theology they received from Protestant missionaries, and the Communist Derg regime (138).

Hansen discusses the dualistic worldview employing four worldview themes. The first one is “attitude towards creation and material reality.” He observed that his Ethiopian Evangelical students see their hope only in a future non-materialistic utopia. They disdain the materialistic world as an object of destruction (138). The result causes them to ignore the physical environment, including personal hygienic care. Second is an “attitude towards work.” The study showed that secular work is seen as serving a worldly master, the Pharaoh. Only full-time ministry is viewed as pleasing to God. The third worldview theme Hansen studied is the “attitude towards society.” Many Ethiopian Evangelicals (and other Protestants, including Adventists) have very limited involvement in public and societal affairs, particularly politics. Orthodox Christians and Muslims are very active in politics, and compete for political and public offices. But Protestants avoid such responsibilities as much as possible. They regard them as

this-worldly affairs that do not concern them. “Attitude towards spirituality” is the fourth worldview theme Hansen studied. He observed dangerous dualism in this area among his Ethiopian students. Reason and faith are divorced. Christians are encouraged to accept teachings or arguments without questioning or reasoning. It is viewed as “having faith.”

Dual allegiance, which “is the condition of those who pledge allegiance to Christ but retain their previous allegiance to traditional power sources mediated by traditional religious practitioners such as shamans, medicine men/women, diviners, fortune-tellers, and priests” (Kraft 1996:201) is one big way through which a dualistic worldview is manifested. For instance, I was amazed by the level of suspicion existing among Adventists residing around my birthplace with regards to the possibility of being attacked by people with an evil eye. They call them *buda*. This suspicion is not only between Adventists and followers of other faith traditions but also among fellow Adventist believers. They believe that one can be an Adventist and at the same time a *buda* who can hurt people with an evil eye. I was told of an Adventist believer (a person I know) who was suspected by the whole village community as being responsible for the death of a man. The man actually died by an attack from a bull. But the community (Pentecostals, Evangelicals, Orthodox, and Adventists) believed that the Adventist lady was the culprit. I have heard several times from many Adventists and non-Adventists that they believe that some people accumulate wealth through sorcery or secretly keeping a python.

There is a standing dilemma and tension among the Oromo Christians in Ethiopia at this time. The dilemma is whether it is right or wrong for a Christian Oromo to participate in the grand annual Oromo festival, the *Irrecha*. The *Irrecha* is an annual festival of the *Waqeffana* religion, an ancient Oromo traditional religion considered as an Oromo thanksgiving day. However, the long history of political suppression of the Oromos, the largest ethnic group in East Africa, led to viewing *Irrecha* as the emblem of the Oromo cultural and political freedom. Consequently, there is a strong resurgence of the *Irrecha* celebration of late. Over a million Oromos—both Christian and non-Christian—pour into Bishoftu Town during the first week of October. The celebration espouses both religious and political intonations. Can Christians participate in a celebration officiated religiously by the priests of the *Waqeffana* religion? Some think it is outright idolatry, while others opt to contextualize it. The debate continues.

In general, these dualistic worldviews affected our disciple-making process. Ermias Mamo, an Ethiopian Evangelical scholar observes that “in many churches [in Ethiopia] discipleship is a program for new converts that is classroom-based and cognitively focused” (2017:45). This is more so in the Adventist Church as our discipleship is more of a cognitive training

focusing on propositional truths (Bauer 2016:186). We assume that a person who knows the doctrines has become a mature disciple. But the true sign of discipleship is a transformed life. With the present approach, “one can easily get away with putting on a mask during the instruction hours and continuing to live a double life” (186).

### Impact of a Dualistic Worldview on Public Life

In the Old Testament, God was the Monarch and the leaders of his people and they were his servants. As nicely stated by Ellen White (2010:9), “for the Lord’s portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance” (Deut 32:9). Not only the nation of Israel, whom White calls “the Vineyard of the Lord” (9-11), but also other nations belonged to Him. “‘For from the rising of the sun, even to its going down, My name shall be great among the Gentiles; in every place incense shall be offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name shall be great among the nations,’ says the Lord of hosts” (Mal 1:11).

Kings were supposed to act as prophets and spiritual mentors of their people. They were anointed and appointed by God. Even among the other nations, writers of the Bible believed that God appoints or deposes kings. Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, was God’s servant (Jer 25:9). Cyrus the Persian king was “God’s anointed” (Isa 45:1). God’s people, therefore, were to be “subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (Rom 13:1). Christians were to pray for the governing authorities (1 Tim 2:1-2).

This does not mean that God’s people would accept the vices of ungodly rulers. The Bible recorded many instances where God’s people had to stand against injustice, immorality, and idolatry. Samuel confronted Saul. “But Samuel said to Saul, ‘I will not return with you, for you have rejected the Word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel’” (1 Sam 15:26). Nathan rebuked David for his brutal murder of an innocent man. “You are the man!” said Nathan to King David referring to the unjust man in his parable who deserved God’s judgment (2 Sam 12:7). Mordecai refused to pay homage to Haman (Esth 3:2). The three Hebrew boys refused to worship Nebuchadnezzar’s image of gold, thereby defying the king’s order (Dan 3:8-30). In the New Testament, John the Baptist rebuked King Herod for taking his brother’s wife (Matt 14:1-12).

The dualistic worldview of our era separated public life from private life. States became secular. Many Christians, particularly Protestants came to consider politics as a matter out of their circle of concern. It is widely considered unchristian to be a politician. In my country, I never saw

religious leaders expressing disapproval of the governments' killing of innocent people or corruption by public offices (I share this blame for I was a church leader). The only exception is the recent personal, not official church statement, by Abuna Mathias, the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. He condemned, on social media through a smuggled recorded speech, the shocking rapes and killings perpetuated against the people in the northern part of Ethiopia. The Inter-religious Council of Ethiopia, of which my church is a founding member, never had the courage to do so. To my knowledge, the Council neither denounced the horrible killings and shameful rapes that embody the current Ethiopian civil war, nor called for cessation of hostilities.

I envied the Justice and Peace Commission of the Church of the Nyayo Province of Kenya that issued a pastoral letter to President Moi's government in 1992: "Fear was the order of the day and before very long that fear became a new culture in the national life—the *culture of fear*. Other institutions which were critical of the government were also intimidated and some succumbed to silence. In the final analysis it appeared as if only the Church and the Law Society had the courage to speak on behalf of the people" (Benson 1995:177, emphasis in the original).

Lack of such courage based on a dualistic worldview has significantly impacted Christian discipleship. The dualism is palpable among Ethiopian Adventists. I remember how I was shocked on my first international trip in 2002 to Nairobi, Kenya, when I saw Adventist pastors reading newspapers. I was a church employee but thought that reading newspapers was political. Hansen notes the negative implications of the sacred/secular dualism he observed in his Ethiopian study. "Rather than viewing government, politics, music, the arts, or science as God-given and therefore good structures of life that can, however, be misused, the dualistic worldview sees them as inherently evil" (2015:139).

Though I, following my church's stance, do not encourage direct political involvement of the church and its ministers, I think the entire Christian community should take up their responsibility of demonstrating moral standard among their communities based on biblical principles.

### Christian Education and Dualistic Worldviews

Christian education can be and should be a bone of contention in the cosmic conflict. It is the process that both God and Satan use effectively. Ellen White succinctly puts why this is so:

True education means more than the perusal of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has

to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come. (1903:8)

Note that this quotation suggests that education is critical for Christian discipleship. First, it is a means of preparation for eternal life. Second, it deals with the whole person throughout their entire life. Third, it prepares people for service to their fellow humans and to God. But few areas of societal life are as impacted by a dualistic worldview as education is. Most missionaries established schools both as a means of evangelism and educating people for society. I became an Adventist in a mission school. At present, it is almost illegal to teach religion in the church schools in my country. Such a restriction is based on the dualistic worldview that the government follows. Curricular theories are mostly secular and operate within the “scientism” framework—the belief that the scientific method is the only method of discovering truth, “a claim that is patently false” (House and Jowers 2010:8). Evolutionary theory, not theistic philosophy, undergirds almost all the educational curricula. The senses and reason, not the Word of God, have become the epistemological authorities. Cognitive academic excellence is the focus at the neglect of holistic training.

How does this affect discipleship? “In the highest sense, the work of education and the work of redemption are one, for in education, as in redemption, ‘other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ’” (White 1903:30). Discipleship is about education and mentoring. Jesus commanded his disciples to “teach” the new believers “to observe all things that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:20). How can a young, tender mind that is continuously indoctrinated by atheistic philosophy become a committed follower of Christ? It is a very difficult task.

### Dualistic Worldview and a Christian Work Ethic

In the contemporary society, work is treated as “secular.” Priests, pastors, and evangelists are supposed to be full-time “spiritual technocrats,” while the church members are engaged in “secular” work. “Very few people instinctively think of business as morally good in itself” (Grudem 2003:11). Such a view is contrary to the holistic biblical worldview. Paul was preaching the gospel while supporting himself as a tentmaker (Acts 18:1-3; 20:33-35). He further encouraged church members to be hard workers (2 Thess 3:8-13). The present-day dualistic worldview and attitudes towards work raise many questions: Can good Christians be business

people? If so, in what kind of businesses can they become involved? What should be the ultimate goal of a Christian business person? Can pastors or their families own businesses? How is work related to worship?

In Ethiopia, dualism is evident in the way Christians dichotomize work as “spiritual” and “secular.” The Ethiopian Orthodox Church is known for its mendicant to-be-priest young disciples. I think that has contributed to the widespread “begging business” in the country. Among many Christians, poverty is viewed as a virtue. The rich are considered as suspects of sorcery in some parts of the country. Rich Hansen notes that “for [the] majority of [Ethiopian] Evangelicals, ‘full-time Christian work is often defined solely as working within church occupations’ (2015:138). His students thought that working outside the church was like working for “Pharaoh.” I had a more or less similar view until recently. My real-life encounter illustrates this well. A pastor friend once came to my office. At the time I was serving as one of the leaders of the Adventist Church in Ethiopia. He told me that he was retiring from full-time church employment to start a supporting ministry along with a family business. I challenged him that it was wrong to think of a family business and leaving full-time “sacred” work of the church. He laughed at me and challenged me. Today, he is engaged in a very rewarding work while serving God much better than when he was a full-time church worker.

In such a dichotomous view, public and professional services are not considered as serving God. This denies Christians the golden opportunity of witnessing to Christ in their daily life at their place of work. More importantly, this led to a double life among Christians. It is widely assumed that Christian public servants are as much involved in corruption as non-Christians. Moreover, many Christians are more and more involved in ethically questionable businesses. For instance, in East Africa, growing and trading Khat has become a big challenge among Seventh-day Adventists and other Christians. Khat is an addictive plant that has deleterious socioeconomic and health consequences. Its tender leaves are chewed by millions of people in Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti, Yemen, and Somalia to stimulate the mind. Governments consider khat businesses as one of the major sources of livelihood for their citizens and generators of tax revenue and foreign currency. Christian involvement in this business was unthinkable a few years back, yet churches have been reluctant to make an official statement against khat growing, trading, and chewing for the governments see such a move as national economic sabotage.

## Dualistic Worldview, Evangelism, and Social Responsibility

Christ's primary mission here on earth was to "seek and save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). But he also declared that he ushered-in the kingdom of God by preaching the gospel to the poor, healing the broken-hearted, proclaiming liberty to the captives, recovering sight to the blind, and setting at liberty the oppressed (Luke 4:18). He asserted that he came so that "they may have life and that they may have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). By all standards, Christ's mission was holistic. The Bible's emphasis on supporting the poor and upholding justice is very instructive in this respect (Ps 82:3-4; Mic 6:8). It says, "Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy" (Prov 31:8-9).

Unfortunately, the church of God often succumbs to the dualistic worldview and focus on "evangelism" at the expense of its social responsibilities. This is rooted in the medieval church's emphasis on the ontology of God rather than on his acts in history (Bosch 2004:194). Great emphasis is put on delivering propositional truths and inviting people to become members of the local church fellowship. Numerical growth is the measure of success (Doss 2018:272). It is easy to forget that "evangelism . . . is not the whole of the Christian mission. It is only a part of the mission" (Moffett 2009:598).

The church's social responsibilities are completely forgotten at worst or partially attended to at best. Hansen notes that the Ethiopian Evangelical churches mostly confine their services to "preaching, healing, and evangelism," relegating other social responsibilities—the "secular" activities—to the government or the NGOs (2015:139). Similarly, the Seventh-day Adventist churches in Africa mostly relegate community services and relief activities to the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), which generates almost all of its funds from international secular donors, and provides services by salaried professionals. The recent trend of pre-evangelistic campaigns using community services falls short of what Ellen White calls "disinterested benevolence" (1948:516).

Adventists barely speak up against injustices perpetuated in the society by individuals, groups, or governments in the name of avoiding political involvement. The Seventh-day Adventist Church is especially susceptible to this. Gender equality, women's empowerment, child labor, human trafficking, environmental degradation, and oppressive government policies are often relegated to activist groups or international institutions such as the UN Human Rights Commission. Major publications on mission by the church's scholars barely touch on social responsibilities. An exception to this is Rudi Maier's comprehensive book, *Church and Society*:



*Missiological Challenges for the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (2015). Without a doubt, such indifference damages the image of God when the church claims to present a total picture of Christ to the world. Christianity loses its “light and salt” influence, and its evangelistic edge is severely blunted.

### Dualistic Worldview and Christian Ethics

Christian ethics is touched upon in the above discussions. I will only add a few details here. George Knight is correct when he writes that “the absolute basis of Christian ethics is God” (2016:38). Guided by this underlying assumption, Christians are expected to demonstrate love and justice. This includes, but is not limited to, admonishing, correcting, and resisting immorality in all of its forms. In other words, Christians have a huge responsibility of demonstrating bible-based moral standards in their society.

A dualistic worldview has significantly affected Christian ethics. The church is seriously challenged not only for its silence with what happens in the world, but also for the serious moral deficiencies manifested in its systems. Corruption, nepotism, racism, tribalism, sexual and other gender-based violence, child abuse, women’s rights abuses, substance abuse, disguised slavery, and many other immoral activities are seen among the members of contemporary churches. Michelet William observes that the Adventist Church is “criticized for keeping silent in the face of social injustices in many contexts in the past, especially under totalitarian regimes such as Nazi Germany, communist Russia, the apartheid regime in South Africa, and the genocide in Rwanda” (2017:1). I am afraid much has not changed since. In most cases, Adventists still remain silent in the face of blatant moral violations.

Like in many parts of the world, corruption in its many forms has become a huge challenge for Christians in Africa, including Seventh-day Adventists. Mamo laments that corruption and embezzlement of public funds is equally or even more prevalent in a mostly Protestant zone in the Southern region of Ethiopia where 75 percent of the public officials are Evangelical Christians (2017:23-24).

Tribalism is another area where double standards are widely manifested among Christians in Africa. In the West similar trends are manifested in the form of racism. Christians are not ignorant of the biblical truth that all humans are created in the image of God and are objects of Christ’s love. Nonetheless, tribalism runs through the veins of many African Christians. For instance, political elections and church elections have a strong tribal tenor on the continent. Election-related issues that recently took the Adventist Churches in Kenya and Burundi to court have strong tribal orientations, if not directly rooted in it. The direct and active involvement of

an Adventist church leader in the Rwandan genocide was a huge public shame to the Adventist Church and the cause of Christ. Adventists have killed fellow Adventists in tribal clashes in Kenya and Rwanda simply because they were from the wrong tribes (Shumba 2009:81). “Tribal loyalty often seems to override spiritual identity” (80). Among John Shumba’s interviewees, “one pastor indicated how uncomfortable he felt working in a location away from his home region. By virtue of belonging to another ethnic group, he was viewed as a foreigner” (74). Shumba further notes that clan and ethnic clashes are common among the church leadership in the region, affecting leadership selection, discipleship, and the sites for administrative offices (74, 75, 79, 80). I have also witnessed this several times in the church in Ethiopia.

No doubt such dualistic worldviews observed in Christianity greatly affect Adventist mission to the major world religions such as Islam. Muslims prioritize their commitment to Allah as more important than to their tribes, to their work, families, or to their governments. Their religious identity is conspicuous whether they are at home or at work. They keep their prayer times regardless of where they find themselves. Though Islam is not free from dualism, reaching them with the Good News about Jesus will require genuine spirituality that is evident in all aspects of life.

### **Toward a Holistic Biblical Worldview**

In trying to describe and thus solve the apparent tension brought about by dualistic worldviews in Christianity, Hiebert proposes employing both synchronic<sup>2</sup> and diachronic<sup>3</sup> analytical approaches. In this holistic approach, he uses the analogy of blueprints among others. “As Christians we hold that this master blueprint is a biblical worldview that helps us see the big picture of reality presented in Scripture and in nature” (2008:75). This blueprint, the biblical worldview, lays the theistic philosophical foundations upon which all our cognitive, affective, and evaluative perceptions and actions are built. It provides a framework through which Christians view both the natural and spiritual realities as a composite whole. From the diachronic analysis perspective, the biblical worldview tells the Bible’s grand narrative that begins and ends with God. “The blueprint begins with God of the Bible and includes the reality of an orderly creation, humans shaped in the image of God, the fall, redemption through the death and resurrection of Christ, and eternal life in Him. The fullest expression of this worldview is found in the New Testament and in the teachings of Jesus” (75).

## Worldview Transformation

A dualistic worldview often arises from failure to address issues at the worldview level. People's allegiance is to what is at the core of their worldview. They remain loyal to their priorities in life. They act to answer the life questions that arise from worldview priorities. Such primary commitments could be "to another god, to family, culture, self, the religious system itself, or to any of thousands of other possible allegiances" (Kraft 1996:200). Such irregularities in commitment are prevalent in all cultures.

In Christian discipleship, overcoming all the consequences of a dualistic worldview discussed in this paper (and the many other consequences not discussed here) cannot happen without transforming the existing worldview. The goal is to help each person be transformed through the power of the Holy Spirit, and to help them embrace a biblically-shaped worldview. Bruce Bauer rightly observes that this is a very long process (2016:188). Believers from other world religions such as Islam go through a very similar process.

The "fast-food approach to evangelism," to borrow Bauer's words, cannot produce such results. Rather, they produce "members who often look like Adventists on the outside, but in times of crises or when they are away from the church, these members revert to their old ways of living because they have not spent enough time allowing God's Word to transform and re-shape their worldview" (188). The good news is that worldviews can be transformed. The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that it has a holistic approach to life. It is by recognizing the need to live beyond a dualistic worldview that the church added its latest fundamental belief: Growing in Christ. As we grow in Christ, "His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual exercise" (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe* 2005:149, 150).

### Steps of Worldview Transformation

The bottom-line question is, How do worldviews change? I believe that understanding the biblical model of discipleship and using appropriate social science tools such as anthropology are key steps. In a biblical model of discipleship, life starts with death—death to self as Jesus indicated in John 12:24 (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe* 2005:153). But such a death to self cannot be achieved with human power. It is the outworking of the Holy Spirit (154). Hansen has a similar conviction (2015:140).

Even those who think that they have surrendered their lives to Christ a long time ago but who are guided by a dualistic worldview need to surrender their lives afresh to the power of the Spirit (Rom 12:2). But they

need to be made aware of their dualistic worldview for worldviews are largely subtle and often worldview values are not even realized. Hiebert suggested three steps (plus one) to transform worldviews (1997:85) and Kraft suggests an alternative but closely related process of worldview transformation (1996:347-353). First, there should be a careful study of the cultural issues under consideration. Hiebert (2008:319) terms the process “‘surfacing’ the worldview to conscious awareness.” Knowledge of cultural anthropology is a huge help here. For instance, a Christian anthropologist, Charles Kraft (1997:63-65) succinctly summarizes the six worldview universals or broad themes that need to be considered in worldview studies. Hiebert studies worldview under three broad themes: cognitive, affective, and evaluative themes (2008:26). The first step does not solve dualistic worldview problems. It only audits the major worldview themes to show their significance.

Second, the Christian community must carefully search the Bible concerning the identified worldview themes (Hiebert 1997:85). Bauer calls this step “a new explanation of reality” (2016:189). The Word of God serves as the sieve that separates the “chaff” from the “wheat.” The third step is correcting the unbiblical (dualistic) worldview values by applying the learned biblical principles to the life of the believers. In addition to the three steps, Hiebert added a fourth step in his later writing: creating living rituals (2008:322-324). The church investigates and applies all the four steps as a hermeneutical community (Hiebert 1997:85). It is critically important to note that this is not a “crash course” event. It should be an ongoing process. Neither do the three steps take place in a clear chronological progression. The process is a going back and forth exercise as issues come up. It should be the culture of the community of believers to keep the process going.

Kraft’s three encounters (truth encounter, power encounter, and allegiance encounter) need to be given serious attention in this process (2009:445-450). Knowledge of the truth alone will not solve a person’s domestic or economic problems. A truth encounter alone cannot protect the believers from demonic oppression. Through prayer and service to others, believers should see the power of God at work. Healings, dreams, visions, exorcism, etc., are a few examples of power encounters. Moreover, in addition to the truth and power encounters, members should be helped to come to the level of willfully committing to Christ (allegiance encounter). The end product will be a committed Christian with a biblically-shaped worldview. Such disciples have not completed their Christian growth. However, as Kraft puts it, they have become mission-minded mature disciples who have a “growing relationship to God and His people” (449). Social science tools such as communication skills (Kraft 1996:250-253),

anthropological knowledge (McQuilkin 1996:169-172; Hiebert 2008; Kraft 1996), and understanding human psychology enhance the whole process of worldview transformation. Most importantly, the need for prayer for the power and guidance of the Holy Spirit through the entire process can never be over emphasized.

## Conclusion

This study revealed that dualistic worldviews are not only ancient but also contemporary. They have not only affected Christian discipleship during medieval times but are still seriously impacting our postmodern world. Because of dualistic worldviews, many Christians dichotomize work as secular and not spiritual. They live double lives, wearing different faces at home, at church, and in the public arena. Racism, tribalism, corruption, and many other immoral behaviors are seen among Christians. Some attend church on Sabbath but revert to visiting witch doctors, shamans, or sorcerers in times of crises. Young people study secular curricula that has a greater hold on them than the biblical worldview. Then shallow discipleship allows for dualistic worldviews to persist in the church.

Such dualistic worldviews are robbing many Christians of the opportunity of witnessing for Christ in “the market place.” However, worldviews can and must be transformed. Based on Paul Hiebert’s process of worldview transformation (1997:85; 2008:322-324), the four continuous and recurrent steps exercised by a local church as a hermeneutic community could help develop biblically-shaped worldviews among its members. These steps include studying the culture, studying the Bible with attention to the cultural issues in question, applying the learned biblical principles, and developing living rituals to sustain the transformed worldview.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Emile Durkheim’s “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life” (1995) who writes that “whether simple or complex, all known religious beliefs display a common feature: they presuppose a classification of the real or ideal things that men conceive of into two classes—two opposite genera—that are widely designated by two distinct terms, which the words *profane* and *sacred* translate fairly well” (Durkheim 1995:34)

<sup>2</sup> Synchronic Analysis, according to Hiebert, views reality “through a slice of time, examining the parts and how these relate to one another” (2008:71). It tries to study and solve life problems in a specialized fashion. For instance, studying nature by compartmentalizing into various disci-

plines such as biology, chemistry, geography, sociology, anthropology, history, etc. The major limitation of the synchronic approach is focusing on the details at the expense of the general and overlooking the ever-changing nature of humanity and its culture.

<sup>3</sup> Diachronic Analysis: views an individual, a community, and a nation from a comprehensive human history in a given period of time. It recognizes the uniqueness and idiosyncrasies of individuals and groups and tells their specific stories. However, it is lacking in depth and specialized analysis that the synchronic approach does (Hiebert 2008:71-72).

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JEFF SCOGGINS

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## Viewpoint

# Systematizing Mission: Focusing on Counting Down Rather Than Counting Up

### Recognizing Mission

Adventist pioneers, before they were called “Seventh-day Adventists,” faced a crisis of faith and mission. Until October 22, 1844, their faith existed at an all-time high, and so did their mission. Although they were unorganized, they were not disorganized. With their eyes clearly focused on the impending Second Coming, they looked at their world, saw what needed to be done, and did it, doing their best to reach everyone with their message.

When their vision crashed down around them, shattered by the uneventful passing of October 22, many of these Adventists lost everything, including their faith. The few that refused to give up their faith still felt lost because their focus and mission had evaporated overnight, literally. *Now what?* was their distraught question. That question pressed them back to their Bibles where they eventually learned to understand Revelation 10 in a new light.

Their lives had been dedicated to understanding and teaching the end of Daniel’s 2,300-day prophecy. But prior to October 22, 1844, how much they understood about the connection between Daniel’s time prophecy and Revelation 10 is for church historians to resolve. What seems clear, though, is that after their disappointment these Adventists studied Revelation 10 with new eyes. In it they may well have come to understand that the Apostle John, by eating the scroll that was sweet in his mouth then bitter in his stomach, had, in a way, acted out in miniature the experience they had just passed through. Like John, they had tasted the sweetness of the message in their mouths, which finally ended with profound bitterness

when Jesus failed to return. If, in fact, they were correct about what they were seeing in John's experience of eating the little scroll, that must mean that God had foreseen what had happened to them. That in itself must have been extremely comforting. And if God had foreseen their situation, he must have given them more than just comfort. He must still have a plan.

It was then that Revelation 10:11 and 11:1–2 became a passage of great interest to them. Considering that the Seventh-day Adventist Church grew out of the disappointed Adventist movement, it seems that these early Adventists recognized in the words, "You must prophesy again," that God was speaking directly to them. God was essentially saying, "You were deeply disappointed. I saw it. I knew it was coming. Do not give up. I am still planning to return soon, and I still have work for you to do." What were they supposed to preach now? Revelation 11:1-2 directed them to a closer study of the sanctuary, where they eventually learned where they had gone wrong. At the same time, they discovered the message they were commanded to preach to the world: the gospel of Jesus Christ in its end-time "three angels" context, as revealed in the sanctuary.

In short, the Seventh-day Adventist pioneers *recognized* their mission. And they recognized that this was not a mission given to all of Christianity, but rather it was a personalized mission given by God specifically to this group that had unsealed Daniel's time prophecy. This recognition of their mission galvanized these early Adventists to renewed fervor, expectation, and effort.

### Organizing for Mission

Fueled by their new understanding, the movement grew slowly and then more rapidly until it became obvious, despite their resistance to the concept, that organization was necessary. If they continued to press forward unorganized, the mission would become increasingly disorganized. To continue effectively they needed to *organize* for mission.

When they finally incorporated and chose a name, the organization operated loosely, relatively speaking. However, over time and by necessity, the organization tightened, evolved, and strengthened.

### Institutionalizing Mission

This organizational evolution was good and essential, but bore with it unintended consequences. Organization requires that money be spent on the institution. For instance, leaders recognized the need to pay pastors. Members recognized the need to provide printed resources, which

required printing equipment and buildings and institutions of their own. The organization needed churches, schools, hospitals, offices, and so on.

As a movement before organization, time and money had been an individual issue. Committed church members chose to give and spend their personal time and money in missional ways, as is evident in the many stories of sacrifice from those pioneer days. Indeed, the only way that the mission went forward was if individuals contributed this way.

But when the church organized, practically overnight money and time became an institutional issue. The individual burden for the success of the mission was quickly handed over to the organization. In other words, mission quickly became *institutionalized*. Why? Because it is natural. No one suddenly decides that mission is finished and that the organization should now become an end in itself. It is just that when people start working together and the group grows, the natural outcome of that growth is institutionalization. And because an organization has a corporate conscience rather than an individual conscience, the inevitable result of transferring responsibility from an individual to an organization is that the organization is prone to first liberally meet its own needs before willing the leftover scraps to mission. Look at any local church budget for an illustration of this reality.

### Departmentalizing Mission

Fortunately, the Seventh-day Adventist Church recognized this pitfall of growing institutionalization. Intent on avoiding the de-missionalization of the institutional church, in 1990 the Office of Global Mission was formed. Wisely, church leaders understood that the church's mission should not be departmentalized; therefore, they chose not to make Global Mission "just another department." Global Mission was to be an organizing force within the Adventist Church to ensure that the church *as a whole* remained mission-focused.

The idea was spot on, philosophically speaking. Practically speaking, however, it has been another story. Institutionalization, like gravity, never ceases to drag down mission. And it is easy to fall into thinking that mission is covered because someone else has been tasked with doing it. And thus a church, for all practical purposes, ends up *departmentalizing* mission, making it easy for individual members and even church departments to believe that they are contributing to the mission more than they actually are.

Both individuals and church departments may protest that they *are* actually focused on mission more than they are focused on the institution because no one is likely to intentionally defend institutionalization as a

priority over mission. At least not in so many words. But what is said is belied by what is done. For instance, institutional celebrations reveal the way mission is unconsciously viewed. When celebrations revolve more around new buildings and new institutions and baptizing large numbers from already-reached people groups, and few celebrations mark the first baptism from an entirely unreached people group, then institutionalization is being prioritized over mission.

Unfortunately, this situation is often unrecognized because of how God's mission in the world is unconsciously understood. When God's mission is understood as a mandate to build and grow the church, then institutionalization is an ally of mission because counting up numbers of members, buildings, resources, and assets is a reflection of missional success. But when God's mission is understood as a mandate to reach the unreached as quickly as possible, then institutionalization is actually an enemy of mission because of the human tendency to build and maintain the institution at the expense of reaching the remaining unreached people groups.

Another way to illustrate the difference between operating in an institutional mindset versus a missional mindset is to note whether daily operations revolve around a to-do list versus a map. If daily working life operates on the basis of a regularized job description in list form, (e.g., run services at 9:30 AM on Saturdays, marry and bury, run public meetings once per year, visit shut-ins, submit statistical reports, etc.), then that part of the church is no longer mission focused. It is institutionally focused because a standardized list works well for maintaining an institution. It does not work well for mission because what is required to reach the remaining unreached people groups around the world is too dynamic and unconventional to be standardized. If regularized methods worked for those groups, they would be reached by now.

On the other hand, if daily work life operates on the basis of a map and strategic priorities, then something missional is happening. Of course, church services will still occur, people will still be married and buried, public meetings may still happen once per year, but the difference is that the church is intentionally looking at who lives within its sphere of influence and is creating a strategy for reaching them.

Militarily, the armed forces in wartime are mission focused. All efforts and money are concentrated on winning the war. Maps play a major role for commanders. Scouts providing minute-by-minute critical updates play a major role on the local battlefield. In that situation, no one is comfortably doing the same thing day after day. At every level the burning question is not, "What's on my to-do list?" The burning question is, "What to do to capture this next strategic priority?" Thought patterns are strategic and dynamic, not static or comfortable.

## Systematizing Mission

The drift from mission focus toward institutional focus is disheartening, as it should be; but it is also a fact of life based on other facts of life. It is a fact that mission is accomplished better with organization. It is also a fact that organizational success tends toward institutionalization. It is also a fact that it is easier, on an individual and departmental level, to make the institution responsible for the mission. The question, in light of these facts, is how does a growing institution preserve mission as its primary focus?

One of the aspects of war that keeps the military mission-focused is a sense of urgency. Obviously Seventh-day Adventists, with our belief in the soon coming of Jesus, should have an even greater sense of urgency. But do we strongly feel the urgency that energized the early pioneers? Many of us are relatively comfortable living here on earth. If somehow we could be ejected from our complacency and into urgency, that would go far in restoring our mission focus. In the meantime, we must deal with our Laodicean reality. Therefore, *systemizing* mission may be the next best option. Since an organization is unavoidably drawn toward institutionalization, it can, at least to some degree, harness the power of that pull. And that is done by systematizing strategic thinking.

Considering the Adventist Church's underlying great controversy worldview, military language is apt. What if every institution was seen as a strategic command center? What if communications between command centers and commanders revolved around strategic opportunities? What if meetings wrestled with what risks to take and resources to apply for capturing the next strategic stronghold? What if hallway conversations were dominated by brainstorming the next strategic move? What if every boardroom and personal office, and home—not just of those tasked with “mission” but every department director, every teacher, every pastor, every medical professional, indeed, every church member—contained maps and lists of people groups that highlighted the next group on which to focus? What if a single difficult but strategic baptism was celebrated to a much greater degree than thousands of “easy” baptisms?

In order for such things to happen, a large institution must bend its efforts toward providing strategic information to its leaders. But generally speaking, the church does not even possess such information in any way that is freely accessible. Therefore, planning for informed strategic initiatives is nearly impossible for church leaders. The church could be so much more effective in a strategic sense if it had a clearer picture of where it is and where it is going.

What might systematizing strategic thinking look like? First and foremost, systematizing mission begins with studying territories and people

groups to identify which groups are being missed and why. It means:

1. Studying and creating a strategy for breaking into each unreached group and effectively discipling them, even if it requires working in unconventional ways.
2. Evaluating whether current strategies are working and altering them if not, as well as evaluating current programs and institutions for their strategic significance and effectiveness.
3. Making strategic discussions the primary focus of executive committees, constituency meetings, and board meetings.
4. Shifting resources, financial and otherwise, toward these strategies.
5. Counting down the number of strongholds that are yet to be conquered for Christ and celebrating them as significant steps toward completing the mission.

All this has not been lost on Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders. Positive steps in this direction can be seen in the I Will Go strategic plan, Global Mission's Mission Priority System, and changes that are being made to policies governing when and where international missionaries are sent.

### Prioritizing Mission

An important part of systematizing mission must include *prioritizing* mission—not prioritizing mission in a generic and general way, but actually ranking specific strategic goals for reaching specific groups of people. For example, say that a church leader identifies people groups X, Y, and Z as three groups that live in a given territory. Group X has no Adventist members among them or even nearby, also no Adventist institutions are operating nearby, and no Adventist materials are available in their language. Group Y has four weak Adventist members and has a moderately successful dental clinic serving the group and has the Bible in its own language. Group Z has significant Adventist activity, evangelism is going well, churches dot the landscape, but there are still a large number of people who have not been baptized.

The institutional model of mission will prioritize Group Z. The organization would focus its efforts, its celebrations, its resources, and its media coverage on the “wonderful,” “exciting,” “miraculous” numbers coming out of Group Z.

The mission priority model, on the other hand, will prioritize Group Y. Leaders might mention in passing the good work happening among Group Z, but it is made clear that since work is going well, it is the responsibility of Group Z to continue that work among its own people. That group will receive fewer resources because most resources will be

reallocated to the front lines of the effort for Group Y. Committee members would see maps, demographics, and strategic ideas for a high-stakes push into Group Y. Internal media would share the same message, generating enthusiasm, support, and prayer for the effort to reach this difficult and unreached group. Church member focus would be directed less to past successes and more to future challenges, risks, and needs.

Meanwhile, church leaders will be studying Group X, trying to figure out how to establish work in that group somehow in the near future.

## Conclusion

Through no fault of any specific person or group of people, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is being unavoidably pulled toward institutionalization, and it always will be. While this gravitational pull toward institutionalization cannot be avoided, it can be and is being resisted. However, the larger an organization grows, the stronger becomes the pull and the more difficult it becomes to resist. Therefore, Seventh-day Adventist leaders must routinely make conscious shifts away from institutional thinking and toward strategic missional thinking. They must consciously exchange to-do lists for maps and people group lists. When they go to bed, the last thing on their minds should not be finances, maintenance, or even theological questions, but rather about how to overcome the current obstacles blocking movement into the next strategic people group. After all, finances, crises, and even theological questions will fall into line when mission is the vanguard of the organization.

Most of all, leaders at every level of the organization must recognize that God's mission is not primarily to build and grow the church. Rather, God's primary mission is to reach the unreached with the gospel (Matt 24:14). Of course, accomplishing God's mission results in church growth (Acts 2:41), which makes differentiating between the two concepts seem unnecessary. But differentiation is necessary because church growth can still happen even while large unreached groups are, for a variety of reasons, being missed. And so long as certain groups continue to be missed, God's mission will not be completed.

Therefore, from an organizational perspective, the best metrics of missional direction are not numbers that count up, like numbers of churches, schools, hospitals, or even baptisms and members. Those numbers have their place, but not necessarily as indicators that the church is making progress toward God's end-goal of taking the gospel to the uttermost ends of the earth. Instead, the best metric that reveals whether the church is making progress toward God's end-goal is the countdown of people groups who remain entirely unreached by the gospel.

This does not mean that work should stop among reached people groups in order to concentrate exclusively on unreached groups. It only means that the *metrics* the organizational church uses to gauge mission success must focus less on impressive growth statistics from reached groups and focus more on reducing the number of groups who remain entirely unreached. As that number counts down, the end of time counts down with it.



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MICHAEL W. CAMPBELL

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# Drs. Bertha and Arthur Selmon: Case Study in the Formation of Early Adventist Mission Identity in China

## Introduction

The early development of Adventist missions in China has been overall relatively understudied in comparison to other parts of Adventist mission history.<sup>1</sup> While most of the attention has focused on Abram La Rue and other early missionaries, the development of Adventist missions really took a definite foothold with the arrival of a group of Adventist missionaries who connected with the Pilquists in 1903. The Pilquists were Protestant missionaries who were missionaries with the China Inland Mission. They made urgent appeals for more missionaries to help them establish a permanent Adventist mission with them. The appeal did not fall on deaf ears. A group of Adventist missionaries would join them. This article seeks to ascertain the story of Bertha Eugenia Loveland-Selmon (1877-1949) and Arthur Clifford Selmon (1877-1931) as a way to fill this lacuna in early Adventist mission history in China. The Selmons would play a key role as medical missionaries. Additionally, they would work as evangelists, teachers, administrators, and wrote extensively for denominational publications.

## Backgrounds

Bertha was born on December 15, 1877, to Nicholas E. Loveland (1852-1929) and Annie E. Parker (1857-1910), in Columbus Grove, Ohio.<sup>2</sup> Her mother converted to Adventism about 1884 (Obituary May 1, 1924:22). As a young girl, she attended the Adventist church in Clyde, Ohio. In the fall of 1886, she was baptized at the Ohio camp meeting by R. A. Underwood

(B. Selmon 1908:222-224). The death of a neighbor's child, who she tried to help, prompted her to study medicine. She raised her initial \$30 canvassing and went on to study at Battle Creek College where she graduated in 1898 (B. Selmon 1942:9-11).



Arthur Clifford Selmon was born to George Washington Selmon (1850-1938) and Mary E. née Helmick (1856-1935) on December 26, 1877, in Columbus Junction, Iowa (U.S. Passport Application May 26, 1919). Arthur grew up in a Methodist home and attended Mount Pleasant Academy in Iowa (Dr. A. C. Selmon Taken Suddenly by Heart attack May 16, 1931:1, 2). He graduated from Howe's Academy with honors in 1896. He dated his conversion to the Spring of 1897 from reading Adventist literature.<sup>3</sup> He then went on to spend two years at Keokuk Medical College (B. Selmon 1942:6).

The couple both matriculated to Dr. John Harvey Kellogg's American Medical Missionary College where they both graduated with degrees in medicine in 1902. The next year Arthur taught anatomy and physiology at the University of Illinois (Dr. A. C. Selmon Taken May 16, 1931:1, 2). The nuptials wedded on July 6, 1903, in a ceremony at Battle Creek, Michigan, officiated by W. W. Prescott and A. G. Daniells (Michigan, U.S., County Marriage Records, 1822-1940). Arthur was also ordained as a minister soon after he arrived in China by H. W. Miller and Eric Pilquist.<sup>4</sup>

### **Missionary Beginnings (1903-1905)**

On October 5, 1903, Arthur and Bertha left on the "Empress of India" from Vancouver with Dr. H. W. and Maude T. Miller, along with Charlotte Simpson and Carrie Ericksen (Houser 1903:11; A. Selmon March 9, 1904:12,

13). After a brief stopover in Japan, they arrived in Shanghai where they stayed for four days gathering supplies and then went up the Yangtze River into the interior as far as they could, after which point, they spent four more days “traveling on wheelbarrows and donkey carts” (A. Selmon January 12, 1904:1). The group was part of a third wave of Adventist missionary reinforcements, first with Abram La Rue as a self-supporting missionary in 1888, then with J. N. and Emma Anderson who with Ida Thompson went as reinforcements in 1902 to Hong Kong, and then this “third wave” of missionaries the following year. Another missionary couple, Eric and Ida Pilquist, had converted to Adventism and had begun initial efforts to establish an Adventist missionary presence in mainland China. This “third wave” of missionaries was in response to their call for help to establish the first permanent Adventist mission station in mainland China. Shortly before they arrived the Pilquists decided to locate the new mission station at Sin Tsai Hsien, where this new missionary group arrived on November 7, 1903 (A. Selmon August 30, 1904:1, 2), as the location for their new missionary base of operations from which they would eventually branch out to other locations (A. Selmon January 12, 1904:1).

Upon their arrival they were inundated with sick patients. One such patient was miraculously healed (Miller and Selmon 1904:468). Arthur complained about the adoption of foreign vices, such as cigarettes, that made missionary work even more challenging (*Life and Health* August 1904:499). Bertha was particularly concerned about infanticide (*Shao Wawa* or *One of China’s Babies* 1904:1). Soon the Selmons moved half a mile away into their “own little compound.” The new place had two homes with mud brick houses and dirt floors. They hoped to have boards on the floor like the original mission, but wood was very expensive. Despite this they were “getting our home settled” feeling “happy and contented.” In addition to treating the sick, they worked diligently to learn the language from a recent native convert, from whom they hoped to be able to soon share their faith:

We are fully convinced that the study of the language should be our first work; for it is very unsatisfactory to examine a patient through an interpreter; and when we have treated him, we cannot tell him of the Great Physician, for we cannot speak to him. I feel that it is a waste of time and energy to treat the people from a humanitarian standpoint only, and not be able to give them the gospel. I came to China as a gospel missionary first, with the intention of using the medical work simply as an aid. Mrs. Selmon and I do treat many cases; for there are many diseases which we can diagnose and treat without asking questions. (A Selmon March 17, 1904:17)



Dr. Bertha L. Selmon and Members of the Girls' School, Honan.

Early on Bertha shared a passion for reaching out to women. Their first convert from the higher classes was won, despite bitter opposition, when Bertha asked her to help her understand the language. The woman, Mrs. Liu, was curious about the medical work they did. Later Mrs. Liu asked Bertha if she would like to do something for the girls and young women in the city to help them learn to read. This led to the opening of a school, the very first Adventist church school in China after the one begun just slightly earlier by Ida Thompson in Canton (A Selmon February 20, 1919:27).

Ida Pilquist had trained one woman as a Bible worker and they hoped to soon start a Bible school for these women (27). They furthermore noted how their initial plans have “greatly changed since coming here” (W. A. S. April 28, 1904:6). One such change included following the example of Eric Pilquist to do itinerant medical and evangelistic work. In one such early description, Arthur described his experience:

In the evening we had a Bible study, and the next forenoon, being Sabbath, a little company of inquirers who had learned of my arrival, sixteen in all, gathered for a Sabbath service. My native teacher spoke to them of the soon coming of Jesus. We then had a song service and Bible study. Not having command of the language, I could only give them the texts, and pray that the Holy Spirit would bring the truths to their darkened minds. (A. Selmon May 19, 1904:14, 15)

Based upon their missionary experience, they concluded that the converted Chinese is the “most effective worker” to reach their own people (A Selmon August 11, 1904:14). They continued to learn the

customs, for example, learning to celebrate their first Chinese New Year, “a great national holiday” (A. Selmon April 12, 1904:157). They noted the great crowds and fireworks, along with “great quantities of incense, yellow paper, and red candles [that] are burned” (157). They also began to learn about the “great religions of China, Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, yet ancestral worship is a feature common to all.” In each home was an ancestral tablet from which mothers train children at a young age “to worship their ancestors” (157). As a result, Arthur noticed the “great need of women as missionaries here in China. The lady missionary can go with her Bible into the home and present the gospel to the mother, and in this way strike at the very root of this false religion” (157).

The Selmons also began to experience some “bitter” opposition against their missionary efforts:

They seemed to have entered into a contract to leave us alone,” wrote Arthur. “Finally, a few of the sick began calling on us. But just as we were beginning to have a fair attendance, a fierce persecution came upon us. It was instigated and kept up by a very wealthy and influential man. . . . He declared that they wanted no missionaries in this place. But the Lord led us here and opened the way for us to get this station, and in this time of need he was near, and protected us. (A. Selmon September 1905:250)

As Bertha would later remember: “There is no romance in going out into the field. There are obstacles to meet, difficulties to overcome” (B. Selmon August 1, 1907:25, 26). One path to overcome these obstacles was through medical treatments that helped “prepare hearts to hear and receive the gospel.” They also continued their plans to quickly establish a school to train “both native and foreign workers.”

Bro. Pilquist already has a good company of native workers, and these together with our company make it necessary to plan for a more extensive work for perishing humanity here in China. The Lord gave us a printing press, and we now have several Bible readings translated and ready to print. Our press is here and we are only waiting for a place to put it up and get it in operation so we can get our literature out in the Chinese language. We have a number of native converts who are distributing portions of the Bible, and they will make excellent colporteurs. (A. Selmon January 19, 1904:110)

In another place, Arthur commented: “Our great hope for the growth of the work in China is in the literature” (A. Selmon February 26, 1908:12).

Thus, early on these Adventist missionaries embraced a threefold missionary strategy of training local people to do evangelism, the

establishment of a printing press with the dissemination of materials in the local language, and a health clinic with which to minister to the sick. "The people of this province," wrote Arthur, "who have heard of the Sabbath and the other truths of the third angel's message call it the 'true doctrine'" (A. Selmon July 5, 1904:3). At times their work could be dangerous. On one itinerant journey, Arthur with Henry W. Miller were attacked by bandits. Arthur was injured with bruises on his shoulders and a cut hand (Mission Notes August 30, 1904:35). Despite this, "In order to work successfully, the missionary must come in close touch with the people, and be one among them; and to do this, he must be well acquainted with the language and the life of those among whom he is working" (A. Selmon November 1, 1904:1, 2). It was about that time that the Selmons adopted a Chinese girl (Ruth 1905-1945) who they would raise as their own. Later they would also adopt a boy, Paul Lyle (1907-1929).

### Missionary Expansion (1905-1909)



Dr. Selmon and Baby Ruth  
in Native Costume



Dr. Mrs. Selmon and Baby Ruth  
in American Dress

In early 1905 the group of missionaries felt sufficiently comfortable with the language to expand in different directions. Carrie Erickson and Charlotte Simpson would remain behind in Sin Tsai Hsien with Dr. Harry W. Miller; the Pilquists relocated to Lo San; and the Pilquists relocated 35 miles east to Hsiang-Cheng (Openings in China March 1, 1905:3; Miller September 13, 1905:3).

Early on Bertha made a particular effort to reach the women in this new location. She hired a woman to do her sewing and when she was not well, she was able to visit her home to offer her treatment. She befriended this woman and was invited to teach a group of women how to sing hymns.

As she explained the words, she found this an easy way to share her beliefs. She noted the harsh conditions under which these women worked to support their families and recounted this experience:

The blessing of God came into my own heart; and while I believe some other heart was touched, in my own was born a greater inspiration to work *now*, and to use the language I have, while I still strive day by day to add to its store. I am thankful that God showed me that I could begin, and for the love of the dear women that grew larger in my heart as I came in touch with their need. I am glad, too, that God sent me to China's waiting women. (B. Selmon March 2, 1905:13)

The Selmons continued to work in culturally sensitive ways to interest people in the Adventist message. For example, recognizing the great value placed upon written characters, the Selmons would wrap medicine within a tract. This was apparently quite effective for some who would not ordinarily listen to them openly share their beliefs (A. Selmon March 15, 1906:175). Arthur also worked on developing a primer for school use (Anderson April 19, 1906:16). They worked closely with Dr. Harry W. Miller to develop the very first Adventist periodical launched in June 1905 (Miller January 15, 1906:20). Arthur was especially concerned that future missionaries "live close to the people." They should regard "their native helpers as brethren and fellow workers" and avoid "anything that would lead to any feeling of caste springing up." They should avoid all outward display and adopt "the dress of the people" (A. Selmon November 7, 1907:23).

The Selmons wrote regularly for church publications urging young people to consider a missionary vocation. Arthur especially agreed with Ellen White's warnings about young people not going to study in Battle Creek lest they lose this missionary spirit (A. Selmon June 7, 1906:9). "The missionary activity of Seventh-day Adventists," wrote Arthur, "is the best index of their faith in the soon coming of the Lord" (A. Selmon June 28, 1906:12).

In 1906 there was a resurgence of another nativist uprising (a so-called "Boxer uprising") from which many missionaries fled. At that particular moment Arthur was away in Hankow so he hurried back where they stayed quietly at their mission post trusting that the Lord would "let us know when to leave" (A. Selmon July 5, 1906:16). This work unfortunately delayed Bertha who attempted to start a girl's school, but after this trouble, many girls were afraid to attend. Instead, they used the time to raise funds to send copies of Adventist publications to the estimated 290 Christian mission stations across China. This had the net effect of leading P. J. Laird, an Anglican missionary, to convert to Adventism (A Selmon

April 18, 1907:18). The Selmons also spent about a month translating and preparing the very first ever Adventist hymnal in Chinese (A. Selmon July 19, 1906:13). Within a short time, Bertha had her girls' school back and running again. She also began to train a local woman whom she had taught how to read and write how to teach the girls (A. Selmon August 16, 1906:17).



DR. SELMON BAPTIZING EVANGELIST WUN

In early 1907 there were two significant turning points. First, Arthur baptized his first convert, a young man he called “Evangelist” Wun, on January 12, 1907, after two years of preparation and assistance with holding evangelistic meetings (A. Selmon June 20, 1907:16). A second major turning point was the organization of the Adventist missionary work in China at a “Shanghai Council” held from February 10-20, 1907. At that gathering the early missionaries, with new recruits, gathered from various mission stations (many of whom had never met fellow missionaries due to the significant distance between mission stations). They organized a number of committees of which Arthur served on the publishing committee, and Bertha served on committees to develop a “uniform hymn book” for the whole field and to promote the Sabbath School work. Other recommendations concerned developing systems for the various Adventist missions to work in concert together (Recommendations June 24, 1907:1, 2). This meeting was also notable because Arthur served as a translator for W. W. Prescott, from the General Conference, and now both Selmons were fluent in the “Chinese language” (A. Selmon April 18, 1907:18). He furthermore noted that it was difficult to literally translate Adventist literature into the Chinese language noting that it “must be adapted to the people” (18).





Afterward the Selmons took a trip 600 miles north to Peking (Beijing) where they observed heightened security and even watched as the Chinese emperor went to the Temple of Heaven to sacrifice. The well drilled military, Arthur noted, rivaled that of any in the world. As they traveled, they visited various Christian missions and were “surprised” to see students at these schools marching and practicing military drills. Arthur expressed concern that “Mission work has been so mixed up with politics that it could not be otherwise.” He feared lest this might hinder the spread of the Christian faith in China (A. Selmon September 5, 1907:15, 16; A Selmon October 3, 1907:638, 639). Another major challenge was malaria. Dr. Harry Miller noted that he would see the Selmons about once every three months, and that all the missionaries had taken turns getting malaria (Miller February 21, 1907:17, 18).

From December 8-14, 1907, the Selmons hosted the first ever Bible training institute for a week with 50 interested believers from surrounding missions who came for Bible instruction. Since the Selmon’s mission station at Siang Cheng was the most centrally located and “commodious and convenient” they hosted the meeting. Other missionaries who participated included John and Christine Westrup, Esta Miller, and F. A. and Eva Allum. At the close of the meeting Arthur baptized seven people, they held the first documented communion service by Adventist missionaries in China, and organized a church at Siang Cheng (Allum and Allum March 16, 1908:3-5; A. Selmon March 5, 1908:14, 15). A second “general meeting” was held starting on October 24, 1908, for nine days in Cheo Chia K’ou. These training sessions set a pattern whereby the early missionaries invested in the local people’s training by equipping them to reach others (Westrup January 28, 1909:13).

In 1908 the Selmons went with the Allums and Esta Miller to “open up work in Cheo Chia K’o [K’ou]” in Honan province (Allum November 16, 1908:2; Allum November 19, 1908:21, 22). Initially this move “caused something of a stir” (see *Atlantic Union Gleaner* 1908:311, 312). The Adventist missionaries refused to participate in the ecumenical efforts brought about by the process that came about as a result of the 1907 Robert Morrison centennial meetings during which an ecumenical effort was made among various Protestant groups to unite together across denominations and to divide up the territory between various mission societies. Although Adventists saw themselves as friendly to these other missionary efforts, their refusal to actively participate caused the China Inland Mission to “declare a boycott against any and all of our [Adventist] literature” (311, 312). They also moved to this new area because it was located at a major intersection of the railroad and river connections (Hankins October 8, 1908:14, 15). The Selmons did not stay in this new location very long due to Bertha’s poor health (“a grave tropical malady” possibly a bad malaria attack for which they solicited prayers from the readers of *The Missionary Worker* (October 14, 1908:168). Bertha’s illness necessitated their seeking refuge from the heat at Moh Kan Shan [Mohkaashan] (near Shanghai). The General Conference granted them sick leave in conjunction with their participation at the upcoming 1909 General Conference session (Allum November 16, 1908:3; see General Conference Minutes October 13, 1908:550, 551). Elder R. F. Cottrell took over their missionary work while they were abroad; (see *Atlantic Union Gleaner* October 14, 1908:332); however, just before the Selmons left, they attended another “important gathering” from January 12-22, 1909, that further organized the Adventist missionary work in China. At this meeting Arthur was elected superintendent of the Central Division. After the meeting closed, the Selmons joined other missionaries on the voyage back to the United States (Evans March 18, 1909:16-18).

### 1909 Visit to the United States

While the Selmons recuperated in the United States they traveled to various church offering missionary talks. One such talk at Union College, focused on “the preparation needed for becoming a missionary” (*The Educational Messenger* October 7, 1909:4). Dr. A. C. Selmon was requested by the General Conference Committee, as they waited for the upcoming General Conference session, to spend two to three months “giving special instruction in tropical diseases and the Chinese language” (*The Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald* February 4, 1909:32).

At the actual 1909 General Conference the Selmons played an active role. They joined with other missionaries to sing “a hymn in the Mandarin language” that had been composed by Pastor His, with the translated title, “I Once Was a Sinner Bound in Sin; Jesus Set Me free.” Immediately afterward, Bertha gave a report, dressed in Chinese garb, on the “Work for Women in China” (*The Adventist Review and Sabbath Herald* May 27, 1909:15, 16), while Arthur chaired the sessions concerning the Medical Missionary Department. After the session, the Selmons spoke at several camp meetings (Underwood September 23, 1909:14, 15; Robinson September 30, 1909:15) where their two adopted children, Ruth and Paul, “attracted a great deal of attention” (*The Worker’s Bulletin* September 7, 1909:4). Apparently, their recruitment was effective as more conferences pledged to financially support missionary work by supplying funds and even the salary for the new workers. When they left from Vancouver on October 20, 1909, they returned with several new recruits: E. W. Wolf and wife (from Iowa), Fred Lee and wife (from the Washington Foreign Mission Seminary), Dr. A. G. Larson and wife, from Nebraska, Sherman A. Nagal and wife, from the Loma Linda College of Medical Evangelists; and O. A. Halland wife and their child, from Nebraska (*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* October 28, 1909:24).

### Publishing Work in Shanghai (1910-onward)



OUR PUBLISHING HOUSE AT SHANGHAI, CHINA

Upon their return to China, the Selmons remained in Shanghai where Arthur was asked to serve as the editor of the church’s paper, *Shi Chao Yueh Pao* (*The Signs of the Times*) (Westworth June 9, 1910:8).<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, soon after their return, the publishing house had a disastrous fire. Arthur

went to work rebuilding, purchasing a new “diamond cylinder press, hand-power series,” along with ambitious new plans to expand the publishing work. The purchase of a gas engine quickly increased their printing capacity (Our Funds August 30, 1910:16) He also developed special evangelistic issues for the Chinese New Year and the six-month Nanjing Exposition (E. R. Palmer September 1, 1910:19).

I. H. Evans, in a visit to China to help further the Adventist Church’s organization and mission, described visiting Arthur and the humble printing establishment:

When I came to see the location of the printing plant, and the meager facilities with which they are compelled to work, I could not but say, “How long, O Lord? how long?” Dr. Selmon showed me the editorial room, which is a sample of what these workers have. They are located up-stairs in a Chinese house with low walls, and with windows on one side. The rear is boarded up with unmatched lumber, leaving cracks from an eighth to a quarter of an inch wide. This is all the protection they have against the penetrating cold of a Shanghai winter. I asked the doctor how it was possible for them to endure the heat and cold. He replied: “It is often so cold that only by standing up and rubbing ourselves can we keep working at all. Our fingers often become so numb we cannot hold a pen. And the heat in summer is just as intense as the cold in winter. (Evans December 1, 1910:10, 11)

The hard work in preparing print materials paid rich dividends. In 1909 the average monthly issue was 5,000 copies, while by the end of 1910 they were printing 12,000 copies. Similarly, the Sabbath calendar in 1910 sold 85,000 copies; by 1911 over 200,000 copies were sold (A. Selmon March 23, 1911:10, 11).

In 1911, Arthur wrote a tract titled *Suggestions on the Care of the Health in Tropical Countries* published in Washington, DC by the Medical Missionary Department of the General Conference in 1912 (see *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* November 9, 1911:14; *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* February 22, 1912:24). This tract was meant to better educate future missionaries so that they would be prepared to face the realities and challenges of harsh conditions, disease, and how to stay healthy. Later it was widely translated into other languages. The Selmons, as physicians, had watched many missionaries come and go, and more than a few had either died or were forced to return home due to “broken health.”



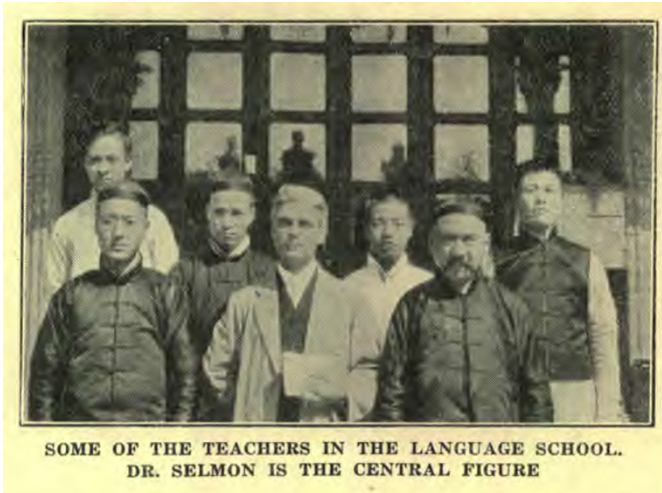
In 1911 there was a severe famine in which many people died and that ultimately sparked a violent revolution that led to the overthrow of the Qing dynasty (A. Selmon March 21, 1911:14, 15). Many missionaries fled to the mission headquarters in Shanghai. The Selmons worked to accommodate and take care of the sick, praising the Lord that no missionary lives lost. Unfortunately, the main missionary compound in Chang-sha was destroyed (From Troubled China December 21, 1911:24). The Selmons, as more senior missionaries, started to take on the role training new missionaries about the culture and teaching language classes (Hall 1912:12). When things stabilized, Arthur led a group of missionaries to return to the mission and held evangelistic meetings throughout the territory. When he finished, they baptized nine individuals (Cottrell 1912:15, 16). The itinerary extended for nine additional weeks across Hunan, Hypeh, Honan, and Anhwei provinces. An additional 58 individuals were baptized from the meetings they held—often meeting as many as four times a day, during the trip (A. Selmon August 15, 1912:10, 11). “There is surely,” he wrote, “a wonderful opening of the ears of the people to hear” (in Spicer November 14, 1912:26).

The year 1912 found Arthur taking I. H. Evans, the new superintendent of the China Mission, on another tour of the field and holding evangelistic meetings. During March and April, they held meetings in Swatow, Amoy, and Fatshan. In one such “revival” meeting there were more than a hundred persons who made a commitment to the Adventist message. In each place they celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Evans noted that these were not “rice Christians” but individuals who were very sincere about their faith ([Evans] July 30, 1912:14). Bertha continued to work on innovative ideas to help girls find ways to fund their education at the girl’s school. One such plan involved a doll production business (B Selmon January 9, 1912:3).

With the new restructuring, in January 1913 Arthur became the superintendent of the east China mission based in Shanghai (General Conference Committee Minutes January 2, 1913:10).



GROUP OF STUDENTS ATTENDING CHINA MISSION TRAINING-SCHOOL, SHANGHAI



SOME OF THE TEACHERS IN THE LANGUAGE SCHOOL.  
DR. SELMON IS THE CENTRAL FIGURE

A major initiative was the development of a dispensary in the marketplace to the east of the mission and press property. After two previous failed attempts, this third effort succeeded in making its debut on August 1, (A Selmon March 1914:132). A second major initiative was the development of the China Mission Training School that opened in 1912. Arthur Selmon was responsible for teaching science (General November 1, 1913:10). When the school officially opened with 51 students on October 13, 1912, the Selmons participated as part of the opening exercises (Hall March 18, 1913:2) even though the school opened in unfinished buildings

(A Selmon First Quarter 1914:15) By the end of the first school year attendance increased to 61 students (A. Selmon June 23, 1914:381). Church members around the world contributed their offerings from the thirteenth Sabbath on March 28, 1914, to help with the development of this new institution.



MISSIONARIES FOR CHINA, SAILING FROM SAN FRANCISCO, CALIF., AUG. 6, 1919  
 Back row, left to right: Mrs. L. A. Carr and child; Mrs. W. R. Smith, L. A. Carr, Dr. A. C. Selmon, C. P. Little, Otis Loveland. Front row: Master Smith, Mrs. A. C. Selmon, three Little children, Mrs. C. P. Little. Miss Ibs Thompson returned to China with this company; she was not present when the picture was taken.



Doctors A. C. and Bertha Selmon at the Extreme Left, with Their Co-workers and Some of Their Native Nurses.

During a visit by A. G. Daniells to China in 1915 it was decided that the Selmons should pioneer as medical missionaries in Peking (Beijing). Another major development at that meeting was the sale of books in Chinese by colporteurs, for up until then they had only sold calendars and magazines (Blunden October 26, 1916:12, 13). The departure of R. F. Cottrell for a one year furlough required that the Selmons return to cover for them during their absence instead (*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* July 22, 1915:24). While away the Shanghai Sanitarium was managed by "trained native nurses" under the direction of Sister H. J. Doolittle (Conference

Proceedings December 16, 1915:7). In 1916 Arthur collaborated with Fred Lee to conduct a series of ministerial institutes in order to develop indigenous leadership for the Adventist denomination in China (A Selmon June 8, 1916:12). By August 1, 1916, the Selmons were able to travel with the Loveland family to Peking as originally planned to pioneer new work in that region, but were delayed once again by a request to spend a year in Nanking training new missionaries in the Chinese language (A Word from China November 23, 1916:24; A Selmon May 24, 1917:12, 13). That same year, when the Asiatic Division was organized, Arthur was placed in charge of the medical missionary work for the division (Daniells December 14, 1916:19, 22). Around that time Bertha began writing a series of readers for elementary schools suitable for the first five years of school work (Mission Notes May 3, 1917:15).

In 1917, as the work of the denomination continued to grow, the various missions were organized into an over-arching union mission called the North China Union Mission, with Bertha serving as medical secretary for the union (*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* September 27, 1917:13). Arthur would be relieved of his editorial work by George Harlow for *Hsing Chwan Luh* and other editorial responsibilities were assigned to the young Le Roy Edwin Froom (General Conference Executive Committee Minutes August 15, 1918:111; White June 27, 1918:10). As the Selmons prepared for furlough, the outbreak of the influenza necessitated special measures such as urging missionaries to wear masks (see photograph June 27, 1918:11). As World War I came to an end, the Red Cross Hospital in Shanghai became available and became the new location for a significantly expanded Shanghai Sanitarium (A Selmon November 28, 1918:26, 27).

### Furlough and Final Years

In 1918 the Selmons went on their second furlough to the United States during which time they enrolled in post-graduate training and had their living expenses paid for by the denomination (General Conference Executive Committee Minutes October 10, 1918:149). They spent time at the College of Medical Evangelists in Loma Linda, California, and Hinsdale Sanitarium in Illinois. Like their earlier furlough, the Selmons once again visited a series of camp meetings (Underwood July 24, 1919:23). In early August 1919 the Selmons sailed on the S.S. *China* with a group of missionaries to return to the land that they loved so much (*The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* August 21, 1919:32; *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* January 8, 1920:3).

Soon after their return, Bertha's brother, Olan A. Loveland (1899-1920) tragically died in a motorcycle accident. He had gone to China as



a missionary less than a year before (Obituary September 1-15, 1920:12). After their return to China the Selmons entered into some “independent [missionary] work” (General conference Executive Committee Minutes May 24, 1922:1358). They still remained connected to the Shanghai Sanitarium and as late as 1925 they both retained denominational credentials (Asiatic Division Outlook April 1-5, 1923:12; *Year Book of the Seventh-day Adventist Denomination, 1925:131*). What is clear is that after their return to China in 1919 their writing for denominational articles dropped off precipitously. The Selmons appear to have increasingly distanced themselves from the denomination during the early 1920s.

By early 1924 the Selmons requested the General Conference Committee for permission to return once again for “special medical work.” The request was denied (General conference Executive Committee Minutes February 25, 1924:580). The Selmons returned home in June 1924 at their own expense where they worked as private physicians and practiced industrial medicine with the W. K. Kellogg Corn Flake Company (Washington, U.S., Arriving and Departing Passenger and Crew List, 1882-1965). Arthur served as medical director for the Kellogg Company and as assistant director of the Kellogg Foundation. In this latter capacity he helped plan the Foundation’s work at the Ann J. Kellogg school, a school for special needs children (Dr. A. C. Selmon Taken Suddenly by Heart Attack May 16, 1931:1, 2). Their adopted children, Ruth and Paul, both attended school—Paul at Battle Creek College for one year, and then two years at Pacific Union College—before returning home after contracting tuberculosis where he died at the age of 21 (Michigan, U.S. Death Records; *Battle Creek Enquirer* May 16, 1931). Bertha was one of the founders of the Maternal Health Center and served as its clinician from 1932 to 1943. After Arthur’s death on May 16, 1931, at the age of 53 (Dr. Arthur Clifford Selmon), the General Conference sent their condolences to Bertha thanking them for their work as “pioneers” of the denomination’s work “in inland China and later in connection with the medical work in Shanghai Committee Minutes May 21, 1931:339). After Arthur’s death, Bertha furthered her two main interests: education about birth control and planned parenthood and her study of the lives and careers of women physicians. She served as history editor of the *Medical Women’s Journal* and collected pictures and stories about female physicians. In 1942 she wrote a book about their experiences as missionaries in China, *They Do Meet: Cross-Trails of American Physicians and Chinese People*. While the book extensively documents their story as missionaries, the book makes no reference whatsoever to the Seventh-day Adventist Church that they were a part of and operated within its missionary network. Her research papers are found in the Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan

(Bertha Eugenia Loveland Selmon papers: 1932-1949). Bertha died in 1949 and she is buried next to Arthur in the Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek, Michigan (Dr Bertha Eugenia *Loveland Selmon*).

### Concluding Observations

In the development of early Adventist missions in China, the Selmons were part of a wave of early Adventist missionary reinforcements to join the Pilquist family to establish the first permanent Adventist missionary presence in mainland China. The Selmons, as physicians, would take a medical missionary approach to help break down prejudices. As a couple, they were a medical missionary team that provided significant leadership in the early organization of the work in China. Of special note was their emphasis on establishing clinics and medical institutions, combined with a strong emphasis on sharing their faith. The Selmons became proficient in the language and culture and served as a bridge to guide later missionaries who came in their footsteps. Bertha would play a significant role in working and mentoring a generation of early Adventist women, setting a precedent for Bible Women who played a significant role in the promulgation of the Advent message in China.

After some two decades of missionary service, the Selmons would eventually return to the United States. While it is not entirely clear, their close friendship with Dr. J. H. Kellogg and his brother, W. K. Kellogg, in their later years cemented their distancing between themselves and the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. In this way the Selmons would both make a significant contribution to early Adventist missions in China, yet on a personal level, they would find that they themselves would distance themselves from the denomination. Not all early Adventist missionaries would remain within the denomination, and the story of the Selmons is not well known, perhaps in large part due to the fact that they effectively left Adventism. Despite this, their story remains pivotal in the story of early Adventist missions in China and their story is one that deserves recognition.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> The standard history of the development of Adventism in Asia is Fernandez, Gil G., ed. 1990. *Light Dawns Over Asia: Adventism's Story in the Far Eastern Division 1888-1988*. Silang, Cavite, Philippines: Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies Publications. No mention is made in that volume of the Selmons.
- <sup>2</sup> For detailed biographical information on the Selmons, see: <https://www.ancestry.com/family-tree/pt/RSVP.aspx?dat=MTc5MDE2Mjg4OzswMjJhNzUyNS0wMDA2LTAwMDAtMDAwMC0wMDAwMDAwMDAwMDAwMDA7MjAyMTEwMDcxMTIyNDE7MQ==&mac=3iiEd6bcOvkEvH9tzcjwww==>.
- <sup>3</sup> Biographical Information Blank, Arthur C. Selmon, Nov. 30, 1905, General Conference Archives.
- <sup>4</sup> See *ARH* (October 15, 1903): 24; *ARH* (October 29, 1903): 24. It appears that Arthur was supposed to be ordained at the Iowa camp meeting, but this didn't work out. Confirmation of his ordination appears in: Biographical Information Blank. 1905. Arthur C. Selmon. General Conference Archives. (November 30).
- <sup>5</sup> The mission was at this time located at P731 Pao Shing Li, North Honan Road, Shanghai.

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YOUSRY GUIRGUIS

## Abortion/Feticide in Islam

Islam seems to uphold the sanctity of life as Allah created it. Sanctity of life and worship of Allah are not two contradictory features of human beings, but rather complementary. Worship of Allah is involved in human sanctity and sanctity is what elevates a person to a higher realm of worship. With regard to abortion, jurists of Islam hold a high regard for the “status of the soul of a fetus” (Braswell 2000:83). Muslim scholars, especially *Sufis*, stand against the termination of life, and unconditionally oppose abortion or feticide. However, whether or not abortion or feticide can be “justified under certain conditions remains controversial” (Çakmak 2017:21) to jurists and to Muslim scholars. It should be noted at this stage that most of the practices and beliefs during the *Jahiliyya* time affect the way Arabs and Muslims believe today. For instance, pre-Islamic Arabia practiced infanticide or feticide based on the gender of the child. Such a practice affected the Arabs for centuries. Arabs and Muslims still believe that to have a baby girl is a cause of shame.

### Different Lexical Definitions for Abortion

The word abortion comes from the Latin word *aboriri*, meaning “to fail to be born” (Williams, Clarke, Kennick, and Langtree 2001:86). Etymologists and anatomists are in favor that the fetus is the correct usage as the word is derived from the Latin *feto* meaning “I bear” (Potts, Diggory, and Peel 1977:20). Linguistically, the Arabic word *al-aijhad* (الإجهاض)—abortion, means “removal of the fetus from the womb before the fourth month” (Catafago 1873:1:470). *Al-aijhad* comes from the noun *ejhād* (إجهاض)—miscarriage, and the infinitive *ajhada* (أَجْهَضَ)—aborted, signify a “miscarried

fetus discharged from the womb before completing the nine-month period of gestation” (Sachedina 2009:129). *Al-aijhad* is of five kinds: *Ejhād Ejramyy* (إجهاض إجرامى)—criminal abortion; *Ejhād Tlqaiyy* (إجهاض تلقائى)—spontaneous abortion; *Ejhād Zatyyy* (إجهاض ذاتى)—self-induced abortion; *Ejhād ‘Lajyy* (إجهاض علاجى)—therapeutic abortion; *Ejhād Motta’mmd* (إجهاض متعمد)—intentional abortion (Baalbaki 2008:42).

From a medical perspective, the word describes the destruction of life after conception and before birth. Islam defines abortion as “the deliberate termination of a pregnancy” (Exposito 2004:1:6). Muslim jurists define the word as “an induced ejection of a fetus prematurely with or without a proper justification” (Sachedina 2013:162). Muslim scholars further described *al-aijhad* as “getting rid of the fetus before completion of the duration of pregnancy” (Zallum 2008:22). As for Keith L. Moore, T. V. N. Persaud, and Mark G. Torchia, *al-aijhad* to them is the “expulsion of an embryo or fetus before it is viable—capable of living outside the uterus” (2011:5). According to Zakariyau Idrees-Oboh Oseni, abortion is not only “pre-natal infanticide, but also a war on the unborn humanity” (2008:75).

### Pre-Islamic Arabia and Abortion/Feticide

Islam identifies with pre-Islamic Arabia in many cultural and doctrinal practices. In pre-Islamic Arabia, contraception and birth control were practiced mostly by *Coitus interruptus* called in Arabic ‘*azl* (عزل). The traditionalist Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Qudūrī (972–1037 CE), who was known for his piety and was a student of law of the Hanafi school, writes in his book, *The Mukhtasar Al-Quduri: A Manual of Islamic Law According to the Hanafi School*, that a man may practice ‘*azl* with his slave girl without her permission, but he may not practice it with his wife except with her permission (2010:692).

In the book *Reproductive Health Behavior and Decision-Making of Muslim Women: An Ethnographic Study in a Low-Income Community in Urban North India*, Constanze Weigl writes that ‘*azl* was practiced in Prophet Muhammad’s time and he did not discourage his followers from using it (2010:222). It is also indicated that the *Sahabas*, companions of Prophet Muhammad, practiced ‘*azl* and he did not object to it. Apart from that, the *Sahabas* introduced the concept of *al-‘azl* to the prophet (Omran 2012:243). Muslim jurisprudence treats ‘*azl* under three categories, namely: first with a wife who is a free woman; second, with a wife who is a slave of another party; and third with a man’s own slave or concubine (Reich 2010:1:44). Sunnah, a body of literature that contains traditional practices and customs, allowed for the practice of ‘*azl* (Waardenburg and Waardenburg 2002:200).

Pre-Islamic people performed sex selective abortions. In the Arabian Peninsula during pre-Islamic times female infanticide was practiced, which deprived women of their basic rights, indicating that abortion seemed to have been possible. Reynold A. Nicholson documents that era: “The dispatch of daughters is a kindness” and the “the burial of daughters is a noble deed” (1996:90). Pre-Islamic Arabs practiced killing of unwanted children, especially girls (Makariev 2008:113). during that era.<sup>1</sup>

### Fetal Stem Cells and Islam

Fetal Stem Cells (FSC) experimentation is a matter of concern in Islam particularly regarding the use of embryonic stem cells (ESC) for research (i.e., using human pre-implantation embryos). Such usages introduce moral and ethical issues that will determine whether abortion is viable in Islamic theology.<sup>2</sup> The use of FSC emanates from the embryo’s moral statues. For many conservative Christians, FSC usage is a moral statue issue and is acquired at conception<sup>3</sup> (i.e., fertilization with the formation of the single-cell zygote). The subject of the FSC should be dealt with not only from an Islamic perspective but ethically by all people. Human beings are created in the image of God, *Imago Dei*; therefore, human life by nature is sacred. The different issues considered in the use of ESC and FSC are similar to those encountered in the abortion debate. The advent of different conclusions on this subject have created support for different ethical positions.

#### Moral Issue

The moral status of the embryo seems to cause no concern to some Islamic schools of thought or Muslim jurists. For some Muslims, the moral status of the fetus is acquired at a later stage of the development of an embryo. In a sense, “it is related to the development of a fetus into a sentient and biologically independent being” (Waskey 2008:466; Farley 2000:3:D-1 to D-5). It has been debated whether life begins at conception by Islam and Muslim scholars with the focal point at this stage being the moral statues of the embryo.

#### Definition of Embryonic Stem Cell

In biology, the ESC has recently generated more discussion in the media, news, tweets, or Facebook than any other subject. This increased interest may offer some insights “into the biology of cells as well as a path toward treatments for a variety of degenerative illness” (Melton



and Cowen 2009:xxiii), and although there is rapid growth in the study of ESC, there exists a variety of debates regarding their nature. Stem cells are defined as “cells that have the capacity to self-renew as well as the ability to generate differentiated cells” (Smith 2001:17). While it is true that Islamic understanding of ESC and FSC is broader than this article can describe, one needs to look at how Muslims deal with the status of the embryo.

### Pre-Embryo

According to conservative scholars the use of ESC involves the destruction of the pre-embryo.<sup>4</sup> In order for one to obtain the ESC, one has to destroy the 5–7-day-old pre-embryo. The crux of this issue is, according to Mohammed Ali Al-Bar and Hassan Chamsi-Pasha, the conflict that results from the “question whether the 5–7-day-old pre-embryo is a human being entitled to protection against harm or destruction” (2015:202). The matter involves the sanctity of human life. I have already alluded to the fact that Islam jealously guards the sanctity of human life. However, with regard to, and according to some Muslim jurists, the fetus does not seem to possess the same rights as a baby following its birth.

### The Qur’an and Abortion

The formation of the human body into a fetus is considered one of the wonders in the Qur’an as it reveals the creative power of Allah. The Qur’an states:

English

Arabic

Man We did create from a quintessence (of clay); Then We placed him as (a drop of) sperm in a place of rest, firmly fixed; Then We made the sperm into a clot of congealed blood; then of that clot We made a (foetus) lump; then we made out of that lump bones and clothed the bones with flesh; then we developed out of it another creature. So blessed be Allah, the best to create! (Ali 2004: Surah 23:12-14)

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ سُلَالَةٍ  
مِنْ طِينٍ. ثُمَّ جَعَلْنَاهُ نُطْفَةً فِي  
قَرَارٍ مَكِينٍ. ثُمَّ خَلَقْنَا النُّطْفَةَ  
عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقْنَا الْعَلَقَةَ مُضْغَةً  
فَخَلَقْنَا الْمُضْغَةَ عِظَامًا فَكَسَوْنَا  
الْعِظَامَ لَحْمًا ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا  
آخَرَ فَبَارِكْ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنَ  
الْخَالِقِينَ<sup>1</sup>

Muslim jurists link the above passage to “empirical observations of fetal formation and the mother’s first sensations of fetal movement” (Al-Kareem 2004: Surah 23:12-14). The Qur’an explains that there are various stages of the development of the human fetus. The verses alluded to give descriptions of fetal development—in the woman’s womb—representing three stages: first, sperm, *nutfah* (نُفْطَنُ); second, congealed blood, ‘*alaqah* (عَقْلَغ); third, lump, *mudghah* (مُدْغَمُ). Analysis of these key words are necessary at this point. However, before analyzing the aforementioned words, there is a need to discuss the words: extracted, *sulalah* (سُلَالَة) and mud, *tyin* (تِين).

### *Sulalah* (سُلَالَة)

The Arabic word *sulalah* (سُلَالَة) literally means “extracted,” derived from *salla* (سَل), or *yasullu* (يَسْلُو) and “its meaning is to purify something from dirt” (Tahir-ul-Qadri 2019:44). It is translated in the above verse with the English word quintessence. The word conveys “the clear,” or “pure,” or “part,” or “the choice,” “best,” or “most excellent.” *Sulalah* denotes the *sperma genitalis* of a man or human being; the water that is drawn from the back; progeny (Lane 1968). Arabs would say *salla al-shye* (السُّي سَل), he drew out the thing or he drew it out from another thing gently (Ahmad 1988:1786). *Sulalah* by implications means part of a whole which indicates that the origin of the creation of human kind was made from only one part of this fluid and not all of it (Al-Ghazal 2006:6). Thus, *sulalah* means what is drawn or becomes drawn forth from a thing.

### *Tyin* (تِين)

The word clay in Arabic is *tyin* (طين) and is derived from *tana* (طَان); meaning clay, mud, earth, mold, soil. For instance, if the word *tanaho* (طَانَة) is used, it means he plastered it with clay or mud. The expression, *tanaho Allah 'Ila al-khira* (طَانَة اللّٰه على الخير) signifies God created him with a good natural disposition. This verse (v. 12) begins a description of the process of creation of the noblest handiwork of God—the first man, from the earliest stage when he lies dormant in the form of dust. The inorganic constituents of the earth, through a subtle process of change, becomes transformed into the life-germ by way of food which a human being eats.

### *Nutfah* (نُفْطَنُ)

Verse 13 uses the word *nutfah* (نُفْطَنُ) that comes from *natafa* (نُطْفَ) meaning “to drip” or “to drop;” it ranges from one drop to a few drops.

Arabs would say, the bucket *natafat*, meaning water dripped drop by drop. *Nutfah*, as a word, is used 12 times in the Qur'an (16:4, 18:37, 22:5, 23:13, 14, 35:11, 36:77, 40:67, 53:46, 75:37, 76:2, 80:19). *Nutfah* is a "little water or drop of water which corresponds to the male's sexual discharge—spermatozoa. The spermatozoon comes from despised water. A spermatozoon looks like a long-tailed fish. This is one of the meanings of the word 'sulalah'" (Ahmad n.d.:198).

In her exegesis of *nutfah*, Sadaf Rizvi says that the word drop is explained as "the sperm, but also the zygote that divided to form a blastocyst which is implanted in the uterus" (2014:595). Edward W. Lane defines *nutfah* as "sperma of a man and of a woman" (1968 s.v. "نُطْفَةٌ"). *Sperma* comes from a late Latin word meaning seed or semen (Chavda 2016:156). Surat al-Qiyamah indicates that *nutfah* is "the ejected semen" (in Ali 2004 Surah 75:37). The word is used in the Qur'an to refer to the first stage of the development of the human embryo. The word *nutfah* is used in three different ways.

**Male Nutfah.** The first is the male *nutfah* that is referred to in the Qur'an—"That He did create in pairs—male and female. From a seed when lodged (in its place)" (Ali 2004 Surah 53:45, 46). The Qur'an seems to allude to the seventh aphorism relating to sex: all things are created in pairs. Each sex performs its proper function. Yusuf Al-hajj Ahmad comments on these two verses and says that both "indicate that the sex of the fetus is determined when the semen is being discharged" (n.d.:199). When male and female *nutfahs* intermingle and mix with each other, it is called *nutfatul Amshaj* (نُطْفَةٌ أَمْشَاجٍ) (Jaleel 2015:73), which means from mixed *nutfah* and signifies the fertilized ovum or zygote. The mixing of the sperm of a man and the ovum of a woman results in the creation of a person (Naef 2012:157-193). Consequently, a person "changes from stage to stage, condition to condition, and color to color" (Kathir and 'Amar 2003:284).

**Female Nutfah.** The second, the *nutfah* of the female, is alluded to in Surah al-Insan: "Verily We created Man from a drop of mingled sperm, in order to try him: So We gave him (the gifts), of Hearing and Sight" (Ali 2004 Surah 76:2). According to Ibn 'Abbaas, *nutfah* is the mixed fluid of both man and woman. It is reported that the Prophet Muhammad said that man was created from both fluids. That is to say, both man and woman participate equally in the formation of the human zygote.

**Male and Female Nutfah.** The third stage is the mixing of the male and the female *nutfah* that takes place in the womb of the mother. Scientists call this stage, the performatonal stage. Sahih al-Muslim says that "children do not become from the entire fluid" (Al Qushayr-I and Siddiqui 2010:1:180). The Hadith says, "of every little part of the whole." It does not say, "Every part of a fluid," but rather speaks of one part of "the whole

fluid,” and that a child does not come from the entire fluid, but from just one part of it. It is just one part of the semen.

*Nutfah* is formed in the mother’s womb when the sperm and the ovum meet and fertilize, a process that takes 40 days according to the Qur’an. A teaching in the seventh century, known as the *Shir’a* law, indicated that conception begins when the fertilization of the egg takes place, that is, “*nutfah* in the womb, and whatever aborts the implanted ovum is forbidden (*haram*)” (Saniei 2012:33). Hence, *nutfah* signifies that a male sexual cell is present in the semen and when it is aborted it is a *haram*. Allah in His infinite wisdom created man with his seminal fluid performing a pivotal role.

**Haml and Nutfah.** The Arabic word *haml* (حمل) is translated as pregnancy; the term comes from the verb *hamala* (حَمَلَ) and literally means “to carry,” “to transport,” and “to show” (Ljubović 2008:104; Wehr 1979:240, 241). *Haml* obviously refers to a pregnant woman who carries “the embryo in her uterus and not in her fallopian tube” (Rizvi 2004:176). Sayyid Muhammad Rizvi in his volume *Marriage and Morals in Islam* gives new insight to the meaning of *haml* and *nutfah*, he states that before the 7th century an expression; such as, “*ilqa’u ‘n-nutfah*,” (اللقاء النطفة), the entering of the sperm into the uterus was discussed; after the 7th century, the expression “*istiqraru ‘n-nutfah*,” (استقرار النطفة), the settling down of the sperm in the uterus, was a concern of theological debate regarding whether or not pregnancy took place and how it related to abortion. Thus, according to the Qur’an, *haml* begins with the implantation not before it. From a *Shir’ah* point of view, *haml* begins when the fertilization of the egg takes place or when it is implanted (*istiqraru*) in the lining of the uterus. Thus, whatever aborts an implanted ovum is forbidden (176).

### ‘Alaqah (عَقْلَغ)

The Arabic word ‘*alaqah* (عَقْلَغ) meaning clotted blood is derived from ‘*alaqa* (عَلَق) and has several meanings.

First, ‘*alaqa behi* (بِه عَلَق) refers to a leech-like structure. The fresh-water leech attached to the embryo is the ‘*alaqah* stage, for the embryo during the ‘*alaqah* stage acquires an appearance very similar to that of a leech.

The second meaning of ‘*alaqah* is “a suspended thing,” which can be seen in the attachment of the embryo during the stage of ‘*alaqah* to the mother’s womb. Other derivative expressions can be ‘*alaqat al-marh* (عَلَقَت المرأة) meaning, the woman became pregnant (Ahmad 1988:1733). Third, it has to do with a blood clot. In the ‘*alaqah* stage, according to Sultan Ahmad, the embryo experiences internal events. He stated: “the embryo goes through internal events, first the formation of blood in the vessels, until the metabolic cycle is completed through the placenta. The blood is caught

within closed vessels and that is why the embryo acquires the appearance of a blood clot, in addition to the leech-like appearance. Both descriptions are miraculously given by a single Qur’anic word ‘*alaqah*’ (2011:174). Thus, ‘*alaqah*’ signifies a portion of clotted blood or the seminal fluid when it becomes thick clotted blood after which it passes to another stage called *mudghah* (مُضْغَةً), which is a lump. In his book, *Islam in Brunei: During the Reign of His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu’izzaddin Waddaulah, Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam*, Sultan Haji writes that it is “haram (illegal and sinful) to cause the abortion of the child in the womb from the moment of its conception as *alaqah*” (2008:128).

### *Mudghah* (مُذْغُومٌ)

The word *mudghah* means flesh or lump and is derived from *madagha* (مَضَغَ). Arabs would say, *madagha al-t’am* (مَضَغَ الطَّعَامِ), he chewed his food. *Madagha* is a chewed-like substance (Awadalla 2004:124), it signifies a piece of flesh or a morsel of flesh; it also means a fetus when it has become like a lump of flesh (Lane 1968 s.v. “مَضَغَ”). *Mudghah* is the third stage where the ovum becomes a blastoderm that consists of three layers—according to the Qur’an—in which all organs of the fetus are developed.<sup>5</sup> The three layers of the blastoderm are described in the Qur’an by the expression “then we made out of that lump,” that is, the *mudghah* from which Allah created bones.

The *Mudghah* at this phase is approximately one centimeter in length (Atei Ondigo 2007:149). The embryo’s external appearance has a curved structure, which resembles teeth-marks, and a curved surface (Al-Rehaili 1998:21). Ibrahim B. Syed indicates that the fetus at this point is about four weeks old (1989:126) or from 23-42 days old, and has a figure similar to that of the chewed lump of flesh with 13 somites (Phāuṇḍeśana 2007:295; Singh 2014:50-55). Harry Wain in his book, *The Story Behind the Word: Some Interesting Origins of Medical Terms* explains that the term somite is composed of the Greek *soma* or body and *pagos* or fixed. A somite, then, is “a segment of the body of an embryo” (2008:292). Keith L. Moore suggest that “the Arabic word ‘*mudghah*’ means ‘chewed substance or chewed lump.’ Toward the end of the fourth week, the human embryo looks somewhat like a chewed lump of flesh. The chewed appearance results from the somites that resemble teeth marks. The somites represent the beginnings or primordial of the vertebrae” (1986:15, 16). The somites give rise to the muscles and later bones. “The somites are the bases from which the greater part of the axial skeleton and musculature develop” (Syed1989:126). At the end of the fourth week and after the somites begin to form, each somite starts to divide into tissues: called a dorsolateral myotome—from the Greek muscle

slice; and a ventromedial sclerotome—from the Greek hard slice (Cartmill, Hylander, and Shafland 2001:16).

The cells of the embryo at this stage is actually formed, while other parts are not yet formed. The Egyptian geologist, Zaghul El-Naggar, in his book *Treasures in the Sunnah 2: A Scientific Approach* states *mudghah* does not take the shape of a human in any sense until the period between 40-50 days after the fertilization of the egg (2012:261). The embryo at this stage is a complete creation describing the part that is already formed, but the other parts that are not yet formed are incomplete.

The question is, Does the embryo possess complete or incomplete creation at this level? Surah 22:5 seems to give a perfect answer concerning the embryogenesis of *mudghah*, that is “partly formed and partly unformed.” That is to say, the embryo consists of “both differentiated and undifferentiated tissues” (Asadi 2000:95). In other words, the formed parts of the embryo are differentiated while the unformed ones are undifferentiated.

The *Shafi'* school believed that the phrase, *mudghah* “clot of blood” and “the lump” belong to the earliest forms of life prescribed at this stage and that the human life begins at the eighth week after fertilization. The fetus denotes a living child in the mother’s womb and that life has begun.

Allah then covers the bones with flesh and skin and other organs. Then, he perfects the internal creation of man. At this phase “the body in the womb develops a soul from within itself” (Ahmad 1988:1788). The phrase, “then we developed out of it another creature” (v. 15b) suggests that the soul is not imported outside of the human body but rather it grows and develops in the womb. These verses deal with the physical development of the embryo. *Nutfah* deals with the first stage of the physical development of man. *'Alaqah* is concerned with the second stage of the development of the fetus that corresponds to when the sperm forms a “blood connection with the womb. It assumes the form of congealed blood and becomes safe from being destroyed” (Ahmad 1988:1788). *Mudghah* is the third stage of development of the embryo, according to Adel Awadalla (2004:124).

The Muslim scholar Imam Abū-Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ibn-Muḥammad Al-Ghazali (450- 505/1058-1111) says:

The first degree of existence is that in which sperm flows into the uterus and is mixed with the woman’s sperm thus becoming receptive to life; destroying this is (already) an attempt on the life of an existing being; if the drop of mixture becomes *mudgha* and *alaqa* (clot), the attempt is even more serious; it is even more so when the soul has been infused and it has taken on human form; but maximum atrocity is reached when the crime is committed after the fetus has been delivered alive. (1953:90)

It suffices to say that *nutfah* is an impregnated ovum on its arrival in the womb's cavity. After it becomes covered up with maternal blood, the Qur'an calls it at this stage, '*alaqah*, that is not only congealed blood but also has a connection to and a formation of blood vessels in it. After that, the *mudghah* stage begins in which organs begin to develop and grow. Bones and muscles form from the *mudghah* phase to become differentiated cells or tissues. The Qur'an views abortion of the fetus at the *nufah* (sperm); the '*alaqah* (blood); and the *mudghah* (lump or embryo) stages as *haram*.

### Janin (جنين)

*Janin* (جنين) as an Arabic word is derived from *janna* (جَانًا), its plurals *ajinna* and *ajunn* means that which is concealed as well as contains life (Yucel and Albayrak 2013:156). It is worthy to mention that most Arabic words have and derive from three root consonants. Thus, *janin* is derived from the j-n-n (ج+ن+ن) root, and means "to cover," "to veil," "to conceal," "to hide," "to protect," and "to become dark" (Lane 1968 s.v. "جن"). In this nuance, *janin* is a fetus, because a fetus is covered in the mother's womb (Yucel and Albayrak 2013:156).

Expressions such as *ajnto al-shye fe sadrey* (أَجْنَنْتُ الشَّيْءَ فِي صَدْرِي) mean, "I concealed the thing in my bosom," and *ajnt waladan* (أَجْنَنْتُ وِلْدَانًا) denotes "she concealed or enveloped in her womb a child or an embryo, or a fetus" (Lane 1968 s.v. "جن"). Chamsi-Pasha takes a similar approach that *janin* means that which is "a conceptus hidden in the womb" (2015:202). Such an interpretation seems to be affirmed in the Qur'an, "He makes you, the wombs of your mothers, in stages, one after another, in three veils of darkness" (Ali 2004 Surah 39:6).

According to the *Safi'i* scholars, the word *janin* refers to the period after the *mudghah* stage—but in connection with the other two stages—*nutfah* and '*alaqah*—the word is used in a metaphorical sense. In order to be "a *janin* it has to have passed the stages of *mudgha* and '*alaqa*, so that it shows some human shape" (Eich 2008:64, 65).

## Hadith 40 or 120 days and Abortion

As stated previously, fetal development begins when the sperm fuses with the egg. Such a fertilization is able to bring about a human being. When this cell develops and breaks into additional cells, a complete organism is formed. Therefore, the cells are "called totipotent meaning they have total potential to produce all cell types present in a living human" (Saniei 2012:31).

In the Islamic world, the concept of whether or not abortion is acceptable was discussed in the 9th century by jurisprudence, where the '*Ulama*' (lit. the learned ones) did not agree on the point of "development at which a fetus becomes 'infused with life'" (Bowen 2005:219). Tayeb Salib indicated that the destruction of infants still in their mothers' womb represented killing, and the '*ulama* create a juridical parallel to rule against abortion. One should not kill a new born; neither should one kill an unborn child (Salib 2002:173). The Qur'an prohibits abortion when it says, "Kill not your children for fear of want. We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin" (Ali 2004 Surah 17:31). And further instructs, that on the Day of Judgment, "aborted babies will require an accounting of the mothers who have put their right to choose above the fetus's right to life" (Tyler and Reid 2004:30).

While the Qur'an seems to be clear regarding abortion, the hadith however, projects a different picture. Life begins either at 40 or 120 days after fertilization in reference to the hadith: "Everyone of you is formed within your mother's womb for a period of 40 days as the *nutfah*, then, as the '*alaqah* over the same period of time, then the *mudghah* which also develops over 40 days, before the angels are sent to blow your souls into yourselves" (Al-Bukhari 2002:63; Al-Hashimi 1971:497).

The above hadith is debatable. Some consider the formation of the fetus to be at 40 days, others consider it to be at 120 days after the fertilization of the egg. The question is often asked: "Could it be that the three stages of 40 days each are three stages of 4 weeks each?" Whichever view one embraces, it all depends on the dominate school in a given locale. Some schools of thought may permit abortion up to 40, 80, or 120 days, or forbid it unless the mother's life is in jeopardy. As a result, Islam seems not to give a consensus (from the hadith above) as to the permissibility of abortion at the early stages of pregnancy.

Jurists generally agree that after 120 days the fetus has a soul. Once it is formed as a soul, abortion is *haram*, *taboo*, or prohibited. Prior to the specific period of 120 days, it seems that abortion is allowed. After 120 days it is prohibited because the fetus has become *insaan* (انسان), a human being (Bowen 2005:224).

Some Muslim scholars understand from this hadith that life commences after 120 days, when the fetus receives a soul. Christopher J. H. Wright concurs that "up to 4 months, the mother has more rights than the fetus, but after this the child has equal rights with the mother" (2003:83). The *Shafi*' school believed that the phrase, "clot of blood" and "the lump" belong to the earliest forms of life prescribed at this stage. And that human life begins at the eighth week after fertilization. The fetus denotes a living child in the mother's womb, life has begun.



Moreover, some *Shafi'i* jurists permit abortion within the period of 80 days. Most of the Hanbali school permits abortion before the 120 days period, it does not, however permit unrestricted abortion. In other words, the Hanbali jurists permit it up to the first stage, that is, 40 days (Bowen 2006:3:314). Abdulaziz Sachedina states that most of the “Hanbali jurists treat abortion as a culpable action only when the ejected fetus is dead or when its partial ejection is caused by blows to the stomach of a pregnant woman or by her having induced abortion through taking a medicine” (2013:129).

In the book *From Islam to Christ: One Woman's Path Through the Riddles of God*, Derya Little writes that the Hanafi school, which is the prominent school of Islamic thought in Turkey, teaches that Islam permits abortion up to the fourth month of pregnancy. After that point, when the life force has been breathed into a fetus, abortion is akin to murder. The Hanbali school in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates prohibit abortion after day 40 (2006:57).

The Malik jurists' view is that the life of the embryo begins the moment the sperm has settled in the uterus; consequently, they prohibited abortion right from the moment of conception. It is worthy to note that while the Maliki jurists forbade abortion, they did not object to abortion when it was done within forty days of conception. Such an action performed within the first 40 days does not make the action *haram*, sinful, but it is perceived as *makruh* (an action that is not recommended in Islam).

Abul Fadl Mohsin Ebrahim, in his book *Abortion, Birth Control and Surrogate Parenting: An Islamic Perspective* states that

the Hanafi school is the most flexible on abortion. It specifies that before the fourth month of pregnancy, an abortion may be induced if a woman's pregnancy poses a threat to the life of her already existing infant. The Maliki position prohibits an abortion after implantation has taken place, while the *Shafi'i* school maintains that at any stage after fertilization the zygote should not be disturbed, and interference with its development would be a crime. The Hanbali school, by stipulating the payment of blood with (a monetary compensation) for causing a miscarriage shows that it regards abortion as a sin. (Ebrāhīm 2010:92; Swain 2011:78)

Ibn Gazey, like imam al-Ghazali from the *Maliki* and *Shafi'i* schools oppose abortion at any time of pregnancy (in El Saadawi 2015:54). Al-Ghazali indicated that even though the fetus of less than 120 days is not a “person,” it would nevertheless soon become one (in Kelsay 2013:99). At the same time, he indicated that it is a crime to disturb the fertilized egg of a human being. Ibn Taymiyah said, “It is the consensus of all fuqaha

(renowned Muslim scholars) that abortion is prohibited.” Imam Malik, well known Muslim scholar said, abortion is not allowed at any stage of the pregnancy from conception. Not only that, but Islamic law prescribes punishment for anyone performing or assisting in abortion (Pennacchia 2012:77).

When the fetus becomes “ensouled,” which happens after 120 days of pregnancy, it becomes a “person” in a legal sense, and it has “rights” (Rahman 2010:204). During this stage, Allah breathes his spirit into it, and it becomes a new human being. This occurs at four months, or 120 days after conception. This prohibition after ensoulment does not apply in general to “therapeutic” abortion, a flexible phrase which can include different cases, three of which occur most frequently in Muslim law: (a) when the continuation of the pregnancy can kill the mother, (b) when it will have serious consequences on her physical and/or mental health, and (c) when the drying up of her milk caused by the new pregnancy threatens the life of her suckling infant while the parents do not have the resources to pay for a wet nurse (Atighetchi 2006:98).

The Qur’an states: “He created you (all) from a single person: then created, of like nature, his mate; and he sent down for you eight head of cattle in pairs: He makes you, in the wombs of your mothers, in stages, one after another, in three veils of darkness. such is Allah, your Lord and Cherisher: to Him belongs (all) dominion. There is no god but He: then how are ye turned away (from your true Centre)?” (Ali 2004: Surah 39:6)

Some Muslim experts have interpreted the phrase, “the three veils of darkness,” as a reference to the abdominal wall of the mother, her uterine wall, and the combined amnion and chorion membranes surrounding the embryo (Hadi 2016:2:173). According to the Osoul Global Center, modern science refers to three layers which form layers of darkness of the embryo in the mother’s womb. These, in turn, provide a powerful protection for the fetus. The layers are the interior abdominal wall of the mother, the uterine wall, and the amino-chorionic membrane (Osoul Global Center n.d.:215).

### The Permissibility of Abortion

Islam sees abortion of a fetus as infanticide except when it is used to save the life of the mother. Even in such situations, an effort should be made to save both lives: mother and child. The fetus is alive as a cell from the time of its inception, with shaping starting at four weeks and movements at four months. According to the Hadith, at 120 days the angel visits the fetus and blows the spirit into it. This coincides with the starting of the baby’s first movements.

According to Shar'a, abortion is permitted when doctors declare that the continuation of pregnancy will place the mother's health in danger. Such a principle is based on the lesser of two evils. Islamic jurists call this *al-ahamm wa'l-muhimm* (more important and the less important) (Leaman 2013:120).

## Conclusion

This article has traced the concept of abortion from pre-Islamic times. While female infanticide and abortion of unwanted babies were practiced during that era, such issues were outlawed in the Qur'an. Linguistically, the Arabic word *al-aijhad*, abortion, signifies the removal of the fetus from the womb before the fourth month and, based on the linguistic analysis of *sulalah*, *nutfah*; *'alaqah*; *mudghah*, abortion is *haram*; illegal and sinful from the time the sperm becomes blood and from blood to a lump, which incorporates the pre-embryo, embryo, and the fetus.

From a Qur'anic perspective, the act of abortion is a direct negation of Allah's creation of human beings. It involves unjust killing of a person. Islam teaches that abortion should never take place for economic reasons, "Kill not your children for fear of want: We shall provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily the killing of them is a great sin (Ali 2004 Surah17:31).

Abortion is not permitted in Islam; however, under some circumstances such as rape or incest, or when the mother's health is in danger, it may be acceptable according to various religious scholars' interpretation of the Quran. This is not to say, however, that abortion cases do not occur in Muslim Arab society (Gobert 2015:120). It seems that neither Islam nor Middle Eastern culture tolerates such abortion discrimination against females in the womb as a circumstance as the lesser of two evils.

It is believed by some schools of thought, based on a hadith, that abortion is a possibility up to 40, 80, or 120 days, or forbidden unless the mother's life is at risk. With regard to this hadith, Islam does not give a precise time when abortion is allowed. Therefore, there are two basic opinions concerning abortion in Islam. One group holds the view that abortion is not allowed during any phase of pregnancy, while the other group sees it as permissible in the early stages of pregnancy. Whichever view one holds, it all depends on the dominant school of thought in a given locale or culture. This is because "both the culture and religion of Islam are intertwined. In other words, they are conjoined" (Guirguis 2019:13).

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Regarding female infanticide, death, and burial rituals, see Guirguis 2019:198-216.

<sup>2</sup> Lars C. Stene said that ESC derived from “the inner cell mass of the mammalian blastocyst and are said to be pluripotent because they give rise to all of the fully differentiated tissues of the embryo proper, including the products of all three embryonic stem layers and thus the b-cells of the pancreas” (2011:213). The definition of the ESC unlike conservative churches, Muslim scholars are opened to support research for the ESC.

<sup>3</sup> For most conservative Christians, ESC begins at conception, see Waters and Cole-Turner 2003:171-176. This same motivation explains the proliferation of terms to specify discreet stages of life growing in the womb: pre-embryo, embryo, and the fetus. The reality is that at every stage from conception to birth there is a human child, whose life is no more “potential” or less human at these stages than is the life of a newborn, a two-year old or an octogenarian (see also Waskey 2008:467).

<sup>4</sup> For instance, research done in North Dakota in the United State of America where the cloning of humans was banned when they issued a decree in 2003 to “outlaw embryonic stem cell research in the state on the basis that it destroys human life” (Walsh 2008:2:392).

<sup>5</sup> The three layers of the blastoderm are the external, or epiblast; the internal, or hypoblast; and the middle, or mesoblast. For more information regarding the three layers of blastoderm see Sudduth (1886:1:543).

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