

Table of Contents / Table des matières / Inhalt

<i>Editorial</i>	3
<i>Reinder Bruinsma</i> God and Pandemics: The Impact of “Pestilences” on Christian Believers in General and, in Particular, on Seventh-day Adventists	7
<i>Radiša Antić</i> Catholic-Protestant Dialogue: An Assessment	31
<i>Laurence A. Turner</i> The Cosmic Week in the History of Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology	45
<i>László Szabó</i> Kirche im Wandel: Eine demografische Analyse der Entwicklung der Freikirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Deutschland und Österreich	69
<i>John Webster</i> Advent Hope: Movements of Embodied Hope and the Common Good	101
<i>Book Reviews</i>	
Richard Rice. <i>The Future of Open Theism: From Antecedents to Opportunities</i> (John Okpechi).....	127
Scott R. Swain. <i>The Trinity: An Introduction</i> (Roland Meyer)	134

Frank Hasel. <i>Living for God: Reclaiming the Joy of Christian Virtue</i> (Stefan Höschele).....	137
René Gehring. <i>Die Dreieinigkeit in Bibel und Adventgeschichte</i> (Holger Teubert)	140
Jehu J. Hanciles. <i>Migration and the Making of Global Christianity</i> (Reinder Bruinsma)	146

Editorial

This issue of *Spes Christiana* offers the readers articles on a number of widely diverging topics. I trust that our readers have a wide-ranging interest and will enjoy reading most, if not all, of these contributions. Besides, I am confident that many will in the near – or perhaps in the somewhat more distant – future consult a specific article in the course of their own research.

What the five articles in this spring 2022 issue have in common is a distinct Seventh-day Adventist perspective. The authors are accomplished academics with expertise in one or more disciplines, who have demonstrated an enduring commitment to the Adventist Church. However, as scholars they do not just applaud the positive aspects of the history and current activities of their faith community, but they want to help their church and its leadership to critically evaluate important trends in their church, including theological developments, interchurch relationships and social interactions.

When I wrote “God and Pandemics,” the Corona-pandemic was still dominating the headlines of the media. At the moment of the publication of this issue the events in Ukraine have taken its place. However, it must be feared that this pandemic may cause further havoc in future Covid-outburst, and that other zoonotic plagues will follow rather sooner than later. The theme of my article has, therefore, not lost any of its actuality. Much is being written on the impact of the Corona-pandemic on various domains of life, and it is to be expected that a lot of research will follow in the coming years. My article on the impact of “pestilences” on Christian believers, and, specifically, on Seventh-day Adventist Christians may inspire others to pursue in more depth a number of aspects that I could only touch upon very briefly.

The next in-depth article explores interchurch relations of the largest Christian denomination: the Roman Catholic Church. Throughout its history, Adventism has had a rather problematic relationship with Roman-Catholicism. Based on a historicist approach to the prophecies of Daniel and the Revelation, Catholicism has traditionally been identified by Adventist Bible interpreters as a spiritual power – often with significant political influence – that was at odds with true Bible-based Christianity. The former widespread anti-Catholic attitude in much of Protestantism has in recent times, to a large extent and at many levels, been replaced with a fruitful Catholic-Protestant dialogue.

Dr. Radiša Antić, who has a background as a systematic theologian as well as a church administrator, assesses Roman Catholic dialogue from the days of the Second Vatican Council until recent times. Although he believes that changes in Catholic teachings would be desirable (as one would expect from a Seventh-day Adventist theologian), Antić points to some developments which he characterizes as positive.

Dr. Laurence A. Turner, an Old Testament specialist, is known in Adventism as a gifted lecturer and preacher. His influence does, however, extend further, through several highly acclaimed publications, especially focusing on the book of Genesis. In 2021, Turner responded positively to a request from his church to investigate the claim of an author/lecturer at the fringes of the church that Christ's Second Coming may be expected around the year 2027. This view is largely based on the so-called *cosmic week concept*, which holds that the six creation days of Genesis 1 correspond with a period of 6,000 years between the creation of the world and the return of Christ. Turner provides a brief historical summary of the cosmic week theory which, for some time in the past, was rather popular in Adventist circles, but was subsequently explicitly rejected. It has been, however, recently been revived by some internet ministries. Turner's criticism of the hermeneutical and exegetical methods used to support the (approximate) 2027 date on the basis the cosmic week theory is an important, well-argued response, which will be widely appreciated.

Dr. László Szabó teaches missiology and related subjects at Friedensau Adventist University (near Magdeburg, Germany). His article reflects his recent research in the area of Adventist church growth in Germany and Austria. The negative growth pattern shows strong similarities with those in other denominations. The retention of its members is particularly problematic for the German and Austrian Adventist Church, while this situation is significantly aggravated by the demographic structure of the church. Szabó proposes a series of measures church leaders might consider in their attempts to reduce membership losses and to provide stronger pastoral support for specific membership segments. Most articles in *Spes Christiana* are in the English language, but manuscripts in French and German are also accepted. Since Szabó's article deals with issues in two German-speaking countries, it is perhaps extra appropriate to publish it in German. László Szabó recently published his doctoral research in his book *Mission: Concept in Context: Post-*

Communism Religious Revival in Eastern Central Europe Experienced in the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Regnum Studies in Mission, 2021).

Dr. John Webster's contribution "Advent Hope: Movements of Embodied Hope and the Common Good" resulted from a paper that he presented in 2021 as a response to the keynote address of Sally Haslanger, the Ford Professor of Philosophy at the prestigious Massachusetts Institute of Technology, at the 2021 annual meeting of the Society of Adventist Philosophers. John Webster hails originally from South Africa, but currently teaches theology and the history of Christianity at La Sierra University – one of several Adventist institutions of higher learning in California. Reading Webster's beautifully drafted response to the key note address of professor Haslanger will perhaps wet the appetite of some readers to look for some of her influential writings. Webster's thesis, in his response, is that agencies that do not share a *common ground* may, nonetheless, cooperate for the *common good*. This is the basis for his assertion that a movement of "Advent Hope" may cooperate with other, quite dissimilar, movements in the struggle against the structural and systemic injustice that Sallanger seeks to combat.

As has become common practice, this issue contains a number of reviews of important books about themes that correspond with the academic realm our journal is dedicated to. We welcome suggestions for future book reviews and trust that members of our society (the European Adventist Society of Theology and Religious Studies) who publish a book will send the book review editor a complimentary copy, so that it can be reviewed.

On a final note, we are saying goodbye to Dr. Kerstin Maiwald as the Managing Editor and Book Review Editor of *Spes Christiana*. In past years she has played a major role in the production of our journal. It has been a pleasure to work with her and her expertise will be missed. Dr. Maiwald is a scholar in her own right. She holds a Dr. phil. in Assyriology. Her teaching load and other assignments as a Research Associate postdoc at Friedensau Adventist University have recently been increased, which made it necessary for her to review her other commitments. As indicated in the previous issue we are happy that Mr. John Okpechi, a pastor and MTS graduate student at Friedensau Adventist University, will assume a more extensive role in the copy-editing process of the next issue.

Reinder Bruinsma, General Editor

God and Pandemics

The Impact of “Pestilences” on Christian Believers in General and, in Particular, on Seventh-day Adventists

Reinder Bruinsma

Abstract

This article analyses the religious impact of a number of past pandemics. After providing a brief survey of major epidemics and pandemics in history—from the fifth century BC Plague of Athens to the Covid-19 pandemic that broke out in 2020—the religious impact of a few of these health disasters is examined: The Black Death of the fourteenth century, the Influenza of 1918-1920, the more recent HIV/AIDS pandemic and the current Corona (Covid-19) pandemic. Special attention is given to the Seventh-day Adventist response to the last three of these pandemics. The available data indicate that, perhaps contrary to expectations, the eschatological aspect of these pandemics, as “pestilences” that were signs of Christ’s imminent coming, was not the dominant element in the Adventist response. Looking at some of the conspiracy theories that accompany the Covid-19 crisis, it is found that at least some Adventists are also susceptible to such theories.

I wrote this article during the Covid-19 pandemic, while I was restricted in my movements as the country of the Netherlands was in what is now referred to as a *lock-down* – an English term that has been adopted into many other languages. It is a time when many Christians are asking questions about “God

and the pandemic,”¹ and many, more specifically, wonder whether the current plague, which at the time of writing has already killed a few million people world-wide, must be regarded as one of the “pestilences” which Christ predicted in His so-called Olivet Discourse, as one of signs that would signal His soon return to this world (Luke 21:11). In a Seventh-day Adventist context, this raises further questions, such as whether Covid-19 has intensified the eschatological awareness of Seventh-day Adventists in any measurable way.

First, however, a more general question calls for our attention. What has been the religious impact of past epidemics and pandemics? And how does the religious impact of the current health crisis compare with that of earlier global health disasters? Pandemics are, after all, rather regular occurrences – on average the world experiences a global pandemic about four times in each century (Wuthnow 2010, 143). Throughout history these crises have often caused panic and deep despair, as they drew people “closer to the prospect of death and compelled [them] to contemplate the meaning of life” (Chandra 2020). But they have also proven to be “moments of pause, renewed energy, and hope” (Ferngren 2020, 22–25). Has that also been true – and if so, in what way – for Seventh-day Adventist Christians, as they experienced the pandemics that hit the world since their denomination came into existence?

1. Epidemics and Pandemics² – Past and Present

Deadly epidemics were already known in Bible times, and are invariable characterized in the Scriptures as the result of divine interventions. The sixth plague, with its “festering boils” that affected humans and livestock, as part of God’s aim to break the stubbornness of the Egyptian Pharaoh (Exodus 9:9), definitely qualifies as an epidemic. And, to mention another Old Testament example: the sudden demise of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers during their assault on Jerusalem, at the time of the reign of Judah’s King Hezekiah (729–686 BC), has often been explained as an epidemic caused by infected mice (Horn 1960,

¹ Cf. the title of a little book by the prominent theologian Tom Wright: *God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath* (Wright 2020).

² Even experts do not always clearly differentiate between epidemics and pandemics. A basic definition for “epidemic” is: A disease that affects large numbers of people within a community or region. A pandemic extends over multiple countries and continents. See: <https://intermountainhealthcare.org/blogs/topics/live-well/2020/04/whats-the-difference-between-a-pandemic-an-epidemic-endemic-and-an-outbreak> (accessed May 11, 2022).

979–982).³ According to Isaiah 37:36, “the angel of the Lord” went out and struck the Assyrian army. Several scholars suggest that “angel of the Lord” is a biblical euphemism for an epidemic.⁴

Records from classical antiquity report a number of epidemics and pandemics. The Plague of Athens, which occurred in 430–426 BC, may well have been a serious outbreak of typhoid, which claimed the lives of more than a quarter of the city’s population (Huremovic 2019). A historical account was provided by Thucydides in his *History of the Peloponnesian War*.⁵ A full-blown ancient pandemic, which occurred in the late second century AD, was the Antonine Plague of 165–180 AD. This is thought to have been caused by smallpox, and was introduced into the Roman Empire by troops returning from the Roman Parthian War. The total number of victims may have been as high as five million.⁶

A century later another plague, named after Cyprian, the bishop of Carthage, brought havoc to a large area around the Mediterranean. This pandemic, the cause of which remains unknown, reportedly killed some 5,000 people a day in Rome alone. St Cyprian wrote about the disaster in a Latin work entitled *De Mortalitate* (Cyprian 1885).

The Justinian Plague, which was described by various contemporary authors, is probably the earliest documented example of the bubonic plague. It spread widely, along caravan trading routes, throughout the Eastern-Roman world and beyond. It started in mid-sixth century and was followed by decades of new outbreaks during which the population in some areas may have been reduced by as much as forty percent (Huremovic 2019).

1.1 *The Black Death*

Several major pandemics occurred in medieval times,⁷ but for a number of centuries the most dramatic example of a horrendous global outbreak of the

³ For historical issues surrounding Sennacherib’s various military campaigns, see Bright 1967, 267–271 and 282–288.

⁴ Cf. <https://www.haaretz.com/archaeology/.premium.MAGAZINE-how-mice-may-have-saved-jerusalem-2-700-years-ago-from-the-assyrians-1.6011735> (accessed May 11, 2022).

⁵ Book II, Chapter VII. An English translation was provided by Charles Foster Smith and published in 1956 by Heinemann (London, UK) and Harvard University Press (Cambridge, MA).

⁶ Cf. https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pest_van_Antoninus (accessed May 11, 2022).

⁷ For an extensive list of epidemics/pandemics, see: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_epidemics. This article provides a wealth of bibliographical information.

bubonic plague remains the “Plague” or the “Black Death.” It originated in China in 1334, reached Rome in 1347, soon to spread all over the European continent, before moving into Russia and the Middle East. Due to its extremely high mortality rate, the Plague often annihilated entire communities. Today scientists understand that this pandemic was spread by a bacillus called *Yersina pestis*, named after the French biologist Alexandre Yersin (1863–1943), who discovered the culpable germ (History.com editors 2020). The bacillus travels through the air, but is also spread through the bite of infected fleas and rats. The number of victims of this plague remains unknown, but some experts put the death toll at about 75 million or even higher. If correct, this would mean that half of all Europeans died (Carlin 2019, 135). The plague had run its course by the early 1530s, but for centuries reappeared every few generations (History.com editors 2020). In 1665–1666 twenty percent of the population of London was killed in another terrible outbreak of the bubonic plague.

1.2 Smallpox

One of the great successes of humankind’s fight against deadly diseases was the eradication of smallpox by the early 1980s. During its long history smallpox left a deadly trail on all continents. In the twentieth century alone it killed nearly 300 million people – three times more than all the wars in that period (Oldstone 2010, 53). Some authors mention even a far higher number of victims.⁸ Over the centuries, smallpox has had a tremendous geopolitical impact (ibid., 53–72).⁹ Its history “is interwoven with the history of human migration and wars” (ibid., 56). It goes back to ancient times and the earliest hints of the disease were found in some Egyptian mummies that date from the twelfth century BC. As the centuries rolled by, smallpox left its marks all over the ancient world and many parts of Asia. The great Islamic expansion across North-Africa and the Iberian peninsula in the sixth to eighth century spread smallpox across Africa and Europe (ibid., 59). Colonization exported the disease to the Americas and other continents, “across oceans by mariners as well as over land routes by armies and caravans” (ibid., 63), in the process often eliminating entire indigenous populations. By the seventeenth and eighteenth

⁸ Carlin puts the number at 500 million: Carlin 2019, 54.

⁹ For the timetable of smallpox virus control, see pp. 94–99.

centuries smallpox was the most devastating disease in the world, also playing a significant role in American colonial and post-colonial history (*ibid.*).

Although variolation (*Variola* means smallpox) may already have been practiced in China in the first century, it did not become a common method to stem smallpox until the eighteenth century. Variolation was a method of inoculating individuals with material from an infected person to immunize them against smallpox. This was later replaced by a smallpox vaccine. Some Christians considered variolation to be an unchristian practice. The modern resistance by a substantial number of people against vaccination is not something new, for eighteenth and early nineteenth Britain already had its campaigns by anti-vaccinationists (*ibid.*, 75–79). On the European continent opposition against smallpox inoculation lasted even considerably longer (McNeill 1998, 255–256).

1.3 The Spanish Flu

Seven waves of cholera struck the world in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although a cholera vaccine was created in 1885, pandemics continued for a considerable time, and even now cholera remains a threat when sanitary conditions are seriously compromised. However, the Influenza of 1918 is often regarded as the first truly *global* pandemic, with a staggering number of victims that may have been as high as 50 or even 100 million. This, however, remains a rough estimate, as many regions in the world, especially in Africa and Asia, did not yet have adequate death records. In other parts of the globe the reporting was also far from accurate. The spread of the influenza around the globe was facilitated by massive troop movements. Improved highway systems and a network of railroads allowed the disease to further spread from the main ports to many localities.

Unlike the virus in most influenza pandemics, this particular strain of influenza affected large numbers of young healthy adults. It was a major factor in the outcome of the First World War. The Spanish Flu contributed significantly to the halting of the advance of the German armies in France in 1918, and to bringing the end of World War I in sight (Oldstone 2010, 306). This influenza pandemic became popularly known as the Spanish Flu, not because the disease originated in Spain, but because this country had remained neutral in the First World War and had uncensored reporting of the havoc this rapidly spreading lethal virus (*ibid.*, 309).

1.4 Since the Influenza of 1918

In the “pandemic century,”¹⁰ between the Spanish Flu and the Covid-19 pandemic that struck the world in 2020, other global contagious diseases created major upheavals and caused an enormous amount of suffering and death. For a long time, outbreaks of diseases like measles or poliomyelitis continued to exert a high death toll, before they were brought under control. The extremely contagious Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which first surfaced in 2002, and which had a high mortality rate, caused global concern but was relatively soon under control. The appearance of the “Bird Flu” set off another global scare. The first documented case of the transmission of avian influenza (H5N1) from birds to humans was in 1997 (Honigsbaum 2019, 172). In a number of countries many millions of (potentially) infected poultry were destroyed, in order to reduce the risk for humans. In retrospect, earlier limited outbreaks of bird flu were found to have occurred, and some experts warn that there is a great risk in the future of an extremely dangerous bird-flu pandemic (Oldstone 2010, 326). The H1N1 (Swine Flu) pandemic of 2009 infected ten percent of the global population, with a death toll that has been variously estimated from about 20,000 to as high as over half a million (Huremovic 2019).

More recently, the Ebola outbreak (2014–2016), though concentrated in Central- and West-Africa, caused global concern after extensive reporting in the media of Ebola’s extreme contagiousness and high mortality (Honigsbaum 2020, 197–226).

But, besides smallpox, perhaps the most notorious pandemic in the period between the Spanish Flu and Covid-19 was (and is) the plague of HIV-AIDS (ibid., 135–166). It was characterized by Huremovic, a prominent New York psychiatrist, in these sobering words: “HIV/AIDS is a slowly progressing global pandemic, cascading through decades of time, different continents, and different populations” (Huremovic 2019). It is generally believed to have developed from a chimpanzee virus in West-Africa in the 1920s, and to have moved to Haiti in the 1970s, reaching the USA in the 1970s (History.com editors 2020). Although HIV has infected tens of millions of people, there is still no vaccine to prevent it (Oldstone 2010, 7), and the worldwide death toll has

¹⁰ Cf. the title of Honigsbaum 2020: *The Pandemic Century: A History of Global Contagion from the Spanish Flu to Covid-19*.

risen to over 40 million (Honigsbaum 2020, 139). The number of victims would have risen much higher if no effective medication had been found to enable people to live with the virus.

2. God and Pandemics

In his recent book *The End is Always Near* Dan Carlin poses the question whether perhaps our world may at some future moment face extinction, just as other civilizations have experienced in the past. In the chapter that deals with the role of pandemics in world history, the author wonders how current and future pandemics might dramatically change our outlook on life:

In the past societies have been reshaped and at times have nearly crumbled under the weight of a pandemic. It's possible that, facing mortality rates of 50, 60, or 70 percent – as people who lived through the Black Death did – we might do as they did: turn to religion, change the social structure, blame unpopular minorities and groups, or abandon previous belief systems. (Carlin 2019, 144)

Within the confines of this paper it is impossible to give a comprehensive picture of how the pandemics of past centuries (and the more recent ones) have impacted on political, economic, demographic, social and cultural structures and developments.¹¹ And even a more limited endeavour, namely to describe the religious impact of these disasters, which took so many lives, will of necessity remain sketchy and incomplete.

The comments of University of Cambridge historian Andrew Cunningham are worth quoting:

For Christians the visitation of disease has always been an ambiguous matter, since their God is a benign god, and nothing happens without His will and knowledge. Obviously, God sends disease, and obviously it must be as punishment for sin. But it was not always clear, even to men of religion, quite which sins were being punished by a particular visitation of a pestilence, nor why the good died under God's justice as well as the wicked. (Cunningham 2008, 29–31)

In actual fact, “there is no single predictable religious response,” as environments also greatly differ (Osheim 2008, 36).

¹¹ For a fascinating study of how infectious diseases have, in many cases, altered the course of history, see McNeill 1998.

In what follows I will focus on just a few of the past pandemics, and on a few aspects of the religious impact. That is not to say that other (some of them ongoing) epidemics and pandemics, such as, for instance, leprosy, tuberculosis and malaria, were relatively unimportant. However, for this paper, I have chosen to limit myself to taking a closer look at the religious impact of the Black Death, the Spanish Flu, the HIV-AIDS pandemic and the current Covid-19 crisis, with special attention to the impact of the last three of these pandemics on Seventh-day Adventist believers.

2.1 *God and the Black Death*

Barbara W. Tuchman (1912–1989), a two-time Pulitzer Prize winning historian, provides in her brilliant book about “the calamitous 14th century” a detailed description of the multifaceted impact of the Black Death, including the religious aspects (Tuchman 1978, 92–125). Reaching Europe in 1346, it spread all over this continent within a few years, and, according to contemporary sources, killing perhaps one third of the population.¹²

Many believed that astrology provided the explanation for the plague: a triple conjunction of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars, in the 40th degree of Aquarius, which was said to have occurred on March 10, 1345 (Tuchman 1978, 103). But the vast majority of people were convinced that human sin had evoked the divine wrath, and that, therefore, the people must do everything possible to appease the divine displeasure. Pope Clement VI (reigned 1342–1352) confirmed in a bull of September 1348 (*Quamvis Perfidiam*) that the plague was “a pestilence with which God is afflicting the Christian people.” As would repeatedly happen throughout Christian history, the blame was to a large extent laid on the Jews. This led to large-scale expulsions, persecutions and seizure of Jewish property, accompanied by the traditional accusations of being Christ-killers, of desecration of the sacred host, and poisoning the wells. In his 1348 bull Pope Clement tried to check the anti-Semitic hysteria.¹³

The church, which in many ways formed the backbone of medieval society, took a severe battering. As members of the clergy were dying at the same rate

¹² Many contemporaries saw the pandemic as an eschatological event, foretold by the Apocalypse. The trumpet judgments (Revelation 9) share a pattern of affecting one-third of their target.

¹³ Cf. <https://jewinthepew.org/2015/09/26/26-september-1348-pope-clement-vi-exonerates-jews-from-causing-the-black-death-otdimjh> (accessed May 11, 2022).

as the rest of the population, their number sharply diminished, while their reputation was severely tarnished by abuses and lack of moral standards (Carlin 2019, 132). As a result of the plague, “a terrible pessimism permeated society”, and the omnipresence of death was clearly reflected in much of the art of that period (*ibid.*, 134). Many adopted “a live-for-today” attitude, while lots of others “went off the deep end with quackery and mysticism” (*ibid.*). “The apparent absence of earthly cause gave the plague a supernatural and sinister quality (Tuchman 1978, 104). Tuchman states: “The sense of a vanishing future created a kind of dementia of despair” (*ibid.*, 99). Though unable to answer the questions surrounding the plague in any definitive way, the church still remained the centre for seeking divine intervention against this supernatural punishment. For the expiation of sins, and to plead for the mercy of God, the church “often called for communal fasts and instituted prayer marathons, together with the carrying of relics in procession through the streets” (Cunningham, 29).

Participating in penitent processions was one of the most radical attempts to appease an angry God. In this connection the Flagellant movement must be mentioned, in which the penitential spirit found its most extreme expression. The flagellants beat themselves until the blood flowed, believing that their physical suffering was redemptive (Ferguson 2005, 504; Southern 1970, 306–309). Hundreds of bands roamed the land, as the movement spread quickly from Germany through the Low Countries to France and further (Galli 1996). The Lollards¹⁴ were not so spectacular in their outward behavior but not less radical in their protest against contemporary Catholicism and their demands for spiritual reform. They were deemed heretical by the Church but paved the way for many of the notions that would characterize various pre-Reformation sects (Chandra 2020).

Pope Clement’s formulation of the theory of indulgences, fatally, linked forgiveness of sins with the exchange of money. People could now buy a share in “the treasury of merit” – which had been accumulated by the blood of Christ, together with the good deeds of the Virgin and the saints – and thus acquire a pardon for their sins. Barbara Tuchman concludes: “What the Church gained in revenue by this arrangement was matched in the end by

¹⁴ A derisive term of Dutch origin for followers of Wycliff, many of whom spread Wycliffite ideas in various parts of Europe. See: Walker et al. 1985, 380–382.

loss in respect" (Tuchman 1978, 121) and: "The plague accelerated discontent with the Church at the moment when people felt a greater need for spiritual reassurance" (ibid., 122–121). "The Church emerged from the plague richer if not more unpopular" (ibid., 122).

The evidence suggests that many people still found solace in religion at this time of great uncertainty, but many also did not. The famous book *Decameron*, by Giovanni Boccaccio,¹⁵ is perhaps the most significant literary testimony to the widespread rejection of religion during the Black Death, "at a time when most of Europe was still under the powerful influence of the Catholic Church and its teachings" (Mueller 2020).

2.2 God and the Spanish Flu

Why the Influenza of 1918, or the "Spanish Flu," was so lethal is still a puzzle that remains to be solved (Oldstone 2010, ix). Perhaps due to the fact that it was of relatively short duration, it soon faded from public memory, and later was often referred to as the "forgotten pandemic" (Huremovic 2019). But when this plague hit Europe and other parts of the world, it caused unimaginable mayhem. The self-portrait of the Norwegian painter Edvard Munch very dramatically pictures him as a victim of the pandemic – "pale, exhausted and lonely, with an open mouth, emanating the "disorientation and disintegration" of someone who "isolated and alone" endures this plague (Kasriel 2020).

Science had by now informed the authorities in Western countries how this flu was spread and had emphasized the need for the temporary closing of public buildings. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish leaders debated government orders to close places of worship. Many were willing to comply, but some believed their ministry was now, more than ever, needed and that the doors of their churches and synagogues should remain open (Sentinel 1918, 258).

In the midst of much suffering and near omnipresent death many turned to traditional forms of religion, but "most turned to our secular deity, the state" for a solution of the problems caused by the pandemic, only to find that "our faith in modern states cannot make the virus go away" (Chandra 2020). Not surprisingly, one of ramifications of the Spanish Flu was an increase in the popularity of occult practices connected with communicating with the dead (Carlin 2019, 139).

¹⁵ For a recent translation into English, see Boccaccio 2009.

The very diverse religious response to the “Spanish Flu” in South-Africa deserves special mention, and was to a major extent also reflected in other regions of the world. In the space of just six weeks the flu killed approximately 300,000 South Africans, or roughly six percent of the population (Philips 2008, 34). Hindus, Jews and Muslims all acknowledged that the pandemic had a divine cause, but they remained mostly quiet, at least publicly, about why the people should deserve this divine action (ibid., 35). The adherents of traditional African religions tended to see the plague as stemming from indignant ancestors, or as nefarious actions of witches or wizards (ibid.). Most Christian clergy pointed to “divine visitation” as punishment for sins. As always, “generic sins like immorality, drunkenness, and lax church attendance featured prominently in the list of those that were said to have called forth God’s wrath” (ibid.). And, as could be expected, the global war (World War I) and the devastating plague were put in an eschatological frame and seen by many as signs heralding the soon return of Christ.

The most authoritative text about Adventist eschatology was, and remained for a long time, the two-volume work of Uriah Smith, which resulted from his “thoughts” on Daniel and the Revelation. Published respectively in 1873 and 1867 (and posthumously revised in 1907), references to “signs of the times” could, of course, not touch on the Spanish Flu and later pandemics. However, another prominent book on eschatology, written by James Edson White (1849–1928) mentioned the 1918 pandemic. It referred to this plague as “the most decimating pestilence of all history.” If there was any sign of the soon coming of Christ, this was it (White 1938)! However, it appears that this pattern of thought did not dominate Adventist thinking when the pandemic was actually taking place.

Seventh-day Adventist church members were certainly not immune to the influenza pandemic, but we have no way of knowing how many succumbed to it (Campbell 2020). Our main information about the reaction of Adventists to the “Spanish Flu” comes from the USA. The extent of the drama was highlighted in Adventist publications. West Virginia Conference President T.B. Westbrook, for instance, wrote in November 1918: “If there was ever a time in the history of the world when we needed to offer incense (pray) to God for help, it is now. All our churches are closed, and some lines of the work are at a standstill. The plague ... is raging everywhere and there are many dead bodies in every place” (Westbrook 1918, 1).

When the authorities wanted the churches and schools to be closed, there were no Adventist protests suggesting that this limited their religious freedom. One article in the *Review and Herald* noted the scarcity of medical personnel. The author added this telling comment: “Many cases of the disease even among our own people have been neglected because of lack of someone to minister to them. Our sanitariums are crowded with these cases, and many nurses, doctors, and others have contracted the disease” (Ruble 1918, 16). Church leaders at various levels urged the members to isolate when needed, and “exercise intelligent faith” in dealing with this enormous threat, mindful of the principles of the church’s health message. Many Adventist schools meanwhile saw a significant increase in the enrolment in medical courses and Adventist periodicals carried extensive advertising for the Red Cross (Campbell 2020).

Confirming what was stated above, a survey of Adventist dealings with the Influenza in one of the American regions (Columbia Union) gives no indication that church leaders and church members emphasized that this pandemic should be seen as a sign of the nearness of Christ’s second coming. The journal of the Columbia Union included many obituaries, but over-all focused on the practical aspects of surviving the disease, and on assisting others to do so. Numerous articles also reported that the church did all it could to continue its various ministries (Blyden 2020). One Adventist leader warned against a “holier-than-thou”-attitude on the part of those who might survive the plague and attribute this to their own righteousness, “while attributing the misfortune of his brother to his lack of fidelity” (Ruble 1918, 16).

2.3 God and HIV/AIDS

AIDS – the acquired immune-deficiency syndrome – was first identified and named in 1981, although researchers now believe that this virus infection had occurred much earlier in different places in the world. Its precise origin is, however, still unknown. AIDS results when the human body is no longer in sufficient measure able to resist the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV). The HIV/AIDS disease, which eventually became a pandemic, differs in a very significant aspect from other pandemics in that the initial expansion (in particular in the USA) was marked by its predominant spread among gay men. This connection with homosexuality, and also with frequent substance abuse, together with its initial high death rate, led many conservative Christians to believe that God was using AIDS to punish the, in their eyes, heinous sin of

homosexuality. For many AIDS sufferers this caused intense feelings of shame and guilt. At first, the diagnosis of HIV was an almost certain death sentence, but, although thus far no vaccine has been developed, the availability of effective medication turned HIV into a manageable chronic condition. (Sadly, this medication is not always obtainable in sufficient quantities, and at an affordable price, in developing countries.)

Susan Sontag (1933-2004), an American author, philosopher and political activist, personally experienced how cancer could cause feelings of shame and culpability, but she pointed out in her book *Illness and Metaphor*¹⁶ that such feelings that were often experienced by cancer patients were to a large extent replaced by those of AIDS-patients (Honigsbaum, 148). The fact that, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, AIDS was often referred to as a lifestyle disease and linked to promiscuous sexual relations, tended to stigmatize AIDS-patients.

In general, the main-line Christian churches rejected any stigmatization and many started initiatives to minister to victims of AIDS. Among evangelicals the picture was more varied. Some, like Jerry Falwell (1933–2007), were adamant that the virus was a biological judgment on those who engaged in sexual (especially, homosexual) promiscuity and drug abuse.¹⁷ However, others were closely involved in President Bush's 2008 PREPFAR program (President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief), which saved countless lives, notably in Africa.¹⁸

Many Christians still feel that they are faced with a moral dilemma how they should deal with PWA's (Persons with AIDS). On the one hand, they "blame the victim by defining AIDS as punishment for sin", while, on the other hand, they recognize AIDS-sufferers are sick people who need care (Kowaleski 1990, 91). In other words: they are sinners and they are sick. This and other views of HIV/AIDS continue to strengthen the incorrect idea that AIDS is almost always linked to a gay lifestyle. But, if AIDS is not a divine punishment, it is, according to other Christians, the "natural" outcome of a "sinful" lifestyle. They frequently emphasize that one should love the sinner, while hating the sins.

¹⁶ Published by Farrar, Strauss & Giroux (New York) in 1978.

¹⁷ "AIDS is not just God's punishment for homosexuals; it is God's punishment for the society that tolerates homosexuals," cited in http://en.thinkexist.com/quotes/jerry_falwell (accessed May 11, 2022).

¹⁸ <https://www.patheos.com/topics/2014-religious-trends/evangelical> (accessed May 11, 2022).

Among Seventh-day Adventist Christians the same views were (and are) found. Because of the frequent association of HIV/AIDS with homosexuality, Adventists have often been reluctant to speak about this disease. Adventist hospitals tended to be afraid that too much focus on the treatment of AIDS-patients would negatively impact on their public image.

In 1987 the Adventist denomination established an AIDS Committee. In the years following a few conferences were held at different levels of the church and a number of AIDS-related initiatives were undertaken, notably in Africa. Activities by ADRA (the Adventist Development and Relief Agency) deserve special mention. Gradually Adventist official journals began to publish articles about the AIDS-pandemic, as a rule carefully avoiding giving the impression that HIV/AIDS was also a problem in the Adventist church, and circumspect in speaking about the issue of homosexuality—due to the church's strong rejection of homosexuality (Lawson 1992). Adventist sociologist Ronald L. Lawson, emeritus professor of Queens College (City University of New York), concluded a detailed survey of Adventist attitudes towards HIV/AIDS with this sobering statement: "The response of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the AIDS crisis has been extraordinary slight" (ibid.).

When the denomination held its quinquennial world congress in 1990 in Indianapolis, an official statement about HIV/AIDS was issued. The statement referred to the moral questions surrounding the pandemic, but, typically, avoided the term homosexuality: "Desiring to reveal the redemptive love of Christ we need to separate the disease from the issue of morality, demonstrating a compassionate, positive attitude toward persons with AIDS, offering acceptance and love, and providing for their physical and spiritual needs." (AIDS 1990). The statement acknowledged that AIDS had made its entrance into the Adventist Church and stressed the importance of accepting persons with AIDS and ministering to them: "The local church can find many ways to minister to those with AIDS. Church members can join or form a support group and become individually involved in a supportive role to meet the needs of persons and families impacted by AIDS" (ibid.).

Lawson, however, found that, when he conducted his research in Africa, many African church leaders tended to deny even the existence of AIDS in the Adventist Church. In reality HIV/AIDS developed into a major crisis among Adventists, especially in the countries around Lake Victoria, which have a high density of Adventist believers. It was reported by researchers on the

ground that “a great number of the church’s members had died of HIV and AIDS, including pastors” (Makahamadze and Sibanda 2008, 293–310; see p. 296). This study in a missiological journal criticized the Adventist leaders in many parts of Africa for disallowing the use of condoms by their members, and thereby jeopardizing the containment of the disease (*ibid.*, 299–300).

2.4 God and Covid-19

As this paper is written, it is too early to analyse the religious impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in any depth. It would seem that the religious responses of the people to this crisis are very similar to those of earlier pandemics. Michael Wakelin, the executive chair of the Religion Media Centre in the UK, stated in July 2020 that “over the last few months, many of us have become more religious and we have all been reminded of the importance of faith in bringing society together in times of distress.”¹⁹ Whether this can be supported by solid data or is based rather on wishful thinking, remains to be seen, and it is impossible at this juncture to predict what role religion will play in the post-Covid world. Certainly, the way people “do” church (or synagogue and mosque) may have changed significantly, as a result of the physical closure of large numbers of places of worship, for a considerable period, all around the world, and the extensive use of online platforms.

The titles of two recently published small books by Christian authors illustrate the different theological interpretations of the pandemic. Professor Mark Hitchcock of the conservative Dallas Theological Seminary, places the Corona-crisis in an eschatological context (Hitchcock 2020). Covid-19, he maintains, is a prelude to the earth’s final events (*ibid.*, 75–79). Tom Wright, a prominent New Testament theologian and former bishop of the Church of England, looks at the Covid-10 crisis from another perspective (Wright, see note 1). We must, he says, accept that events happen which we do not fully understand. We must also acknowledge that in what happens humans play a role, and humans (Christians in particular) also have special responsibilities in confronting the consequences of such events.

We find this dual approach to the current pandemic also in the Adventist media, although the eschatological emphasis is much more pronounced in the

¹⁹ <https://www.abc.net.au/religion/religion-technology-and-the-covid19-pandemic/12496668> (accessed May 11, 2022).

media of independent ministries on the right-wing fringe of the church than elsewhere. A message of church leadership about the COVID-19 vaccines opened with combining these eschatological and pragmatic aspects: “Seventh-day Adventists look to the coming of Christ as the great culmination of history and the end of all disease, suffering, and death. At the same time, we have been entrusted with the Adventist health message” which teaches “healthful living through practical and wholistic lifestyle behaviours.”²⁰

The “official” denominational media have so far (early 2022) tended to emphasize pragmatic aspects which concern worship services and “running” the church during this crisis, and have reported how many of the church’s ministries have continued to function, while new creative initiatives have been launched.²¹

3. Covid-19 and Conspiracy Theories

In the past pandemics have always given rise to conspiracy theories. We have already mentioned that during the fourteenth century Plague, the Jews, in particular, were scapegoated. At the time of the Spanish Flu conspiracy theories abounded and often focused on the Germans. Pieces of “fake news” reported that German submarines purposely spread the disease around the world (Mawdsley n.d.).

It should come as no surprise that millions around the world also embraced various conspiracy theories in connection with the Covid-19 pandemic.²² A

²⁰ “Covid-19 Vaccines: Addressing Concerns, Offering Counsel,” *Adventist Review* Online: www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story15816-covid-19-vaccines-addressing-concerns,-offering-counsel (accessed May 11, 2022). The article written by representatives of the Health Department of the headquarters’ office of the Adventist denomination and of the Biblical Research Institute, together with experts of the Loma Linda University School of Pharmacy and School of Public Health; December 18, 2020.

²¹ This is illustrated in the list of articles about Corona that have appeared in the *Columbia Union Visitor*. See: www.columbiaunionvisitor.com/2020/how-visitor-reported-1918-1920-pandemic (accessed May 11, 2022).

²² The European Union defined a conspiracy theory as a “belief that certain events or situations are secretly manipulated behind the scenes by powerful forces with negative intent.” These theories “often appear as a local explanation of events or situations which are difficult to understand and bring a false sense of control and agency. This need for clarity is heightened in times of uncertainty like the Covid-19 pandemic. See: ec.europa.eu/info/live-work-travel-eu/coronavirus-response/fighting-disinformation/identifying-conspiracy-theories_en (accessed May 11, 2022).

study in the Netherlands found that ten percent of the population believes that Covid-19 is spread on purpose by pharmaceutical companies to boost their profits.²³ Existing on-line conspiracy movements, such as the anti-5G groups and anti-vaccine movements, have melted into new umbrella-like conspiracies, as, for instance the ID2020 theory. This is a version of a popular theory which proclaims that Bill Gates and Microsoft are doing everything they can to use the Covid-19 crisis as “a pretext for mandatory vaccination programs.” These vaccines, allegedly, are a cover for “implanting some form of microchip, radio frequency implantation (RFID) chip or other digital tracking device” (Thomas and Zang 2020).²⁴ It appears that this ID2020 theory is especially driven by “fringe Christian conspiracy sites.” The plan to inject microchips is allegedly part of a global New World Order that is in the process of being established, and that those microchips represent the “mark of the beast.” As a result, entire populations can easily be checked and controlled (*ibid.*).

It was to be expected that this and similar totally unfounded theories would also have a strong appeal to segments of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. In a substantial article in the official journal of the denomination, church leaders referred to false, alarmist, ideas that are circulating among Adventists, and pointed out that any linking of the “mark of the beast” with a Covid vaccine has no basis in Adventism’s traditional eschatological understanding. The article downplays the eschatological significance of the Covid-19 pandemic, warns against acceptance of these and other extremely speculative ideas, and encourages the church’s membership to place full trust in the vaccines that have been developed.²⁵ (Interestingly, it is noted in the article that Ellen G. White did not in principle object to vaccination. At the time, when there was a smallpox epidemic in the region where she lived, Ellen White herself was vaccinated and encouraged her staff to follow her example [Dobson in White 1958, 303]). The media on the right-wing fringe of the church tend to be quite open to conspiracy theories, but are not speaking with one voice with regard to any linkage between the Covid-19 vaccine and the mark of the beast.

²³ <https://nltimes.nl/2020/08/17/10-percent-dutch-believe-covid-19-conspiracy-theories> (accessed May 11, 2022).

²⁴ See: s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/ad-aspi/2020-06/ID2020%2C%20Bill%20Gates%20and%20the%20Mark%20of%20the%20Beast_%20how%20Covid-19%20catalyses%20existing%20on%20line%20conspiracy%20movements.pdf (accessed May 11, 2022).

²⁵ “Covid-19 Vaccines: Addressing Concerns, Offering Counsel.” See note 20.

In an article for the website of the *Amazing Facts* ministries, Gary Gibbs, the president of the Pennsylvania Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, insists that “the mark of the beast concerns enforced worship,” and “this is not an element of the current pandemic.” He does, however, emphasize that many developments with eschatological significance might be accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Gibbs n. d.). Walter Veith, the person behind the *Amazing Discoveries* ministries, who is known for conspiracy theories, has circulated a series of YouTube video-discussions with one of his associates, Martin Smith, which are replete with conspiracy theories.²⁶ David Gates, an independent Adventist evangelist, who speaks to audiences around the world, promotes the idea that the Covid-19 vaccines, together with the 5G-signal, are Satan’s tool to destroy humanity and make human beings into automatons.²⁷

4. Pandemics as Signs of the End

Whenever pandemics struck, many Christians asked the question whether they were experiencing a sign that the return of Christ was near, and this is a question many are asking today with respect to the Covid-19 crisis. In the Lukan version of the Olivet Discourse, Christ mentions among the signs of the end the occurrences of “earthquakes, famines and pestilences in many places” (Luke 21:11). In some versions of Matthew 24 these “pestilences” are also mentioned, but scholarly opinion almost unanimously supports the view that the original Matthean text (24:7) “favors the omission of this word” (Nichol 1957, 497).

The “signs of the end” would signal the impending doom over Jerusalem (which came when the Romans destroyed that city in 70 AD), and would also remind mankind of the certainty of the Second Coming of Christ at the end of time. This applies to all the “signs” which Jesus mentioned, and also to other signs, mentioned by the apostles, including the sign of the “pestilences”. Josephus mentions in his *Book of War* that at the time of the storming of Jerusalem by the Romans “pestilential destruction” came upon them; and soon

²⁶ These may all easily be found on YouTube. See: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCCGmv31EbHg8wPORSb9s_IXg.

²⁷ <https://atoday.org/sda-evangelist-vaccine-5g-will-make-you-an-automaton> (accessed May 11, 2022).

afterward a famine.²⁸ First-century Roman sources confirm that the Roman world repeatedly suffered from epidemics.²⁹ Tacitus, for instance, reports in his *Annals* a plague that hit Rome in the autumn of 65 and killed at least 30,000 people.³⁰ Moreover, the history books give ample testimony of numerous “pestilences” during the Christian era.

The traditional Seventh-day Adventist view has been that the time of the end began around the time of the French Revolution. At that time the prophetic time period of 1260 days (which in Adventist traditional thinking equals as many years) was thought to have ended. It was when “the great tribulation,” caused by the medieval papacy, had come to an end (Nichol 1956, 500–502). In line with this view the signs of the times occurred from around that time onwards. Thus, epidemics and pandemics that occurred since that time (as e.g. the Spanish Flu) qualify as “pestilences” that Christ predicted. The Covid-19 pandemic would, therefore, certainly also qualify as a sign of the times.

Hans K. LaRondelle (1929–2011), a prominent Adventist theologian, who wrote extensively about aspects of eschatology, emphasized that the so-called “signs of the end” cannot be placed in any chronological order. They are “signs of the age” and characterize the entire period between Jesus’ two events (LaRondelle 1999, 11). Jon Paulien, another Adventist theologian who specialized in eschatology, warns against placing too much emphasis on the time-element of the signs (Paulien 1994, 85–87). The Reformed systematic theologian G.C. Berkouwer very much agrees: “The signs are not pertinent to only a remote end-time. No, for believers they are summons to constant watchfulness” (Berkouwer 1972, 248). If this view is accepted, it would follow that all epidemics and pandemics of the last two millennia may be seen as genuine “signs of the times”. They all are signals pointing mankind to the climax of history, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

It was to be expected that during major pandemics of the past many Christians would regard these plagues as signs of the certainty of Christ’s coming. And even more so, that Seventh-day Adventist Christians would emphasize

²⁸ Josephus, *Book of War*, I, vi. 9, § 3. <https://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/war-6.html> (accessed May 11, 2022).

²⁹ www.kyleharper.net/uncategorized/database-of-pestilence-in-the-roman-empire (accessed May 11, 2022).

³⁰ Tacitus, *Annals*, Book 16, par. 13. <https://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/txt/ah/Tacitus/TacitusAnnals16.html> (accessed May 11, 2022).

this aspect as they lived through the Spanish Flu and saw how HIV-AIDS ravaged particular segments of society in numerous countries. It would go against the Adventist DNA, if they did not regard the Covid-19 pandemic as a sign of the Second Coming. It is, however, surprising that the eschatological dimension does not dominate the response of Adventist Christians to the current pandemic to a greater extent. This aspect would certainly invite further investigation.

Reference List

- "AIDS – A Seventh-day Adventist Response." Statement released by the AIDS Committee of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and by the Health and Temperance Department at the General Conference Session in Indianapolis, Indiana, 1990. Online: www.adventist.org/articles/aids-a-seventh-day-adventist-response (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Berkouwer, G.C. *The Return of Christ*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972.
- Blyden, Celeste Ryan. "How the Visitor Reported the 1918–1920 Pandemic." www.columbiaunionvisitor.com/2020/how-visitor-reported-1918-1920-pandemic (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Boccaccio, Giovanni. *Decameron*. London: Everyman's Library, 2009.
- Bright, John. *A History of Israel*. London: SCM Press, 1967.
- Campbell, Michael W. "Adventists and the 1918 Influenza Pandemic." May 24, 2020, <https://www.nadministerial.com/stories/adventists-and-the-1918-influenza-pandemic> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Carlin, Dan. *The End is Always Near: The Apocalyptic Moments, from the Bronze Age Collapse to Nuclear Near Misses*. New York: HarperCollins, 2019.
- Chandra, Uday. "Thinking Theologically with Pandemics." <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2020/7/28/thinking-theologically-with-pandemics> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- "Covid-19 Vaccines: Addressing Concerns, Offering Counsel." *Adventist Review online*: <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story15816-covid-19-vaccines-addressing-concerns,-offering-counsel> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Cunningham, Andrew. "Epidemics, Pandemics, and the Doomsday Scenario." *Historically Speaking*, September/October 2008, 29–31.

- Cyprian. "De Mortalitate." Transl. Ernest Wallis, ca. 1885. Online at *Christian Classics Ethereal Library*. <https://www.ewtn.com/catholicism/library/on-the-mortality-or-plague-de-mortalitate-11412> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Ferguson, Everett. *Church History*. Vol. I: *From Christ to Pre-Reformation*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005.
- Ferngren, Gary B. "Searching for Meaning in Uncertain Times." *In Trust*, Fall 2020, 22–25.
- Galli, Mark. "When a Third of the World Died – During the Black Death, the Greatest Catastrophe in Human History, How Did Christians Respond?" *Christianity Today*, January 1, 1996.
- Gibbs, Gary. "Coronavirus and the Last Days." <https://www.amazing-facts.org/news-and-features/news/item/id/24670/t/coronavirus-and-the-last-days> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- History.com editors. "Pandemics that Changed History." January 21, 2020. <https://history.com/topics/middle-ages/pandemics-timeline> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- History.com editors. "Black Death." July 6, 2020. <https://history.com/topics/middle-ages/black-death> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Hitchcock, Mark. *Corona Crisis: Plagues, Pandemics, and the Coming Apocalypse*. Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2020.
- Honigsbaum, Mark. *The Pandemic Century: A History of Global Contagion from the Spanish Flu to Covid-19*. London: Penguin, 2020.
- Horn, Siegfried H. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Dictionary*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1960.
- Huremovic, Damir. "Brief History of Pandemics." May 16, 2019, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7123574> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Josephus, Flavius. *Book of War*. Online: <https://penelope.uchicago.edu/josephus/war-6.html> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Kasriel, Emily. "What Plague Arts Tells Us About Today." May 18, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20200514-how-art-has-depicted-plagues> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Kowaleski, Mark R. "Religious Constructions of the AIDS Crisis." *Sociological Analysis* 51.1, 1990, 91.
- LaRondelle, Hans K. *Light for the Last Days*. Nampa: Pacific Press, 1999.
- Lawson, Ronald L. "'Is This Our Concern?' HIV/AIDS and International Seventh-day Adventism." Paper read at the meeting of the Association

- for the Sociology of Religion, Pittsburgh, August 1992. <https://ronaldlawson.net/2018/06/11/is-this-our-concern-hiv-aids-and-international-seventh-day-adventism> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Makahamadze, Tompson, and Fortune Sibanda. "Battle for Survival: Responses of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to the HIV and AIDS Pandemic in Zimbabwe." *Swedish Missiological Themes* 96.3, 2008, 293–310.
- Mawdsley, Hannah. "Fake News and the Flu." N.d., <https://wellcomecollection.org/articles/XXIeHhEAACYAIdKz> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- McNeill, William H. *Plagues and Peoples*. New York: Anchor Books, 1998.
- Mueller, Agnes. "What Literature Can Tell Us about People's Struggle with their Faith during a Pandemic." August 3, 2020, <https://theconversation.com/what-literature-can-tell-us-about-peoples-struggle-with-their-faith-during-a-pandemic-143083> (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Nichol, Francis D., ed. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Vol. V. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1956.
- Nichol, Francis D., ed. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Vol. 7. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1957.
- Oldstone, Michael B. A. *Viruses, Plagues & History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- Osheim, Duane J. "Religion and Epidemic Disease." *Historically Speaking* 9.7, 2008, 36–37.
- Paulien, Jon. *What the Bible Says about the End-Time*. Hagerstown: Review and Herald, 1994.
- Philips, Howard. "Why Did It Happen? Religious Explanations of the 'Spanish' Flu Epidemic in South Africa." *Historically Speaking* 9.7, 2008, 34–36.
- Ruble, Wells Allen. "After Influenza, What?" *Review and Herald*, October 31, 1918.
- Sontag, Susan. *Illness and Metaphor*. New York: Farrar, Strauss & Giroux, 1978.
- Southern, R.W. *Western Society and the Church in the Middle Ages*. Pelican History of the Church. London: Penguin Books, 1970.
- Thomas, Elise, and Albert Zhang. "ID2020 Bill Gates and the Mark of the Beast: How Covid-19 Catalyzes Existing Online Conspiracy Movements." International Cyber Policy Center, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2020.
- Tuchman, Barbara W. *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1978.

- Walker, Williston, et al. *A History of the Christian Church*. 4th ed. New York: Scribner, 1985.
- Westbrook, T.B. "Present-day Conditions. A Call to Prayer." *Columbia Union Visitor*, November 7, 1918.
- White, Ellen G. *Selected Messages*. Vol. 2 Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1958.
- White, James Edson, and Alonzo L. Baker. *The Coming King*. Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1938.
- Wright, Tom. *God and the Pandemic: A Christian Reflection on the Coronavirus and its Aftermath*. London: SPCK, 2020.
- Wuthnow, Robert. *Be Very Afraid: The Cultural Response to Terror, Pandemics, Environmental Devastation, Nuclear Annihilation, and Other Threats*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Zusammenfassung

In diesem Artikel werden die religiösen Auswirkungen verschiedener Pandemien der Vergangenheit analysiert. Nach einem kurzen Überblick über die wichtigsten historischen Epidemien und Pandemien – von der Pest in Athen im 5. Jh. v. Chr. bis zur Covid-19-Pandemie ab dem Jahr 2020 – werden die religiösen Auswirkungen einiger dieser Gesundheitskatastrophen untersucht: Der Schwarze Tod im 14. Jh., die Grippe von 1918–1920, die später aufgetretene HIV/AIDS-Pandemie und die aktuelle Corona-Pandemie (Covid-19). Fokussiert wird hierbei die Reaktion der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten auf die letzten drei Pandemien. Die verfügbaren Daten zeigen, dass der eschatologische Aspekt dieser Pandemien – „Seuchen“ als Zeichen für das bevorstehende Kommen Christi, – entgegen den Erwartungen nicht das dominierende Element der adventistischen Reaktion war. Betrachtet man einige der Verschwörungstheorien, die die Covid-19-Krise begleiten, so ist festzustellen, dass indes zumindest manche Adventisten auch für solche Theorien empfänglich sind.

Résumé

Cet article analyse l'impact religieux d'un certain nombre de pandémies passées. Après un bref aperçu des principales épidémies et pandémies de l'histoire – de la peste d'Athènes au Ve siècle avant Jésus-Christ à la pandémie de Covid-19 qui a éclaté en 2020 –, l'article examine l'impact religieux de quelques-unes de ces catastrophes sanitaires: La peste noire du XIVe siècle, la grippe (ou influenza) de 1918–1920, la plus récente pandémie de VIH/SIDA et l'actuelle pandémie de Corona (Covid-19). Une attention particulière est accordée à la réponse des Adventistes du 7e jour aux trois dernières de ces pandémies. Les données disponibles indiquent que, peut-être contrairement aux attentes, l'aspect eschatologique de ces pandémies, en tant que « pestilences » qui étaient des signes de la venue imminente du Christ, n'a pas été l'élément dominant de la réponse adventiste. En examinant certaines des théories de conspiration qui accompagnent la crise du Covid-19, on constate qu'au moins certains adventistes sont également sensibles à de telles théories.

Reinder Bruinsma, Ph.D., is the General Editor of *Spes Christiana*. He is a retired pastor and church administrator and author of several theological books in various languages. E-mail: reinder@bruinsmas.com

Catholic-Protestant Dialogue

An Assessment

Radiša Antić

Abstract

During the last forty years of the Protestant-Catholic dialogue was there any real change in dogmatic substance? Was the underlying theological question of justification by faith alone of 1517 really solved and thus the way to unity and reconciliation opened? The Roman Catholic Church of today is in many ways dissimilar to the church known by Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of the Protestant Catholic interchange demonstrates that Rome is having a dialogue with other Christians only on its own terms. The Roman Catholic Church has never changed its doctrinal position and does not intend to do so in the future. Moreover, a careful reading of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue indicates that contemporary Protestant leaders have abandoned the bold attitude of the Reformers, especially their position on the key biblical teaching on justification by faith alone. It is ignored and occasionally denied.

It seems that the fundamental *raison d'être* for most Christian churches today is to promote the unity of all Christians, and it is not without justification because Jesus himself said: "I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:20–21). On the one hand, the sixteenth century Reformation created apparently unbridgeable obstacles in the way of communication between Catholics and Protestants and changed the world forever, not only in the field of religion but also the economy, politics, social science, human freedom and art. On the other hand, Catholics responded with anathemas at the Council of Trent (1545–1563), and since that time not only have they not changed their position on the question of human salvation, indulgences, sources of authority and other disputed issues, but they have added

new elements of contention entirely unacceptable to Protestants (see Gulley 2012, 3:773–774; Heinz 2017, 2; Sherwood 2016, 2/3).

However, in spite of all this, on October 31, 2016, the world leaders of both Catholics and Protestants signed a joint declaration in Lund in Sweden stating “what unites the two traditions is greater than that which divides them” (“From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017”). What followed were different events leading to the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther nailing his 95 theses to a church door in Wittenberg as well as the commemoration of fifty years of dialogue between Catholics and Protestants in order to try to overcome the disagreements of past centuries. Pope Francis in the presence of the Swedish king and queen prayed that:

The Holy Spirit help us to rejoice in the gifts that have come to the church through the Reformation, prepare us to repent for the dividing walls that we and our forebears have built and equip us for common witness and service in the world. (Sherwood 2016, 2/3)

Pope Francis continued by saying:

The two traditions had undertaken a common journey of reconciliation. Now, in the context of commemoration of the Reformation of 1517, we have a new opportunity to accept a common path, one that has taken shape over the past fifty years in the ecumenical dialogue between the Lutheran World Federation and the Catholic Church. (Ibid.)

Munib Younan, President of the Lutheran World Federation, from his side, said that fifty years of dialogue had been rewarding and helped Catholics and Lutherans to overcome their divisions and to strengthen joint confidence and understanding (ibid.). The declaration itself reads:

At the same time, we have drawn closer to one another through joint service to our neighbours, often in circumstances of suffering and persecution. Through dialogue and shared witness we are no longer strangers. Rather, we have learned that what unites us is greater than what divides us. While we are profoundly thankful for the spiritual and theological gifts received through the Reformation, we also confess and lament before Christ that Lutherans and Catholics have wounded the visible unity of the Church. Theological differences were accompanied by prejudice and conflict, and religion was instrumentalized for political ends. (“From Conflict to Communion,” 3/51)

It is believed that the signing of the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999 between Lutherans and Catholics has solved the underlying theological question of 1517 and opened the way for all churches to search for unity and reconciliation. Since 1999, the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* was adopted by the World Methodist Council in July 2006, by the World Communion of Reformed Churches in July 2017 and by the Anglican Consultative Council in 2016. Thus, Lutherans, Methodists, Reformed and Anglicans have been drawn into closer communion with the Roman Catholic Church.

Does this new unity express a deep desire by both Catholics and Protestants to fulfil the prayer for harmony in the Church prayed by its founder, Jesus Christ, or are there some other issues involved? What kind of unity has been achieved? Have there been any radical regrets, and returns to the beliefs and practices of the apostolic church of the first century?

1. Historical Development of the Dialogue

A new era of the relationship between Catholics and Protestants began with the founding of the World Council of Churches (1948) and the Vatican II Council (1962–1965). In the 19th century the work of evangelizing the world with the Christian message was very effective, but conflicts had developed among missionaries over the new converts. The new converts kept asking the question: “If you serve the same God, how come you are so divided?”

The issue of “How to Evangelize the World without Fighting” was first discussed in 1910 at the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, Scotland. After a long-lasting discussion a decision was taken “to plant in each non-Christian nation one undivided Church of Christ” (Beach 1974, 345). This is how the ecumenical movement was conceived, but because of the First and Second World Wars this idea could not be realised. In 1949 representatives from 147 Protestant churches met in Amsterdam, Holland, to establish the World Council of Churches. Today the headquarters of the World Council of Churches is in Geneva, Switzerland, and consists of 349 churches (see Pfandl 2018).

At the beginning only the Protestant churches were members of the World Council of Churches but in 1961 all Orthodox Churches joined the Council. The Roman Catholic Church with its 1.2 billion members had never joined the Council but it changed its attitude towards it after 1964 because the Second Vatican Council issued a declaration on ecumenism, which said:

All who have been justified by faith in baptism are incorporated into Christ; they, therefore, have a right to be called Christians and with good reason are accepted as brothers by the children of the Catholic Church. (Abbott 1966, 84)

Thus, non-Catholic Christians (“separated brethren”) after the Second Vatican Council could become members of the Roman Catholic Church or continue existing as members of their churches but “within the framework of a fraternal religious system” (ibid.). The former Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, in 1989 said:

For the universal church I renew the plea. Could not all Christians come to reconsider the kind of primacy the bishop of Rome exercised within the early church, a ‘presiding of love’ for the sake of the unity of the churches in the diversity of their mission. (Nelson 1992, 41)

Although in 1969 Pope Paul VI and in 1984 John Paul II visited the World Council in Geneva, the Roman Catholic Church will probably never become a member of the World Council of Churches but will remain an observer. In spite of this, there is continual and intensive collaboration between the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches.

2. Vatican Council II

Vatican II was an ecumenical council in the sense that it was the first council to speak of its relationship with other churches and religions. The Council established a new Vatican office, the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, whose goal was a global union in which “the whole human race may be brought into the unity of the family of God” (Abbott 1966, 55). Pope John XXIII, although rated by many as merely a transitional pope, became one of the most important figures in modern times, because under his leadership the Catholic Church, for the first time, was invited to approach the world and other Christians (“separated brethren”) in a spirit of love. The Council, among other things, made a decision to introduce the comprehensive use of vernacular language in the church service and the reading of the Bible during the liturgy. It also made a decision in favour of the principle of religious liberty, which it had opposed for a long time. The Council acknowledged the right of religious liberty for all individuals by stating that although “only true religion is fulfilled in the Catholic, apostolic Church,” human beings have the duty to

search individually and to decide according to their conscience (Rahner and Vorgrimler 1966, 32). The state has the responsibility to promote this human right because religious liberty is not only a basic human right but also belongs to the revealed faith (ibid.).

In addition to this, the documents of the Vatican II Council claim, “through the Church, we abide in Christ” and the church is “an instrument for the achievement of such union and unity” (Abbott 1966, 15 and 19). The text reads:

We take great pleasure in sending to all men and nations a message concerning that well-being, love, and peace which were brought into the world by Christ Jesus, the Son of the living God, and entrusted to the Church. For this is the reason why, at the direction of the most blessed Pope John XXIII, we successors of the apostles have gathered here, joined in single-hearted prayer with Mary the Mother of Jesus, and forming one apostolic body headed by the successor of Peter. (Ibid., 3)

Hence, Christ has assigned to the Roman Catholic Church a ‘succession of apostles’ with Peter as its head, and its goal should be to bring a global unity of churches, unity of all religions and unity with the rest of humanity. This worldview is in sharp contrast with the perceptions of the Inquisition, the Crusades and the Council of Trent.

3. Key Themes in the Catholic-Protestant Dialogue

3.1 The Importance of Dialogue and Reconciliation.

Although the parties involved in the dialogue are committed to the doctrines of their own churches, the dialogue is still important and necessary, claim both Lutherans and Catholics (“From Conflict to Communion,” 9/51). The participants involved in the dialogue can have not only divergent grasps of doctrinal questions but even opposed and contradictory positions. These differences should not be overlooked but should serve as the bases for a common search for the truth.

All partners participating in the dialogue should likewise go through the process of grieving and self-examination. There is a long list of why Lutherans should lament. For instance, Martin Luther’s vicious statements against the Jews, the persecution of the Anabaptists, Luther’s violent attacks against the peasants during the Peasants’ War and Luther’s identification of the pope with Antichrist. In the same way, the Catholic side recalls that, even in 1522, Pope Hadrian VI criticised sins and errors committed by the Catholic Church

authorities. Pope Paul VI in his opening speech to the Vatican Council II asked for forgiveness from the Eastern Orthodox Churches. John Paul II in his encyclical *Ut Unum Sint* said:

The Catholic conviction that in the ministry of the bishop of Rome she has preserved in fidelity to the Apostolic Tradition and faith of the Fathers, the visible sign and guarantor of unity constitutes a difficulty for most other Christians, whose memory is marked by certain painful recollections ... I join with my predecessor Paul VI in asking forgiveness. (Abbot 1966, 88)

3.2 *Toward a Common Mission*

In 1995, a book was published, *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission* (Colson and Neuhaus 1995), which states that there is one Christ and one mission, and because of that the first responsibility of the church is to proclaim the gospel without proselytizing (ibid., xxviii). Further, it emphasizes that both Evangelicals and Catholics should confess their sins against the unity that Christ intends for all his disciples, because the conflict between Christians obscures the cross of Christ and thus cripples the mission of the church (ibid., 16).

3.3 *Justification by Faith Alone*

For Luther and other reformers the doctrine of justification by faith alone is the first and chief article, guide and judge over all parts of Christian doctrine (see Luther 1955–1986, 39:1–3.301). Because of that, efforts to overcome this dispute in the Catholic-Lutheran dialogue was a matter of the highest priority. After long and comprehensive research of this subject both parties in the dialogue published their findings in the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* in 1999 (The Lutheran World Federation and Roman Catholic Church 2000). It states:

By grace alone, in faith in Christ's saving work and not because of any merit on our part, we are accepted by God and receive the Holy Spirit, who renews our hearts while equipping and calling us to do good works. (Ibid., 15)

Lutheran's insistence that a person can only receive the righteousness of Christ now is interpreted to mean that a human being cannot contribute in any way to one's own justification and yet believers are fully involved in their faith

in God. When human beings come in faith to God, He does not impute to them their sins and through the Holy Spirit effects in them an active love (ibid., 22).

Catholics speak of justification in terms of cooperation and personal consent, and this phenomenon is an effect of the grace of God, which includes hope in God and an active love for him. The Catholic emphasis on the 'meritorious' character of good works, according to the joint understanding, points only to the biblical teaching that there will be a reward in heaven for good works.

Moreover, if humans are saved through Christ alone, what about the Roman Catholic teachings about Mary, the saints and the church that actively participate in the process of salvation? *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* states:

The working of God's grace does not exclude human action: God affects everything, the willing and the achievement, therefore we are called to strive (cf. Phil. 2:12 ff.). As soon as the Holy Spirit has initiated his work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and the holy sacraments, it is certain that we can and must cooperate by the power of the Holy Spirit. (Ibid., 64)

It seems clear that the massive disparity between declarative justification and transformational justification characterizes this unbridgeable gap in the dialogue between Lutherans and Catholics and makes the whole project of real Christian unity unrealistic.

3.4 Scripture and Tradition

The Roman Catholic theologian, Sylvester Prierias, wrote in his answer to Luther: "Whoever does not hold to the teaching of the Roman church and the pope as an infallible rule of faith from which the Holy Scripture also derives its power and authority: he is a heretic" (Prierias 1988, 55). John Eck also replied to Luther: "The Scripture is not authentic without the authority of the church" (Eck 1979, 27). Luther, instead, regarded Scripture as the ultimate judge, the first principle (*primum principium*) on which all theological statements should be grounded. For him, Christ is the midpoint of the Bible: "Take Christ out of the Scriptures, and what else you will find in them?" (*Luther's Works* 33:26) Luther insisted that nothing could claim a higher authority than Scripture, and that it is not opposed to all traditions but only so-called human traditions. The meaning of Scripture can be known through the power of the Holy Spirit and in this sense Scripture is its own interpreter.

Roman Catholics, on the other hand, believe that the church life is enriched by various factors and not by Scripture alone. According to the decisions of the Council of Trent, the sources of authority are the non-written apostolic traditions and the Scripture. Furthermore, the interpretation of the Scripture has to be guided by the teaching office of the church. Vatican Council II also claims that the magisterium is the exclusive agent of interpretation and has the ultimate judgment in the understanding of the Scripture (Abbott 1966, 12). Therefore, regarding Scripture and tradition, Lutherans and Catholics agree to disagree.

3.5 The Church

Lutherans claim that the church is understood as “the assembly of saints in which the Gospel is taught purely and the sacraments are administered rightly” (“The Augsburg Confession,” see Kolb and Wenger 2000, vii). The local congregation is the centre of spiritual life, it is gathered around pulpit and altar and connected to all other local congregations through pure preaching and the right celebration of sacraments.

Roman Catholics, on the other hand, claim:

The church itself can be understood as a sign and instrument of grace, instituted by one mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ, and through the gospel, mediating his grace to the word. While the ancient formula, “Outside the Church no salvation,” may lend itself to misunderstanding, we agree that there is no salvation apart from the Church, since to be related to Christ it is necessary to be related, in however full or tenuous a manner, to the Church which is his body. (“The Gift of Salvation,” 2003, 26–33)

Through the Catholic Church, Christ, who is its head, believers receive the fullness of the means of salvation, correct confession of faith, sacramental life and ordained ministry. In other words, there is only one source of the fullness of grace and the Roman Catholic Church is “the universal sacrament of salvation” (Abbott 1966, 584). All other churches (“separated brethren”) derive their grace and truth from the Catholic Church.

4. Critical Assessment of the Protestant-Catholic Dialogue

After an examination of the documents produced by the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue, one may wonder why there was so much passion and urge for such

negotiation toward Christian unity during the last forty years and why it had to be accomplished apparently almost at any cost. Was there any real change in dogmatic substance? Were there any dividing theological walls removed and divisions overcome? Was the underlying theological question of justification by faith alone of 1517 really solved, and thus the way to unity and reconciliation opened?

First, the Roman Catholicism of today is different from the early Christian communities in the apostolic time as well as from the Catholic Church of the second to fourth centuries. In more recent times Roman Catholicism has become more open to a synthesis of elements from Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism and Shintoism (Adam 1957, 12 and 234). According to Heiler, Roman Catholicism is a union of extremes where the basic biblical teachings are joined with ecclesiastical traditions developed later (Heiler 1970, 12).

Today's Roman Catholicism is also dissimilar to late medieval Catholicism because it rejected Reformation at the Council of Trent (16th century), it introduced the doctrine of Mary's immaculate conception (1854) and Mary's bodily assumption into heaven (1950), and introduced the doctrine of the infallibility of the pope (1870). Thus, the Roman Catholic Church of today is in many ways dissimilar to the church known by Luther, Calvin and Zwingli (Heinz 2017, 1).

Nonetheless, the post-Tridentine Roman Catholic Church has made some positive changes as well, such as, the prohibition of preachers of indulgences and the reform of mendicant orders. After the Second Vatican Council some further developments were made, for example, the introduction of the vernacular language in church services, celebration of the mass with church members, support for reading the Bible, an emphasis on a church that is more tolerant and readier to engage in dialogue, a decision in favour of the principle of religious liberty which was opposed for a long time. Furthermore, it was emphasized by Catholics that the state should no longer support one single religion but defend the liberty of all citizens and religious denominations (Rahner and Vorgrimler 1966, 518). Besides, Martin Luther used to be seen as a philosopher of the flesh and an abnormal character, while now, after the Second Vatican Council, he is considered to be a religious person, a prophetic person and his teaching on justification by faith alone as a return to the gospel (see Kung 1967, 464). Additionally, in 1965 Pope Paul VI and Patriarch Athenagoras facilitated the reversal of the reciprocal excommunication between Rome and Constantinople which took place in 1054.

Nevertheless, a deeper analysis of the Protestant-Catholic interchange demonstrates that Rome is having a dialogue with other Christians only on its own terms. It seems obvious that Rome has to remain the deciding centre in matters of faith and there are some non-negotiable issues, such as, the primacy of the pope and the necessity of the Roman church for human salvation. In the encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964) the Vatican has developed a strategy for the whole world, for other Christians, non-Christians and for all humans. According to this strategy, Rome is to become the universal mental-spiritual centre (see Heinz 2017, 8). The basis of the unity between different churches is the papacy and other Christians should be led in such a way that they attain all the fullness of Catholic truth (ibid.).

The Roman Catholic Church has not changed its doctrinal position and does not intend to do so in the future. The dogmatic substance of the Roman church is irreversible and there can never be any essential changes. Thus, the inner core of the being of Catholicism has not been affected at all by the Lutheran Catholic dialogue.

Second, if Rome seems to be the same, who is changing? Some thinkers believe that the Reformation churches are in a state of theological confusion (McCormack 2004, 83), which was caused by several key factors: the contemporary Protestant understanding of the Scriptures, postmodernism and its understanding of truth, and the frequent denial of justification by faith alone as the central truth which holds the whole theological system together.

The contemporary Protestant understanding of the Scriptures has been immensely influenced by the use of the historical-critical method in the interpretation of the Bible. This method uses atheistic (secular) assumptions and presuppositions in its analysis of the sources, forms, redactions, and traditions in order to interpret the formation of the Bible, a book which is full of supernatural activities of God in human history. Consequently, the concept of pure doctrines was relativized and all the efforts to find common theological ground in the Protestant-Catholic dialogue were made meaningless. The Bible has lost its normative and authoritative character. For many Protestant theologians the inspiration lies not in the biblical text but in the experience of the reader. The Bible is generally considered not to be the word of God but it contains this word when men respond to it (see Preus 1997, 21–22).

Furthermore, postmodernism developed in the middle of the 20th century mostly in the field of philosophy, theology, arts and architecture, and is defined by its attitude of scepticism and the rejection of all meta-narrative perceptions that maintain the existence of universal values, morality, truth and social progress. All meta-narratives promote universal truths, which need to be accepted by everybody, everywhere and in all times. Because of that, according to postmodernists, all metanarratives are coercive and simplistic because they do not take into account nuances, differences and the uniqueness of each human being. For them, the promotion of universal values resulted in an allergy to the 'different' and paved the way for concentration camps during the Second World War. Although it is not the intention of the paper to analyse the basic assumption of postmodernism, it is important to say that wherever postmodernism was introduced into Protestant theology, "the affirmation of the gospel as part of the biblical worldview is diminished" (Wells 2001, xx). It explains, at least partly, why Protestants lost their theological battle with Roman Catholics during the dialogue.

Moreover, a careful reading of the Lutheran-Catholic dialogue indicates that contemporary Protestant leaders have abandoned the bold attitude of the Reformers, especially their position on the key biblical teaching on justification by faith alone. It is ignored and occasionally denied. Hence, "if the mass takes away the sins of the living and dead, *ex opera operato*, then justification hangs on a mere rite" (Wylie 2002, 642) and makes the death of Christ unnecessary. Karl Barth states that Protestant churches "could not reunite with a church which holds this doctrine," that is, "speaks of the good works of the regenerate man, who is only a little sinner and commits only tiny sins, and who is in the happy position of being able to increase the grace of justification in cooperation with it" (Barth 1956–1975, 4:498).

However, if the search for an objective truth based on the Scriptures has ceased to be the primary goal of the Christian church and its theology, then everything is possible. The unity that Jesus is talking about in John 17 is spiritual unity based on the word of God and not on some political and social manifestos. According to this new unity between Protestants and Catholics, any mission to the non-Christian world is politically incorrect since all religions lead to God anyway. Truth has been sacrificed on the altar of unity and the Reformation has been wiped out.

5. A Prophecy

Seventh-day Adventists see the danger of Catholicism and Protestantism linking hands and exercising religio-political power in an authoritarian and conceivably persecuting way. Ellen White wrote:

When Protestantism shall stretch her hand across the gulf to grasp the hand of the Roman power, when she shall reach over the abyss to clasp hands with spiritualism, when, under the influence of this threefold union, our country shall repudiate every principle of its Constitution as a Protestant and republican government, and shall make provision for the propagation of papal falsehoods and delusions, then we know that the time has come for the marvellous working of Satan and that the end is near. (White 1948, 451)

When Ellen White originally wrote this in 1885, the Protestant-Catholic dialogue about possible reunification was not even thought of. Most Protestants at that time were passionately opposed to the Roman Catholic Church.

The times have obviously changed. Adventists hold, on the basis of the Bible, that the faithful church of God in eschatological times is not a massive, mega church but a faithful remnant. However, Seventh-day Adventists believe that they should cooperate with all Christian churches and non-Christian organizations, insofar as the authentic Gospel is proclaimed and fundamental human needs are being met.

Reference List

- Abbott, Walter M. ed. *The Documents of Vatican II*. New York: Guild Press, 1966.
- Adam, Karl. *Das Wesen des Katholizismus*. Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1957.
- Barth, Karl. "The Doctrine of Reconciliation." *Church Dogmatics*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956–1975.
- Beach, B.B. *Ecumenism – Boon or Bane*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1974.
- Colson, Charles, and Richard John Neuhaus, eds. *Evangelicals and Catholics Together: Toward a Common Mission*. Dallas: Word, 1995.
- Eck, John. "Enchiridion Locorum Communium Adversus Lutherum et Alios Hostes Ecclesiae (1525–1543)." *Corpus Catholicorum*. Münster: Aschendorff, 1979.

- "From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017," www.va/roman_curia (accessed May 11, 2022).
- Gulley, Norman R. *Systematic Theology: Creation, Christ, Salvation*. Berrien Springs: Andrews University Press, 2012.
- Heiler, Friedrich. *Der Katholizismus: Seine Idee und seine Erscheinung*. Munich: Reinhard, 1970.
- Heinz, Hans. "Roman Catholicism: Continuity and Change." *Reflections: Newsletter of the Biblical Research Institute*, July 2017, 1–11.
- Küng, Hans. "Katholische Besinnung auf Luthers Rechtfertigungslehre heute." *Theologie im Wandel*. Munich:ewel, 1967.
- Luther, Martin. *Luther's Works*. 55 Vols. Ed. by Helmut T. Lehmann, Hilton C. Oswald, and Jaroslav Pelikan. Saint Louis: Concordia, 1955–1986.
- McCormack, Bruce L. "What's at Stake in Current Debates over Justification? The Crises of Protestantism in the West." *Justification: What's at Stake in the Current Debates*. Downers Grove: Inter Varsity, 2004.
- Nelson, Dwight K. *Countdown to the Showdown*. Fallbrook: Hart Research Center, 1992.
- Pfandl, Gerhard. "Ecumenism: At What Cost?" *Perspective Digest*, June 2018.
- Preus, Robert D. *Justification and Rome*. St. Louis: Concordia, 1997.
- Prierias, Sylvester. "Dialogue de Potestate Papae." *Dokumente zur Causa Lutheri*. Münster: Aschendorff, 1988.
- Rahner, Karl, and Herbert Vorgrimler. *Kleines Konzilskompendium: Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanums*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1966.
- Sherwood, Harriet. "Catholics and Lutherans Sign Joint Declaration 'Accepting Common Path.'" *The Guardian*, October 2016, 1/3, 2/3.
- "The Augsburg Confession." *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. by Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wenger. Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000.
- "The Gift of Salvation." *First Things* 131, March 2003, 26–33.
- The Lutheran World Federation and Roman Catholic Church. *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000.
- Wells, David. *What Happened to the Reformation?* Phillipsburg: P and R, 2001.
- White, Ellen. *Testimonies for the Church*. Vol. 5. Mountain View: Pacific Press, 1948.
- Wylie, James A. *The History of Protestantism*. Reprint. Rapidan: Hartland, 2002.

Zusammenfassung

Gab es in den letzten vierzig Jahren des evangelisch-katholischen Dialogs eine wirkliche Veränderung in der dogmatischen Substanz? Wurde die grundlegende theologische Frage der Rechtfertigung allein durch den Glauben von 1517 wirklich gelöst und so der Weg zur Einheit und Versöhnung geöffnet? Die heutige römisch-katholische Kirche unterscheidet sich in vielerlei Hinsicht von der Kirche, die Luther, Calvin und Zwingli kannten. Dennoch zeigt eine tiefere Analyse des protestantisch-katholischen Austauschs, dass Rom einen Dialog mit anderen Christen nur zu seinen eigenen Bedingungen führt. Die römisch-katholische Kirche hat ihre Lehrmeinung nie geändert und strebt dies zukünftig auch nicht an. Darüber hinaus zeigt eine sorgfältige Lektüre des lutherisch-katholischen Dialogs, dass heutige protestantische Leitungspersonen die kühne Haltung der Reformatoren aufgegeben haben, v. a. ihre Position zur biblischen Schlüssellehre: der Rechtfertigung allein durch den Glauben. Sie wird ignoriert und gelegentlich verleugnet.

Résumé

Au cours des quarante dernières années du dialogue protestant-catholique, y a-t-il eu un réel changement de substance dogmatique? La question théologique sous-jacente de la justification par la foi seule de 1517 a-t-elle été réellement résolue, ouvrant ainsi la voie à l'unité et à la réconciliation? L'Église catholique romaine d'aujourd'hui est différente à bien des égards de l'Église connue par Luther, Calvin et Zwingli. Néanmoins, une analyse plus approfondie des échanges entre Protestants et Catholiques montre que Rome ne dialogue avec les autres chrétiens qu'à ses propres conditions. L'Église catholique romaine n'a jamais modifié sa position doctrinale et n'a pas l'intention de le faire à l'avenir. En outre, une lecture attentive du dialogue luthérien-catholique indique que les dirigeants protestants contemporains ont abandonné l'attitude audacieuse des réformateurs, en particulier leur position sur l'enseignement biblique clé de la justification par la foi seule. Cet enseignement est ignoré et parfois nié.

Radiša Antić, Ph.D., is director of the Ellen G. White Research Centre and principal lecturer in Systematic Theology and Philosophy at Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, United Kingdom. E-mail: rantic@newbold.ac.uk

The Cosmic Week in the History of Seventh-day Adventist Eschatology

Laurence A. Turner

Abstract

This article begins by briefly surveying the history of the cosmic week concept from its origins in pre-Christian texts through to the late eighteenth century. It then investigates its role in Millerite eschatological thought and the ways in which this impacted early Seventh-day Adventism. Between the mid-nineteenth century and early twenty-first century, the place of the cosmic week in Adventist eschatology moved from common acceptance to explicit rejection in church publications. It has recently been revived by some Adventist internet ministries, with a focus on the year 2027, seen as the end of the sixth millennium since creation and thus, it is claimed, the (approximate) date for the second coming. The biblical hermeneutics and exegesis employed to substantiate these claims are critiqued.

The cosmic week (CW) concept claims that the seven creation days of Genesis 1 prefigure seven thousand years of history. Generally, in this scheme, the end of the first six days/millennia is followed by the climactic seventh, the millennium of Rev 20. This study focuses on how the CW was enthusiastically embraced by early Adventism, increasingly side-lined in the first half of the twentieth century, explicitly opposed from that point on, but recently revived by internet presenters such as David Gates and Walter Veith.

1. Pre-Nineteenth Century Origins and History¹

Understanding the CW's long history illuminates its justification in early Adventism. Of necessity, the following sketch is selective and surveys only major

¹ This brief survey is indebted to the comprehensive and highly detailed account of the history of interpretation of Gen. 1 by Brown 2014.

points of the CW's journey through the centuries prior to the rise of Adventism. It appears first in the Jewish pseudepigraphal books of Jubilees (mid-second century BC) and 2 Enoch (first century AD?). Both interpret the seven days of creation from a mystical point of view. For example, in 2 Enoch 33:1 the seven days are related to seven thousand years of the world's history, following which the eighth millennium inaugurates a period in which time is not reckoned. This Jewish concept influenced Christian thinking as early as the second century. The Epistle of Barnabas (ca. 135) uses the seven days of creation as a paradigm for seven millennia of earth's history, though with the sabbatical seventh millennium rather than the eighth, as in 2 Enoch, forming the climax. "In six thousand years [from creation] the Lord shall bring all things to an end", when the second coming heralds the seventh millennium (Barn. 15:4–5). As proof, Barnabas cites part of 2 Pet. 3:8, "*with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day*" (cf. Ps. 90:4).

Throughout the long history of the CW, 2 Pet. 3:8 is the primary biblical justification for reading the seven creation days as foreshadowing the subsequent seven millennia of history. But its content and context indicate otherwise. Peter writes that some will scoff at the promise of Christ's second coming because life continues as it always has since the creation (2 Pet. 3:3–4). These scoffers are probably the "false teachers" whose errors appear in ch. 2. They deliberately ignore that in the past God acted in judgement at the flood and he will do so in the future with fire (3:5–7). What appears to be a delay to humans is not a delay to God, for "with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day" (3:8). Thus, "the Lord is not slow ... But the day of the Lord will come like a thief" (3:9–10). Contextually, therefore, v. 8 expresses the contrast between human and divine perspectives regarding the passage of time, not the key for unlocking the prophetic potential of the days of creation as representing millennia. That correlation is as unwarranted as arguing that since "a thousand years are like one day", then the millennium of Rev. 20 will last for twenty-four hours.

Peter's statement is probably a paraphrase of Ps. 90:4: "For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past, or like a watch in the night". The use of "like" by MT (כִּי) and LXX/NT (ὡς) makes clear that these texts use metaphorical analogy. Metaphorical comparisons are not literal correspondences as required by the CW. Applying that hermeneutic to e.g., Job

32:19, “My heart is indeed like (ϑ) wine that has no vent; like (ϑ) new wine-skins, it is ready to burst”, or Matt. 10:16, “See, I am sending you out like (ὡς) sheep into the midst of wolves”, results in nonsense.

Following Barnabas, Irenaeus (ca. 130–ca. 200) expounds the CW,² claiming that Adam did indeed die on the day he ate the fruit (Gen. 2:17), for his death when aged 930 occurred within the earth’s first millennium/day.³ The CW schema requires a date for creation to calculate where one is living in the seven thousand year “week”. However, the chronologies of the Greek Septuagint (LXX) and Hebrew Masoretic Text (MT), deviate considerably. Hippolytus of Rome (?–ca. 236), following the LXX chronology that creation occurred ca. 5,500 BC, believed that Christ was born about the middle of the sixth millennium. Thus, by the time of Hippolytus, the seventh millennium was soon to dawn. The CW also influenced Augustine, but he took a more figurative approach. Each day of creation prefigures one of seven stages in salvation history, from Adam to the Second Advent, but he does not assign time periods to these stages.

Throughout the mediaeval period, scholars usually considered the literal sense of a text less significant than its prophetic or allegorical importance, and the CW was part of this type of speculation. For example, Abelard (1079–1142) believed the days of creation not only prefigured the phases of the human lifespan and the believer’s journey of salvation, but also outlined the stages of human history. Also, Richard of St. Victor (1110–1173) wrote, “The work of creation was done in six days The work of the restoration of man can be completed in six ages. The six of the one repeat the six of the other so that he who was creator may be recognised as redeemer” (cited in Brown 2014, 79).

In the Reformation and Counter-Reformation period, the Jesuit Benet Perera (1535–1610) reflected profoundly on the spiritual potential of the CW but significantly warned against using it to calculate the time of the end. Protestant theologians were even more cautious, presumably because they considered its biblical basis uncertain and indebted to Roman allegorical interpretation. For example, Andrew Willet (1562–1621) dismissed it as “more curious than profitable” (Willet 1605, 20, cited in Brown 2014, 136).

² *Adversus haereses* 5.28.3.

³ *Adversus haereses* 5.23.2.

The CW remains a feature of mid-seventeenth-century theological thought. For example, John Bunyan (1628–1688), saw an analogy between the almost one millennium lifespan of the first Adam with the millennium reign of the second Adam “in the seven thousandth year of the world” (cited by Elliott et al. 1856, 339). John Swan in his *Speculum Mundi* (1670) works with seven historical periods, although each is not a strict millennium. Indeed, he claims one cannot limit earth’s history to six thousand years and the CW cannot be used to calculate the date of the Second Advent. However, the most influential chronology of this period was that of Archbishop James Ussher, whose *Annals of the Old Testament* (1650), dated creation at 4004 BC. While Ussher approached his task in a scholarly manner, the CW influenced his work. In his time, the generally accepted date for the birth of Christ was 4 BC. “Ussher is attracted to a chronological solution that puts creation exactly 4000 years earlier. He divides his treatment of history into seven Ages of the World, with their ‘hinges’ at well-established key moments in God’s redemptive work, for example, the dedication of Solomon’s temple, which in Ussher’s scheme occurs exactly 1000 years before Christ’s birth” (Brown 2014, 142; cf. Barr 1985, 578). In 1701, Ussher’s dates were added to the margin of the KJV. Both Cambridge and Oxford University Press continued this practice until the early twentieth century. Thus, while most readers of the KJV would be unaware of the influence of the CW in reaching these dates, the dates themselves would later be used in popular works as evidence for the CW.

2. The CW in Early Nineteenth Century America

In New York State in 1828, Josiah Priest, an influential self-taught popular writer of pseudo-history whose books sold in the thousands, ventured into the realm of Christian millennial expectation. “I believe that each day in the first week of time stood each the representative of a thousand years; for it is said of God, that with him a day is as a thousand years, or a thousand years a day. ... I have concluded, that seven thousand years are but seven days, and that the seventh is the Sabbath, which is the Millennium” (Priest 1828, 197–98). Priest marshals the classic proofs for the CW: the analogies between creation and human history, the Sabbath and the final millennium; and the hermeneutical key provided by 2 Pet. 3:8, that one day represents one thousand years.

Priest's opinion was nothing new, and his contemporaries who joined the Millerite movement appealed to the CW's longevity as evidence for its truth. In a period of eschatological ferment, the CW supplied one more reason for expecting the imminent Second Advent. It spawned highly imaginative biblical exegesis. For example, what should one make of Christ's statement, "I am casting out demons and performing cures today and tomorrow, and on the third day I finish my work" (Luke 13:32)? Clearly, argues one author, it shows Christ using "day" in the sense of one thousand years (cf. 2 Pet. 3:8). He ministered during the fifth day of the CW ("today"), through the church, during the sixth day ("tomorrow"), "and then on the third day, on the third thousand years, which would be the seventh from creation, Christ would be perfected with all those who are redeemed in his everlasting kingdom" (Anonymous 1842, 142). Indeed, is not this the intent of Hosea 6:2, "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up"? (Anonymous 1842, 144).

Such scenarios however, required a specific chronology of earth's history to pinpoint the transition from the sixth day to the eschatological seventh. Josiah Litch argues in a comparable manner to Josiah Priest, emphasizing the typological significance of the Sabbath as foreshadowing the seventh millennium. In a condensed, intricate, and somewhat confusing calculation, he claims that the decree promulgated in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, which inaugurated the 2,300-day prophecy of Dan. 8:14, occurred in 3700 AM (*anno mundi*, i.e., since creation). The addition of 2,300 years brings us to 6000 AM, which is AD 1843 (Litch 1842, 15). Thus, the CW dovetails into and confirms the significance of 1843, a date established on other grounds. William Miller's own "Bible Chronology from Adam to Christ" agrees with Litch's calculations regarding Artaxerxes' decree in 3700 AM (Miller 1842a, 12; cf. 1842c, 1). Of necessity, however, this requires a date for creation in 4157 BC, 153 years earlier than Ussher's chronology. Therefore, unlike Ussher, neither Litch nor Miller has a precise 4,000 years from creation to the birth of Christ, nor a precise millennium between Solomon's temple and Christ's birth, nor any significant event occurring at the transition from one day to the next of the CW. The one significant datum they have is that 1843 is 6000 AM, the transition from the sixth to the seventh millennium, the year of Christ's second advent. The later adjustment from 1843 to 1844 kept the connection with the CW. Since creation took place in what is now considered the seventh month of the Jewish year, "6000 years must therefore terminate in the 7th month ... This, then, is the

year, and Tisri the month, when, if we do not fall through unbelief; we shall enter into rest" (Stowe 1844, 69).

3. The CW in Seventh-day Adventism

3.1 *Acceptance in Early Adventism*

The faithful who persevered beyond the Great Disappointment of October 22, 1844, adjusted their understanding not only of the 2,300-day prophecy but also of the CW. Rather than pinpointing the exact time of the Second Advent, as with Miller and Litch, it now indicated a general period when believers might expect it. During the early years, leaders such as Joseph Bates, (Bates 1846, 24–25), James White, (White 1850, 51; 1856, 180; 1870, 35), and J.N. Andrews, (Andrews 1852, 91; 1860, 1) allude to the CW (usually termed "the great week of time"), clearly expecting their readers to be aware of the notion, but not once do they provide a specific date for its completion. Only occasionally do they try to justify the CW. When they do, they emphasize Sabbath and Jubilee/millennium typology.

The CW provided a foundation for Adventists to explore the cosmic significance of the interrelated issues of the Sabbath, sabbatical year, and year of jubilee. For example, Joseph Bates saw the seventh-day Sabbath as a type of the seventh millennium, while the first day of the week is not (Bates 1846, 24–25). This polemical thrust, discrediting the significance of Sunday on the basis of the CW, is also alluded to by Uriah Smith (Smith 1856, 58). J.N. Andrews also drew attention to early church fathers who believed in the Sabbath as type and seventh millennium as antitype (Andrews 1873, 89.105–106.108). The implication of this for Adventists was that a type is in force until its antitype arrives. Since the seventh millennium had not yet dawned, the Sabbath must still be in force (e.g., Smith 1856, 58). The derivatives of the weekly Sabbath, that is, the sabbatical year and jubilee year cycles, coalesced within this general typological framework. For some, not only was the final millennium a sabbatical rest but also "the great jubilee, the seventh millennium, in which the LAND, the whole earth will rest" (White 1850, 51; cf. Bourdeau 1872, 189). However, there were alternative positions. J.N. Andrews, for example, noted that the year of jubilee in Israel came after the full cycle of seven sabbatical years. Therefore, its antitype was not the millennium of Rev. 20, but rather the period beginning immediately after, once "the great week of 7000 years [is] finished" (Andrews 1883e, 536).

While these differences of perspective might seem minor, they underline the inherent weaknesses of the CW (see above), which are once again present in these sabbatical and jubilee extrapolations. Like the CW itself, they all rest on the strength of analogies and typologies, not one of which is biblically explicit.

In 1872, D. T. Bourdeau provided a reason for the shift from the chronological specificity of Miller and Litch. He begins by (inaccurately) noting the objection of some that if, according to Ussher, there were “only 4004 years from creation to Christ” (note Ussher’s chronology has exactly 4,000 years), “and as we have only reached the year of our Lord 1872, we cannot consistently look for Christ for about 124 years” (Bourdeau 1872, 189). Bourdeau solves this apparent problem for an imminent second advent by effectively discounting Ussher’s chronology. He claims that God has so arranged matters that “we cannot tell the precise age of our world. There must be in the best of chronologies a variation of at least a few years” (Bourdeau 1872, 189). Thus, the CW stands but its starting point is unknown. Yet, its endpoint must be soon for the signs of the times are unambiguous.

The most detailed defence of the CW is a series of six short articles by J. N. Andrews (1883). They reiterate the classic arguments, such as Christian tradition and the key provided by 2 Pet. 3:8. Yet, there is a lack of dogmatism. He hedges his proposals with provisional statements such as “*it appears* that God designed by the first seven days of time ... By this [2 Pet. 3:8] *we think he meant ... we think* St. Peter also signified by it... *We think*, therefore, that at the end of 6,000 years from the creation, the day of Judgment will commence” (Andrews 1883a, 456, emphasis supplied). While the lack of dogmatism might indicate Andrews’ careful mind, these compounded suppositions undermine his claims. He suggests specific events at the transitions from one “day” to the next, but all are only approximate chronologically and some events vague. For example, the transition from first to second “day” is the translation of Enoch in 988 AM, and from second to third is the death of Noah in 2007 AM (1883b, 472–73), while in the transition from fifth to sixth he merely suggests imprecisely, “between the year 880 and 900, in the midnight of the Dark Ages” (1883d, 504). Not only is the exact starting point of the crucial sixth “day” unknown, but chronological difficulties in the fourth period also “make it impossible to determine the exact age of the world” (Andrews 1883d, 504). However, to keep the CW on track so that the close of the sixth “day” would occur

in Andrews' time, he deviates from the MT. While usually following the generally shorter MT chronology, he adopts the even shorter chronology of the LXX and SP for the age of the patriarchs and sojourn in Egypt. He occasionally claims that the NT clarifies the MT chronology without acknowledging that it is generally simply following the chronology of the LXX, the version of the OT dominant in the first century Church (1883c, 488). Despite acknowledged problems in determining biblical chronology and hence the beginning of the eschatological seventh millennium, Andrews is confident that "the sixth period of 1000 years *must end in this century* though we cannot fix the year when it will terminate. But the signs of the times admonish us to watch and to keep our garments" (1883e, 521, emphasis supplied). Therefore, Andrews' conclusion is that Christ will return before 1901. As far as I am aware, this is the last time in mainstream Adventist sources that anyone proposed a deadline for the Second Advent.

During the remaining years of the nineteenth century, the final period of the sixth "day", according to Andrews, the CW appeared frequently in church publications. Some suggested new insights. For example, E.W. Whitney claimed that the plan of redemption, writ large in the CW, had intriguing analogies with the "science of music". Given that the seven creation days represent the seven millennia, it is surely also reasonable to assume "that the seven tones of the diatonic scale serve the same function" (Whitney 1894, 773). Whitney also suggested that the slight disharmonies imposed on all seven notes of the diatonic, or "perfect", scale by the compromises of equal temperament (the tuning system used predominantly since the times of J.S. Bach), represent sin marring human history over 7,000 years. The disappearance of such compromises as the octave (i.e. the restart note) is reached further demonstrates this point (Whitney 1894, 773).⁴ Yet deeper truths may be discerned. The chord formed by playing the first (do), third (mi), and fifth (so) tones "produce upon the ear and mind a most pleasing effect." The corresponding periods of the CW explain the reason for this. These successive millennia, the first (creation), third (giving the law to Israel), and fifth (the gospel announced to the world), are replicated in the musical tones, which when played together express "the perfect harmony existing in God's purpose in

⁴ I would like to thank Dr. Lynden Rogers (Avondale University), physicist and piano-tuner, for his help in explaining Whitney's argument.

creation, the giving of the law, and the work of the gospel." Yet, when the first (creation) is played with either the third (flood), or seventh (millennium) tones, the resulting dissonance reflects the desolation of God's created earth in those periods of the CW (Whitney 1894, 774). Whitney adduces further examples. This article represents, perhaps, the high-water mark of exegetical and logical esoterica aimed at justifying the CW as a hermeneutical template. Just one of its shortcomings is that it deals with only the western musical scale. The pentatonic scale, for example, does not reflect the CW.

Other writers with less uninhibited imaginations content themselves with justifying the CW with the classic arguments: 2 Pet. 3:8, Christian tradition, sabbatical typology, and the indications of biblical chronology that the end of the sixth millennium is nigh (See e.g., F.M. Wilcox 1892, 66; The Editor 1898, 200; Draper 1905, 12). However, we do find the first explicit statements of disillusionment with the CW. Uriah Smith, responding to a reader's letter, dismisses the notion as "conjecture and tradition." Even if it did have some substance, he argues, "it would still be clothed with an element of uncertainty; for the notion of chronology, especially in regard to the age of the world, is involved in doubt by the disagreement and confusion of the leading systems of chronology" (Smith 1901, 523). In general, however, most authors in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who mention the CW do so only in passing, their brief allusions suggesting that while the concept was well understood, terms such as "seventh millennium" had become idioms expressive of an imminent Second Advent rather than a precise or approximate calculation (see e.g., Waggoner 1888, 253; Reed 1901, 313; M. C. Wilcox 1911, 6).

3.2 Waning Usage up to Mid-Twentieth Century

As the twentieth century progresses there is a noticeable decline in popularity of the CW. Understandably, nobody claims that it could pinpoint the date of the second coming, as in Millerite chronologies. Yet also, nobody, like Andrews in 1883, tries to identify noteworthy events at the transitions from one "day" to the next, or to claim a time by which Christ will come. Nor does anyone justify it as being an example of God's salvation-historical templates running through creation in such details as musical tones, as argued by Whitney in 1894.

Nevertheless, it still appears, though in muted form. T. E. Bowen employs a diagram to illustrate the events before, during and after the millennium of

Rev. 20. There follow several explanatory notes, the first of which is “The millennium is the closing period of God’s great week of time—a great sabbath of rest to the earth and to the people of God” (Bowen 1918, 6). The same diagram and notes are reproduced in many church publications (e.g., Spicer 1918, 350; F.M. Wilcox 1918, 5; Bollman 1933, 4; Anonymous 1937, 4). Such brief references indicate a continuing CW tradition, but one relegated to allusion rather than exposition. Typically, Adventist authors in this period refer merely to “seven thousand years”, (e.g., Vesey 1912, 6; Conradi 1917, 9; Lee 1936, 7), or “seventh thousand/millennium” with no further explanation (e.g., *Present Truth*, 27 June 1918, 4; Vincent 1927, 5; Stewart 1937, 1). Of the few who do expand, Albert E. Place informs us that Christ’s ministry occurred during the fifth millennium, we are living in the sixth, and during the seventh God will chain the Devil (Place 1918, 8). Frank Edgar Hinkley, in two sentences, explains enigmatically, “In six days the creation work was accomplished. Likewise, six time periods, whether of days, or months, or years, or millenniums, were to limit human toil, but the seventh day, the seventh month, the seventh year, the seventh millennium were to bring rest” (Hinkley 1928, 35). However, these two are rare exceptions.

3.3 *Opposition to the CW*

A turning point in the assessment of the CW occurred with the publication of F.D. Nichol’s *The Midnight Cry* (1944), on the centenary of the Great Disappointment. His assessment of the CW is devastating. He explains how William Miller believed the days of creation to be figurative. Then adds, “These figurative days, ... [Miller] declared, were a thousand years, taking 2 Peter 3:8 as his proof. *In the field of Scriptural interpretation this is exhibit A of the fallacy of false analogy*” (Nichol 1944, 508, emphasis supplied). He also refers to it as “this fanciful analogy”, arising from “fanciful reasoning” based on a “widely accepted fallacy” (Nichol 1944, 508–509). These assessments pertain not only to the use of 2 Pet. 3:8 but also to Luke 13:32 and Hos. 6:2 (referred to above). Miller’s “principal errors are found in the reasoning adopted in his endeavor to create certain secondary proofs [for 1843/44]” (Nichol 1944, 510), of which the CW was one. Nichol’s dismissal of 2 Pet. 3:8 as biblical justification for one day of creation representing one thousand years of history, is not simply a disagreement about a detail. It removes the central biblical plank for suggesting the analogy. Nichol also edited the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*.

Volume 1 (1953) explains that the commentary “assigns no dates to the period before Abraham” because “the date of creation is not known, [and] the chronological data in the Bible are not continuous or complete”. What is more, “the 6,000-year theory” is invalid because “there is no 6,000-year prophetic period in the Bible” (see Nichol 1953, 1:195–196).

In the years following, advocates for the CW virtually disappear from Adventist publications.⁵ But the concept obviously lingered in Adventist oral tradition, judging by the number of published refutations that are in line with Nichol. Don Neufeld begins his article on the CW by stating, “Perhaps some have never heard of the 6,000-year theory” (Neufeld 1976a, 10). Nobody could have said this of nineteenth-century Adventists, and it indicates the degree to which the idea had fallen out of favour by 1976. Neufeld draws heavily on Nichol and like him rejects 2 Pet. 3:8 for applying the one day/one thousand years analogy. He rejects the CW for two main reasons. First, neither the Bible nor Ellen White draws an analogy between one day of creation/one thousand years of history, indeed Ellen White never even refers to the CW. Second, the context of 2 Pet. 3:8 shows it is not making any reference to creation week. He concludes: “While the theory is intriguing, those who want a clear ‘Thus saith the Lord’ before accepting a teaching will have to admit that such an authority is lacking” (Neufeld 1976a, 11). Neufeld’s article attracted so much response that he followed up his arguments with clarifications. Nevertheless, he affirmed that the 6,000-year theory fails the test of authenticity, for it is based on inferences and analogies rather than explicit support from either the Bible or Ellen White. Remarkably, he claims that while William Miller advocated the CW, Seventh-day Adventists never have, even stating “we would appreciate learning from any of our readers if in their study of Adventist literature they have anywhere found the theory advocated” (Neufeld 1976b, 10). Neufeld’s ignorance of its numerous advocates in early Adventist history is surprising to say the least.

The Adventist New Testament scholar Robert M. Johnston provided the most in-depth scholarly reaction to the CW as part of his argument in a journal article concerning the eschatological sabbath in Revelation. For example, he notes that Rev 20 has “a final millennium without any mention of six earlier

⁵ Two exceptions are Whittaker 1952, 5; Slade 1966, 8. They refer in passing to the “seventh millennium” and “seven thousand years” respectively.

ones. We find a Cosmic Sabbath without a Cosmic Week” (Robert M. Johnston 1987, 48; cf. 2011, 321–22). Given the penchant of Revelation for groups of seven (churches, seals, angels, trumpets, plagues, heads etc.), this would seem to be a lost opportunity to present the seven-thousand-year schema, if, in fact, it is a scriptural concept.

A flurry of articles expressing scepticism about the CW appeared in the late twentieth century, inspired by growing speculation that the end of the millennium would see Christ return. The most substantial of these is by Norman Gulley. For him, the analogy between creation days and historical years is invalid, “creation week is history, not prediction ... Eschatology is based on prophecies and not on protology, the study of first things like Creation week.” Nor can the scheme be based on sabbatical or Jubilee years for they “were pragmatic, not prophetic ... and had nothing to do with eschatology”. The kind of typology foundational to the concept is invalid, for it must be inferred, while “biblical typology is always stated within scripture”. The use of 2 Pet. 3:8 as justification is completely wrong-headed, for the same hermeneutic could be used to argue that each original creation day was also one thousand years. Further, one should not accept uncritically Ussher’s chronology, and nobody knows the date of creation. Finally, Ellen White provides no support for the notion (Gulley 1999, 16–18).⁶ This catalogue of glaring deficiencies stands in stark contrast to the confident optimism of many mid-nineteenth century Adventists. But it epitomises the CW’s standing in Adventist publications on the eve of the 21st century.

3.4 *Recent Revival*

Having traced the progression of the CW in Adventist eschatology from common acceptance to general rejection, one might think it would not rise again a second time. Yet recently, due to the global reach of some Adventist internet preachers, it is once again prominent. I will concentrate on the two most significant exponents, David Gates and Walter Veith, who have each attracted hundreds of thousands of hits to their CW-inspired presentations. I begin with an outline of their respective arguments and follow with assessment.

⁶ See also e.g., Laws 1986, 4–5; Heisey 1995, 25; Knight 2000, 30. An example post-2000 is Elder’s Digest 2011, 6.

Speaking in 2021, Gates said: “The 6,000 years are almost finished. No matter who cuts the cake in whatever direction, we are living in the last generation of the 6,000 years we are in the last 20 years of the 6,000 years ... We have entered the last seven years of earth's history It could be a little longer” (Gates 2021, 02:45 ff.; 20:20 ff.). His lack of dogmatism on the timing of the end is only relative. Just a few more years and Christ will come. His year of choice is 2027.

Gates argues that God works in history in sets of seven: days at creation, years for the sabbatical year cycle, cycles of sabbatical years plus one year for the years of Jubilee, and overarching all of these, “the great week of time” (using the preferred terminology of Adventist pioneers), culminating in the seventh millennium (Gates 2020, 22:00 ff.). Gates believes the end of the sixth millennium coincides with the 120th Year of Jubilee.⁷ This is a highly significant number, the same as the age at death of Moses, when God’s people entered the promised land. The Jubilee year cycle began with the fall of Adam and Eve, and fifty jubilees later Israel entered Canaan. Another thirty jubilees marks Christ’s baptism in AD 27, a year he claims Josephus confirms as the last jubilee before the destruction of Jerusalem. Forty jubilees, or 2,000 years, later is the year 2027, the climactic jubilee heralding the end of the world (Gates 2020, 23:40 ff.). Thus, we are probably living in the last seven years, or the final sabbatical year cycle, of the CW. This last period will fulfil the prophecy of seven times (or years) given to Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4:16.23–25.32). This last point is clear once one acknowledges that prophecies which in the past were fulfilled according to the day-year principle, will in the future be fulfilled as literal days. This is true of Nebuchadnezzar’s seven years or 2,520 days prophecy, which as William Miller saw began in 677/76 BC and ended in AD 1843/44 (see Miller 1842b). This is simply one example of how biblical prophecy transforms from day-year fulfilments in the past to literal day fulfilments in the future. Rev. 10:2 indicates this hermeneutical shift by the angel standing with one foot on the sea and the other on the land. The sea represents past (historicist) fulfilments – for example, the beasts of Daniel 7 arose from the sea – but the land represents prophetic fulfilment in literal (futurist) terms

⁷ Gates’ views on the sequence of jubilee years, and other matters, are heavily influenced by Lang 2020.

(Gates 2020, 32:00ff.). Consequently, Nebuchadnezzar's seven times prophecy will constitute the final literal seven years of the CW (Gates 2020, 33:48ff.).

Walter Veith presents a more detailed and sophisticated argument than Gates and has provoked more response. His eschatological scenario also focuses on 2027, though less dogmatically than Gates. However, Veith's claims that he is merely fielding possibilities for Christ's return, that he is not time-setting, and that the CW is an entirely separate matter, are debateable, as many who have responded to him point out (e.g., Brasil de Souza 2020; Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen 2020; Northern Conference of South Africa n.d.).

While Veith works with a similar hermeneutic, he dismisses arguments based on jubilee year sequences, or reinterpreting biblical prophecies in a futurist, literal sense (Veith and Smith 2020a, 0:50:00; 1:03:40). However, he defends the legitimacy of investigating the approximate date of Christ's return. The usual rendering of Christ's own words is unambiguous: "But about that day and hour no one knows (οἶδα), neither the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father" (Matt 24:36). However, Veith invokes the authority of James White who claims that "an old English version of the passage reads, 'But that day and hour no man *maketh known* ... but the Father'". White claims "this is the correct reading, according to several of the ablest critics of the age" (White 1876, 37). Veith argues that this rendering "makes a lot of sense" (Veith and Smith 2020a, 0:59:27). Thus, the Father *will* make known the day and hour of the Second Advent and it is legitimate to study so that we might discern the Father's voice.

The major source Veith investigates is not the Bible but Ellen White. However, he departs from normative Adventism by arguing that her authority is equal to that of biblical prophets (Veith and Smith 2020a, 1:09:00). Consequently, at least some of her statements regarding chronology are specific, accurate and fully authoritative. For Veith, she makes a critical statement that Christ's baptism in AD 27 (established by the seventy-week prophecy of Dan. 9), occurred "four thousand years after Adam turned his back upon the light of his home" (Con 32). He concedes her chronological statements are sometimes only approximate, but here she is precise. Thus, if Christ was baptised in AD 27, precisely 4,000 years after the fall, then 2027 will be the end of the earth's sixth millennium. However, Satan's ambition to take control of this world pre-dates the fall of humanity, and Ellen White states "for six thousand years [taken by Veith as specific] Satan has struggled to maintain possession

of the earth" (AH 539). In context, she is referring to a time at the end of the millennium (of Rev. 20), during which period Satan has no power over the earth. After the millennium and the resurrection of the wicked, Satan will require time to prepare for battle. It could be, therefore, that one should deduct this preparatory time from the period before 2027 for the precise "six thousand years" to be maintained. If so, then Christ could return prior to 2027.

In a follow-up presentation, he clarifies points that caused a reaction against his first video. Most relevant for our present purpose are the following. He returns to the CW, citing Ps. 90:4 and 2 Pet. 3:8 as its traditional support (Veith and Smith 2020b, 06:50). There is no more biblical prophetic time after 1844, as Ellen White states, but "that doesn't mean that the cosmic clock doesn't continue to tick ... but that doesn't affect cosmic time" (Veith and Smith 2020b, 21:15; 22:15). So, for Veith, 2027 (or a little earlier) is the end of the 6,000 years, but not the end of the 2,520-day prophecy read in a futurist/literal fashion, as Gates argues. Ellen White is clear that we do not know the precise time of Christ's return. God might hasten or delay his coming, but 2027 (or sooner) is the end of the 6,000 years.

Despite his emphasis on Ellen White, Veith also explores biblical passages beyond the foundational 2 Pet. 3:8, which he argues reflect a belief in the CW. For example, he cites the interpretation of Job 5:19 (probably by the Millerite Joshua V. Himes). "In six troubles the Lord will be with thee and support thee, and in the seventh there shall no evil befall thee.' ... after the six thousand years of labor and toil, perplexity and suffering, the seven thousandth will usher in the glorious jubilee" (Himes[?] 1843, 70). Veith comments, "isn't that beautiful!" His video dialogue partner, Martin Smith, observes, and Veith agrees, that the verse means so much more when one is aware of the CW (Veith and Smith 2020b, 01:10:25). Like some Millerites (see above), he also sees significance in Hosea 6:2, "After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up, that we may live before him." There have been two cosmic days since Christ's ministry began and the third will see the second advent (Veith and Smith 2020b, 01:19:10).

While Gates and Veith reflect elements familiar from the long history of the CW, they take matters into realms beyond anything previously suggested in Adventism. Of the two, Gates is the more extreme. No argument is stronger than its weakest link and every link in Gates' argument is weak. For example, why should the Jubilee year cycle begin at the fall when it appears first in Lev.

25:27, with no hint of retrospective application or eschatological significance? His manipulation of Nebuchadnezzar's "seven times" is remarkable. In Dan. 4, the time is explicitly literal, "all this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar" (v. 28, cf. v. 32). But Gates adopts the Millerite stratagem of converting seven years to 2,520 days, each day representing a literal year in the historicist scheme, and uses this as a secondary proof for 1843/44, a period starting in 677/76 BC with the exile of King Manasseh marking the exile of Judah. But it was nothing of the kind, for Manasseh returned to the throne and Judah was not exiled until decades later. Then, Gates reinterprets the same "prophecy" literally in futurist terms as seven years, arbitrarily assigning it as the final sabbatical year cycle in the CW. How many permutations can one biblical passage withstand? Finally, the interpretation of the angel in Rev. 10:2, straddling land and sea and thus symbolically indicating a transition from historicist to futurist interpretation, is simply erratic and random. It is an example of a conviction in search of a text to support it. Gates' whole argument is a pastiche of supposition and assertion with no consistent or discernible hermeneutic guiding it, and doctrinaire exegesis.

While Veith avoids some of Gates' extremes, he too engages in idiosyncratic biblical speculation. His appeal to James White's interpretation of Matt. 24:36 is untenable. Neither White nor Veith are competent in Greek and their translation of the Greek is based on theological conviction rather than linguistic argumentation. In support of the notion that the Father will make known the time of the second coming, White claims an unnamed "old English version" that translates the key verb as "maketh known", and that this is supported by the "ablest critics of the age". I have been unable to locate any old English version published between 1395–1850 which translates the verse this way.⁸ Veith also cites White's reference to Albert Barnes. White, hopefully inadvertently, gives the impression that Albert Barnes (1798–1870) supports this rendering of Matt. 24:36. He cites part of a sentence from Barnes' *Notes on the New Testament*, p. 636, but omits the remainder, italicised here. "Others have said that the verb rendered 'knoweth,' means sometimes to make known, or to reveal; and that the passage means, 'That day and hour none makes known,

⁸ For example, see the comprehensive listing of twenty-two versions of the New Testament: http://textus-receptus.com/wiki/Matthew_24:36#English_Translations.

neither the angels, nor the Son, but the Father.' It is true, the word has sometimes that meaning, as in 1 Cor. 2:2; *but then it is natural to ask where has the Father made it known? In what place did he reveal it?*" That is, Barnes, one of the "ablest critics" of his age, does not believe the verb should be translated "maketh known" in Matt. 24:36.

Veith's claim that biblical prophets and Ellen White have equal authority is doctrinally aberrant, but it emboldens him to engage in a forensic investigation of Ellen White's chronological statements. His claim that she dates the baptism of Christ to 4000 AM precisely, is problematical. When Christ was baptised, "for four thousand years the race had been decreasing in physical strength, in mental power, and in moral worth" (DA 117). Yet, when Christ was born, "the race had been weakened by four thousand years of sin" (DA 48), and his death would, "bring to an end the system of types and ceremonies that for four thousand years had pointed to His death" (DA 652). Christ's birth, baptism and death cannot all occur in 4000 AM precisely. Ellen White, as she frequently does, is using approximations. As Warren Johns has demonstrated, most of her "4,000-year statements fall under the category of literary linkage, and most of the 6,000-year statements are examples of literary emphasis" (Johns 1984, 22), not authoritative chronological time periods. Occasionally, she made chronological statements about biblical events that were incorrect and which were subsequently revised (Johns 1984, 23). She neither claimed nor demonstrated that she was an authority on chronology. Adding 2,000 years to AD 27 does not bring us to the 6,000th year since creation.

Veith compounds his misinterpretation of Ellen White with misinterpretation of the Bible. "He will deliver you from six troubles; in seven no harm shall touch you" (Job 5:19), does not express belief in the CW. It is an example of an $x + 1$, or graduated, saying, in which one numeral is succeeded by one greater, as an idiomatic expression of completeness. For example, "For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four, I will not revoke the punishment" (Amos 1:3, cf. 1:6.9 etc.), announces judgement on *all* the sins of Damascus. Similarly, "There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him" (Prov. 6:16), has the same 6/7 sequence as Job 5:19. Read literally it is nonsense, raising the question "how many things does God hate – six or seven?" But read idiomatically, as a graduated saying, it is a comprehensive statement about human actions that are an abomination to God, and Proverbs continues with a catalogue of seven sinful actions, expressive of complete

wickedness (vv. 17–19). Likewise, the 6/7 sequence in Job 5:19 is followed by seven pairs of positive outcomes for the faithful (vv. 20–26), as idiomatically summarised in v. 19 itself.

Likewise, Hos. 6:2, “After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will raise us up”, is another example of the same $x + 1$ Hebrew idiom. Hos. 6:1a is a call to return to the Lord. While the Lord has punished, he will “heal us ... and he will bind us up” (v. 1b). The next verse idiomatically conveys the completeness of that restoration by using the sequence 2/3. To read the “two days” as being 2,000 years from Christ’s ministry and the third “day” as being the third millennium, and thus the seventh since creation, is non-contextual wishful thinking.

4. Reflection

In the history of Adventist eschatology, the CW went from general acceptance and prominence, through decline in popularity and vagueness of application, to rejection in official publications by the late 20th and early 21st centuries. And there were good hermeneutical, exegetical, and theological reasons for its demise. Thus, its recent revival is striking and raises the question of the reason for its resurgence. The answer lies beyond the confines of this article, but I will make some brief observations. On the one hand, one should not overestimate its current popularity. It has not yet reclaimed the place it had in the 19th century. Yet, anyone who has listened to its internet proponents, seen the hundreds of thousands of hits, and scanned the multiple thousands of positive responses, realises that the CW strikes a responsive chord for many. The arrival of the internet has seen Adventism divide into online tribal groupings. Those most attracted to the CW appear to be conspiracy theorists. For example, David Gates amalgamates dire warnings about the lethal consequences of Covid-19 vaccinations and 5G radiation with the climax of the CW. And Walter Veith’s penchant for seeing Jesuit threats behind apparently benign developments in the religious and political world, as the cosmic clock is ticking, belongs in the same camp. Their extreme theological positions, derived from speculative hermeneutics, undisciplined exegesis, and Ellen White fundamentalism, might seem unsustainable. Yet many find them compelling. But, of course, it is easier to convince people with highly questionable interpretations of the Bible and Ellen White, when we have reached our current

level of biblical illiteracy. We have clearly not enabled some members to absorb appropriate principles of biblical interpretation and thoughtful application. This makes them vulnerable to those who read biblical texts as if they were written by Nostradamus, needing only the esoteric insight of the internet interpreter to find apocalyptic significance in any news headline. The church might find greater success in challenging these aberrations by placing greater emphasis on the depth and richness of Scripture, nurturing members in the spirituality of the Psalms and Sermon on the Mount, for example, and enabling them to study the Bible inductively, rather than merely telling them what they should believe.

Reference List

- Andrews, J.N. "Remarks of O.R.L. Crozier on the Institution, Design and Abolition of the Sabbath. Reviewed." *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 17 February 1852.
- Andrews, J.N. *The Sabbatic Institution: And the Two Laws*. Battle Creek: Steam Press of the Review and Herald Office, 1860.
- Andrews, J.N. *The Complete Testimony of the Fathers of the First Three Centuries Concerning the Sabbath and First Day*. Battle Creek: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1873.
- Andrews, J.N. "The Great Week of Time: Or the Period of Seven Thousand Years Devoted to the Probation and the Judgment of Mankind. First Article." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 17 July 1883 a.
- Andrews, J.N. "The Great Week of Time: The Events of the First and Second Thousand Years. Second Article." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 24 July 1883 b.
- Andrews, J.N. "The Great Week of Time: Events of the Third and Fourth Thousand Years. Third Article." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 31 July 1883 c.
- Andrews, J.N. "The Great Week of Time: The Events of the Fifth Thousand Years. Fourth Article." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 7 August 1883 d.
- Andrews, J.N. "The Great Week of Time. Events of the Seventh Thousand Years. Sixth and Last Article." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 21 August 1883 e.

Laurence A. Turner

- Anonymous. "The Sign of Jonas the Prophet." *Signs of the Times, and Expositor of Prophecy*, 3 August 1842.
- Anonymous. *The Millennium. Lesson 1 for April 3, 1937*. [Sabbath School Lesson Quarterly]
- Barr, James. 1985. "Why the World Was Created in 4004 B.C.: Archbishop Ussher and Biblical Chronology." *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library Manchester* 67.2, 575–608.
- Bates, Joseph. *The Seventh Day Sabbath: A Perpetual Sign from the Beginning, to the Entering into the Gates of the Holy City According to the Commandment*. New Bedford: Benjamin Lindsey, 1846.
- Bollman, C.P. "Events of the Great Day of the Lord." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 15 June 1933.
- Bourdeau, D.T. "Another Objection against the Immediate Coming of Christ." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 26 November 1872.
- Bowen, T.E. "The Unfolding of God's Plan in the 'Day of the Lord.'" *The Present Truth*, 27 June 1918.
- Brasil de Souza, Elias. "Apocalyptic Fiction in Times of Covid-19." *Biblical Research Institute Reflections* 70, April 2020, 1–5.
- Brown, Andrew J. *The Days of Creation: A History of Christian Interpretation of Genesis 1:1–2:3*. History of Biblical Interpretation 4. Blandford Forum, Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2014.
- Conradi, Ludwig R. "Here Is the Patience of the Saints." *Australasian Record*, 30 April 1917.
- Draper, George W. "Some Bible Numerals." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 26 January 1905.
- Elder's Digest*. "Did Ellen White Teach that Jesus Will Return at the Beginning of the Seventh Millennium?" March 2011.
- Elliott, Edward Bishop, John Cumming, Thomas Chalmers, Edward Hitchcock, and John Wesley. *The Time of the End*. Boston: John P. Jewett, 1856.
- Gates, David. "The Wise Shall Understand." Video, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPKGisHYWM>.
- Gates, David. 2021. "How Much Time Do We Have Left?" Full Interview in English. RedADvenir Television. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F9PZHkOnxb4>.
- Gulley, Norman R. "Will Christ Return in 2000?" *Ministry*, December 1999.
- Heisey, Mark A. "Even So, Come Lord Jesus." *Elder's Digest*, 1995.

- Himes[?], Joshua V. "Second Advent." *Signs of the Times and Expositor of Prophecy*, 3 May 1843.
- Hinkley, Frank Edgar. "Thirteen Months in a Year." *The Watchman Magazine*, March 1928.
- Johns, Warren H. "Ellen G. White and Biblical Chronology." *Ministry*, April 1984.
- Johnston, Robert M. "The Eschatological Sabbath in John's Apocalypse: A Reconsideration." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 25, 1987, 39–50.
- Johnston, Robert Morris. "The Sabbath as Metaphor in the Second Century C.E." *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 49.2, 2011, 321–35.
- Knight, George R. "Adventist Approaches to the Second Coming." *Ministry*, July 2000.
- Lang, Gregory D. *Chronology and Prophecy Forecast Earth's Final Events Autumn 2020 – Autumn 2027*. Self-published, 2020.
- Laws, Lindsay John. "Computing the Second Coming." *South Pacific Record*, 11 October 1986.
- Lee, James M. "God's Seven Calls." *The Youth's Instructor*, 1 December 1936.
- Litch, Josiah. "A Dissertation on the Chronology of Prophecy." *The First Report of the General Conference of Christians Expecting the Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. Held in Boston, Oct 14, 15, 1840*, 1–18 vols. Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842. [volume pages not numbered cumulatively]
- Miller, William. "A Dissertation on Prophetic Chronology." *The First Report of the General Conference of Christians Expecting the Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ. Held in Boston, Oct 14, 15, 1840*, 1–12 vols. Boston: Joshua V. Himes, 1842a. [volume pages not numbered cumulatively]
- Miller, William. "Chronological Chart of the World." Adventist Digital Library, 1842b. https://adventistdigitallibrary.org/adl-421835/chronological-chart-world?solr_nav%5Bid%5D=d64071c3838057cbeda1&solr_nav%5Bpage%5D=0&solr_nav%5Boffset%5D=0.
- Miller, William. "Reasons for Believing the Second Coming of Christ in Eighteen Hundred Forty-Three, from the Chronology of Prophecy." *The Midnight Cry*, 22 November 1842c.
- Neufeld, Don F. "Is the 6,000-Year Theory Valid?" *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 25 March 1976a.
- Neufeld, Don F. "Footnote to the 6,000-Year Theory," 13 May 1976b.
- Nichol, Francis D. *The Midnight Cry: A Defense of the Character and Conduct of William Miller and The Millerites, who Mistakenly Believed that the Second*

Laurence A. Turner

Coming of Christ Would Take Place in the Year 1844. Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1944.

Nichol, Francis D. *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary*. Vol. 1. Washington D.C.: Review and Herald, 1953.

Northern Conference of South Africa. "Memorandum of Understanding," n.d. Online available: <https://ncadventist.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Combine-Statement-with-Prof-Veith-26-5-2020-Official-signed-GW.pdf>.

Place, Albert E. "The Chain That Binds Satan." *The Present Truth*, 31 October 1918.

"The Millennium: A Bible Study." *Present Truth*, June 27, 1918.

Priest, Josiah. *A View of the Expected Christian Millennium*. Albany: Loomis' Press, 1828.

Reed, L. A. "Sowing and Reaping." *The Youth's Instructor*, October 10, 1901.

Seminar Schloss Bogenhofen. "2027 – Ende der Welt? Hat Walter Veith RECHT!?" Online-Video, 2020. <https://youtu.be/zoNPgVmuVXw> (accessed: May 13, 2022).

Slade, John H. "What Is Christian Education?" *Australasian Record*, October 17, 1966.

Smith, Uriah. "The Institution of the Sabbath." *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 19, 1856.

Smith, Uriah. "The 7th Thousand Year." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, August 13, 1901.

Spicer, William Ambrose. *Our Day in the Light of Prophecy*. Washington D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1918.

Stewart, G. G. "A Stirring Message." *Australasian Record*, February 8, 1937.

Stowe, C. "Letter from Sister C. Stowe." *The Advent Herald and Signs of the Times Reporter*, October 8, 1844.

The Editor. "God's Great Week of Time." *The Bible Echo*, June 20, 1898.

Veith, Walter, and Martin Smith. "Is This The End? Part 1 (2 Hour In Depth Study) – What's Up Prof? No. 8." Online-Video, 2020a. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v6h4H1DHQzc> (accessed: May 13, 2022).

Veith, Walter, and Martin Smith. "Is This The End? Part 2 – What's Up Prof? No. 9." Online-Video, 2020b. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qd fHzjGmPHo> (accessed: May 13, 2022).

Vesey, F. W. "A Royal Gardener." *North Pacific Union Gleaner*, July 11, 1912.

- Vincent, Noah Wood. "Bright Contrasts." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 1, 1927.
- Waggoner, Joseph Harvey. *From Eden to Eden: A Historic and Prophetic Study*. Oakland: Pacific Press, 1888.
- White, James. "The Day of Judgment." *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 1850.
- White, James. "Letter to H. V. Reed: No. 1." *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, March 6, 1856.
- White, James. *Sermons on the Coming and Kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ*. Battle Creek: Steam Press of the Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1870.
- White, James. *The Second Coming of Christ: Or a Brief Exposition of Matthew Twenty-four*. Battle Creek: Seventh-day Adventist Publishing Association, 1876.
- Whitney, E.W. "Scientific Features Expressive of Facts in the Plan of Redemption (Concluded)." *The Signs of the Times*, October 15, 1894.
- Whittaker, M.H. "Rebellion in High Places." *Signs of the Times*, June 9, 1952.
- Wilcox, Francis McLennan. "Our Question Corner: 61. The Seven Thousand Years." *The Signs of the Times*, December 5, 1892.
- Wilcox, Francis McLennan "A Significant Religious Gathering – No. 2: A Bible Conference on the Return of Our Lord." *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, June 20, 1918.
- Wilcox, Milton C. "The Revelation of Jesus Christ: XLIV The Final Judgment." *The Signs of the Times*, 1911.
- Willet, Andrew. *Hexapla in Genesis*. Cambridge: John Legat, 1605.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel beginnt mit einem kurzen Überblick über die Geschichte der Vorstellung einer kosmischen Woche von seinen Ursprüngen in vorchristlichen Texten bis zum späten 18. Jh. Danach wird ihre Rolle im eschatologischen Denken der Milleriten untersucht und wie sich dies auf die frühen Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten auswirkte. Zwischen der Mitte des 19. und dem Beginn des 21. Jh. wurde die Idee einer kosmischen Woche in der adventistischen Eschatologie nicht mehr allgemein anerkannt, sondern in kirchlichen Veröffentlichungen sogar ausdrücklich abgelehnt. In jüngster Zeit wurde sie von einigen adventistischen Internetmissionswerken wiederbelebt mit dem Fokus auf dem Jahr 2027, das als Ende des sechsten Jahrtausends seit der Schöpfung angesehen wird und nach dieser Behauptung das (ungefähre) Datum für das zweite Kommen Jesu ist. Die biblische Hermeneutik und Exegese, die zur Untermauerung dieser Behauptungen herangezogen werden, werden kritisch beleuchtet.

Résumé

Cet article commence par un bref aperçu de l'histoire du concept de la semaine cosmique, depuis ses origines dans les textes préchrétiens jusqu'à la fin du XVIII^e siècle. Il étudie ensuite son rôle dans la pensée eschatologique millérite et son impact sur les débuts de l'adventisme du 7^e jour. Entre le milieu du XIX^e siècle et le début du XXI^e siècle, la place de la semaine cosmique dans l'eschatologie adventiste est passée d'une acceptation commune à un rejet explicite dans les publications de l'Église. Elle a récemment été ravivée par certains ministères adventistes sur Internet, en mettant l'accent sur l'année 2027, considérée comme la fin du sixième millénaire depuis la création et donc, prétend-on, la date (approximative) de la seconde venue. L'herméneutique et l'exégèse bibliques utilisées pour étayer ces affirmations sont critiquées.

Laurence A. Turner, Th.M., Ph.D., is an Old Testament scholar and specialist in Hebrew narrative, especially in the book of Genesis. He is retired after serving as Head of Department of Theological Studies and as Principal Lecturer in Old Testament at Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, United Kingdom. E-mail: lturner@newbold.ac.uk

Kirche im Wandel

Eine demografische Analyse der Entwicklung der Freikirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Deutschland und Österreich

László Szabó

Abstrakt

Veränderungen in der kirchlich geprägten Religiosität in Europa stellen viele konfessionelle Ortsgemeinden auf eine existenzielle Bewährungsprobe. Die hier vorgestellten Forschungsergebnisse zeigen, dass es dafür in der Freikirche der Adventisten neben allgemeinen demografischen und gesellschaftlichen Trends auch wesentliche beeinflussbare Faktoren gibt. Durch vorbeugende, strukturell optimierte Maßnahmen könnte der Mitgliederverlust stark reduziert werden und zudem könnten sich neue Möglichkeiten für Gemeindeentwicklung eröffnen. Besonders zu berücksichtigen sind: der bewusste Umgang mit dem steigenden Belastungsquotienten in den Ortsgemeinden, die Integration von jungen Erwachsenen, die Aktivierung der passiven Babyboomer-Generation, neue Gemeinde- und Gottesdienstmodelle für Kleinstgemeinden, die Wahrnehmung der besonderen Bedürfnisse und Erwartungen von Männern, die Betreuung von Alleinstehenden, seelsorgerliche „Sterbebegleitung“ schrumpfender Gemeinden, das missionarische Feld der konfessionsverschiedenen Ehen und neue zielgruppenorientierte Missionsansätze.

Immer mehr Kirchen¹ versuchen ihre Lage und mögliche Entwicklungsperspektiven mit Hilfe von empirischen Forschungsprogrammen zu erkunden,

¹ Die Katholische und Evangelische Kirche führten z. B. umfassende Untersuchungen über den Verlauf der demografischen Entwicklung durch und stellten Prognosen über die Konsequenzen für ihre Weiterentwicklung in den nächsten Jahrzehnten auf (vgl. www.ekd.de). Auch bei den

um Aussagen treffen zu können, die eine über die subjektive Meinung und Alltagserfahrung von Einzelnen hinausgehende Gültigkeit beanspruchen können. Die Untersuchungen, die vom Arthur-Daniells-Institut für Missionswissenschaft (ADIMIS) an der Theologischen Hochschule Friedensau über die Freikirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten (im Folgenden: STA) in Deutschland, Österreich und anderen Ländern Europas durchgeführt wurden, leisten eine Art Seehilfe und geben ansatzweise Auskunft darüber, in welchen Bereichen die Freikirche der STA gut aufgestellt ist und wo Handlungsbedarf und -möglichkeit bestehen. Die Grundfrage der Mission ist, wie Gottes Anliegen in dem jeweiligen Kontext von der Gemeinde wahrgenommen und erfüllt werden können. Diese Grundfrage braucht in dem neuen und veränderten Kontext des 21. Jahrhunderts neue Antworten. Diese empirisch angelegte Studie möchte dabei sensibilisieren, damit wichtige Themen im Zusammenhang mit der demografischen Entwicklung der Freikirche und entscheidende Faktoren für die Gemeindegeseundheit in den Ortsgemeinden neu bedacht werden können. Dies ist umso notwendiger, weil immer mehr Leiter, Pastoren und Gemeindeglieder das Bedürfnis äußern, Aussagen und Theorien kennenzulernen, die über die Alltagserfahrung des Einzelnen hinaus mehr Gültigkeit beanspruchen können und die dazu beitragen, sie im Umgang mit der überwältigenden und sogar ständig wachsenden Komplexität ihres Gemeindefeldes zu unterstützen. Ihr Anliegen ist, dass sie es den Söhnen Issaschars gleichtun können, „die Einsicht hatten in die Zeiten, um zu wissen, was Israel tun sollte: 200 Häupter; und alle ihre Brüder folgten ihrem Wort“ (1. Chr. 12,33; Schlachter 2000).

1. Kontext, Quellen und Forschungsziel

1.1 Geschichtlicher Hintergrund

Der religiöse Kontext hat sich in den letzten Jahrzehnten in vielen europäischen Ländern radikal verändert. Der Übergang ins 21. Jahrhundert mit seinen globalen Trends hat das Leben der Kirchen auf dem europäischen Kontinent in vieler Hinsicht vor gewaltige Herausforderungen gestellt. Vor einigen Jahrzehnten waren noch Evangelisten und Missionare die christlichen

kleineren Freikirchen existieren Initiativen, die sich dem Thema Gemeindebau aus der Richtung der Sozial- oder Wirtschaftswissenschaften nähern. Dabei ist die Gemeinnützige Gesellschaft für Gemeindebau mbH in Moers zu erwähnen.

Helden, und die intensive Verkündigung des Evangeliums sowie mit Stolz veranstaltete kirchliche Feste und Programme mobilisierten eine erhebliche Zahl von Gläubigen. Europäische Pastoren reisten nach Süden, Osten und Übersee, um etwas von ihrer Begeisterung für Gottes neues Reich weiterzugeben.

Mit Beginn des neuen Millenniums gingen aber die Evangelisten der Generation von Billy Graham langsam in Rente und an ihre Stelle traten oft die neuen Propheten, die Statistiker. Sie haben bei vielen Kirchen das Ruder ergriffen, um die gegenwärtige Lage und die Aussichten zu interpretieren. Kirchen in Europa haben immer weniger Kapazität für Entwicklungsländer, da sie sich immer mehr mit ihrer eigenen, eher ernüchternden Realität auseinandersetzen müssen. Zwar feierte noch vor Kurzem Deutschland und die protestantische Welt mit ihren Millionen von Menschen das Reformationsjubiläum und die historischen Stätten in Europa glänzten in christlicher Nostalgie, aber der Optimismus über die Zukunft der Religion verschwindet immer mehr in Anbetracht der traurig erscheinenden Realität. Ereignet sich gerade tatsächlich der Untergang der christlichen Kirchen in Europa, wie einige dies behaupten (z.B. Latzel 2017) und war die Reformationsfeier eine der letzten großen Ereignisse der kirchlich-geprägten Religiosität in Europa? Oder geht es hier eher um natürliche kulturelle Verschiebungen von religiösen Interessen ohne beträchtliche Veränderungen am Interesse an Religiosität allgemein? Unabhängig davon, wie diese Fragen beantwortet werden, ist es eindeutig, dass gegenwärtige religiöse Entwicklungen in westlichen europäischen Gesellschaften institutionalisierte Formen der Religiosität, wie dies in den meisten christlichen Kirchen gepflegt wird, auf eine harte und existentielle Bewährungsprobe stellen.

1.2 Forschungshintergrund und Zielstellung

Der besondere Fokus der Forschung, die als Grundlage dieses Artikels dient, richtet sich auf die Frage, wie die Freikirche der STA in dem erwähnten europäischen Kontext demografisch aufgestellt ist. Kommt auch auf die Freikirche eine existenzielle Bewährungsprobe zu, oder muss sie damit in der nahen Zukunft nicht rechnen? In welchen Bereichen des Kirchenlebens besteht Handlungsbedarf und welche Fragen der Gemeindegundheit sind besonders aktuell, um den Auftrag Gottes erfüllen zu können?

In den letzten Jahren führte ADIMIS in Zusammenarbeit mit der jeweils zuständigen Kirchenleitung etliche Untersuchungen in mehreren europäischen Ländern durch, die Informationen über den Zustand der Freikirche als Ganzes, aber auch über den Zustand, die Entwicklung und die Gesundheit der Ortsgemeinden liefern. Darüber hinaus ermöglichen diese Maßnahmen auch eine Prognose darüber, wie die Weiterentwicklung voraussichtlich verlaufen wird. Leider existiert keine Untersuchung, die genügend Informationen für repräsentative Aussagen über die gesamteuropäische Lage der Freikirche der STA liefern könnte. Aus diesem Grund liegt der Fokus dieses Artikels hauptsächlich auf die Lage in den deutschsprachigen Ländern Deutschland und Österreich, da über sie die Daten erhoben wurden und diese am zuverlässigsten sind.

Das Ziel ist, die demografische Lage der Freikirche in den genannten Ländern anhand der ausgewählten Datenquellen zu schildern und relevante Herausforderungen und Möglichkeiten zu entdecken. Es besteht kein Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit, da der Rahmen dieses Artikels den Umfang limitiert und in einigen Themenbereichen sogar weitere Untersuchungen nötig wären. Auch die Auswirkungen der Corona-Pandemie wurde nicht berücksichtigt, da dies ein umfassendes Update der Daten verlangen würde. Über die Fragen der Demografie hinaus sind Themen der Gemeindegesundheit wichtig, die aufzeigen, welche Aufgaben und Bedürfnisse dringend Aufmerksamkeit auf Leitungsebene brauchen und welche Aspekte bei der Ausbildung und Weiterbildung der Pastoren berücksichtigt werden müssten.

Zunächst steht die Demografie im Mittelpunkt. Danach werden die möglichen Maßnahmen zur Reduzierung der Verluste erörtert. Im nachfolgenden Teil rückt die strukturelle Optimierung in den Fokus, um die Frage zu beantworten, wie die Gemeinschaft der STA auf die veränderte Lage strukturell reagieren könnte. Anschließend werden die missionarischen Möglichkeiten und Maßnahmen untersucht und weiterführenden Themenbereiche genannt, die durch neue Forschungsprojekte noch tiefere Erkenntnisse über aktuelle Fragen bringen würden.

1.3 Datenquellen

1.3.1 Stammdaten und aggregierte Bewegungsdaten der Vereinigungsberichte
In allen Ländern, wo die Freikirche der STA tätig ist und eine standardisierte Administration hat, werden in den Vereinigungsstatistiken die Stammdaten

sowie für jede Gemeinde die aggregierten Bewegungsdaten regelmäßig erhoben. Dies entspricht den Richtlinien der Generalkonferenz. Diese Daten sind aber noch nicht ausreichend, um etwa die Frage zu beantworten, wie sich die Altersverteilung im Verlauf der Zeit verändert hat.

1.3.2 Nicht aggregierte Bewegungsdaten der Einzelpersonen und Gemeindestatistiken

In Deutschland und Österreich wurde eine umfangreichere Analyse der anonymisierten Mitglieder Gesamtdatenbank durchgeführt. Über die Stammdaten hinaus konnten auch die Bewegungsdaten der einzelnen anonymisierten Mitglieder aus der Gesamtdatenbank verwendet werden. Weil die Daten nicht aggregiert sind, kann die Bewegung und Lebensveränderung eines jeden Mitglieds erfasst werden.² Die Bewegungsdaten älteren Datums wurden in Deutschland weniger sorgfältig gepflegt, daher kann diese Untersuchung nur begrenzt auf diese zurückgreifen. Um die Zuverlässigkeit der Daten zu erhöhen, wurde eine Datenbereinigung der deutschen Daten durchgeführt.

1.3.3 Datenerhebung

Aus organisatorischen Gründen war die gleichzeitige Datenerhebung in verschiedenen Ländern leider nicht möglich. In Deutschland wurde die Datensammlung im Jahr 2015 durchgeführt und die untersuchte Zeitperiode waren die Jahre 2004–2014. Ein Update der Daten über die Gliederzahlentwicklung der einzelnen Gemeinden wurde im Jahr 2020 über alle Vereinigungen erhalten. Die Datenerhebung in Österreich startete 2020 und der Fokus der Untersuchung lag auf der Zeitperiode 2009–2019. Bei der Datenerhebung und Auswertung haben Dirk Schomburg in Deutschland und Markus Savli in Österreich maßgeblich mitgewirkt.

² Verwendete Datenquellen in Deutschland: anonymisierte Mitgliederlisten mit Geburts-, Tauf-, Todesdatum, Familienstand und Ortsgemeinde vom 01.07.2015 für BMV, BYV, Hansa, MRW, NIB und NRW. Gliederbewegungstabellen mit Tauf-, Todes-, Aufnahme- und Abgangszahlen von BMV (2008–2012 und 2014), Hansa (2003–2014), NIB (2003–2014), NRW (2002–2014) und MRV (2004–2014). Exporte der anonymisierten Stammdaten mit Stand vom 03.09.2015 aus der deutschlandweiten Mitglieder Gesamtdatenbank. Exportiert wurden die Daten von Mitgliedern und Ehemaligen. Export der anonymisierten Bewegungsdaten mit Stand vom 03.09.2015 aus der deutschlandweiten Mitglieder Gesamtdatenbank. Eine Aktualisierung der Stammdaten wurde im Jahr 2020 durchgeführt.

Zwar repräsentieren die Ergebnisse unterschiedliche Zeitperioden der beiden Länder, jedoch werden im Folgenden die Ergebnisse gemeinsam präsentiert, um durch Vergleichswerte die Gemeinsamkeiten und die Unterschiede zeigen zu können. Außerdem geschehen die Veränderungen in der Geschichte der STA nicht über Nacht, daher sind auch diese Untersuchungsergebnisse und die Vergleiche dafür geeignet, die Trends in der Entwicklung der STA wahrzunehmen, um die persönlichen subjektiven Beobachtungen entweder zu untermauern oder zu widerlegen.

1.4 Religiöse Entwicklungen im Umfeld

Was Deutschland betrifft, gehörte nahezu die gesamte Bevölkerung noch vor etwa einhundert Jahren einer christlichen Konfession an. In den nächsten etwa einhundert Jahren bis 2011 wuchs der Konfessionslosenanteil auf etwa 33% (Zensus in Deutschland 2011). Die Folgen der sozialistischen Zeit sind bis heute in den neuen Bundesländern, im Gebiet der ehemaligen DDR, wahrzunehmen. Hier sind zwei Drittel der Bevölkerung konfessionslos (Zensus 2011). Dies weist darauf hin, dass sich die Freikirche der STA in einigen postkommunistischen Ländern einer besonders großen Herausforderung stellen muss. Das Wachstum derjenigen ohne Konfessionszugehörigkeit beschleunigt sich in Deutschland. Ihr Anteil in der Gesamtbevölkerung ist zwischen 2002 und 2011 um etwa 10% gestiegen. Laut Einschätzungen der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) hat im Jahr 2019 der Anteil der Konfessionslosen zusammen mit den nichtchristlichen Gläubigen 43,8% erreicht (EKD 2019).

Neben den natürlichen Verlusten verzeichnen die Katholische und Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland massiv ansteigende Kirchenaustritte. Allein im Jahre 2018 verließen 216.078 Katholiken ihre Kirche, 29% mehr als im Vorjahr (Lutz 2019) und 220.000 evangelische Christen, 11% mehr als im Vorjahr (EKD 2019). Dies bedeutet 1,02% Verlust durch Austritte in einem Jahr. Bei der Adventgemeinde lag die statistisch erfassbare Zahl der Austritte im Jahr 2018 bei 0,6%, der jährliche Gesamtverlust ist etwa 2% und dies entspricht etwa dem deutschen Trend der protestantischen Kirchen.

Wenn wir die insgesamt schrumpfende Mitgliederzahl der beiden großen Kirchen in Deutschland betrachten und sehen, dass allein im Jahr 2018 über 704.000 weniger Mitglieder zu verzeichnen waren als im Jahr davor, liegt die

Schlussfolgerung nahe, dass diese Prozesse zu einer grundlegenden Veränderung kirchlicher Religiosität führen. Die demografische Entwicklung und auch der dramatische Rückgang der Gottesdienstbesucherzahlen der großen Kirchen in Deutschland scheinen dies zu bestätigen. Untersuchungen weisen darauf hin, dass eigentlich weniger als die Hälfte des Rückgangs auf den demografischen Wandel zurückzuführen ist: Den größten Einfluss üben Faktoren aus, die durch menschliche Entscheidungen bestimmt werden. Besonders das Tauf-, Austritts- und Aufnahmeverhalten der Kirchenmitglieder ist ausschlaggebend. Die Tendenz hat beispielsweise für die Evangelische Kirche zur Folge, dass sich ihr Mitgliederbestand bis zum Jahr 2060 halbieren wird (EKD und Katholiken in Deutschland 2019). Diese Tendenzen bilden die Grundlage dafür, dass immer mehr von „Kirchensterben“ und „Krise“ gesprochen wird und dass beide Kirchen ernsthafte Schritte überlegen, um diesen Herausforderungen gerecht zu werden.

In Österreich dürfen seit der Volkszählung 2001 keine Daten zur Religionszugehörigkeit mehr erhoben werden und aus diesem Grund erfasst der Staat auch keine Mitgliederzahlen von in Österreich vertretenen Religionsgemeinschaften. Nur selbstveröffentlichte Daten der Religionsgemeinschaften und Schätzungen geben eine limitierte Auskunft über ihre Entwicklung wieder. Über 55% der Bevölkerung gehören der Katholischen Kirche an (2020), etwa 8% sind Orthodoxe Christen (2018), 7,8% sind Muslime (2016), 3% sind Evangelische Christen (2020) und 0,6% gehören einer Freikirche an (2013), (Statista 2022). Die zahlenmäßige Entwicklung der Katholischen Kirche sieht ähnlich zu der in Deutschland aus. Die Mitgliederzahl von 2019 auf 2020 verzeichnete einen Rückgang von 1,6%, wobei Kirchenaustritte und die starken Rückgänge bei den Sakramenten dabei eine wesentliche Rolle spielten. Auch bei den Austritten ist eine wechselhafte, aber doch langsam steigende Tendenz zu beobachten (Kirchliche Statistik, <https://www.katholisch.at/statistik>).

1.5 Grundlegendes über empirische Forschung im kirchlichen Bereich

Im kirchlichen Bereich herrscht oft Skepsis über die Sinnhaftigkeit von soziologischen Analysen und Beobachtungen. Was bringt eine Analyse über die demografische Entwicklung, wenn die Kirche offensichtlich einer erheblichen Krise entgegenschreitet? Durch solche Untersuchungen bekommt die Leitung über subjektive und oft widersprüchliche Beobachtungen hinaus mehr Klar-

heit dafür, welche Fragen im Zusammenhang mit dem Thema Kirchenentwicklung und Gemeindegeseundheit wichtig sind. Die Stärken können entdeckt werden und Leiter können erkennen, was getan werden muss, um spätere Engpässe zu vermeiden. Die vorliegende Studie hat das Ziel dazu beizutragen, dass Missverständnisse und falsche Annahmen korrigiert und Handlungsfelder klarer definiert werden können. Für die Planung des Kirchenlebens ist es in Zeiten wie diesen unbedingt notwendig, realitätsnah zu bleiben und relevante Fragestellungen so zu präzisieren, dass sie anhand von empirischen Tatsachen beantwortet werden können.

Nicht nur die großen Kirchen in Deutschland, sondern auch die Freikirche der STA erleben historische Herausforderungen. Es wird immer klarer, dass Gemeindeleben in vielen Ortsgemeinden nicht mehr lange unverändert weiter gestaltet werden kann. Welche Maßnahmen sollen ergriffen werden, damit Gemeindeleben eine neue Zukunftsperspektive gewinnt und auch der missionarische Auftrag zum Dienst effektiv wahrgenommen werden kann?

Untersuchte Gemeinden berichten von einer Fülle verschiedener Maßnahmen, die in der Vergangenheit ausprobiert oder einfach übernommen wurden. Durch die weltweite Vernetzung der adventistischen Welt und durch den regen internationalen Austausch werden immer wieder neue erfolgversprechende Methoden, Best-Practice-Modelle oder Aktionen bekannt gegeben und für die lokale Umsetzung empfohlen. Dies führte zu einer Copy-and-Paste-Mentalität in vielen Ortsgemeinden ohne Berücksichtigung der lokalen Gegebenheiten und ohne bewusste nachhaltige Planung. Das Ergebnis war am Ende oft Frustration, Motivationsverlust und die Schrumpfung von Gemeinderessourcen. Im Laufe der Zeit ist das Bewusstsein dafür gestiegen, dass veränderte Zeiten Maßnahmen benötigen, die an die lokalen Bedingungen angepasst wurden. Es gibt keine Zeit mehr für unüberlegtes Experimentieren und unbegründete strategische Schritte. Die empirische Forschung möchte im Dienst der Kirche als Gemeinde- und Kontextanalyse auf einer Seite eine Sehhilfe leisten, um Handlungsmöglichkeiten zu entdecken und um Handlungsmaßnahmen untermauern zu können.

2. Die demografische Entwicklung der STA in den ausgewählten Ländern

2.1 Typische Altersstrukturen

Die Altersverteilung spiegelt das Ergebnis der kirchlichen Aktivitäten und die vergangene Entwicklung wider. Wünschenswert wäre eine ideale Altersverteilung, wo alle Altersgruppen mit gleichem Anteil vertreten sind, aber da dies kaum möglich ist, stellt sich die Frage, in welchen Bereichen die Abweichung vom Idealen am größten ist und welche Folgen sie auf die weitere Entwicklung der Organisation ausüben wird. Eine falsche Einschätzung der Altersstruktur hat weitgehende Konsequenzen auf die Strategieentwicklung, die wiederum die Zukunft der Organisation wesentlich mitgestaltet. Es gibt vier typischen Altersstrukturen:

- (1) In einer *seniorenzentrierten* Altersstruktur sind die Senioren die dominante Gruppe; meistens tragen sie die Verantwortung und haben nur limitierte Möglichkeiten für die Weitergabe ihrer Erfahrungen.
- (2) *Mittenzentriert* ist die Altersstruktur, wenn die Mehrheit im Alter von 35 und 55 ist.
- (3) Ist dagegen die Gruppe der Jugendlichen und jungen Erwachsenen am größten, sprechen wir über eine *jugendzentrierte* Altersstruktur. Die junge Generation hat nur begrenzt Möglichkeiten auf die Erfahrungen der Vorgänger aufzubauen; so kann sie jedoch traditionsungebundene Prozesse selbst gestalten und die Institution neu prägen.
- (4) Eine *ausgewogene* Altersverteilung wäre natürlich für die meisten Fälle wünschenswert, weil Abgänge und Zugänge dabei im Gleichgewicht bleiben und dazu beitragen, dass die Organisation in allen Altersbereichen etwa gleichmäßig aufgestellt ist und langfristig erhalten bleiben kann. Das Wissen durch Erfahrungen bleibt lange erhalten und wird auf die neuen Generationen natürlich weitergetragen, die der Weiterentwicklung wiederum neuen Schwung geben und durch neues Wissen die Zukunftsgestaltung bereichern.

2.2 Demografische Entwicklung der STA in Deutschland und Österreich

Die Untersuchung der Entwicklung der Altersstruktur der Freikirche der STA in Deutschland und Österreich sorgte auch für positive Überraschungen. Bei einer vorläufigen und nicht repräsentativen Befragung über den Stand der Altersverteilung waren die absolute Mehrheit der befragten Leiter und Gemeindeglieder der Meinung, dass die Adventgemeinde in Deutschland, aber

auch in Österreich, eher *seniorenzentriert* aufgestellt ist. Entgegen der eher pessimistischen Vermutung zeigte die Demografie, dass die altersmäßige Aufstellung in beiden Ländern immer noch eher *mittenzentriert* ist und noch genügend Stärken aufweist, die für die aktive Zukunftsgestaltung wesentlich beitragen können.

2.2.1 Die Altersstruktur der STA in Deutschland

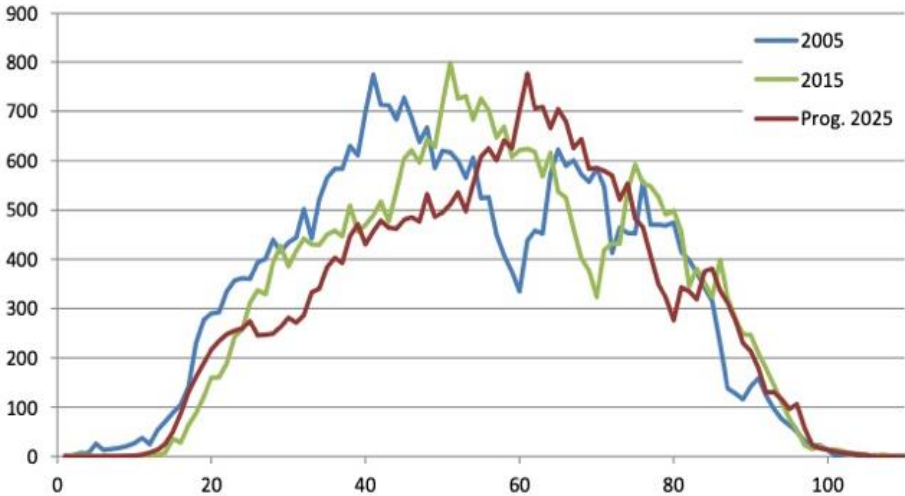


Abb. 1. Altersverteilung und Prognose der STA in Deutschland

Bei der Altersverteilung in den beiden deutschen Verbänden in 2015 ist es sichtbar, wie die Spitze der häufigsten Altersgruppe weiterwandert, die Alterskurve der jungen Generation verflacht und besonders bei der Gruppe der jungen Erwachsenen im Alter von 22–34 eine mengenmäßige Ausdünnung entsteht. Die Generation der über 63-Jährigen, die den zweiten wesentlichen Teil der Mitglieder der Freikirche ausmachten, übergeben den Platz an die Babyboomer. Der Altersmittelwert weist in den deutschen Vereinigungen Abweichungen auf. Die jüngsten Vereinigungen in Deutschland waren mit 53 Jahren NRW und BMV. Dagegen war in NIB der Wert mit 58 Jahren am höchsten. In MRV und BYV war der Wert bei 55 Jahren, in Hansa bei 56 Jahren, und in BWV bei 57 Jahren.

Es wird aber sichtbar, dass der Übergang von *mittenzentriert* zu *seniorenzentriert* bereits läuft und in den nächsten Jahren mit einem starken Anstieg der Über-65-Jährigen in den Gemeinden zu rechnen ist. Die am stärksten vertretene Gruppe der 45- bis 65-Jährigen des Jahres 2015 wechselt langsam in das Segment 65 bis 85 Jahre. Ein linearer Altersanstieg ist in der STA in Deutschland zu beobachten.

Bei der Erstellung der Prognose haben wir alle wachstumsverändernden Einflüsse untersucht und anhand der vorhandenen Bewegungsdaten bis 2025 ausgerechnet. Darin wird sichtbar, dass die Nachwuchsfrage immer relevanter wird und die Verluste kaum mehr ausbalanciert werden können. Die Prognose zeigt, dass die Mitgliederzahl von 36.125 im Jahr 2005 auf 31.543 im Jahr 2025 zurückgehen wird. Dies würde fast 13% Mitgliederzahlverlust in den nächsten 20 Jahren bedeuten. Langfristig stellen diese Tendenzen die Gemeinschaft vor eine ernsthafte ekklesiologische, personelle, aber auch finanzielle Herausforderung.

2.2.2 Die Altersstruktur der STA in Österreich

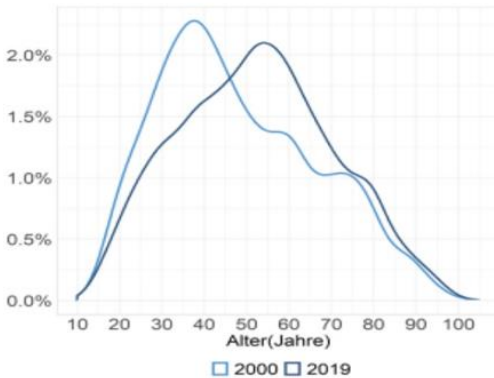


Abb. 2. Altersstruktur der STA in Österreich, 2000–2019

Die Altersstruktur der österreichischen Union und ihre Veränderung weist Ähnlichkeiten zu der deutschen auf. Der Altersmittelwert lag im Jahr 2019 bei 52 Jahren; damit ist die Adventgemeinde in Österreich jünger als die in Deutschland, besonders, wenn man bedenkt, dass die Erhebung 5 Jahre später stattfand. Die Verflachung der Kurve bei der jungen Generation ist wesentlich

langsamer als in Deutschland, dagegen ist die Kurve bei den älteren wesentlich steiler geworden. Dafür ist die steigende Lebenserwartung verantwortlich. Insgesamt wird die Gemeinschaft älter, der Altersanstieg verläuft linear mit 0,21 Jahren pro Jahr.

2.2.3 Schlussfolgerungen und Fragen

An beiden Darstellungen und an der Entwicklung der Alterspyramide ist gut sichtbar, dass vorhandene Maßnahmen der STA für Mission und Gemeindeentwicklung scheinbar wenig Einfluss ausüben und die Altersstruktur der Freikirche mit wenig Veränderung im Laufe der Zeit voranschreitet. Die Veränderungen sind eher Abgänge ab dem Alter von etwa 24 Jahren. Zusammenfassend kann festgestellt werden, dass die allgemeine gesellschaftliche Entwicklung der westlichen europäischen Länder auch in der Freikirche der STA in beiden untersuchten Ländern Spuren hinterlässt und besonders in folgenden Bereichen zu neuen Herausforderungen führt:

- (1) Die Gemeindeglieder werden weniger – es geschieht eine natürliche Schrumpfung und Abnahme der Gliederzahl.
- (2) Die Gemeinschaft wird älter – der Prozess der demografischen Alterung ist scheinbar kaum aufzuhalten und dies wird auch in der Freikirche zu wesentlichen Änderungen führen.
- (3) Die Zusammensetzung der Freikirche wird heterogener – Verluste werden teilweise durch Zugänge aus dem Ausland geringer gehalten, aber die Folgen sind in vielen Ortsgemeinden spürbar. Die kulturelle und sprachliche Vielfalt wächst und führt oft zu neuen Herausforderungen.

Die demografische Entwicklung lässt Fragen für die Administration, Pastoren und Gemeindeglieder der Adventgemeinde auf allen Ebenen entstehen, die nach lösungsorientierten Antworten und Maßnahmen verlangen: (1) Inwieweit kann die starke mittlere Generation zur aktiven Mitgestaltung der Kirchenentwicklung motiviert, aktiviert und hineinbezogen werden, solange sie noch die Stärke aufweist? Der konstante Verlauf der demografischen Entwicklung weist darauf hin, dass sie ihre eigene Generation in der Gesellschaft missionarisch nicht erreicht, christliche Werte in der Gesellschaft nicht überzeugend und anziehend weitergeben kann. (2) Welche Möglichkeiten und Maßnahmen stehen zur Verfügung, um die Folgen der sinkenden Größe der neueren Generationen auszubalancieren und das Leben der Gemeinschaft mit

weniger aktiven Mitarbeitern und Ressourcen doch gesund zu gestalten? (3) Was geschieht mit dem Erfahrungswissen der älteren Generationen und woher kommt die Kraft zur Erneuerung und zu neuen Initiativen, wenn jede neue Generation kleiner ist als die davorstehende? (4) Was bedeutet diese Entwicklung für die Organisation als Ganzes und für den strukturellen Aufbau der Freikirche? Welche Maßnahmen sind notwendig, damit die Funktionalität erhalten bleibt, aber der Aufbau dem zahlenmäßigen Rückgang der Gemeindeglieder entsprechend optimiert und angemessen kleiner gestaltet wird?

3. Mögliche Maßnahmen zur Erhaltung und zur Verlustreduzierung

Die Zugänge können die Abgänge in der STA in Deutschland seit langem nicht mehr ausgleichen, was zu einer kontinuierlichen Abnahme der Gliederzahl führt. An Abb. 3 ist sichtbar, dass besonders die Kleinst-, Klein-, und die größten Gemeinden gefährdet sind. Am besten schneiden Gemeinden mit Mitgliederzahl von 40–50 und von ca. 100 ab. Allerdings muss man berücksichtigen, dass 23% der Gemeinden durch Zuzug wächst und nur 6% der Gemeinden die Abgänge durch Taufe ausbalancieren kann. 71% der Gemeinden in Deutschland schrumpfen.

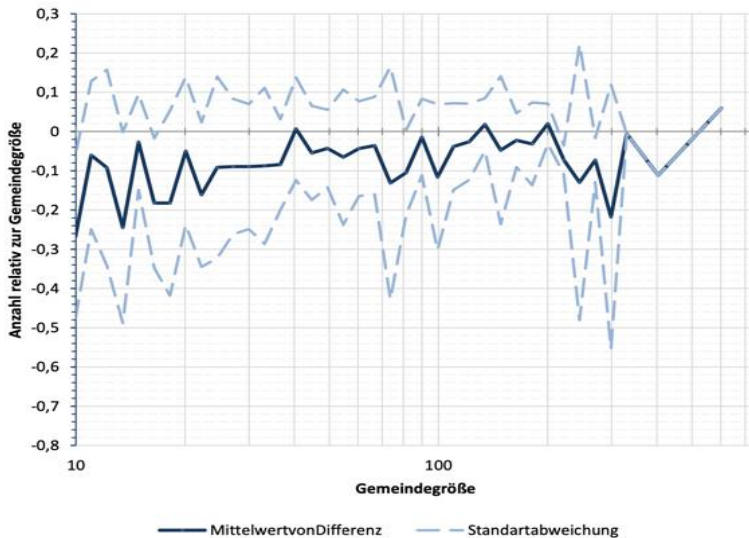


Abb. 3. Mittlere relative Anzahl Aufnahmen minus Abgänge 2005–2014 über Größe

In Österreich sind die Zugänge höher als die Abgänge, allerdings geschieht dieses Wachstum durch Zuzug aus dem Ausland, wodurch die kulturelle Zusammenstellung der Gemeinden wächst und das missionarische Engagement unter den nativen Österreichern erschwert wird. Die Abgänge scheinen ein wichtiger Faktor im weiteren Verlauf der Entwicklung zu sein. Eine wichtige Frage ist daher, ob und inwieweit die Zahl und die Entwicklung der Abgänge beeinflusst werden könnten. In Deutschland scheinen die Kirchenaustritte konstant zu verlaufen. Dies könnte aber einfach daran liegen, dass die Registrierung der Austritte anders, eventuell nur zeitverzögert oder gar nicht geschieht. In Österreich sind einige Trends zu beobachten, die besonders wichtige Informationen vor allem über die Beziehung der jungen Erwachsenen zur Freikirche vermitteln.

Kirchenaustritte sind zurzeit für die meisten europäischen christlichen Kirchen ein ernstzunehmendes Kennzeichen und eine Herausforderung. Schon das Resümee des EKD-Berichts über die Zukunft der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland weist darauf hin, dass für den Mitgliederrückgang überwiegend nicht der demografische Wandel verantwortlich ist. Das Tauf-, Austritts- und Aufnahmeverhalten weist auf einen Entfremdungsprozess und auf Vertrauensverlust hin, was Untersuchungen in der Adventgemeinde ebenfalls ergeben. Dies bedeutet, dass auch beeinflussbare Faktoren für die Schrumpfung verantwortlich sind, die durch geeignete Maßnahmen mindestens teilweise entkräftet werden könnten. Dadurch erscheint die Frage sehr dringend, welche Gruppen innerhalb der Freikirche zu den Verlusten am meisten beitragen und wie ihre Gefährdung entschärft werden kann. Folgende Gruppen benötigen besondere Aufmerksamkeit:

- (1) Junge Erwachsene, deren Integration nachweislich überdurchschnittlich scheitert.
- (2) Alleinstehende, deren Zahl ständig wächst.
- (3) Gemeindeglieder in konfessionsverschiedenen Ehen, die besondere Herausforderungen durch ihre Lage erleben. Ihre Zahl wächst schnell als Folge des wachsenden Gender Gap.
- (4) Männer, die sich von der Kirche scheinbar immer weniger angesprochen zu fühlen.

In den folgenden Abschnitten stehen diese Zielgruppen für mögliche besondere Erhaltungsmaßnahmen im Mittelpunkt.

3.1 Junge Erwachsene und Getaufte brauchen mehr Unterstützung bei der Integration

In beiden Ländern ist ein stetiger Rückgang der Taufzahlen von Jugendlichen zu beobachten. Adventistenkinder entscheiden sich fast ausschließlich als Jugendliche oder junge Erwachsene für die Taufe. Nachdem sie das Alter 24 erreicht haben, hören die Taufentscheidungen fast auf und über 25 sind sie nur noch Ausnahmen. Genau in diesem Alter, wo die meisten großen Entscheidungen fürs Leben getroffen werden (Berufswahl, Studium, Selbstständigwerden, Umzug, Partnersuche, Jobsuche etc.), verlieren junge Erwachsene offensichtlich die Beziehung zur Kirche und der Entfremdungsprozess geht unumkehrbar weiter. Genau in diesem Alter werden sie auch von der Kirche alleingelassen, da die Jugendprogramme für junge Erwachsene nicht mehr interessant sind und für ihre eigene Lebenswelt kaum relevante Angebote existieren. Etwa die Hälfte der Jugendlichen treffen keine Taufentscheidung und verlassen die Gemeinschaft. Was geschieht aber mit denen, die getauft werden?

Das Taufalter hat sich in Österreich nicht verändert, dagegen ist eine leichte Verschiebung in Deutschland zu beobachten. Früher haben die meisten Jugendlichen die Taufentscheidung im Alter von 14–21 getroffen. Im Laufe der Jahre ist eine Verengung dieses Zeitfensters zu beobachten, da sich die Entscheidung vom unteren Bereich bis zu zwei Jahre nach oben verschoben hat. Dies beutet, dass für Entscheidungen heute ein engerer Zeitraum zur Verfügung steht als früher.

Bei den Austritten ist besonders in Österreich eine Beschleunigung zu beobachten. In Österreich tritt einer von drei Getauften im Durchschnitt wieder aus und die unlängst Getauften treten am schnellsten wieder aus. 50% der Austritte von Adventistenkindern finden in den ersten sieben Jahren nach der Taufe statt (Median 26 Jahre). Wenn wir nun noch die 17%, deren Mitgliedschaft entzogen wurde, den Taufzahlen entgegenrechnen, wird sichtbar, dass die Union in Österreich fast 50% aller Taufen der letzten zwanzig Jahre verloren hat. Diese Zahl macht die Relevanz des Themas der Einbindung ins Gemeindeleben deutlich.

Da die Daten auf eine erhebliche Herausforderung bei der Integration hinweisen, könnte es ein möglicher Ansatz für die Reduzierung der Austritte der jungen Erwachsenen sein, eine aktive Integrationsunterstützung zu leisten. Dies kann einerseits dadurch geschehen, dass die Ortsgemeinden eine Begleitung ihrer eigenen Kinder im Bereich Studium, Jobsuche, Ehevorbereitung

und Beratung, Wohnungssuche und Umzug leisten und in der Lebenswelt der Jugendlichen als relevante Partner erscheinen. Auf der anderen Seite ist auch die Frage zu klären, welche Prägungen im Gottesdienst und in den sonstigen kirchlichen Programmen integrationshindernd sind und welche Schritte dazu führen könnten, dass die jungen Erwachsenen in dieser kritischen Phase ihres Lebens die Gemeinde als Heimat und echte tragende Gemeinschaft erleben können. Ohne besondere Aufmerksamkeit dieser Generation zu widmen, wird es herausfordernd, ihre Bindung an die Kirche beizubehalten.

3.2 Alleinstehende im Fokus

Ein überraschend bedeutender Anteil der Gemeindeglieder sind Alleinstehende. In der Adventgemeinde in Deutschland ist die Mehrheit unter 34 Jahren, in Österreich unter 30 Jahren, ledig. Jede vierte Frau ab 40 Jahren, jede dritte ab 60 Jahren und jede zweite ab 70 Jahren ist in Österreich alleinstehend. Die Männer sind davon weniger betroffen. Sie bleiben durchwegs bis ins hohe Alter verheiratet und der Anteil der Alleinstehenden bei Männern überschreitet nicht einmal im hohen Alter 30%. Wenn wir dies gemeinsam mit den Austrittszahlen betrachten, wird sichtbar, dass alleinstehende Frauen mehr gefährdet sind als Männer. Die Untersuchung hat gezeigt, dass in Österreich Frauen tendenziell die Gemeinschaft früher verlassen als Männer. Auch in Bezug auf den Entzug der Mitgliedschaft sind Frauen zunehmend jünger als Männer.

Der große Anteil der Alleinstehenden in den sehr unterschiedlichen Altersgruppen in der Freikirche lässt Fragen über ihre Bedürfnisse, Nöte und besondere Erwartungen entstehen. Die Gemeinde im Neuen Testament legte besonders viel Wert auf die Betreuung dieser Gruppe. Welche Maßnahmen sind heute möglich bzw. notwendig, um für sie als Gemeinde ein Ort von Gemeinschaft, geistlicher Heimat, Unterstützung und geistlichem Wachstum sein zu können?

3.3 Wachsender Frauenanteil – Sind Männer weniger religiös?

In Deutschland ist ein wesentlicher Unterschied in dem Anteil der Frauen zu Männern zu beobachten, Tendenz wachsend. Die Untersuchung zum Familienstand in Deutschland hat ergeben, dass 60% der Gemeindeglieder weiblich und 40% männlich sind.

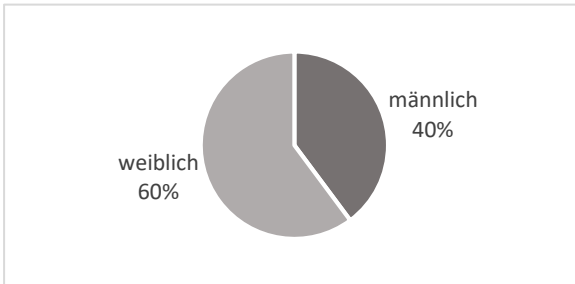


Abb. 4. Geschlechterverteilung der STA in Deutschland, Stand 2015

Die Analyse der Taufzahlen und Austritte zeigt, dass der proportionale Anteil der Männer bei der Taufe geringer und beim Austritt größer ist. Vielleicht liegt dies an der erfolgreichen Arbeit der Frauenabteilung? Auf jeden Fall ist es wichtig darüber nachzudenken, warum das Gemeindeleben, die erfahrbaren Werte und präsentierten Inhalte, Männer weniger ansprechen. Ist es vielleicht notwendig, eine Abteilung für Männer ins Leben zu rufen, um diese Herausforderung bewusster wahrzunehmen? In einigen anderen europäischen Ländern ist der Unterschied noch größer. Zum Beispiel ist in Bulgarien der Anteil der Frauen noch wesentlich höher und liegt bei über 70% der Mitglieder.

In Österreich dagegen sind die Frauen nur in der Altersgruppe über 60 in eindeutiger Mehrheit, die Männer zogen in den späteren Jahrgängen allmählich nach. Dies bedeutet, dass in den Jahrgängen 25–42 und 47–60 die Männer sogar in der Mehrheit sind. Erst bei den unter 20-Jährigen übernehmen die Frauen wieder leicht die Führung.

Diese Tendenz des wachsenden Frauenanteils führt nicht nur in Gemeinden von Deutschland und Bulgarien, sondern auch in anderen Teilen Europas zu wesentlichen Fragen über die Rolle, Integration und Zufriedenheit der Männer und inwieweit die Gemeinschaft sie durch ihre Aktivitäten ansprechen und überzeugen kann. Klassisch gibt es die Abteilung für Frauen mit vielen bunten und kreativen Aktivitäten, aber wo wird über die Bedürfnisse

und Anliegen der Männer in der Gemeinde nachgedacht und wer ist für sie verantwortlich?

Die globalen Trends und gesellschaftlichen Entwicklungen haben eine unaufhaltbare Auswirkung auf das Bild des Mannes in der Gesellschaft. Da die Veränderungen im kirchlichen Bereich anders verlaufen, entsteht ein Unterschied zwischen der allgemeinen Gesellschaft und Männern in der Kirche. Davis und Hunter kommen in ihrem Buch zu der Schlussfolgerung, dass Männer in den von ihnen untersuchten Kirchen vom allgemeinen Durchschnitt in wesentlichen spezifischen Merkmalen abweichen und in ihrer Charakterisierung verstanden werden sollten (Davis und Hunter 2017). Auch durch milieubasierte Untersuchungen kommen Wippermann und Calmbach zu dem Ergebnis, dass sich das Männerbild im Wandel befindet (Wippermann und Calmbach 2009). Ihre Analysen über das Wunschbild der Männer, das sie selbst anspricht, zeigen, dass sie Stabilität schätzen und stark wertorientiert sind. Sie legen besonders viel Wert auf Familie, Treue, berufliche Kompetenz und liebevolle Fürsorge für ihre Kinder. In diesem Wertesystem muss die christliche Gemeinschaft ihre Relevanz für den Alltag beweisen.

3.4 Gemeindeglieder in konfessionsverschiedenen Ehen und Mischehen

Davidson analysiert die relevanten Bibelstellen und kommt zu der Schlussfolgerung, dass das Alte Testament sich klar und deutlich gegen Ehen ausspricht, in denen der eine Partner gläubig und der andere nicht gläubig ist (Davidson 2007). Außerdem scheint das Neue Testament einheitlich gegen konfessionsverschiedene Ehen zu sein, oder zumindest gegen Ehen mit einem Nichtchristen. Schnabel (Schnabel 2006) und Krimmer (Krimmer 1990) kommen durch die Exegese von relevanten Bibelstellen zu dem Ergebnis, dass bei der Heirat der Ehepartner auch ein Christ sein soll.

Die Freikirche der STA ist traditionell gegen konfessionsverschiedene Ehen. Rodríguez begründet diese – auch in den meisten Gemeinden gut wahrnehmbare Haltung – mit folgenden Gefährdungen:

- (1) Gefahr der Aufgabe bzw. Verwässerung des Adventglaubens,
- (2) Herausforderungen im Bereich Kindererziehung,
- (3) die Pflege des geistlichen Lebens wird erschwert,
- (4) Gemeindeaktivitäten können nicht frei besucht werden,
- (5) Uneinigkeit in der Ehe wegen unterschiedlichen Vorstellungen und Wertesystemen.

Nun ist aber ein scheinbar unlösbares Problem durch die demografische Entwicklung der Freikirche in vielen Ländern entstanden. Durch den wachsenden Frauenanteil wird es für Frauen immer schwieriger oder sogar unmöglich, in der eigenen Konfession einen Mann zu finden. In Deutschland waren es im Jahr 2015 mehr als 3.700 Frauen, die eine konfessionsverschiedene Ehe führten. Darüber hinaus gibt es gewiss auch Männer, die in einer ähnlichen Ehesituation sind. Gemeinsam mit Ehepartner und Kindern bilden sie eine erhebliche Gruppe von Gemeindegliedern und direkten Angehörigen mit sehr speziellen Bedürfnissen, Erwartungen, Herausforderungen und Nöten. Untersuchungen zeigen, dass Gemeindeglieder in konfessionsverschiedenen Ehen zu denen gehören, die am ehesten die Gemeinschaft verlassen. Ihre Kinder werden nur selten eine Taufentscheidung treffen. Sie brauchen unterstützende Maßnahmen, Verständnis und Begleitung.

4. Möglichkeiten zur strukturellen Optimierung

Die Analyse der Gemeindegewandtheit hat einige Bereiche im Gemeindeleben gezeigt, die nicht nur persönliche Unterstützung, sondern auch strukturelle Optimierung brauchen. Die Folgen der gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen sind auch im Bereich Kirche und Ortsgemeinde zu spüren. In diesem Teil werden einige markante Punkte angesprochen, die die besondere Aufmerksamkeit der Leitung brauchen.

4.1 Dem steigenden Belastungsquotienten entgegensteuern

Das zahlenmäßige Gemeindegewandtheit in Österreich und die Stagnation oder die verhältnismäßig wenigen Verluste in Deutschland sind dem Zuzug vom Ausland zu verdanken. In Österreich macht der Zuzug im Zeitraum von 2000 bis 2019 drei Viertel des gesamten Gemeindegewandtheits aus. Der Zuwachs durch Zuzug in Deutschland und Österreich war nicht über allen Altersgruppen gleichmäßig verteilt. In Österreich sind z. B. die Senioren ab 65 Jahren am stärksten gewachsen (+ 46%). Das fehlende natürliche Gemeindegewandtheit durch Jugendliche treibt den Belastungsquotienten³ laufend nach oben. Das Resultat ist ein stetiger Altersanstieg. Dies wird durch die rückläufigen Taufzahlen und Austritte aus der jüngeren Generation weiter beschleunigt.

³ Das Verhältnis von Jugend und Senioren zu Erwachsenen.

Weitere demografische Aspekte haben auch Einfluss auf diese Entwicklung. Die steigende Lebenserwartung bewirkt, dass auch in der Gemeinde die Senioren länger leben, wodurch das Ansteigen des Durchschnittalters zusätzlich beschleunigt wird.

Welche Folgen hat diese Entwicklung ganz praktisch auf das Leben der Ortsgemeinde? Der wachsende Belastungsquotient bedeutet für die aktiven Gemeindeglieder, dass immer weniger Personen sich um immer mehr Aufgabenbereiche und Personen kümmern sollen. Dies führt zu einer ungewollten Überlastung der aktiven Gemeindeglieder und es entsteht in vielen Bereichen eine Burnout-Gefährdung von denen, die die Verantwortung auf sich genommen haben. In Anbetracht der Tatsache, dass Gemeindedienste die aktiven Mitarbeiter überstrapazieren, werden immer weniger die Entscheidung treffen, sich für solche Dienste anzumelden. Die Belastung der Aktiven wächst, die Zahl der nachrückenden sinkt und die Gemeinde verliert Motivation, Lebensqualität und es wird immer schwieriger die Programme weiterführen zu können.

Ein Warnzeichen für diesen Prozess ist die Tatsache, dass z. B. in Österreich die typischen Gemeindeämter wie Sabbatschulleiter, Gemeindeleiter, Missionsleiter etc. heute Geschwister innehaben, die um 15 Jahre (Median) älter sind als vor 20 Jahren. Scheinbar gibt es nur sehr wenig Erneuerung bei den Verantwortungsträgern. Eine wichtige Aufgabe der Gemeindeleitung ist nicht nur, auf die Erfüllung der Aufgaben zu achten, sondern auch Maßnahmen für die Schonung und die Unterstützung der aktiven Mitarbeiter einzuführen, damit ihr Engagement und ihre Dienstbereitschaft erhalten bleiben und sie durch ihre Tätigkeit Freude und Erfüllung erleben können. Um dies zu erreichen, wird wahrscheinlich oft die Reduzierung der Gemeindeaktivitäten und Programme notwendig sein. Dies ist aber nur möglich, wenn Gemeindestrukturen auf Zweckmäßigkeit überprüft werden und ein Prozess der Optimierung durchgeführt wird.

Besonders wichtig ist diese Aufgabe für die Zeit nach Covid-19, wo die Gemeinden eventuell mit weiteren Verlusten rechnen müssen und frühere aktive Leitungsträger weniger Bereitschaft zeigen, nach den etwas ruhigeren Quarantäne-Sabbaten wieder in den teilweise stresserfüllten Gemeindealltag zurückzukehren.

4.2 „Sterbebegleitung“ von Gemeinden

Die Demografie hat gezeigt, dass immer mehr Gemeinden älter werden und das Durchschnittsalter der Gemeindeglieder stetig steigt. Viele Gemeinden verlieren im Laufe der Zeit ihre Vitalität und ihr Lebenszyklus neigt sich dem Ende zu. Z.B. ist auf der Darstellung von Gemeindegrößen in Deutschland und ihrer Wachstumsart sichtbar, dass etwa 70% der Kleinstgemeinden, die unter 20 Mitglieder haben, weiter schrumpfen und ernsthaft gefährdet sind. Auch der größte Teil der Kleingemeinden ist schrumpfend und es besteht die Gefahr, dass sie bald in die Kategorie der Kleinstgemeinde rutschen.

Die Folgen sind für Gemeindeglieder schwer zu verkraften, da sie wahrscheinlich mit dem Gefühl des Versagens kämpfen müssen, und mit der Abnahme der Gliederzahl und der Reduzierung der Gemeindeaktivitäten nicht zurechtkommen. Oft ist die Ursache für das bedrückende Gemeindeklima das früher erlernte wachstumsorientierte Leistungsdenken. Trotz wohlgemeinter Maßnahmen für Mission und Gemeindeaufbau in der Vergangenheit blieb der erhoffte Segen und das Wachstum weg. Allein der verspürte Druck und das nicht zufriedenstellende Gemeindeklima können auch dafür verantwortlich sein, dass die Anziehungs- und Überzeugungskraft der Ortsgemeinde geschwächt wird und die Bemühungen in Erfolglosigkeit enden.

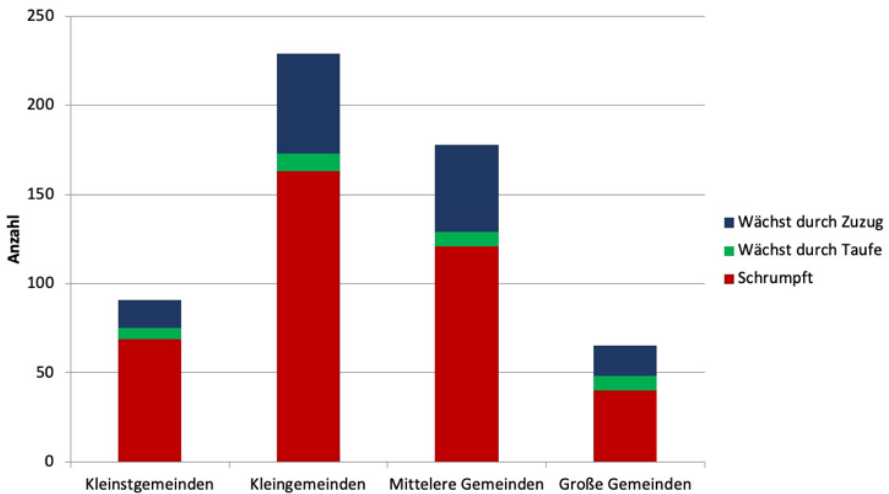


Abb. 5. STA-Gemeindegröße und Wachstumsart, Deutschland 2010–2014

Es ist aber ein natürlicher Teil des Lebenszyklus einer Gemeinde, dass sie mit den Menschen, die sie gegründet, gebaut und unterstützt haben, älter wird. Verschiedene Gründe können für das fehlende Wachstum aufgelistet werden und viele von denen können kaum von der Gemeinde selbst beeinflusst werden. Demografische Entwicklung, fehlende Arbeitsangebote vor Ort, Wegzug der jüngeren Generation in größere Städte, Leitungsfehler und innerkirchliche Herausforderungen können unter anderen eine wesentliche Rolle dabei spielen, dass das Wachstumspotential einer Gemeinde erlischt.

Doch sollte es weiterhin ein wichtiges Anliegen bleiben, dass trotz Prozessen der Alterung ältere Gemeindeglieder, die lange treu gedient haben, weiterhin Freude am Evangelium und Gemeinschaft haben können, auch wenn nur noch zwei oder drei geblieben sind. Trotz Fehlern in der Vergangenheit, als sie Herausforderungen nicht richtig meistern konnten, haben sie das Recht auf Seelsorge, Vergebung und geistliche Neuausrichtung. Die Leitung soll die Lage ermessen und entscheiden, ob die Gemeinde noch Wachstumspotential besitzt oder ihre Geschichte langsam dem Ende entgegen schreitet. In dem zweiten Fall braucht die Gemeinde eine geistliche „Sterbebegleitung“, damit sie ihre Geschichte noch feiern kann, den erhaltenen Segen Gottes nicht vergisst und mit Würde die letzte Phase tragen kann. Zudem können andere Maßnahmen ergriffen werden, z.B. dass an dem Ort Pläne für eine Gemeindegemeinschaft erstellt werden.

4.3 Angepasste Gottesdienstmodelle für Kleinst- und Kleingemeinden entwickeln

In beiden Ländern wächst die Zahl der Kleinstgemeinden unter 20 und der kleinen Gemeinden, die zwischen 20 und 50 Gemeindeglieder haben. Die meisten von ihnen haben kaum das Vorrecht, einen Pastor, Musiker, Sabbat-schullehrer und sonstige Verantwortungsträger vor Ort zu haben. Meistens wird der Gottesdienst wöchentlich von denselben Personen gestaltet. Oft waren diese Gemeinden früher wesentlich größer und auch die Programme konnten lebhaft und abwechslungsreich gestaltet werden. Ihre alte Tradition kann nur noch mit ernsthaften Kompromissen weitergeführt werden und dies sorgt für Unzufriedenheit und Frust. Soweit es möglich ist, versuchen sie immer noch, sich an Gottesdienstmodellen von größeren Gemeinden zu orientieren.

Besucher und Gäste merken sicherlich bald an der Atmosphäre und am Programmverlauf, dass Natürlichkeit, Relevanz und Spontanität fehlen und

die Gemeinde mit großen Anstrengungen versucht, Ideale zu erfüllen, die für sie nicht zu schaffen sind. Das Gemeindemodell passt einfach nicht zur gegenwärtigen Lage. Als Folge dessen wird das eigene Profil nicht entdeckt und vorhandene Ressourcen zur Gestaltung eines angemessenen Gottesdienstes werden nicht wahrgenommen. Die betroffenen Gemeinden brauchen ein zu ihrer Lage passendes Gemeindemodell, womit sie Gemeinschaft, Gottesdienst, Anbetung und Bibelstudium erfrischend, stärkend und segensreich gestalten und erleben können. Andere, am Anfang der Adventgeschichte sehr verbreitete Formen des Gemeindelebens, könnten für sie eine echte Lebenshilfe sein.⁴

Bei einigen Gemeinden wäre der Übergang zur Hausgemeinde eine ernsthaft zu erwägender Alternative. Da die finanziellen Belastungen, die durch den Unterhalt einer eigenen Kapelle entstehen, kaum zu meistern sind und die Voraussetzungen für einen klassischen Gottesdienst oft fehlen, bietet das Modell Hausgemeinde neue Möglichkeiten für kleinere Gruppen.

Das Modell Hausgemeinde bietet aber auch für größere Gemeinden Raum für mehr Begegnung und Wachstum. Besonders dort, wo Gemeindeglieder am Sabbat Vormittag zum Gottesdienst an einer vom Wohnort entfernten zentralen Stelle fahren, entsteht eine kaum lösbare missionarische Herausforderung. Am Standort der Kapelle, wo alle Gemeindeprogramme und Veranstaltungen stattfinden, wohnen kaum Gemeindeglieder, daher können sie nur sehr eingeschränkt Kontakte pflegen, der Gesellschaft dienen und missionarisch tätig sein. Am Wohnort der Gemeindeglieder, wo sie ihre Netzwerke in der Bevölkerung pflegen, gibt es jedoch kaum Gemeindeveranstaltungen; daher kann eine Verbindung von der Gemeinde zur Gesellschaft nur eingeschränkt aufgebaut werden. Einige Personen ergreifen die Initiative, aber ihre Dienste verlaufen nicht integrativ und es entstehen auch Fragen über die Nachhaltigkeit.

Über das Modell Hausgemeinde hinaus ist es notwendig, weitere Lösungsansätze für Kleinst- und Kleingemeinde zur Gestaltung der Liturgie, für die Gemeindestruktur, Gemeindedienste und sonstige Fragen der Integration in

⁴ Das Hausgemeinde-Model war z. B. sehr verbreitet. Die durchschnittliche Gemeindegroße bei den Adventisten im Jahr 1871 war 23,5 Personen laut des Business Proceedings der Generalkonferenz in Battle Creek. Das Leben in einer Hausgemeinde macht die Gestaltung des Gottesdienstes wesentlich einfacher, ohne auf entscheidend wichtige Werte zu verzichten; außerdem wird die Gemeindeatmosphäre entlastet von unerfüllbaren Erwartungen.

das Leben der Vereinigung auszuarbeiten. Dies könnte anhand von weiteren Analysen ihrer individuellen Lage realitätsnah durchgeführt werden.

5. Schlussfolgerungen für die Mission

Im folgenden Abschnitt werden einzelne ausgewählte Themen dargestellt, die entscheidend sind für die weitere Gemeindeentwicklung und auch bei missionarischen Unternehmen der Freikirche berücksichtigt werden sollten. In einer sich verändernden Zeit ist die Gemeinschaft der STA dazu genötigt, Ergebnisse der vorliegenden Untersuchungen wahrzunehmen, damit die Planung und Durchführung von Maßnahmen für den Gemeindeaufbau nicht an der Realität vorbeigehen.

5.1 Das Gemeindegewachstum hängt von externen Einflüssen ab

In beiden Ländern macht die Analyse der Kirchenentwicklung sichtbar, dass Gemeindegewachstum größtenteils durch externe Faktoren beeinflusst wird und nicht auf eine gesunde dauerhafte Missionsstrategie zurückzuführen ist. Die letzte Wachstumsphase in Europa, als die Gemeinschaft der STA dauerhaft Wachstum durch strategische Schritte erreichen konnte, war noch unter der Leitung von Conradi in den ersten Jahrzehnten des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts. Nachdem die intensive Ausbreitung endete, gab es immer wieder günstige äußere Umstände, Krisen, politische Wendezeiten und sonstige Nöte, wodurch überdurchschnittlich großes Interesse an Religion und Glaube entstand und die Freikirche mehr Möglichkeit zur Darstellung der eigenen Werte erhielt. Diese Zeiten führten zu vorübergehenden Wachstumsperioden, die jedoch bald endeten. Da die weltpolitischen Ausnahmesituationen die Entwicklung der Taufzahlen anscheinend positiv beeinflussen, möchte ich hier bemerken, dass eventuell auch die Corona-Pandemie unter günstigen Umständen eher zum Taufanstieg beitragen könnte.

Die letzten Jahrzehnte haben für die Entwicklung der Adventgemeinden in den europäischen Ländern wesentliche Veränderungen gebracht. Die intensive „Völkerwanderung“ hat die osteuropäischen Länder auf eine Bewährungsprobe gestellt. Rumänien hat schätzungsweise über 14% ihrer Gemeindeglieder nach der Wende in 1989 durch den Transfer ins Ausland verloren. Weitere wachstumsverändernde Faktoren wie z.B. die Taufe der Kinder der Ausgewanderten stärken nicht das Heimatland, sondern erschei-

nen in den Statistiken des westlichen Ziellandes. Die zahlenmäßige Entwicklung der Adventgemeinde in Österreich kann in den letzten zwei Jahrzehnten positiv betrachtet werden, da in dem Zeitraum 2000–2019 ein Gesamtwachstum von 19% verzeichnet werden konnte. Wenn wir aber die Zahlen weiter untersuchen, wird es eindeutig, dass der Zuzug aus dem Ausland dafür verantwortlich ist und 75% des gesamten Gemeindegewachstums in diesem Zeitraum ausmacht. Zusammenfassend kann festgestellt werden, dass die oberflächliche Betrachtung der zahlenmäßigen Entwicklung in Österreich könnte das falsche Gefühl der Sicherheit entstehen lassen, dass es den Gemeinden gutgeht und keine ernsthaften Probleme im Bereich der Gemeindegesundheit vorhanden sind. Das Mehr an Zahlen bedeutet konkret auch mehr Vielfalt und Konfliktpotenzial. Weitere Untersuchungen scheinen dies zu bestätigen, da sie z. B. zeigen, dass in Österreich trotz der steigenden Gliederzahl die Zahl der Gottesdienstbesucher am Sabbatvormittag sinkt.

Es ist Zeit, eine realitätsbasierende Strategie für Gemeindeaufbau und Mission zu entwickeln, die nicht nur die Möglichkeiten wahrnimmt, die durch äußere Umstände entstehen, sondern Gemeindeentwicklung langfristig, prozesshaft und gesellschaftsrelevant gestalten kann.

5.2 Die Babyboomer-Generation bietet viele Ressourcen für Gemeindeaufbau

Die Untersuchung weist auf eine wesentliche Tatsache hin: Gemeindegewachstum in historischer Perspektive und zugleich auch die bedeutsamste Kohorte in der Freikirche sind durch einige geburtenstarken Jahrgänge nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg entstanden. Es gab eine Phase nach der Krisenzeit, in der die Geburtenrate wieder dauerhaft stieg. Der Babyboom begann in Westdeutschland Mitte der 1950er Jahre und dauerte bis zum Ende der 1960er Jahre. Der Höhepunkt wurde z. B. in Deutschland 1965 erreicht, als eine Frau im statistischen Durchschnitt 2,53 Kinder zur Welt brachte. Die geburtenstarken Jahrgänge trugen damals entscheidend zum kirchlichen Wachstum sowohl in den beiden großen Landeskirchen, als auch in der Adventgemeinde bei. Die zahlenmäßig starken Jahrgänge in der Altersstruktur sind bei drei Generationen zu beobachten: den Babyboomern, ihren Eltern und ihren Kindern. Ab 1965 ging die Geburtenrate zurück („Pillenknick“) und seit 1972 fällt sie immer weiter unter die Sterberate. Die Zahl der Geburten hat sich von 1964 bis 2002 halbiert (Statistisches Bundesamt). Dies führte unter anderem auch zu einer starken Abnahme der Taufzahlen in den Kirchen.

Die Babyboomer werden oft auch Wohlstandsgeneration genannt und diese Bezeichnung weist gleich auf gemeinsame historische und soziale Erfahrungen hin, wodurch sie neben den individuellen Unterschieden doch bestimmte Merkmale teilen. Die Kohorteneffekte haben die Entwicklung der Freikirche wesentlich beeinflusst und sind vor allem in den westlichen Ländern durch eine sinkende Arbeitslosenquote, einen steigenden Lebensstandard und vorher unerreichten Wohlstand wesentlich entstanden. Wie hat diese Kohorte das Leben der Freikirche der STA geprägt?

Wenn auch die Analyse des Taufalters parallel zur Altersstruktur mitberücksichtigt wird, wird es sichtbar, dass diese Generation und ihre evangelistischen Bemühungen in ihrer eigenen Generation kaum zum Wachstum der Freikirche durch missionarische Maßnahmen beigetragen hat.

Die meisten Gemeindeglieder waren im Alter zwischen 15 und 25 aus adventistischen Familien getauft worden und dies blieb tendenziell bis heute so in Deutschland und Österreich.

Das Wachstum oder sogar die Stagnierung ist in diesen Ländern externen Einflüssen zuzuschreiben, die mehrheitlich aus drei Aspekten bestehen:

- (1) geburtenreiche Jahre in der Vergangenheit,
- (2) die steigende Lebenserwartung und
- (3) Zuzug aus anderen Ländern.

Die Schlussfolgerung von Markus Savli gilt für beide Länder: „Unter solcher Dynamik lässt die Beobachtung des absoluten Gemeindegewachstums keinen eindeutigen Rückschluss auf die tatsächliche Arbeitsleistung oder den Erfolg zu und täuscht außerdem über die eigentliche Gemeindegewandtheit hinweg, wie z.B. rückläufige Taufzahlen, schrumpfende Gemeinden, Austritte oder die Umstrukturierung der Altersverteilungen und dessen einhergehende Konsequenzen.“ (Savli 2019, 3)

Zusammenfassend kann festgestellt werden, dass die Babyboomer in den deutschsprachigen Adventgemeinden ihre eigenen Kinder teilweise erreichen, in ihrer eigenen Generation aber keine zahlenmäßig nachweisbare missionarische Leistung erbringen. Da aber die in den 1950er und 1960er Jahren Geborenen z.B. etwa ein Drittel der heutigen Bevölkerung in Deutschland stellen und ihnen nicht nur eine demografisch hervorgehobene Position zukommt, sondern auch in Politik (50% des Deutschen Bundestags), in Wirtschaft und in vielen anderen Lebensbereichen der Gesellschaft, sollten sie nicht übersehen werden. Besonders interessant ist aber ihr großes Interesse an

gemeinnützigen oder wohltätigen Aktivitäten. In Deutschland waren fast 50% der 50- bis 64-Jährigen 2014 ehrenamtlich tätig. Ihnen droht aber im Alter die soziale Isolation, da viele Babyboomer ohne eine Familie altern werden („Die Babyboomer gehen in Rente“, 2018).

Ein großes Wachstumsgebiet ist die Mission mit und unter Erwachsenen und scheinbar hat die Gemeinschaft den Ansatz dafür noch nicht entdeckt. Dies ist heute umso dringender, da im Gegensatz zu früheren Zeiten, Mission immer mehr auf der persönlichen Ebene gelingt und die institutionellen Veranstaltungen immer weniger Interessenten ansprechen. Die Frage ist daher zu beantworten, wie man im kirchlichen Kontext freiwillige Mitarbeit fördern und Gemeindeglieder durch klare adventistische Identität und entsprechende Vorbereitung und Ausbildung in der Gestaltung von missionarischen Tätigkeiten in den Dienst integrieren kann.

5.3 Zielgruppenorientierte Ansätze ausarbeiten

Nicht nur die Zuzüge aus dem Ausland, sondern auch die fortschreitende gesellschaftliche Entwicklung trägt dazu bei, dass Adventgemeinden in vielen Ländern Europas immer heterogener werden. Dies ergibt die Möglichkeit, aber auch die Notwendigkeit, zielgruppenorientiert zu arbeiten und spezifische Maßnahmen differenziert für unterschiedlich geprägte Personengruppen zu entwerfen. Im ersten Teil des Artikels sind einige solche Zielgruppen bereits genannt worden:

Adventisten in konfessionsverschiedenen Ehen und ihre Familien bilden eine solche wachsende Zielgruppe für Gemeindeaufbau und Mission. Auch Männer, deren Integration und Glaubensentwicklung besondere Aufmerksamkeit braucht, sind bereits in vielen Gemeinden durch entsprechende Aktivitäten betreut. Junge Erwachsene, die zwar in der Gemeinde aufgewachsen sind, aber in das Gemeindeleben nicht integriert werden konnten und sich allmählich entfernen, bilden auch eine besonders gefährdete Zielgruppe.

Darüber hinaus ist es auch wichtig, die wachsende Internationalität besonders im westlichen Teil Europas und deren Folgen für die lokalen Gemeinden wahrzunehmen. Die Gemeinde steht immer vor einer wichtigen Entscheidung mit weitgehenden Konsequenzen. Wenn eine neue Gruppe von Rumänen, Bulgaren, Serben, Brasilianern oder sonstigen Nationalitäten erscheint, muss die Entscheidung getroffen werden, welches Modell für ihre Integration benutzt wird. Es gibt drei Integrationsmodelle. Bei der *Adaption* schließen sich

die Aussiedler den bestehenden Gemeinden an und die bestehenden Differenzen versucht man innerhalb der Gemeinde durch verschiedene Maßnahmen zu bearbeiten. Das zweite Modell ist die Gründung von neuen *Tochtergemeinden*, die in Zusammenarbeit mit existierenden Gemeinden entstehen und unter der Aufsicht der Vereinigungsleitung sind. Die dritte Möglichkeit ist die völlige *Separation*, wodurch die Aussiedler oder Einwanderer ihre eigenen Gemeinden gründen.

Da die Gemeinschaft der STA weltweit viel Wert auf Einheit legt und deren Botschaft bis zu den Ortsgemeinden sorgfältig kommuniziert wird, wird zuerst meistens der Weg der Integration versucht; allerdings ist der Preis dafür verhältnismäßig hoch und der Zugang zu einem neuen Kulturkreis wird dadurch nicht gewährleistet. Nach der Wende in Osteuropa sind viele Russlanddeutsche nach Deutschland ausgewandert. Darunter waren auch viele Freikirchler, die sich in Deutschland vorhandenen Glaubensgemeinschaften anschließen wollten. Die absolute Mehrheit der Mennoniten gründete Aussiedlergemeinden und nur wenige schlossen sich einheimischen deutschen Gemeinden an (Diether 2013, 99f.). Baptisten gingen den Weg der Adaption in den 70er Jahren. Dies änderte sich aber bald. Mehr und mehr legten sie den Akzent auf Selbständigkeit und Bewahrung der Identität:

Während in den frühen Jahren der Einwanderung aus der UdSSR im BEFG auf Integration gedrängt wurde, liegt der Akzent heute auf Selbständigkeit und Bewahrung der jeweils eigenen Gemeindeidentität. Diese Werte werden heute von der Bundesleitung gefördert. (Klassen 2007, 126)

Warum änderten die Baptisten die Strategie weg von der Integration? Hartfeld fasst in wenigen Worten den Grund zusammen und zieht die Schlussfolgerung:

Wir im Bund strebten eine Integration der Baptisten aus Osteuropa unter unserer Regie an. Das ist bereits deshalb nicht möglich, weil es in Deutschland nicht weniger, sondern mehr russlanddeutsche Baptisten gibt als Einheimische. Wir wollten die russlanddeutschen Baptisten zwingen, sich uns im deutschen Bund anzupassen. Das war ein abenteuerliches Unternehmen, das nie eine Aussicht auf Erfolg hatte. (Hartfeld 2007, 38)

Zwar kamen wesentlich weniger Adventisten als Baptisten und Mennoniten nach Deutschland und dadurch war es einfacher den Weg der vollständigen Eingliederung zu versuchen, aber die Erfahrungen dieser Zeit über die Integration von Einwanderern in einheimische westeuropäische Gemeinden brachten wichtige Erkenntnisse, die nicht übersehen werden sollten. Scheinbar waren die Adventisten am meisten mit Integration erfolgreich, aber einige Indizien zeigen, dass die späteren Wachstumsprozesse in neuen Aussiedlergemeinden wesentlich günstiger und ohne gegenseitige kulturelle Kompromisse wegen der Eingliederung verliefen. Die Gründung von internationalen Tochtergemeinden könnte dazu beitragen, dass statt Energie und Zeit mit der Schlichtung von kulturellen Unterschiedlichkeiten zu verbringen, die neuen Tochtergemeinden durch ihr eigenes Profil wesentlich schneller zu einem attraktiven Zentrum der Gemeinschaft und des Gemeindelebens für ihre eigenen Landesleute – als eine sehr logische Zielgruppe für Dienst und Mission in der Umgebung – werden können. Die gesunde Beziehung zur Muttergemeinde könnte später eine engere Zusammenarbeit und Vernetzung unterstützen und den Austausch fördern.

6. Schlussfolgerung

Die ausgewählten Themenbereiche, die in diesem Artikel behandelt worden sind, versuchten ansatzweise die veränderte Lage der Freikirche der STA ohne Anspruch auf Vollständigkeit zu schildern und mögliche Handlungsbereiche und ihre Dringlichkeit in den Fokus zu rücken. Aus den Beispielen wurde sichtbar, dass für Gemeindeaufbau und Mission wesentliche Möglichkeiten vorhanden sind, die aber besondere Aufmerksamkeit und strategische Überlegungen benötigen. Statt allgemeine umfassende Projektpläne für viele oder möglicherweise für alle Gemeinden zu entwerfen, wie es in der Vergangenheit üblich war, ist es immer wichtiger, differenzierter und gezielter voranzugehen. Dies würde aber die bestehende, eher hierarchische Kirchenorganisation überlasten und die Ressourcen für strukturelle Lösungen weiter festbinden. Wenige Zentralstellen würden die vielen differenzierten und zielgruppenorientierten Ansätze weder steuern, noch durchführen können.

Die Delegation von Aufgaben an geeignete Personen, die dafür eine Gabe von Gott erhalten haben, und die Motivation der freiwilligen Mitarbeiter für Verantwortungsübernahme und Kooperation wird eine immer wichtiger

werdende Aufgabe für die Freikirche. Die Möglichkeiten und teilweise auch die Ressourcen sind vorhanden. Mitarbeiter werden gebraucht, um die zu Kirche zu bauen und Gottes Reich in seiner vielseitigen Entwicklung mitzugestalten. Die Alarmsignale der Demografie erinnern aber alle daran, dass die Zeit langsam davonläuft und die Weichen sehr bald gestellt werden sollten.

Bibliografie

- „Bevölkerung und Umwelt.“ Statistisches Bundesamt: Bevölkerung – Geborene und Gestorbene Deutschland. Online: www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/_inhalt.html (Zugriff: 7. Februar 2021).
- „Die Babyboomer gehen in Rente.“ Berlin: Körber Stiftung, 2018. Online: <https://www.koerber-stiftung.de/koerber-demografie-symposien/news-detailseite/die-babyboomer-gehen-in-rente-1497>.
- Davidson, Richard M. *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007.
- Davis, Woody L. und George G. Hunter III. *Church Talk Makes Men Walk: What the Research Shows and What to Do*. Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2017.
- „EKD und Katholiken in Deutschland im Jahr 2060“. n.d., <https://fo-wid.de/meldung/ekd-und-katholiken-deutschland-jahr-2060> (Zugriff: 7. Februar 2021).
- „Ergebnisse des Zensus 2011.“ Statistische Ämter des Bundes und der Länder: www.zensus2011.de/DE/Home/Aktuelles/DemografischeGrunddaten.html?nn=3065474 (Zugriff: 15. Dezember 2019).
- Hartfeld, Hermann. „Die russlanddeutschen Gemeinden in Deutschland auf dem Weg zur Selbstfindung: Ein Erfahrungsbericht.“ *Freikirchenforschung* 2007, 32–54.
- Klassen, John N. *Russlanddeutsche Freikirchen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland: Grundlinien ihrer Geschichte, ihrer Entwicklung und Theologie*. Nürnberg/Bonn: VTR/VKW, 2007.
- Krimmer, Heiko. *Erster Korintherbrief*. Bibelkommentar: Band 11. Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1990.
- Krimmer, Heiko. *Zweiter Korintherbrief*. Bibelkommentar: Band 12. Neuhausen-Stuttgart: Hänssler, 1995.

- Krumov, Vladimir. „An Analysis of the Demographic Developments of the Bulgarian SDA Church: Recommendations for Mission Strategizing.“ Masterthese an der Theologischen Hochschule Friedensau, Friedensau, 2016.
- Latzel, Olaf. „Wir erleben derzeit den Untergang der evangelischen Landeskirchen.“ *Idea*, 17. November 2017. Online: https://www.idea.de/freikirchen/detail/wir-erleben-derzeit-den-untergang-der-evangelischen-landeskirchen-111121.html?fbclid=IwAR3ziQa5418jCrq_bHTNlf20J-tQd2CUYnPMINy5flpVAdV8qNsNRubN9ks (Zugriff: 15. Dezember 2019).
- Lichdi, Diether. „Mennoniten.“ Weiß, Lothar, Hrsg. *Russlanddeutsche Migration und evangelische Kirchen*. Göttingen: V & R, 2013, 95–112.
- Lutz, Maximilian. „Statistik für 2018: Massiver Anstieg an Kirchengliedern.“ *Die Tagespost*, 19. Juli 2019. Online: www.die-tagespost.de/kirche-aktuell/Statistik-fuer-2018-Massiver-Anstieg-an-Kirchengliedern;art312,199848 (Zugriff: 19. Dezember 2019).
- „Religionszugehörigkeit nach Bundesland, 2002–2011“. Forschungsgruppe Weltanschauungen in Deutschland, 4.7.2014. Statistisches Landesamt, Zensus 2011. <https://fowid.de/meldung/religionszugehoerigkeit-nach-bundesland-2002-2011> (Zugriff: 19. Dezember 2019).
- Savli, Markus. „Bericht STA Gemeindeanalyse der österreichischen Union 2000–2019.“ Unveröffentlichtes Manuskript, o.J.
- Schnabel, Eckhard J. *Der erste Brief des Paulus an die Korinther: Historisch theologische Auslegung*. Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2006.
- „So viele Mitglieder zählten die Kirchen 2018.“ *Sonntagsblatt*, 19. Juli 2019. Online: www.sonntagsblatt.de/artikel/kirche/statistik-so-viele-mitglieder-zaehlten-die-kirchen-2018 (Zugriff: 15. Dezember 2019).
- Wippermann, Carsten, Marc Calmbach, und Katja Wippermann. *Männer: Rolle vorwärts, Rolle rückwärts. Identitäten und Verhalten von traditionellen, modernen und postmodernen Männern*. Opladen: Barbara Budrich, 2009.
- „Zahlen und Fakten zum kirchlichen Leben.“ EKD – Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland: Gezählt 2019. S. 5.; www.ekd.de/kirche-im-umbruch-projektion-2060-45516.htm (Zugriff: 19. Dezember 2019).

Abstract

Changes in church-based religiosity in Europe are existentially challenging for many denominational local churches. The research results presented here show that, in addition to general demographic and social trends, there are also significant factors that can be influenced in the Adventist Church. Preventive, structurally optimised measures could greatly reduce the loss of members and open up new possibilities for church development. Particular attention should be paid to: the conscious handling of the increasing stress quotient in the local congregations, the integration of young adults, the activation of the passive baby boomer generation, new congregational and worship service models for smallest congregations, the perception of the special needs and expectations of men, the care of single people, pastoral "end-of-life-care" for shrinking congregations, the missionary field of inter-denominational marriages and new target group-oriented missionary approaches.

Résumé

Les changements dans la religiosité marquée par l'Église en Europe mettent à l'épreuve l'existence de nombreuses églises locales confessionnelles. Les résultats de la recherche présentés ici montrent qu'il existe pour cela dans l'Église adventiste, outre les tendances démographiques et sociales générales, des facteurs influençables essentiels. Des mesures préventives et structurellement optimisées pourraient réduire fortement la perte de membres et ouvrir de nouvelles possibilités de développement de l'Église. Il faut notamment tenir compte de la gestion consciente du taux de charge croissant dans les églises locales, de l'intégration des jeunes adultes, de l'activation de la génération passive des baby-boomers, de nouveaux modèles d'églises et de cultes pour les petites églises, de la prise en compte des besoins et des attentes spécifiques des hommes, de la prise en charge des personnes seules, de l'« accompagnement spirituel » pastoral des églises en déclin, du champ missionnaire des mariages de confessions différentes et de nouvelles approches missionnaires ciblées.

Dr. László Szabó ist Dozent für Missionswissenschaft und interkulturelle Studien und Leiter des Arthur-Daniells-Institut für Missionswissenschaft an der Theologischen Hochschule Friedensau in Möckern, Deutschland.

E-Mail: laszlo.szabo@thh-friedensau.de

Advent Hope

Movements of Embodied Hope and the Common Good

John Webster

Abstract

What's become of the "common good"? Given the current state of polarization, and the systemic and structural nature of social injustice, is it still possible to hope for justice? The article proposes that the basis for working together is not necessarily sharing "common ground" but a pursuit of "common ends." A keynote presentation and response at a *Society of Adventist Philosophers* conference provided an opportunity to test the thesis. Could a secular philosopher (Sally Haslanger, MIT professor, founder of *Critical Social Theory*) and an Adventist theologian engage in a serious common pursuit of hopeful change without stumbling over worldview differences? The article provides a case study in self-aware and self-critical conversation "across a divide." It asks, can "Advent Hope," rejecting the distortions of *escapism*, *apocalyptic sensationalism*, *political quietism*, and *individualism*, become a "movement of embodied hope," *en route* to the coming Kingdom of God?

To say we are living in dark times seems obvious, if not downright trite. Europe is experiencing a refugee crisis unlike anything seen since the Second World War. Human life and wellbeing have been significantly impacted by pandemic and now by war. But just beneath the surface of these major disruptions (and contributing to their severity) is a thorny problem that has been insidiously growing for some time. That is thorough-going polarization: the

sense that we are living in radically different worlds that are rapidly becoming incommensurable. And if we have no 'common measure' (or 'common ground') is it still possible to seek for the 'common good'?¹

Moreover, as recent critical social theory lays bare, these social worlds that structure our lives, while constructed, acquire the allure of 'being just the way things are' and thus have the power to resist our attempts to change them. Thus we seem to be stuck with social constructs that now have the rarified force of 'reality,' so that no matter how unjust, they seem to be self-preserving and self-perpetuating. The divides are becoming more pronounced. Can we still talk with each other? In particular can we talk across the 'secular-religious' divide so constitutive of our times?

Given our current socio-political situation, it is easy to become discouraged in the belief that we can find 'common ground' in our quest for *any* sort of 'common good.' And it is even more discouraging to acknowledge that there might be quite rational reasons for being so discouraged. What then are the prospects for hope? In a moving passage, Rebecca Solnit reminds us that:

Cause-and-effect assumes history marches forward, but history is not an army. It is a crab scuttling sideways, a drip of soft water wearing away stone, an earthquake breaking centuries of tension. Sometimes one person inspires a movement, or her words do decades later; sometimes a few passionate people change the world; sometimes they start a mass movement and millions do; sometimes those millions are stirred by the same outrage or the same ideal, and change comes upon us like a change of weather. All that these transformations have in common is that they begin in the imagination, in hope. To hope is to gamble. It's to bet on the future, on your desires, on the possibility that an open heart and uncertainty is better than gloom and safety. To hope is dangerous, and yet it is the opposite of fear, for to live is to risk. ... I say all this because hope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky. I say it because hope is an ax you break down doors with in an emergency; because hope should shove you

¹ "What's become of the 'Common Good'?" was the theme for the 2021 annual conference of the *Society of Adventist Philosophers* in San Antonio, TX. An earlier version of this essay was presented (in written and oral forms) in response to the keynote oral address "Hope not Optimism" by Prof. Sally Haslanger. I must also, gratefully, acknowledge the help and input from my son, Craig, who regularly works directly with these issues both intellectually and practically.

out the door, because it will take everything you have to steer the future away from endless war, from the annihilation of the earth's treasures and the grinding down of the poor and marginal. Hope just means another world might be possible, not promised, not guaranteed. Hope calls for action. (Solnit 2016, 3–4)

In what follows, I will attempt just such an exercise in hopeful conversation about action. The recent annual conference of the *Society of Adventist Philosophers* provided such an opportunity. I was asked to provide a response (indeed an “Adventist response”) to the keynote address by Professor Sally Haslanger, who is the Ford Professor of Philosophy at MIT, and a leading figure in the development of “Critical Social Theory.” While she is a philosopher, with considerable understanding of theology (e.g. she is an expert in medieval philosophy), and I am a theologian, with some interest in and familiarity with philosophy, what we lacked was precisely *a common ground*. Could a secular philosopher and an Adventist theologian engage in a serious common pursuit of hopeful change without stumbling over our worldview differences? The presentation and response was intended to be a case study in self-aware and self-critical conversation ‘across a divide.’ A hopeful conversation about hope. My thesis then and now is that the basis for working together is not necessarily sharing “common ground” but pursuit of “common ends.” What can provide a basis for common action is working for the same goals, even though we might do so for very different reasons.²

Thus this essay is not a ‘neutral research paper’ in the normal scholarly sense, but an engaged conversation (although here you get it filtered largely through my voice) between a non-theist and an Adventist about change and hope.

² The result of the conference experiment was widely perceived to have been a success. Undoubtedly, this was also due to her personality and engagement. Unlike some invited keynote speakers who just come for their presentation, she attended every session of the conference, knitting and engaging with speakers and participants. After her keynote address and my response she ended up talking about her exposure to the world of religion and faith in taking her adopted children to the AME church each week so that they could continue their formation in the faith of their family of origin. What started with Critical Social Theory ended up with the power of the social practice of ‘singing’ to form and direct action for social change across racial and religious divides.

First, I will follow Haslanger's analysis of the problem facing us, then pick up the question of hope (and here I will focus on "Advent hope" as a case study) before exploring the prospects for any practical steps forward in our quest for a 'common good'.

1. The Social Construction of Reality and the Difficulty of Change

Today we hear much talk of social problems being "systemic," "structural" or "institutional." What do we mean by such notions? Haslanger gives us a helpful example drawn from the tragic history of racism: "In 1963, after the bombing at the 16th St. Baptist Church that killed four girls (Addie May Collins, Cynthia Wesley, Denise McNair, and Carole Robertson), Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a eulogy at the funeral for three of them. One passage reads: 'They are the martyred heroines of a holy crusade for freedom and human dignity. And so this afternoon in a real sense they have something to say to each of us in their death. ... They say to us that we must be concerned *not merely about who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderers.*' (King/Washington 1991, 221)."³ They died because of "the system."

But "how should we understand systemic and structural racism? What does it mean to say that injustice is systemic or structural? Are these different terms for the same thing?" According to Haslanger, societies are complex,⁴ materially

³ <http://digitalcollections.library.cmu.edu/awweb/awarchive?type=file&item=434085> [taken from a slide in Haslanger's oral presentation in San Antonio; italics supplied].

⁴ Haslanger argues that we can recognize three types of organization: *simple*, *chaotic* (disorganized complexity), and *complex* (organized complexity). Societies are *complex* systems. Complex systems are self-organizing, self-reproducing/adaptive, non-linear/stochastic [i. e. non-predictable]. While the behaviour of individuals in the system is stochastic, nevertheless their interactions give rise to stable (emergent) features of the whole by virtue of an internal structure. Examples: ecosystems, economies, climate, brains, ant hills, societies (etc.) ... The structure of a system affects the individuals in it and the interactions that are possible. In such systems, local interactions can spontaneously self-organize *without external intervention or central authorities* [taken from Haslanger's presentation slides]. For a more in depth analysis see Sally Haslanger, *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012. Of course, all this has become embroiled in a divisive political brouhaha under the banner of "Critical Race Theory" in the USA. Even a Supreme Court nominee had to be grilled on the topic.

embedded systems;⁵ and structures are the networks of relations⁶ that go to make them what they are. Social relations (as kinds of “structure”) are formed by *participation in practices*.⁷ Sometimes these social practices can become what we can call “second nature.”⁸ But while they may seem “natural” (the way things inherently are) they are in fact only “*second nature*” (i.e. learned relations and practices). And some of the learned practices (that might even become “second nature”) are *ideological* (in Haslanger’s use this means they are problematic and unjust/harmful). And thus, if “not only racism, but other social ills, are integral parts of social systems, is there any hope for justice?”⁹

⁵ “Social systems and structures: a) *are material* – they are not simply composed of mental states or actions. (Think of transportation systems, healthcare systems, judicial systems ...); b) they are *also embedded in broader physical systems* – their environment – that affect their functioning; and c) the broader systems may impose constraints (physical laws), or provide inputs (e.g. weather, climate); and d) the environment of a system may include other systems – and *because systems do not entirely saturate a social space, systems can overlap and intersect.*” (Ibid.)

⁶ “Structures are ‘networks of relations.’ As such they form the skeleton of the system: They consist of nodes and relations. Social relations are established in practices, e.g., x is a mother of y is a biological relation, but is also a legal and social relation. Social relations are formed by **participation in practices.**” (Ibid.)

⁷ “What is a ‘social practice’? It is coordination around resources, i.e., things of (+/-) value. It is a fundamental human task, and our ability to develop flexible forms of coordination that can be passed down through social learning is the key to our evolutionary success (Sterelny 2012). Coordination relies on meanings, symbols, default assumptions and associations – that is, culture, or what I call a *cultural technē* – to shape our behaviour. We not only learn what is edible, but develop cuisines, menus, daily and holiday rituals On my account, an *ideology* is a cultural technē gone wrong: it obscures or distorts what is valuable and/or organizes us in unjust/harmful ways.” (Ibid.)

⁸ “Practices rely on social meanings – including categories, signals, norms, background assumptions, and material infrastructure (‘apparatus’ in Althusser) – to solve the problems. Solutions establish stable social relations and produce individuals who are highly motivated to conform. Those who are fluent in social interactions needn’t think twice about what to do: performing one’s role comes ‘naturally’ – but it is *second nature*. It is useful to be able to rely on the same categories *across tasks*, so networks of social relations form that regularly position individuals in one category together, fulfilling roles that *build up broad competencies* and *shape identities.*” (Ibid.)

⁹ “Tying some of the threads together: A cultural technē is the *cultural dimension of the local social-regulation* system; When internalized by individuals, it provides tools for *psycho-somatic self-regulation* that enables fluent coordination with others; it also structures our subjectivity. We don’t need to be coerced to fulfil our social roles. We do it ‘all by ourselves.’ (Althusser); Because of its coordinating function, the structure has *normative force*; Yet insofar as it regulates our interactions

That is the question put to us by Haslanger's careful analysis of social construction and systemic injustice. I believe that she invites us to ask the hard question together: *If societies are complex systems that reproduce injustice, and are self-regulating in the face of reform, then how do we hope for justice?*

I'd like to respond in that same mode of humble questioning. As humans in the world right now, it is hard to hope well. That is: in ways that cultivate wise and loving action towards radical change.

In a section of Solnit's book entitled "The Branches Are Hope; the Roots Are Memory" she reminds us of Walter Brueggeman's statement that "memory produces hope in the same way that amnesia produces despair" and then she comments:

It's an extraordinary statement, one that reminds us that though hope is about the future, grounds for hope lie in the records and recollections of the past. We can tell of a past that was nothing but defeats and cruelties and injustices, or of a past that was some lovely golden age now irretrievably lost, or we can tell a more complicated and accurate story, one that has room for the best and worst, for atrocities and liberations, for grief and jubilation. A memory commensurate to the complexity of the past and the whole cast of participants, a memory that includes our power, produces that forward-directed energy called hope." (Solnit 2016, xix)

For a few moments I would like us to reconsider *our* Adventist memories and 'takes' on the past, in order to tell "a more complicated and accurate story." So, in light of what we have just read, I invite you to consider what Adventists commonly call "Advent Hope." I propose that we explore it as a long-term, passionate, flawed, yet precious case study. Perhaps this can help us, and others, think and feel our ways forward.

2. "We Have This Hope"

In 1962, more than a half-century ago, Wayne Hooper composed a simple theme song for the Seventh-day Adventist church's General Conference Session that was to be held in San Francisco's Exposition Auditorium from July 26 to August 4. It was entitled "We have this Hope:"

in ways that are problematic (morally, epistemically, politically), *it is an apt target for critique and we ought to change it. But HOW?*" (Ibid.)

We have this hope that burns within our heart, Hope in the coming of the Lord. We have this faith that Christ alone imparts, Faith in the promise of His Word.

We believe the time is here, When the nations far and near Shall awake, and shout and sing Hallelujah! Christ is King!

We have this hope that burns within our hearts, Hope in the coming of the Lord.¹⁰

To say it captures a quintessential aspect of Adventist spirituality would be an understatement. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that the same piece of music was selected again as the theme song for the 1966, 1975, 1995, and 2000 General Conference Sessions. Perhaps it is not too glib to say that what we call the “Advent Movement” is a movement of hope. For it does go from fewer than 50 disappointed individuals in New England in 1844 to some 22 million (more or less) hopeful adherents in 212 countries today (with more than 90% now living in the 2/3 world).

However, if we are interested in “a more complicated and accurate story” there is more we have to say. For, if truth be told, Adventism has repeatedly struggled with four besetting and beguiling distortions of hope. Let me briefly deal with each in turn.

2.1 Escapism

Here hope is distorted by becoming merely a form of flight from the injustice, oppression and turmoil of the present.¹¹ This is a sort of ‘pie-in-the-sky-by-e-and-by-e’ view of hope.¹² Suffering must be endured, because in this life it can-

¹⁰ A clip of people from around the world singing it: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-92g_oXvq4. See also: <https://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/w/h/t/h/whthhope.htm>; <https://adventist.news/news/we-have-this-hope-composer-wayne-hooper-dies>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tgG9plezoTc>. By popular demand, it has also been incorporated into Adventist church hymnals and translated into dozens of languages, e. g. *SDA Church Hymnal*, 214.

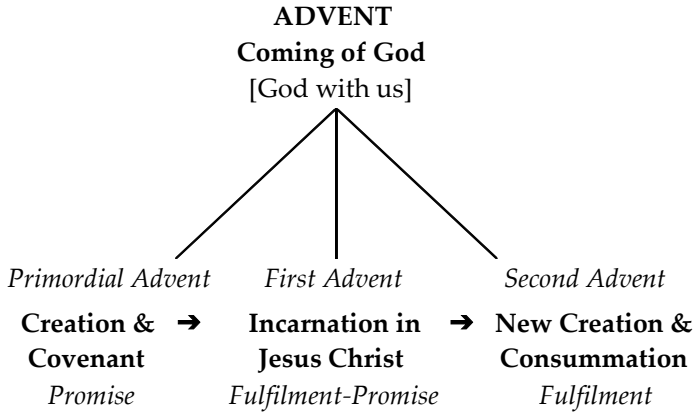
¹¹ This is, of course, one dimension of Marx’s take on religion as the “opium of the people.” The other dimension is less commonly known and noted: Religion can also serve as a needed sedative to assuage the pain of alienation.

¹² The origin of the phrase “pie in the sky” is interesting. “It comes from the Industrial Workers of the World, the anarchist-syndicalist labour organization formed in the US in 1905, often called the Wobblies. The Wobblies concentrated on organizing migrant and casual workers; one of the ways

not be cured. Hope rests in getting delivered out of the mess. Hope thus becomes an excuse for avoiding social responsibility in the here and now. One way of singing “we have this hope” is to interpret the “coming of the Lord” as simply a future event, the only thing worthy of true hope. No use trying to work for racial or gender justice in the present, or be concerned about climate change – for we cannot solve these problems. It is all about a purported *future* event that is all of God’s doing.

But, however prevalent, this rendition is a distortion of Advent Hope. For it fundamentally misunderstands the “Advent” or “Coming of the Lord” as merely a future event. But to talk of the “Second Advent” or Second Coming of Christ (as Adventists do following the New Testament) necessarily implies that there was a “First Advent” that preceded it. And even Christmas, while indeed understood as a singularity, is not *de novo*, for it is to be seen as the fulfillment of promises made long before. [As Moltmann reminds us this reflection on the Coming of God is a theology of hope!] Here then is a diagram that captures this “Adventist” meaning of “Advent:”

in which they brought such disparate and fragmented groups together was by song. Every member got a little red book, containing parodies of popular songs or hymns (the book had a motto on the cover: “To Fan the Flames of Discontent”). One of the early ones, predating the IWW, was *Hallelujah, I’m a Bum*. One IWW member was Joe Hill, a Swedish-born seaman and hobo (one of the martyrs of the union movement: he was convicted of murder on dubious evidence and executed in 1915) [Joan Baez memorably sang a folk song about him]. He wrote several popular pro-union parodies for them, such as *Coffee An’*, *Nearer My Job to Thee*, *The Rebel Girl* and *The Preacher and the Slave*. This last song, dating from 1911, was aimed directly at the Salvation Army, a body anxious to save the Wobblies’ souls, while [they] were more interested in filling their bellies. The Wobblies hated the Sally Army’s middle-class Christian view that one would get one’s reward in heaven for virtue or suffering on earth. The song was a parody of the Salvation Army hymn *In the Sweet Bye and Bye*: *Long-haired preachers come out every night, Try to tell you what’s wrong and what’s right; But when asked how ’bout something to eat, They will answer with voices so sweet: CHORUS: You will eat, bye and bye, In that glorious land above the sky; Work and pray, live on hay, You’ll get pie in the sky when you die.* By 1911, other expressions using *pie* had already been around for some time, such as *nice as pie* and *easy as pie* and it had begun to be used for a bribe or political patronage (of rewards being distributed like slices of pie) so *pie* was already in the air, so to speak.” (from: <http://www.worldwidewords.org/qa/qa-pie1.htm>; accessed June 7, 2022; italics in the original)



This means we are living “between the times”¹³ in the midst of a *theodrama*, the emerging reality of the Coming of God.¹⁴ To sing “we have this hope ... in

¹³ Cf. Merz, 1923–1933, which was the leading journal of the dialectical theology movement which flourished in the aftermath of the First World War. Karl Barth, along with his good friend Eduard Thurneysen, and later Friedrich Gogarten, Rudolf Bultmann and Emil Brunner began the journal to highlight the tension within which Christians live “between the times” of the crucifixion/resurrection and parousia/eschaton. With the rise of the Nazis and their Christian sympathizers (including, for a time, Friedrich Gogarten) and those Barth considered unconscious apologists (specifically Brunner and Bultmann), the journal collapsed. Nevertheless, the perspective at the heart of Barth’s project is one that calls for active social and political involvement, in the interim, “between the times.” Christians are to live with the dialectical tension between the promise of the coming consummation and transformation of the New Creation, while all the time still immersed in this reality of sin, evil, and death. The hope for coming consummation must drive us to transformative action in the present.

¹⁴ Thus, the Advent of God is a single (yet complex) purported event; and Christian theology is the ongoing attempt to *interpret* this event. Likewise, Christian life is the never-ending quest to live life in light of the Advent. The Advent of God is thus both the object and subject-matter of Christian theology, and the complex event from which everything in Christian life is derived and normed. Viewed one way (i.e. from what we might construe as a God’s eye perspective) it is a single sustained movement of *God with us* (for all its complex historical unfolding and deepening subtlety). Viewed another way (i.e. from our temporally structured perspective) it is a single drama or ‘play’ unfolding in three grand ‘acts’ (Creation, Incarnation, Consummation). From both perspectives the Advent is God’s free act of self-sharing love, wherein God graciously encounters us where we are (addressing us with a Word of both judgment and salvation); giving Godself to us (in covenant and incarnation) and adopting us to Godself (through resurrection, ascension, and glorification). It is thus both an act of revelation and salvation. And not merely as a means to

the coming of the Lord” is not only an expression of hope in a future redemptive event, it is also to evoke the memory of “the coming of the Lord”¹⁵ in all its forms (i.e. those that have already happened, including the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost) and those that continue to happen in the here and now (i.e. in Sabbath and Eucharistic presence “where two or three are gathered together in my name”¹⁶). For the One we expect is the “One who *was*, and *is*, and *is to come*” (Rev. 4:8).

2.2 Apocalyptic Sensationalism

Here Advent hope morphs into a cheap adrenaline rush. The latest headline is taken to be a portend of the end of the world. Fear and hope are often whipped up in equal measure. Unfortunately, all too many Adventists have been unduly susceptible to this kind of distortion of hope. For example, in the aftermath of the pandemic, the reasons why it has been so easy for some Adventists to latch onto conspiracy theories and give them an apocalyptic twist,

some other end, for it is itself the *telos* (goal) of all the ways of God. Advent – Emmanuel: God with us, and us with God, for eternity. *This* is the Christian Gospel. Christians (certainly Adventist Christians) are commissioned to join the past and present crowd of witnesses that are called to proclaim it “to every kindred, nation, tongue and people.” “We are Christ’s ambassadors” (2 Cor. 5:20).

¹⁵ “*Are you the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?*” Matt. 11:4, is the central question that revolved around Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, as recorded by the Gospel writers. Already in Isaiah we read “*Behold, your God will come ... and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing for joy*” (Isa. 35:4 ff). In Luke’s account of Jesus’ ministry, which opens with his sermon at Nazareth, Jesus explicitly calls attention to this promise of God’s coming as the context in which to understand what he was about, and adds, “today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21). There is an obvious centrality to the First and Second Advents in the New Testament. Christ has come and will come again. The New Testament is about nothing if not the story of Jesus Christ, Immanuel, “God with us.” But it would be very difficult to wrest from its pages the promise that “this same Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11), without unravelling the coherence of the whole account. It would be equally hard to deny that Hebrews 9:28 is a sort of summary of the gospel: “So Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.” If you add to this the Old Testament’s *eschatological* and *messianic* themes, then you have a very significant biblical theme indeed.

¹⁶ Matt. 18:20: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.”

will have to be looked into.¹⁷ You would think Adventists would have developed some immunity to all this over time. But, apparently, we do not yet have “full herd immunity.”

Of course, this is deeply ironic given that not only was Adventism founded on a mistake – what is referred to as “the Great Disappointment” of October 22, 1844 – but that this memory is kept alive and counts as the start of the Adventist story (rather than say 1863, the date the church was officially organized). You would think we would have learnt our lesson. Of course, we are officially opposed to any sort of date setting, but this does not prevent the lure of apocalyptic sensationalism from warping and distorting Advent hope. While it is possible to sing about the coming of the Lord believing we have a calculus as to when it will happen, this is not genuine Adventism. For an Adventist is one who seeks to live life well together in the present, in light of the (threefold) Advent; humbly acknowledging that they don’t know it all, and open to the ‘Other’ as the foreshadowing of the One who will come (i.e. the “messianic structure of experience”).¹⁸

2.3 Political Quietism

Here Advent hope is seen as the decided opposite of socio-political activism. I remember growing up with the joint idea that Adventists must stay out of politics, and that this was to be seen as a virtue! It is true that in many places

¹⁷ In response to vaccine mandates, some Adventists have been vulnerable to FUD (fear, uncertainty and doubt); others have been attracted to conspiracy theories (although the specifics of Adventist apocalyptic beliefs have provided some resistance to their wholesale adoption); while still others (probably the majority) have been all too easy to rally to the ‘infringement of religious liberty’ bandwagon promoted by the religious right.

¹⁸ For Derrida “the messianic structure” is the universal structure of experience. It is the waiting for a future that you know will come though you do not know how, in what shape, in what way that which comes is determined or what it will determine. It is the impossible possibility of any future. Cf.: “As soon as you address the other, as soon as you are open to the future, as soon as you have a temporal experience of waiting for the future, of waiting for someone to come: that is the opening of experience. Someone is to come, is now to come. Justice and peace will have to do with this coming of the other, with the promise.... This universal structure of the promise, of the expectation for the future, for the coming, and the fact that this expectation of the coming has to do with justice – this is what I call the messianic structure” (Derrida 1997, 22–23). See also Derrida 1994, originally given as a lecture in 1993 at University of California, Riverside, down the road from my own institution.

this has now decidedly changed. But the uneasiness one senses in the air when addressing the problems say of structural racism or gender equality, go well beyond the general problems of “white fragility” or patriarchy – for in addition I think it betrays the fact that we are not yet done with this distortion of hope. We still hear all too often the old slogans: “The Gospel is about salvation from sin, not liberation from oppression;” for after all “Jesus stayed out of politics” and anyway “you will have the poor with you always,” and ultimately “our citizenship is in heaven, and not of this world.”¹⁹

Of course, it all depends on how we tell our story. If memory is to produce hope, then it matters what story we tell. My late colleague Charles Teel, along with so many others, never ceased to retell the stories of early Millerite and Adventist activism in the abolitionist cause and other reform movements of the day (Charles 1995, ch. 1). Not only did he march with Martin Luther King Jr., but over the years took thousands of students to walk in the revolutionary footsteps of Anna and Fernando Stahl in the Altiplano of Peru. He reminded us that the Stahls understood missionary work to include not only proclamation, healthcare and education but also courageous political action on behalf of the indigenous peoples they served. My La Sierra colleague Ron Osborn is hard at work ensuring that the memory and legacy of Adventist John Weidner’s heroic work in the French Resistance, saving the lives of Jews and others on the Dutch-Paris Escape Line during the worst days of Nazi oppression, will be an inspiration to new generations (weidnerfoundation.org). And I had an opportunity to play a small part in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the aftermath of apartheid.²⁰ And these references only scratch the surface. I suppose (to re-evoke Solnit) we can choose to tell of a past that was nothing but distortions of hope, or even try to conjure up some illusory golden age now irretrievably lost – but alternatively we can commit to telling “a more complicated and accurate story, one that has room for the best and worst ... a memory commensurate to the complexity of the past and the whole cast of

¹⁹ It has been pointed out to me that Bull and Lockhart’s sociological study of Adventism, *Seeking a Sanctuary*, was provisionally entitled *The Quiet Americans!*

²⁰ I was asked to work on and write the response of the Southern African Union Conference (of the SDA church) to the TRC. See: http://www.religion.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/113/Institutes/Archives/submissions/DOCUMENT_TO_THE_TRUTH_AND_RECONCILIATION_COMMISSION.pdf. Also for the full TRC report, see Vol. 4, chap. 3. on Faith Communities: https://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/volume_4_0.pdf.

participants, a memory that includes our power” – memories that produce that “forward-directed energy” we call hope.

2.4 Individualism

The fourth distortion of Advent hope, and perhaps the most widespread and insidious, is the assumption that it is hope for a personal and individual good rather than for a universal common good. This distortion has two roots: the individualism of post-enlightenment liberal western culture in general, and the specific individualism of evangelical belief and piety.²¹ This is the idea that the only hope that really counts is an expectation of individual salvation after death. One’s hope is directed to the idea of “going to heaven when we die.” We are but “brands plucked from a fire.” The earth is going to burn up (i.e. hell) and the only hope is to be saved from it. Thus, why worry about saving the planet or caring about gender dysphoria or fighting for racial justice, when at best these goods would be transitory gains, while real hope resides in eternal salvation – which is simply assumed to be *individual*.

The real problem is that we hardly balk at this or even think much about it. We simply assume it to be the ‘reality’ of the matter. We tend to take Christian faith, hope and love as *individual* virtues, whereas Paul describes them as *communal* virtues. Of course, this focus on the individual is a theological construction (*à la* “social construction”), but like with race and gender we think of it as “natural” not constructed. Of course, there is a lot of sloppy talk these days about things being merely “social constructs” (often implying that they are thus “unreal” and would just go away if we changed our minds). But this is not so, for social/theological constructs are *real* even if they are to be *resisted*.²²

²¹ Of course, these two are intimately connected, for both are products of 17th century enlightenment. I think we should think of liberalism and fundamentalism as in the same bed together, just facing in opposite directions.

²² See of course, Haslanger 2012. I regard this title as belonging to that limited set of extremely aptly named books where the title captures everything in a nutshell. In that, I would rank it up there with Karl Popper’s *Conjectures and Refutations* – understand the title and you get the gist of critical rationalism. Cf. p. 29–30: “The title of the book, *Resisting Reality*, is intentionally ambiguous. On one hand, it reflects a common resistance to recognizing the reality of the social world and the tendency of theorists, in particular, to opt for an anti-realist approach to social categories such as race. I reject this approach and argue throughout for the reality of social structures and the political importance of recognizing this reality. On the other hand, given that much of the

Perhaps we need something in theology akin to “critical social theory.”²³ The individualist frame is *real* but it is to be *resisted*, both because it props up ambivalence to caring about the common good, and because it betrays the essential universality of the Gospel.

However, here is where a re-envisioned Advent Hope could make a difference. Because this sort of hope is for universal cosmic renewal, not just for individual escape. We truly are in the same boat together. The shape of the ultimate vision matters for what we do in the here and now. We even see this in Hooper’s song (for all its limits): “We believe the time is here, *when the nations far and near* shall awake, and shout and sing: Hallelujah! Christ is King!” Advent hope looks for “the healing of the nations”²⁴ not just the salvation of souls. True hope cannot be privatized, it is hope for the healing of the nations and all who live in them. Also, unlike most other Christians, Adventists believe in a universal bodily resurrection of all who have ever lived.²⁵ Our hope is not individualized escape from this mess, but a renewed and healed world. This means that we must work for penultimate (Bonhoeffer), “fitting” (H. Richard Niehbur) and “analogical” (Barth) goals in the here and now that correspond with the values and ultimate vision of the promised “New Heav-

(very real) social world consists of unjust social structures, I think this reality must be resisted. Another theme in the book is that one of the main goals of social constructionism is to lay bare the mechanisms by which social structures are formed and sustained so that we are better positioned to locate the levers for social change. We should not resist seeing the reality that we should, in fact, resist; in fact, disclosing that reality is a crucial precondition for successful resistance.”

²³ We might even want to call it “critical ecclesial theory”!

²⁴ Rev. 22:1–2 paints this picture of the New Jerusalem: “Then the angel showed me a river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the main street of the city. On either side of the river stood a tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit and yielding a fresh crop for each month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” See also Rom. 8: 18–25, where the whole universe itself is to be saved from mortality.

²⁵ Most Christians believe that when we die our immortal souls either go to heaven or hell. Yes, Christians have always professed (following the NT) a “resurrection of the body” but this quickly became a far distant event, and one only for the saved. While I note that Thomas Aquinas (13th century) accepts the universal resurrection of the body for all (*Summa Theologiae*, Supplement, Question 75), this has not become the focus of popular Christian hope. It is true that Adventists talk about two resurrections (following Rev. 20), with different outcomes for each, but this does not detract from the fundamental move: “In Adam all die, in Christ all are made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).

ens and New Earth.” This is also why (unlike many other apocalyptically oriented communities) Adventism has invested so much of its resources and efforts in a global network of healthcare, education, welfare and development work. For we are to “occupy till He comes.”

Now, this fourth distortion of hope (i.e. hope as an individualized and even privatized good) raises again the question of the *common good*, to which I will turn in the final part of the paper. But before that, let me return to our key question: *If societies are complex systems that reproduce injustice, and are self-regulating in the face of reform, then how do we hope for justice?*

3. The Advent Movement: A Movement of Embodied Hope?

Is it possible, despite our failures, for the Advent Movement to be (or perhaps become?) a movement of embodied hope? I will outline what I think would be required for this to become a possible outcome:

(1) Could we (now, “between the times”) consider the Advent as the coming of a qualitatively and essentially different social being – i.e. a radically other **complex system**, animated by love, freedom and justice? For while the Advent is the Coming of God, it is the Coming of God for the purpose of being “God with us.” Therefore it is not only an act of God but also the emerging of a new community, a different (new) social being (or kind of complex social system) among others.

(2) Then to have this hope in the Advent is not merely (or even primarily) a cognitive experience, asserting truth-values regarding statements of past and future events.

(3) Rather it is the choice, the experience, and the symptom of *participating* in that new complex system (called the Body of Christ, or the proleptic Kingdom of God), already *here and now*, although aligned to its future consummation.

(4) Of course, this participation is surely incomplete. We are still in the dominion of evil, of what some call “Empire” (e.g. Hardt and Negri 2000; and we might want to call “Babylon” or Christendom which is Christianity in its imperial form lasting from the 4th to the 20th century). However, despite this, can we not already “taste” that other world, and recognize it as a different life?

(5) This would give our hope for systemic change its dual character. From within the ideology of Empire, it is irrational. “There is no alternative.” But as participants in Christ’s body, it is *second nature* (cf. Haslanger’s use of this term).

(6) Is this then a way to answer the question we posed at the beginning? *We can hope, through participating in the shared practices already of a not-yet-realized new complex system.* This calls for some further explication:

First this calls for **humility**. For, as we have already noted, this hope can be distorted! In fact, the grave danger (that Adventists in particular should be attuned to!) is being co-opted by the Empire.

What is meant by **Empire**? Empires in general are complex systems that conquer and rule many peoples under the sovereign power of a ruling elite. There have been many around the world, through time. “The Empire” as I use it here, borrowing from many others, refers to the now-globe-spanning specific system that emerged through the European colonization of the Americas, the slave trade, capitalism, and military-industrial-driven “growth.” This Empire has important roots in Christendom’s poisoned marriage with Rome. Early Christianity, and early Adventism, both arose as utterly *against* and aspirationally *other than* this Empire. Empire’s sin is masquerading one specific complex system (i.e. society), and its rulers/rules, as the “One True Way” with forced conversion/conquest/assimilation. Adventists have always had some of this in mind when (in light of Rev. 14’s three angels’ message) they have linked “Babylon” with Christendom (the longest lasting temporal-spiritual empire)²⁶ and seen their vocation as to echo the call to “Come out of her my people.”

But what does “Come out of her my people” mean? Adventists have always thought of it as leaving “Babylon” and becoming part of the true **Body of Christ**. But note, to leave the Empire is a communal process. We die to one

²⁶ After the conversion of Constantine (±300 C. E.), Christianity quickly moved from the margins to the centre of power, from a “faith of pilgrims” to the “state religion.” The Church took on the form of the Empire. As history makes clear, Christendom (imperial Christianity) is one of the longest lasting empires in human history. Despite morphing at least five times – They are (note some overlapping): (1) the Eastern Byzantine Christian Empire (300–1453 C. E.); (2) the Early Roman (Latin) Christian Empire (300–476 C. E.); (4) the new Holy Roman Empire in the West (800–1806 C. E.); (5) the Multiple European Colonial (Christian) Empires (1480s–1960s; but at its zenith in the 19th century) – and splitting twice (in the 11th and 16th centuries) it has lasted almost two millennia. “Christendom” defined as Christianity in Imperial form essentially ends in the 20th century (“fall of Babylon”; “deadly wound”); but actually it continues in “shadow mode” in the form of Global Western (American) Free Market Capitalism (1800–today; what Rev. calls the “healing of the deadly wound”). See www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/longest-lasting-empire-in-history/?fb_comment_id=908289045888748_949562308428088.

social being, and are born to another. We appropriately use the word “adoption.” It is not primarily an intellectual process, but a material one – a matter of our practices [recall Haslanger’s discussion of social practices]. We can think for example of practices such as the Eucharist, Sabbath-keeping, Foot-washing (and Singing!). But this also has an economic, political, reproductive dimension. For we are a “people” among peoples. Furthermore, the Body of Christ is not dependent on Empire, for it has its own autonomy, and horizontal support network. (Think of the Adventist parallel infrastructure.)²⁷

Finally, we need to note that this will call for a sort of **pluralism ... in practice**. So we can ask: How do we build resistance to being co-opted (again) into Empire? There are several resources: (a) *Theology* reminds us that God is beyond any of our social forms! Thus the Coming of God (the consummation of the Advent) remains out of our control and it thus relativizes all that we are and do; (b) *philosophy* reminds us that action for the “common good” need not require a universal “common ground” (see section 4) since “common ground” anyway usually defaults to the dominant hegemony;²⁸ (c) *action* or praxis reminds us that perhaps we should seek to encounter others in as much fullness of their otherness as possible. From these encounters with ‘other’ others, we may grow into shared practices – but they will always be contingent, changing, penultimate yet sacred.

In practice we might have very different grounds for working for common goods; but we can still do so by forming *ad hoc* alignments, held together by nothing other than the pragmatic pursuit of those goods themselves. Here the “we” become movements of engagement. These will be *ad hoc* alliances, where solidarity emerges from and in action, not necessarily theory (i.e. one “no” many “yesses”). This may seem “weak” to those weaned on the Empire’s cen-

²⁷ Note: We are emphasizing the radical difference between Empire and not-Empire. I.e. the difference between attempting justice through reform vs. through the death of Empire and the becoming of something profoundly other. And yet, are not all systems interwoven, their boundaries more or less firm depending on perspective, nesting within and beyond each other? Thus, this is an essential tension. Here there is no place for dogmatism. Of course, the “Body of Christ” is bigger than Adventism, as we confess in Fundamental Belief #12 and #13.

²⁸ Thus “we are lost without it”! (See the responses of both the left and right in the U.S. to the fading elite liberal consensus.) And finding a “lowest common denominator” may not inspire the deepest alignment.

tralized versions of power; but “blessed are the meek.” And we must remember that many ecologies, neural nets, and other complex systems are deeply resilient precisely *because* of their “weak” links between nodes!

We can thus hope to hope, through participating in the shared practices here and now, of an embodied movement – e.g. an Advent Movement, as a not-yet-fully-realized new complex system.

Finally, let me return to the quest for the Common Good, which was the problem that I raised at the start.

4. Is Common Ground Necessary for the Common Good?

The problem is that if “memory produces hope,” it would appear that it can only flourish within communities of shared memory. More broadly, the question can be put this way: “Is not common ground necessary for the common good?” The answer has usually been “yes.” Let me briefly recount three representative and classic answers (in rough chronological order): Classical Greek (Aristotle); Medieval Christian (Aquinas); and Modern Liberal (Stout).

4.1 Classical Greek City-State (Aristotle’s Communitarian Virtue Ethics)

What makes an act “right”? Character, virtue, deliberation and practice! But we must note that this can only take place in communities of practical (prudential) wisdom. For this is the necessary context for the practice of the virtues and the avoidance of vices. So, for example, temperance (or moderation) is finding the mean between excess and deficit. But since we can only learn temperance by “doing,” it is essential that we have a community with agreed exemplars of such virtues. Thus, “good behaviour” is to be understood as what a person of good character would do in the given situation to further the end (*telos* or goal) of life (*eudaimonia*, happiness, or living and faring well). It involves deliberation about appropriate means to an end, and requires action shaped by moral virtues acquired through practice and normed by community exemplars of moral excellence.²⁹

²⁹ This is, of course, an extreme précis of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. What makes for a good act is a good person. Only persons of virtuous character can truly act well. And the virtues (e.g. justice, temperance, courage, etc.) can only be developed in communities that care about them, model them, and provide for the training essential to develop them. From this perspective, a good act is an act that is done with due deliberation (about means to an end, i.e. about the best way to

Here you can only achieve the common good by having common ground (i.e. prudential communities of shared agreement on the virtues). Of course, the Achilles' heel of all this was the severely limited scope of the community. Only free male persons were counted as citizens.

While the drawing of the citizenship boundary has changed over time, this limitation still dogs the attempt to secure the common good. Who belongs? Who gets to be counted as a citizen?

*4.2 Medieval Christendom and the Concept of "Natural Law" (Aquinas' 'Treatise on Law')*³⁰

Law is something pertaining to reason. Ultimately, all law is based on and derives from the Eternal Law which is equivalent to the mind and plan of God. But no one has direct access to the mind of God (and thus to Eternal Law). However, in the very act of creation God has "imprinted" the Eternal Law into nature itself. So we can through careful observation, deliberation and reflection work out the principles of the Natural Law. We can think of this as a sort of "reverse-engineering." For example, a car's engine is built according to a blueprint; but with effort we can figure out its design and how it works from its physical reality. Aided by Divine Law (i.e. revealed law in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures) and based on Natural Law, human laws can be created such that they are just. And as just they have the power to "bind the conscience" because they ultimately derive from the Eternal Law.³¹ Aquinas offers this summary of the nature of law: "*Law is an ordination of reason for*

attain to proximate goals that lead ultimately to the goal of life itself – happiness; living and fairing well), facilitated by the exercise of the moral virtues (states of character acquired by practice) in which one finds the "mean" between excess and deficit.

³⁰ In addition to incorporation of Aristotle's virtue ethics, Aquinas elaborates a conception of natural law. See Aquinas, *Summa Theologia* Part II/1.

³¹ Human laws have several characteristics that must be considered. First, human laws are established for the benefit of human beings – although perfectly virtuous humans do not require human laws (Q. 95, Art. 1). Second – and this is absolutely crucial – human laws have their force insofar as they derive from natural law. Human laws derive from natural law in two ways: as conclusions from first principles and as specifications of general principles (Q. 95, Art. 2). Third, as Isodore points out, human laws should be "virtuous, just, possible by nature, in accord with a country's customs, suitable to time and place, necessary, useful, so clear that they contain nothing obscure ..., and decreed for the common benefit of all citizens" (Q. 95, Art. 3). Fourth, human laws may be categorized according to their characteristics: as they are derived from the natural

the common good by one who has care of the community and promulgated” (Q. 90, Art. 4, emphasis added).

Now, in all this, it is critical to note that this can work in medieval Christendom because there is a common ground – the belief in God as Creator. Interestingly, it is not because all persons were Christians – they were not – but because despite their heterogeneity (13th century medieval European society was composed of Christians, Jews and Muslims) they all shared this common ground. Thus *all* rational persons could join in the making of human laws based on universal natural law.

4.3 *Modern Liberal Democracy (Jeffrey Stout’s Democracy and Tradition)*

With the erosion of confidence in a Creator God, turmoil in the post-reformation breakup of Christendom, and a general “flight from authority”, (Stout) a new conception of common ground emerged in liberal modernity. The common ground thought necessary for a nation state to survive was to be found in the “rules of engagement” rather than in the content of its citizens’ beliefs. Specific (and heterogeneous) beliefs were to be tolerated (as long as they were privatized) and everyone agreed to play by the newly devised democratic/market rules. These “rules of the game,” became the civil religion of liberal democracy.

In the aftermath of 9/11, Jeffrey Stout asked whether we can hold democracy together despite our fractures over moral issues? Could the citizens of a modern democracy still reason with one another? In answer, he carves out a controversial position between those who view religious voices as an anathema to democracy (e.g. Rorty) and those who believe that democratic society is a moral wasteland because such voices are not heard (e.g. McIntyre).³²

law, as they are ordained for the common good, as they are established by the ruling authorities, and as they direct human actions (Q. 95, Art. 4). Finally, human laws should be formed in general rather than particular terms; and while they do not prohibit all vices, they do command all virtues (insofar as all virtues tend to the common good) (Q. 96, Art. 1–3). Probably the most significant of all the characteristics of human laws, and the characteristic is crucial for understanding Thomas, is that human laws derive their just authority from being in accordance with the natural law.

³² See Stout 2004. “Drawing inspiration from Whitman, Dewey, and Ellison, Jeffrey Stout sketches the proper role of religious discourse in a democracy. He discusses the fate of virtue, the legacy of racism, the moral issues implicated in the war on terrorism, and the objectivity of ethical norms. Against those who see no place for religious reasoning in the democratic arena, Stout champions a space for religious voices. But against increasingly vocal antiliberal thinkers, he argues that

But that was back in 2004. What about now, after January 6, 2021? The real (and perhaps new) crisis is that it seems we can no longer agree on the “rules of the game.” Power seems to be the only norm. We seem to have irretrievably lost (a) homogenous communities of character; (b) confidence in the existence of so-called “Natural Law;”³³ (c) and now the agreement to “play by the rules” of the democratic game. What now?

We could follow leading communitarian moral philosophers like Alisdair McIntyre who have argued that it is just this lack of common vision that is plunging us back into a “moral dark ages.”³⁴ Or we could dare to challenge the assumption itself. Is common ground necessary for achieving the common

modern democracy can provide a moral vision and has made possible such moral achievements as civil rights precisely because it allows a multitude of claims to be heard. Stout’s distinctive pragmatism reconfigures the disputed area where religious thought, political theory, and philosophy meet. Charting a path beyond the current impasse between secular liberalism and the new traditionalism, *Democracy and Tradition* asks whether we have the moral strength to continue as a democratic people as it invigorates us to retrieve our democratic virtues from very real threats to their practice.” (Publisher’s blurb).

³³ Although, it needs to be pointed out that modern talk of “human rights” is a sort of continuation of natural law without the appeal to Divine Creation to back it up.

³⁴ See e.g. the famous (and now almost prophetic) last paragraph of McIntyre 1981/1984/2007, 263: “It is always dangerous to draw too precise parallels between one historical period and another; and among the most misleading of parallels are those which have been drawn between our own age in Europe and North America and the epoch in which the Roman empire declined into the Dark Ages. Nonetheless certain parallels there are. A crucial turning point in that earlier history occurred when men and women of good will turned aside from the task of shoring up the Roman *imperium* and ceased to identify the continuation of civility and moral community with the maintenance of that *imperium*. What they set themselves to achieve instead – often not recognizing fully what they were doing – was the construction of new forms of community within which the moral life could be sustained so that both morality and civility might survive the coming ages of barbarism and darkness. If my account of our moral condition is correct, we ought also to conclude that for some time now we too have reached that turning point. What matters at this stage is the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained through the new dark ages which are already upon us. And if the tradition of the virtues was able to survive the horrors of the last dark ages, we are not entirely without grounds for hope. This time however the barbarians are not waiting beyond the frontiers; they have already been governing us for quite some time. And it is our lack of consciousness of this that constitutes part of our predicament. We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another – doubtless very different – St. Benedict.”

good? I would like to venture the thesis that it is *not*. *We might have very different grounds for working for common goods; but we can still do so by forming ad hoc alignments, held together by nothing other than the pragmatic pursuit of those goods themselves.* Let me indicate three important qualifications and then offer a couple of illustrations to conclude.

(a) Who are the “we” we are talking about? Communities of character, McIntyre was urging in *After Virtue*. Richly textured by their own story, traditions and complex social practices (or communal gestures). But now not movements of withdrawal, but movements of engagement. Engagement with what? Selected social, political or other “common goods.” I believe Adventism to be such a community of character. I suggest that Advent Hope can become a *movement of embodied hope*. Working (with a range of others) to fight injustice here, and enhance flourishing there.

(b) These *ad hoc* (i.e. not systematic, fundamental, ideological, grounded, or permanent) alliances will be based on the hope that some common good might be achieved, rather than that some “lowest common denominator” type of intellectual (theoretical, or even theological) agreement exists. And these alliances will, no doubt, change from issue (good) to issue (good). Such hope is compatible with either optimism or pessimism! In fact, Advent Hope, if it is to be true to itself and its own source, must be a hopeful (for penultimate goods) pessimism (for while evil can be reduced, it can never – short of the consummation of the Advent – be totally eradicated).

(c) Solidarity comes in action (common cause) not in theory (common ground). To play with the powerful title of Prof. Haslanger’s book: The common good resides in the *resisting* and not in a shared vision concerning *reality*. To conjure up a hypothetical example. Feminist philosophers who wish to eradicate the categories “men and women” [though not male and female] (e.g. MacKinnon), and evangelicals who might believe that God created men and women different but equal (e.g. Davidson) *might* be both willing and able to join together in fighting for a renewed push for the ERA (Equal Rights Amendment; see Haslanger 2012, 35–82; Davidson 2007). No guarantees. But also no inevitable impossibility. Or to allude to a real example. In the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd, the Black Lives Matter movement brought a diverse range of people into the streets, who would almost certainly not share a common ideology or even vision of where we are to go from here. It might not have enduring or staying power, it might not have been enough to

finally succeed in needed police reform, but we can allow ourselves glimmers of hope in the fleeting solidarity.

Just two, more first hand, examples. My eldest son, who was in NYC at the time, tells of an incredible solidarity across all sorts of divides in the days after 9/11. Disasters can do that.

I personally remember standing in line to vote in Somerset West in the first election in the New South Africa (1994). It was almost a liturgical moment. People who had never had much to do with each other, in some cases had been on opposite ideological sides, and even some who had been in violent conflict – were joining together in a complex social practice that was itself a “common good.” Was utopia ushered in? No. Was it thus a pointless failure? No. It was a moment of embodied hope in the messy thing we call the struggle for justice.

To return to Advent Hope and Wayne Hooper’s song. Even for Adventists, I suspect that singing this song can prompt a whole variety of reactions: Some might feel rather uncomfortable with its implied triumphalism; some might feel a fleeting moment of nostalgia; others might perhaps experience a flashback recalling their life’s journey from literalism to a more mature appreciation of symbolism; while still others might find themselves distinctly “cross-pressured”³⁵ in doing so.

But perhaps it is even more pertinent to note the fact that in all likelihood we would probably have *very* different notions of what was *meant* by the words we were singing. For some of us it might be a rather traditional expression of longing for the literal second coming of Christ on the clouds of heaven and all that is said to accompany such an event (along with visual images from childhood); for others it might be a different yet still realistic expectation of a coming *Parousia*; for others it might evoke nothing more than a vague longing for a better world to come; for still others it might actually elicit an urge to push back against what could be perceived as mere other-worldly escapism.

In the face of the global challenges of rising polarization, social fragmentation, and political malaise, what we would appear to need is some common ground to work for the common good. What hope is there for that, when even

³⁵ “According to Charles Taylor, faith in a secular age is cross-pressured; that is, it is contested by the presence of multiple accounts of belief and unbelief in contemporary Western culture” (<https://hcommons.org/deposits/item/hc:13001>; accessed June 7, 2022). See Taylor 2007.

a relatively small global subculture (with highly homogeneous religious practices, at that) cannot even bank on common ground when singing its most famous theme song?

One song, evoking different memories and meanings, even for those singing it. But in the singing we would be doing something together. A complex social practice (singing) that for a moment would embody the solidarity we were singing about.³⁶ Is it possible that witnessing, even participating in an expression of hope in a very different communal frame, can still inspire and evoke our own hope? Our challenge is for those differences to become a source of alignment, not assimilation; of solidarity, not sameness. The spirit moves through us, in mysterious ways. It is not up to us! But it matters what we do.³⁷

Conclusion

According to Haslanger:

(1) *Structural injustice* occurs when the practices that create the network of positions and relations (a) distribute resources unjustly, (b) distort our understanding of what is valuable, or (c) organize us in ways that are unjust/harmful/wrong.

(2) *Systemic injustice* occurs when an unjust structure is maintained in a complex system that is self-reinforcing, adaptive, and creates subjects whose identity is shaped to conform to it.

(3) *Hope* is a syndrome of attitudes, motivations, beliefs, centred on one's scheme of ends. One has reason to act to promote one's fundamental ends, even in the face of obstacles. Such reasons, when aligned with the will, are a source of motivation; hope is not merely passive. Those who value social justice should be prepared to take on the risks and costs of pursuing it. We should not give up

³⁶ Interestingly, before the General Conference session in 1995, with the theme "United in Christ," Hooper was asked to write a second stanza. In thinking about 1 Corinthians 13, he decided to centre the whole second stanza on love as the uniting force in Christ. Second Stanza of "We have this Hope": "We are united in Jesus Christ our Lord. We are united in His love. Love for the waiting people of the world, people who need our Saviour's love. Soon the heav'ns will open wide, Christ will come claim His bride. All the universe will sing: 'Hallelujah! Christ is King!' We have this hope, this faith, and God's great love, we are united in Christ."

³⁷ Recall the Adventist belief that we can prepare the way for the Second Coming – hope is a call to action! May we have hope, and thus faith, in love.

hope in justice, even if success is unlikely (Haslanger's final slide in the presentation titled "Hope not Optimism").

In this article, I have explored the possibility that "Advent Hope" could become a movement of embodied hope, that in *ad hoc* collaboration with others, takes a stand (again and again) against structural and systemic injustice, precisely because it believes it is not futile, for the One who *was*, and *is*, is to *come again* (Rev. 4:8).

Following on immediately from the quote on p. 1, fn. 1 (above) Rebecca Solnit writes: "At the beginning of his massive 1930s treatise on hope, the German philosopher Ernst Bloch wrote, 'the work of this emotion [hope] requires people who throw themselves actively into what is becoming, to which they themselves belong.' To hope is to give yourself to the future, and that commitment to the future makes the present inhabitable" (Solnit 2016, 4).

Reference List

- Aquinas, Thomas. *Summa Theologia: Part II/1* [Prima Secundæ Partis], Q. 90–97 [Treatise on Law].
- Davidson, Richard M. *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*. Ada: Baker Academic, 2007.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell*. New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1997.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Specters of Marx*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2000.
- Haslanger, Sally. *Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique*. Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2012.
- McIntyre, Alisdair. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. Third Edition. Notre Dame: Univ. of Notre Dame Press, 1981/1984/2007.
- Merz, Georg, ed. *Zwischen den Zeiten*. München: C. Kaiser, 1923–1933.
- Solnit, Rebecca. *Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities*. Third edition. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016.
- Stout, Jeffrey. *Democracy and Tradition*. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2004.
- Taylor, Charles. *A Secular Age*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 2007.
- Teel, Charles, ed. *Remnant and Republic: Adventist Themes for Personal and Social Ethics*. Riverside: La Sierra Univ. Press, 1995.

Zusammenfassung

Was ist aus dem „Gemeinwohl“ geworden? Kann man angesichts der aktuellen Polarisierung und der systemischen und strukturellen sozialen Ungerechtigkeit noch auf Gerechtigkeit hoffen? In dem Artikel wird vorgeschlagen, dass die Grundlage für eine Zusammenarbeit nicht unbedingt eine „gemeinsame Basis“ ist, sondern nach „gemeinsamen Zielen“ zu streben. Ein Hauptvortrag und Reaktionen darauf auf einer Konferenz der *Society of Adventist Philosophers* boten die Gelegenheit, diese These zu testen. Können eine säkulare Philosophin (Sally Haslanger, MIT-Professorin, Begründerin der *Critical Social Theory*) und ein adventistischer Theologe ernsthaft gemeinsam einen hoffnungsvollen Wandel anstreben, ohne über weltanschauliche Unterschiede zu stolpern? Der Artikel ist eine Fallstudie für ein selbstbewusstes und selbstkritisches Gespräch „über Trennendes hinweg“. Er fragt, ob die „Adventhoffnung“, die die Verzerrungen des Eskapismus, der apokalyptischen Sensationslust, des politischen Quietismus und des Individualismus ablehnt, zu einer „Bewegung der verkörperten Hoffnung“ auf dem Weg zum kommenden Reich Gottes werden kann.

Résumé

Qu'est devenu le « bien commun »? Tenant compte de l'état actuel de polarisation et de la nature systémique et structurelle de l'injustice sociale, est-il encore possible d'espérer la justice? L'article suggère que la base du travail en commun ne soit pas nécessairement le partage d'un « terrain d'entente » mais la poursuite de « buts (ou objectifs) communs ». Une présentation principale et une réponse à une conférence de la Société des Philosophes Adventistes ont permis de tester cette thèse. Une philosophe laïque (Sally Haslanger, professeur au MIT et fondatrice de la *Critical Social Theory*) et un théologien adventiste pouvaient-ils s'engager dans une recherche commune sérieuse d'un changement porteur d'espoir sans buter sur les différences de vision du monde? L'article présente une étude de cas de conversation consciente et autocritique « par-delà les clivages ». Il pose la question suivante: « l'espérance de l'Avent », qui rejette les distorsions de l'évasion, du sensationnalisme apocalyptique, du quietisme politique et de l'individualisme, peut-il devenir un « mouvement d'espoir incarné », en route vers le Royaume de Dieu à venir?

John Webster, Ph.D., is Professor of Theology and the History of Christianity and Chair of the Department of Theological Studies at La Sierra University.
E-mail: jwebster@lasierra.edu

Book Review

Richard Rice. *The Future of Open Theism: From Antecedents to Opportunities.* Downers Grove: IVP, 2020. 250 pp.

What Richard Rice has essentially achieved in *The Future of Open Theism* is to appraise the prominent issues in the development of the open theism discourse and to chart new paths for its future, especially since the publishing of *The Openness of God*¹ twenty-eight years ago. Rice, a leading voice of the open theism theology, sums up its major argument: “God is open to the world, and the world is open to God. Both Creator and creatures contribute to the ongoing course of events, and God experiences these events as they happen.” (p. 1). There is a genuine interaction between God and His creatures. The idea of God’s temporality, or time being real for God, according to Rice, “enables us to make sense of a wide range of biblical passages, such as those that speak of God testing people; asking questions about the future; being surprised, delighted, and disappointed; experiencing regret and sorrow; and perhaps most important, changing His mind in response to human decisions and actions” (pp. 30–31).

The sensitivity and centrality of the doctrine of God, which for Paul Tillich, is the “beginning and end of all theological thought,”² adds significance to this discourse that seeks to understand God in a novel way; it is a theological venture that is certain to elicit opposition and criticism, partly because the traditional view and the new view operate with different theistic paradigms. Critics who subscribe to the traditional view of God (classical theists or divine

¹ Clark Pinnock, Richard Rice, John Sanders, William Hasker, and David Basinger, *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994). Rice admits that the subtitle of this book may have provoked opposition, since it suggests that open theism and the traditional view of God are at variance and that the latter view falls short of biblical veracity.

² Paul Tillich, *Biblical Religion and the Search for Ultimate Reality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 82.

determinists) contend that open theism denies God's most fundamental attributes (simplicity, impassibility, immutability, and eternity) and even its attestation to God's omniscience is but in an attenuated sense. However, Rice strongly argues that open theism is not on a mission to shake traditional pillars of theism but seeks to present the discourse from new perspectives. And if there is ever a rallying point for both critics and proponents of open theism, it is in the novelty and depth of understanding that the openness perspective brings to the doctrine of God. He rejects the common notion that open theism proposes a limited view of God. Instead, he observes that "it enhances and enriches our concept of God rather than limiting it" (p. 7).

Rice has divided his book into two parts of eleven chapters. The first part, chapters one to five, evaluates aspects of the origins and development of open theism. The second part attempts to look at some elements of Christian faith through the lens of open theism.

In chapter one Rice observes that even before 1994 and the publishing of *The Openness of God*, thinkers had been discussing the central themes of open theism as far back as the seventeenth century and beyond, even before its emergence as a distinct theological subject. Freewill theist Jacobus Arminius (1560–1609) reacted to Calvin's doctrine of predestination by arguing that since humans are not coerced by God to accept the salvation He offers but are allowed to make decisions in the course of events, then His will is not all-determining. Arminius's dilemma was in how God's absolute foreknowledge was to be understood in the light of the freewill of humans. Adam Clarke (1760–1832) argued that God does not have foreknowledge and saw a difference in God's knowledge of "necessities" and His knowledge of "contingencies". Clarke believed that God does not predetermine all that happens, because then nothing humans do would be wrong. Lorenzo Dow McCabe (1817–1897) equally rejected absolute divine foreknowledge and God as a timelessly omniscient being. These, he argued, rob God of positive experiences of delight, enjoyment, curiosity, love, novelty, surprise and wonder. McCabe would rather argue for divine temporality – God relating to the world and His creatures in an open-ended view of history that makes Him actively involved and engaged with humans, responding and reacting to the actions and decisions of humans. This, McCabe believed, presents a far more personal view of God than how He is perceived in the absolute knowledge

framework. Other thinkers of the past who questioned absolute divine foreknowledge while supporting a dynamic and interactive relation of God with the world include Jules Lequyer (1814–1862), Gordon C. Olson (1907–1989), and Howard R. Elseth. Rice notes that apart from Clarke, the above individuals were situated outside the theological mainstream, and this might have given them the liberty to look at the doctrine of God without the lenses of the traditional attributes of God.

Chapter two considers early formulations of open theism in mainstream theology. Rice had written a 1980 book, *The Openness of God*, which did not quite receive the approbation of many in his Seventh-day Adventist tradition. But it was *The Openness of God* in 1994, a collection of essays, that sought to describe the features of open theism more notably. Its authors point out that biblical references depicting God's response to human actions and reconsiderations of His decisions are not mere anthropomorphisms, instead they should be regarded as having the same importance as His attributes of eternity, changelessness, and steadfastness. Open theism hinges on the principle that "God not only affects the world, the world has an effect on God" (*ibid.*, 31). This "interactive view God" is echoed by the contributors – John Sanders, Clark Pinnock, William Hasker, and David Basinger – in that they affirm both God's self-sufficient fullness and God's openness to the world and His creatures. Although God is all-powerful, what is accentuated by the openness of God is how He exercises His power. On God's foreknowledge, open theism and its subscription to libertarian freedom argues that because the future is laced with various possibilities and dependent on the changing choices and decisions of His creatures, the details of their decisions are non-existent in the present and cannot be known by God in advance. The authors were quick to distinguish open theism from both Calvinism and process theology, and at the same time show the compatibility of both prophecy and predestination with open theism. Rice appraises other theological works that appeared after *The Openness of God*, including Sanders's *The God Who Risks: A Theology of Divine Providence* (1998), Gregory A. Boyd's *God of The Possible: A Biblical Introduction to the Open View of God* (2000), and Clark H. Pinnock's *Most Moved Mover: A Theology of God's Openness* (2001).

Rice goes on in chapter three to show the intense criticism that the openness of God discourse has precipitated with the passing of time. Books with critical titles appeared in the evangelical world. A few include R. K. McGregor Wright's

No Place for Sovereignty: What's Wrong with Freewill Theism (1996), Norman Geisler's *Creating God in the Image of Man*, Bruce A. Ware's *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism* (2001), and Douglas Wilson's *Bound Only Once: The Failure of Open Theism* (2001). For evangelicals, the denial of God's absolute knowledge is a theological red line. And the most vigorous objections to open theism hinge on the thinking that it distorts God's power and questions His omniscience. The criticism of the open theism view became personal as some of its proponents became alienated from their various denominations and relieved of their teaching positions. However, Rice submits that criticism has shaped open theism into an increasingly popular theological perspective.

The philosophical discussion of open theism is reviewed in chapter four. Rice observes that the openness of God has been accepted by a growing number of theistic philosophers as a model in the nature of God discourse and as a fitting perspective for answering both scientific and philosophical questions. One intriguing inquiry that philosophers ask is on the compatibility of divine foreknowledge and human freedom of choice – the knowability of human future choices by God. The approaches of presentism (all of reality exists now, in the present; the past is no more, the future is not yet) and eternalism (past, present, and future are equally real) have been employed in suggesting answers to the foreknowledge question. Philosophers, whether for or against open theism, have also used complex models (like 'simple foreknowledge' and 'middle knowledge') in handling the foreknowledge debate. And on the nature of the future, open theists argue that the future is both causally and epistemically open to God. But even among open theists, some believe that God knows all that can be known, but there are elements of the future that are not accessible to Him because they cannot be known in the present. Other theists take more complex stances, such as the "bivalentist" or "non-bivalentist" omniscience models; both models agree that the future is epistemically and alethically open to God, but they disagree on what will or will not happen in the future. Other aspects of open theism that have enjoyed philosophical discussions are the technical issue of divine providence (God's love in an evil world) and the nature of the risk God took in creating the world. Given that philosophical inquiries rarely come to a conclusion, philosophical discussions of the openness of God remain ongoing.

Given the robust conversation that has attended the open theism discourse, Rice observes in chapter five that the inputs of both its supporters and critics

have brought about variations in how open theists understand it and corresponding theological themes. Open theists find commonalities in the principle that God has a real interaction with His creatures, His ontological independence from the world, and the temporality of His experience, but they have varied understandings of these shared views. A case in point is in theodicy. Some open theists argue for the 'cosmic conflict theodicy model', which reasons that human suffering is not God's wish but due to a raging cosmic conflict where God's enemies inflict pain on His creatures. Simply put, natural evil derives from moral evil. Other open theists go with the 'natural-order theodicy model' which argues that natural evil is purposeful and unavoidable; the evil in the world is not emanant from demonic activities in the universe, instead it emanates from the kind of world God purposefully created – one that will provide challenges that will help His creatures grow and develop according to His expectations. This chapter ends with a review of various approaches with which open theists have discussed God's interaction with His world vis-à-vis the paradigms of love and control.

The second part of Rice's book, chapters six to eleven, shows how Christian doctrinal themes can be understood using the open theism paradigm. In chapter six Rice attempts to address the criticism that open theism proposes a limited view of God by reiterating the argument that it instead presents a rich paradigm for reappraising the doctrine of God and other central doctrines of the Christian faith. He equally recommends the use of more positive terminology other than the "limit" or "limiting" connotation. A further argument is that it is actually the traditional view of God that poses limitation and restriction in understanding the doctrine of God. Rice then suggests five compelling reasons why open theists and their critics should eliminate "limit" language completely from the open theism discourse.

Concerning Christian doctrines, Rice admits the limitation of the open theism motif in constructing a complete theological system; instead, he sees open theism as a theological perspective to enrich theological reflections, and even *The Future of Open Theism* represents his views on the subject matter and not a consensus view of all open theists. Cautiously Rice begins, in chapter seven, to explore the implications of open theism for God's own identity. Central to the Christian understanding of God is the doctrine of the Trinity. From an open theism perspective, the expressions *Father*, *Son*, and *Spirit* connote relationality, that is, God is inherently relational, interactive, and dynamic. God's

relational and interactive acts in salvation history derive from the essence of the Trinity. The implication being that temporality applies to God's inner life as well as to His experience of the world.

Chapter eight considers the basic nature of libertarian freedom for open theism. One of the challenges to the notion of human freedom is the scientific study of human behavior which concludes that there is no such thing as freedom; an argument that human choices derive from neurological phenomena. Doing theology is another challenge to the notion of freedom. Many theologians allege that the freedom open theism promotes distorts the supremacy and centrality of God in the Bible. But Rice contends that libertarian freedom is not about saying no to God, but about saying yes to His invitation to contribute to the world's development. Also, humans have a voluntary, and not a coercive choice to make in accepting God's gift of salvation from sin.

Christology is treated in chapter nine. Rice uses two parameters (Jesus's service to God and humans while on earth) to discuss a Christology of open theism. Jesus's obedience was real, willing, and by choice – especially during the temptations in the wilderness. Open theism maintains that Jesus's entire mission on earth was a risk on God's part, given that Jesus could have failed the test of loyalty. As a part of the bidirectionality of His service, Rice shows how Jesus's ministry (humanitarian works and miracles) to humans in real time shows the expansive vision of God's loving, caring, and relational work in the world and for His creatures.

In the penultimate chapter Rice responds to the assumption that the libertarian freedom open theism promotes strengthens individualism and in turn poses a threat to the community that the church provides. Rice argues for a replacement of individualism with individuality, or more accurately, what he terms individual-in-community.

The concluding chapter of Rice's book discusses open theism's understanding of eschatology. Borrowing insights from Rudolf Bultmann, Oscar Cullmann, and Wolfhart Pannenberg, Rice examines the nature, totality, and finality of history. On the nature of eternity, Rice notes that temporality and eternity are not incompatible, since "God is both eternal and temporal, utterly changeless in certain respects, and supremely changeable in others; eternally changeless in His essential nature and everlastingly temporal in His concrete experience" (p. 221). Rice concludes with the question of the ultimate security

of the universe when the unknown future God has in store for humanity becomes reality. Given the centrality of human freedom in open theism, will the redeemed still be able to freely choose to love God or not? What if someone chooses not to obey God? To maintain a sinless universe, will God restrict the range of options His creatures could then choose from? Inasmuch as Rice attempts to proffer tenable answers to the questions he raises, his book ends by admitting that the open theism discourse is not a completed task; there is much to do as it has yet to mature into a system of theology.

The Future of Open Theism is well written and with easily-readable language and style; yet, laced with the commensurate theological technicality that a discourse as important as open theism demands. Professor Rice has equally used a wide range of authoritative sources from across the spectrum of supporters and critics of open theism, which makes his argumentation robust. After reading this book word for word, it can be said that the author accomplished the goal he set for himself – to appraise the development of the openness of God theology. While I am not fully converted to the claims of open theism, I find many of its arguments biblically congruous and recommend that those critical of this view spend time reading this well-studied opinion by a practising open theist in order to understand the dynamic transformations that open theism has undergone since 1994. In any case, “openness” is a crucial prerequisite for theological reflection.

John Okpechi is a graduate student at Friedensau Adventist University, Germany, where he assists at the Institute of Adventist Studies. He is also part of *Spes Christiana*'s editorial team. E-mail: john.okpechi@stud.thh-friedensau.de

Book Review

Scott R. Swain. *The Trinity: An Introduction.* **Short Studies in Systematic Theology.** Wheaton: Crossway, 2020. 154 pp.

The book deals with a particularly complex and controversial subject: the Trinity. This is an introduction to the subject. The topic is covered in some 150 pages. Christians struggle to understand this transcendent notion of the Trinity (Father – Son – Spirit) because it goes far beyond what humans can imagine. The Bible presents a triune God in action in creation and redemption. It is this notion that the author introduces to his readers.

The author of this book, Scott R. Swain, presents in a very concise way the doctrine of the Trinity as it can emerge from the biblical texts, both the Old and the New Testament. He systematizes his remarks so that this teaching can be understood and useful to the Church. The author specifies that “Systematic theology takes God and all things in relation to God as its object.” This book is part of a collection in which each volume “introduces the doctrine, sets it in context, develops it from Scripture, draws the various threads together, and brings it to bear on the Christian life.”

Dr. Swain is President of Reformed Theological Seminary in Orlando, Florida, where he teaches Systematic Theology. He is an ordained pastor of the American Presbyterian Church. He has published several books on issues related to Theology Proper and has collaborated in several publications. We must recognize in him this ability to make accessible a theme as complex as that of the Trinity. To make this doctrine comprehensible, it is necessary to attempt definitions of God, of Jesus and of the Spirit, but also to say how and why the first "person" is called God the Father, the second Jesus the Son, and the third the Holy Spirit.

After a general introduction, the author presents the subject in eight short chapters. In the first chapter, Swain comments on the text of Matthew 28.19 which says that one must baptize for or in the name [εἰς τὸ ὄνομα – *eis to onoma*] of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. The word "name" is singular. “If 'the name', says Swain, is a reference to God's proper name,

YHWH, then, according to Matthew, the holy name of the Lord, the name which signifies - above all names - the uniqueness of one God, belongs to the three: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. These three are the one God. In this case, the three persons are not three gods. Nevertheless, these three persons are distinct from each other and have a name that qualifies them: "the Father", "the Son" and "the Holy Spirit". The author presents the asymmetrical relationships between the three persons. The Father begets the Son. The Spirit originates in the Father and the Son, and the Father does not originate in anyone. The Father is the eternal source of the Son. As for the Holy Spirit, he proceeds from the person of the Father and from the person of the Son in eternity.

Chapter two presents the three types of biblical texts which, according to Swain, speak of the Trinity: texts which relate the words of the persons of the Trinity which speak of one or the other person, texts which speak of the cosmos and the cosmic work of the divinity and the texts dealing with redemption and presenting the works of each of the persons of the Trinity.

The third chapter presents the one and indivisible God; it is therefore not possible to affirm the existence of three gods in one. Each divine person is identical to the one God in all his fullness.

In the fourth chapter, Swain presents God the Father who, for him, begot the Son from all eternity (paternity). As for the Son, he is eternally begotten by the Father (filiation). Finally, the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, also from time immemorial (spiration). The paternity of God is unique, it is not an imitation of another paternity. It is determined by divine paternity itself and transcends any limitation that would be that of the creature. I would have expected the author to dwell more on the meaning he gives to the verb "to beget" (the Father begets the Son), as well as on the verb "to proceed" (the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son).

Chapter five presents the begotten but uncreated Son, which makes him a unique and transcendent being like the Father. The Son is the Lord our God. In this chapter the author warns against three errors: "modalism" which would mean that the three persons are modes of interaction of God with the world (negation of the dignity of the Son); "subordinationism" which denies that the second and third person of the Trinity are one God with the first person (negation of the true deity of the Son); "eternal functional subordinationism" which affirms that only the Father has authority.

Book Review

Chapter six deals with the question of the Holy Spirit who has always shared the Father's sovereignty, who is at work during the creation and during the life of humans. He is sent to the people of God by the Father and the Son. He is not a mere emissary; he has everything in common with the Father and the Son from whom he proceeds.

In chapter seven, the author discusses the form of the work of the triune God. The divine actions performed in favor of creatures are actions of the three persons of the Trinity.

The book concludes with chapter eight in which the author mentions the final work of the triune God who "builds" a dwelling for the union between the triune God and his children.

The author builds his argument in a very logical way and involves his reader in the progression of his reasoning. Since this is a book intended for a wide audience, the notes are few. Readers benefit from a glossary which allows them to discover certain expressions that are little used in everyday vocabulary. The glossary is followed by a brief bibliography for those who wish to deepen their study. A general index makes it possible to find the essential words used in the text. The last pages contain an index of biblical texts.

This brief study in systematic theology on a topic as sensitive as that of the Trinity allows the reader to get to the point and get an idea of what is hidden behind the word "Trinity". As with any publication, the positions taken by the author are his own.

Dr. Roland Meyer, docteur en théologie protestante (Université de Strasbourg), is Professor Emeritus of Systematic Theology at the Faculté Adventiste de Théologie of the Campus Adventiste du Salève (Adventist University of France). E-mail: roland.meyer@campusadventiste.edu

Book Review

Frank Hasel. *Living for God: Reclaiming the Joy of Christian Virtue*. Nampa: Pacific Press, 2020. 119 pp. (print version); 128 pp. (Kindle version; page numbers given here relate to this version).

This is a very spiritual book. As a sequel to the author's volume titled *Longing for God: A Bible-Prayer Journal* (Pacific Press, 2017), it continues its personal character and focus on practical piety. It is also a book with a personal background. Hasel recounts numerous details of the tragic loss of his wife Ulrike, who died of cancer, and his struggles in other realms of life, such as the envy he once felt regarding a cousin who seemed "more successful."

Why, then, a review of a clearly non-academic publication in a theological journal? Well, so far little attention has been given by Adventist authors to the foundational themes in ethics, including the virtues. In view of the lack of any significant comprehensive attempt at addressing virtue theory, this short book is a first of its kind in the Adventist sphere, at least as far as I am aware.

It is also a uniquely Adventist book. If there are "Adventist virtues," the patience of the saints ("A Transforming Virtue: Waiting," ch. 3) and restfulness (ch. 11, "The Virtuous Rest," mainly regarding the Sabbath) must be among them. Hasel complements these and some more traditional virtues (faithfulness, kindness, courage, humility) with three more types of virtue: crucial Christian ones (love and emulating Christ – chs. 12 and 13), religious practices which he classifies in this category (prayer, chs. 7 and 8, and a kind of fasting, ch. 10: "The Virtue of Digital Detox"), and "intellectual" virtue (ch. 1, subcategories: intellectual carefulness, fair-mindedness, honesty, and humility).

Prayer and fasting-as-digital-detox are somewhat surprising candidates on the list, but one understands the author's choice better when one reads until chapter 12, where he explains that for him virtues and habits are closely linked (p. 109). This remark is key for understanding Hasel's approach: Although he does not mention Aristotle (who only appears in connection with Kepler and geocentrism [p. 19]), the first great virtue ethicist, his understanding of virtues

as a result of practice is close to the philosopher in this regard. What is missing in the reflections here, however, is a reference to, or discussion of the well-known definition of virtues by Aristotle as being a mean between extremes. The section on the virtue of courage (pp. 32–34), one of the classic examples of ancient virtue ethics, would have easily lent itself to this purpose: I would have been curious to know how Hasel relates his thinking to the insights of the ancient philosopher.

With regard to Hasel's intellectual virtues, placed right at the beginning of the book, I could not agree more. His insistence upon intellectual honesty and humility (pp. 20–21), the warning against bias (p. 19), observations regarding careless thinking (p. 17) and even the peak statement that "You cannot truly worship God without thinking" stem from a celebration of the sanctified mind that is as characteristically Adventist as it is based on the ideas of the biblical writers. While one does not need to present "heart" and "mind" as opposed to each other (p. 18; in Jewish thinking the heart was not so much the seat of emotions, but of thinking, of wisdom, conscience, of morality), this contrast is frequently made among Christians, so it is not unreasonable to emphasize the mind in discussions of ethics.

Altogether the virtue list that we are confronted with is somewhat atypical, but the author claims neither comprehensiveness nor having a final say on which virtues are crucial and which should be of secondary importance (such as the ranking that the traditional list of cardinal virtues implies). In fact, with a good number of reflection questions at the end of each chapter, it becomes clear that the aim of this small book, rather than settling for any kind of theory, is to stimulate the reader's moral and spiritual instincts. Probably the best use of the book, beside individual reflection, would be small groups. With such a *Sitz im Leben* and ensuing group discussions, readers certainly benefit most.

There are many instances where I felt touched and where I agreed. The previously unpublished story of Hasel's grandfather, who spared the life of a Russian soldier in hiding, and afterwards was spared his own life by the same man, touched me so much that I had to shed tears (pp. 31–32; the grandfather is the main character in the book *A Thousand Shall Fall*, Review and Herald, 2001: The pacifist soldier who carried a fake gun made from wood throughout World War II). It is not only a fitting illustration of the virtue of kindness, but it also actually implies that virtue can come at great risk and with great reward.

The Sabbath as a space for virtue is a most inspiring idea for exploring an Adventist brand of virtue ethics further, as are Hasel's reflections on waiting (e.g., this one: "waiting is ... about who you can become"; p. 43). And the entire chapter on digital detox is a timely cautionary notice to a generation glued to small handheld computers. (It is a certain paradox, though, that this was the first book ever that I had to read on a laptop computer – it was only available as a Kindle version in my country. Of course, the author did not decide about the distribution policy of the publishing house.)

One element that I would have formulated differently is found in the section on faithfulness. The author emphasizes that faithfulness must be 100%, not merely 95% (p. 28). I agree, but virtues cannot be counted. And perhaps another way of presenting the legitimate concern would have helped avoid a flavour of moral perfectionism that can be read into this statement. A passage that I found unconvincing was the author's list of authority/submission relationships (borrowed from Tom Yeakley, *Growing Kingdom Character*, NavPress 2011, 59): "God and mankind, government and citizens, employer and employees, husband and wife, parents and children, and spiritual leaders and followers." (p. 58) Although Hasel emphasizes the need for "appropriate boundaries" with regard to "abusive or unsafe" persons in authority, I would respectfully disagree with the idea that all these relationships reflect authority/submission structures. Employees are in a contractual relationship (so are married couples, in addition to their mutual love); husband and wife are supposed to submit to each other (Eph. 5:21); humility is necessary for parents as much as for spiritual leaders – and the latter are servants rather than masters. But the author's goal was merely to illustrate how humility works out in various realms, so probably I should not overstretch my comments here.

The book ends with a strong emphasis on God's love as being foundational for all virtues, and on Christ as their origin. "Jesus is our virtue" (p. 125): Therefore virtuous living is beautiful (p. 14) and therefore we do not need to be heroes (p. 15) – Christ is our hero, and ultimately Christian virtuous living is simply following Jesus Christ. I could not agree more.

Stefan Höschele, Ph.D. (University of Malawi), is Professor of Systematic Theology and Adventist Studies at Friedensau Adventist University in Germany. E-mail: stefan.hoeschele@thh-friedensau.de

Book Review

René Gehring. *Die Dreieinigkeit in Bibel und Adventgeschichte.* Wien: Top Life Wegweiser-Verlag, 2021. 168 S.

In der Einleitung seines Werkes weist der Autor auf den zweiten Artikel der Glaubensüberzeugungen der Kirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten aus dem Jahr 1980 hin: „Es ist ein Gott: Vater, Sohn und Heiliger Geist, eine Einheit von drei gleichermaßen ewigen Personen.“ Doch dieser Satz stehe bei manchen Adventisten so sehr in der Kritik, dass ganze Gemeinden darunter leiden. Besonders seit den 1990er Jahren könnten innerhalb der Kirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten verstärkt sogenannte antitrinitarische Tendenzen beobachtet werden (S. 9). Aber zunächst soll die Bibel als „einzige Glaubensgrundlage“ der Adventisten für sich allein sprechen. Schon das Alte Testament enthalte eine Vielzahl deutlicher Belege dafür, dass der Glaubensartikel über die Dreieinigkeit korrekt ist. Das Neue Testament wird hier noch deutlicher und erschließt insbesondere die Göttlichkeit Jesu und die Persönlichkeit des Heiligen Geistes noch umfassender, so der Autor (S. 10).

René Gehring promovierte 2009 in Geschichte an der Universität Salzburg und 2011 in Theologie am Avondale College/Australien. Er war vier Jahre Pastor im Raum Kassel und zwei Jahre in Österreich. Seit 2017 ist er Direktor des Seminars Schloss Bogenhofen, ein Bildungszentrum der Kirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Österreich und der deutschsprachigen Schweiz, bei St. Peter am Hart/Oberösterreich.

Oft werde die Meinung vertreten, die Dreieinigkeit sei nur mit dem Neuen Testament belegbar. Das Alte Testament würde demgegenüber lediglich von einer einzigen göttlichen Person sprechen. Dem widerspricht Gehring im Kapitel 1 mit der Überschrift: „Der dreieinige Gott im Alten Testament“. Die ersten Hinweise auf die Dreieinigkeit bzw. auf mehr als eine einzige göttliche Person, findet der Autor bereits auf den ersten Seiten der Bibel, nämlich in 1. Mose 1,26: „Und Gott sprach: Lasset uns Menschen machen als unser Bild, uns ähnlich!“ Hier wird deutlich, dass es zwar nur einen einzigen Gott gibt, der „aber durchaus aus (mindestens) zwei göttlichen Personen besteht“ (S. 16).

Auch der am häufigsten verwendete hebräische Begriff Elohim für „Gott“ ist grammatikalisch eine Pluralform, obwohl es drei andere hebräische Begriffe gibt, die „Gott“ grammatikalisch im Singular beschreiben würden. Elohim könnte daher auf mehrere göttliche Personen deuten, die als eine einzige Gottheit gemeinsam handeln (S. 17f.).

Zudem finden sich Bibeltexte, die zeigen, „dass es mindestens zwei göttliche Personen gibt, die sogar beide als Jahwe bezeichnet werden und eng zusammenwirken“. Das ist beispielsweise in 1. Mose 19,24 beim Untergang von Sodom der Fall. Hier ist die Rede von einem Jahwe auf der Erde und einem zweiten im Himmel. „Es muss demnach mehr als einen einzigen Jahwe geben“ (S. 20). Mit dem Begriff Jahwe kann tatsächlich einmal Gott-Vater gemeint sein, an anderer Stelle aber auch Gott-Sohn. Dieses Verständnis deckt sich mit verschiedenen Aussagen des Alten Testaments, in denen Jahwe genannt wird und die dann im Neuen Testament auf Jesus Christus bezogen werden, so z. B. Jes. 40,3 und Joh. 1,23 oder Jes. 45,23–24 und Phil. 2,10–11.

Die alttestamentlichen Bibelstellen, die von allen drei göttlichen Personen sprechen, sind allerdings nicht so zahlreich und auch nicht so deutlich wie jene, die allein den Vater und Sohn zum Inhalt haben, stellt Gehring fest und nennt Beispiele (S. 27–29). Er findet im Alten Testament auch Hinweise, dass der Heilige Geist nicht als bloße Kraft Gottes oder als das Denken Gottes verstanden wird, sondern als eigenständige göttliche Person (S. 29–30). Daher lautet seine Schlussfolgerung: „Das Alte Testament kennt einerseits einen klaren Monotheismus, der andere ‚Götter‘ ausschließt. ... Andererseits wird an zahlreichen Stellen der hebräischen Bibel klargestellt, dass Monotheismus nicht bedeutet, dass die eine Gottheit aus nur einer einzigen göttlichen Person bestehe“ (S. 31).

In Kapitel 2 geht es um den dreieinigen Gott im Neuen Testament. Zunächst werden prophetische Vorhersagen des göttlichen Messias im Alten Testament angesehen, die erst durch das Neue Testament verständlich werden. So spricht Gott in Jes. 44,6 von sich selbst als dem „Ersten und Letzten“, was in Offb. 1,17–18 von Jesus Christus in Anspruch genommen wird. Es verwundert daher nicht, dass Jesus auch andere Charakteristika bzw. Bezeichnungen auf sich anwendet, die im Alten Testament allein Gott vorbehalten sind. Damit zeigt er auf, wie stark er bereits in alttestamentlicher Zeit wirkte.

Der Autor weist darauf hin, dass Jesus Christus im Neuen Testament mit verschiedenen göttlichen Merkmalen beschrieben wird. Er nennt Bibelstellen, die von Jesus als präexistenten Gott, als wiederkommenden Erlöser-Gott, als alles erhaltenden, lebensspendenden Schöpfergott, als wahrhaftigen Gott, als allgegenwärtigen, allwissenden Gott und als anbetungswürdigen Gott sprechen. Auch beansprucht Jesus, was Gott gehört.

Danach befasst sich Gehring mit neutestamentlichen Texten, welche den Heiligen Geist als eigenständige, göttliche Person beschreiben. Neben den Einzeldarstellungen von Sohn und Heiligem Geist als eigenständigen, göttlichen Personen, gibt es auch Stellen, die alle drei Personen gemeinsam nennen und damit „wohl am deutlichsten veranschaulichen, dass jede dieser drei Personen zwar eigenständig existieren und nicht das Wesen des einen mit dem anderen identisch ist, dass sie andererseits aber auch untrennbar in vollkommener Harmonie zusammenwirken“, so der Autor (S. 59).

„Als Adventisten glauben wir, dass Gott unsere Gemeinde durch den Dienst Ellen G. Whites (1827–1915) in besonderer Weise prophetisch führte“ (S. 10). Deshalb lautet das Kapitel 3 „Der dreieinige Gott im Schrifttum Ellen G. Whites“. Gehring stellt fest: „Verteilt über nahezu alle Schriften Ellen Whites finden sich Aussagen über die Göttlichkeit Jesu oder die Persönlichkeit und Göttlichkeit des Heiligen Geistes“ (S. 63).

Das früheste schriftliche Zeugnis Ellen Whites zur Göttlichkeit Jesu findet sich schon im Jahr 1869 im zweiten Band der *Testimonies for the Church*. Die meisten Aussagen dazu gibt es in ihrem 1898 erschienenen Buch *Desire of Ages*. Gehring zitiert über 60 Beispiele zur Göttlichkeit Jesu und schlussfolgert: „Die äußerst zahlreichen Aussagen aus dem Schrifttum Ellen Whites sind unmissverständlich darin, dass Christus von Ewigkeit her Gott war, gleich dem Vater, und diesem in nichts nachstand oder steht“ (S. 87). Auch zur Göttlichkeit und eigenständigen Persönlichkeit des Heiligen Geistes sowie zu den drei göttlichen Personen – Vater, Sohn und Heiliger Geist – führt der Autor Belege aus dem Schrifttum von Ellen G. White an. Da manche Adventisten besonders die Aussagen von Ellen White zur eigenständigen Gottheit des Heiligen Geistes als Fälschung ansehen, wurden „Fotos der Originalschriften samt Unterschrift Ellen Whites unter den wichtigsten und deutlichsten Zitaten beigegeben“ (S. 88).

Schon zu ihren Lebzeiten taten sich manche ihrer Zeitgenossen schwer mit der allzu deutlichen Darstellung von Ellen White der drei göttlichen Personen. Sie meinten, dass dies nicht der ursprünglichen adventistischen Lehre entspräche und deshalb gewiss nicht von ihr unterstützt werden könnte. Einer der Zweifler war Milian L. Andreasen (1876–1962). Er besuchte 1902 Ellen White in ihrem Heim in Elmhaven/Kalifornien und studierte drei Monate lang ihre Originalmanuskripte. 1948 bekannte er in einer Ansprache vor der adventistischen Gemeinde in Loma Linda/Kalifornien: „Ich glaubte damals, dass ihre Sekretäre und Korrekturleser sie [Ellen Whites Schriften] verändert hatten, denn ich war mir sicher, dass sie es nicht in der Weise geschrieben haben könnten, wie es im Druck erschien. Ich brachte eine Menge Zitate mit, die ich im Original prüfen wollte, in ihrer eigenen Handschrift. Ich wollte sehen, wie diese Zitate aussahen, bevor sie durch das Korrekturlesen ausgebessert wurden. Mir wurde Zugang zu den Manuskripten gewährt. ... Aber nun sah ich es in ihrer eigenen Handschrift, genauso wie es veröffentlicht worden war. Das traf auch auf andere Aussagen zu. Als ich es überprüfte, stellte ich fest, dass es Schwester Whites eigene Formulierungen waren“ (S. 100f.). Auch heute sind die Originale noch einsehbar.

Das Kapitel 4 „Die Dreieinigkeitslehre in der Adventgeschichte“ bietet nur einen knappen, grundlegenden Überblick. Für ein breiteres Studium verweist Gehring auf eine Reihe anderer Artikel zur Thematik (S. 103, Fn. 20). Tatsache ist, so der Autor, dass die Dreieinigkeitslehre nicht zu den ersten Lehren des adventistischen Glaubens gehörte. Der Verlauf der Entwicklung zeigt, dass die anfängliche Positionierung in Befürworter oder Gegner meist davon abhing, in welcher Glaubensgemeinschaft die betroffene Person aufgewachsen war und ob diese Lehre dort befürwortet oder abgelehnt wurde (S. 103). Die frühen Jahre der Adventgeschichte bezeichnet Gehring als „dunkle Jahre“ hinsichtlich der Dreieinigkeitslehre. Es war kein zentrales Thema – und wo es doch behandelt wurde, sind vielfach noch semi-arianische Ansichten erkennbar. Angestoßen durch ein anderes zentrales Glaubenthema, die „Rechtfertigung durch Christus“ (1888), wurde die Kirche zu einer intensiveren Untersuchung ihres Christusverständnisses und damit auch der Dreieinigkeit geführt (S. 126).

Im abschließenden Kapitel 5 geht René Gehring auf „Kritische Fragen zur Dreieinigkeitslehre“ ein. Dabei handelt es sich um vermeintlich antitrinitarische Bibeltexte, die zu folgenden Fragestellungen führen: Wurde Jesus „gezeugt/geboren“? Ist Jesus geringer als der Vater? Ist nur der Vater „allein

wahrer Gott“? Werden auch Menschen als „Gott“ bezeichnet? Ist Jesus nicht allwissen? Ist der Heilige Geist nur der Geist Christi/Gottes? Kann ein Geist eine Person sein? Ist die trinitarische Taufformel (Matth. 28,19) echt? Laut Gehring lassen sich alle vermeintlich schwierigen Fragen oder Textstellen „problemlos in das gesamtbiblische, dreieinige Bild Gottes einfügen“ (S. 152).

Das Buch erschien in der Reihe „Schriften für die Gemeinde“ des Seminars Schloss Bogenhofen. Es richtet sich vor allem an die Mitglieder und Freunde der Kirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten und ist apologetisch ausgerichtet. Das wird besonders im Abschnitt „Ergebnis und Konsequenzen“ am Ende des Werkes deutlich. So behauptet Gehring: „Die große Fülle an trinitarischen Belegtexten sowohl im Schrifttum des Alten und Neuen Testaments als auch in den Büchern, Artikeln und Briefen Ellen Whites macht es im Grunde unmöglich, die Dreieinigkeit abzulehnen“ (S. 153).

Dennoch gibt es Adventisten und Splittergruppen, bestehend aus ehemaligen Mitgliedern der adventistischen Kirche, die genau das tun. So sorgt das Thema Trinität in manchen Adventgemeinden für heftige Auseinandersetzungen, worunter alle Mitglieder leiden. Die antitrinitarischen Splittergruppen betrachten sich als die wahren Adventisten, die noch an der alten Adventbotschaft, so wie sie von den Mitbegründern und Pionieren der Kirche vertreten wurde, festhalten.

Diese Splittergruppen beschuldigen die Kirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten die vielen Aussagen von Ellen White zur Dreieinigkeit gefälscht zu haben. Die vorhandenen originalen Handschriften von Ellen White ignorieren sie. Es geht sogar die Verschwörungstheorie um, dass die Jesuiten durch Unterwanderung der adventistischen Kirchenleitung dafür gesorgt hätten, dass die Trinitätslehre Bestandteil der Glaubensüberzeugungen wurde. Deshalb gehöre die Kirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten, wie die anderen von Gott abgefallenen Kirchen, zum in der Bibel erwähnten antigöttlichen Babylon, so dass alle noch treuen Adventisten ihre Kirche verlassen müssten, um nicht von Gott bestraft zu werden.

Gehring erwidert: „Während viele Gegner der Dreieinigkeitslehre bemüht sind, jenen Abgötterei vorzuwerfen, die Jesus und den Heiligen Geist als Gott annehmen und verehren, sei darauf hingewiesen, dass man diesen Vorwurf vielmehr auf die Ablehnung jener umkehren muss, die Jesus Christus und/o-der den Heiligen Geist als Gott ablehnen.“ Der Autor weist darauf hin, „dass es kein geringerer als Satan war und ist, der Jesus von seinem göttlichen Thron

stoßen möchte (Jesaja 14,12–14; Matthäus 4,9). Selbstverständlich ist es auch seine Absicht, Menschen genau hierzu zu verleiten – und gerade der Antitrinitarismus wirkt in eben diese Richtung! ... Es ist bedauerlich, wenn sich Christen diesem Werk Satans anschließen und eine oder gar zwei der drei göttlichen Personen ihrer göttlichen Autorität und Ehre berauben“ (S. 153). Das klingt hart, scheint jedoch angesichts des auf Misstrauen bauenden und zerstörerischen Wirkens von Einzelpersonen und Splittergruppen angemessen zu sein.

Seit dem 4. Jahrhundert wird in der Kirchengeschichte über die Trinitätslehre gestritten. In diesen langen Jahrhunderten sind alle Für und Wider ausgelotet worden, sodass es wohl kaum noch neue Argumente gibt. Deshalb mahnt Gehring: „Da Gott unser menschliches Fassungsvermögen um ein unendliches Maß übersteigt, ist gerade auf diesem Gebiet äußerste Vorsicht und Demut geboten. Es gibt in dieser gegenwärtigen Welt noch vieles, was nicht nur uns, sondern schon den biblischen Propheten und Aposteln rätselhaft war“ (S. 10).

René Gehring legte in seinem Buch Wert auf Genauigkeit. Das betrifft die zitierten Bibeltexte mit der möglichst genauen deutschen Übersetzung, wie auch die Ellen White-Zitate, welche wortgetreu aus dem englischen Original übersetzt wurden. Sein Werk ist übersichtlich strukturiert und enthält eine Fülle von Bibeltexten und Zitate von Ellen White. Wer noch tiefer in die Thematik eindringen möchte, findet im Anhang weiterführende meist englischsprachige Literatur „aus adventistischer Feder“ (S. 158).

Das verständlich und sachlich geschriebene Buch mit 68 erläuternde Fußnoten ist ein Beleg dafür, dass der Artikel 2 der adventistischen Glaubensüberzeugungen biblisch gut begründet ist. Dabei geht es nicht nur um eine Lehre, sondern um die Gottheit selbst. Deshalb ist es nicht gleichgültig, ob jemand an eine oder drei göttliche Personen glaubt. Gerade wer in dieser Frage unsicher ist oder sich hat verunsichern lassen, sollte das Buch von René Gehring lesen.

Holger Teubert, Pastor i. R., Diplom-Theologe (Theologische Hochschule Friedensau), war über 20 Jahre für Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, Apologetik, zwischenkirchliche Beziehungen und Kriegsdienstverweigerung der Freikirche der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten in Deutschland (Nord- und Süddeutscher Verband) zuständig. Gleichzeitig war er Chefredakteur des Adventistischen Presbiterien (APD Deutschland). E-Mail: holger.teubert@t-online.de

Book Review

Jehu J. Hanciles. *Migration and the Making of Global Christianity.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2021. 461 pp.

According to the promotion text on the jacket, Jehu Hanciles' book provides "a magisterial sweep through 1500 years of Christian history." The distinguished church historian Philip Jenkins agrees, and, in his foreword, credits Hanciles with redrawing "the historical maps by which we understand the Christian story." Jenkins just regrets that he did not write "this excellent book" himself (p. xiii). The author, Jehu J. Hanciles, hails from the West African country of Sierra Leone. He currently teaches at the prestigious Emory University in Atlanta (Georgia, USA) and has several important books to his name. His study *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration and the Transformation of the West* (2009) was widely acclaimed. This review focuses on his newest book in which migration plays an even more crucial role. Hanciles, repeatedly, in this new book emphasizes that "migration is a defining feature of human existence and a significant force of historical change" (p. 416), and that migration has been a primary factor in the spreading of Christianity. This study "debunks the centuries-old view that the global spread of the Christian faith is largely the work of institutional entities (ecclesiastical or political) and their trained agents" (p. 8). Hanciles' thesis is that the global expansion of Christianity was not primarily the result of the endeavors of professional missionaries and of initiatives by major political powers ("empires"), but depended to a very large extent on the migration of Christian individuals and groups (p. 2). This is not only an important aspect for our understanding of the past, but remains quite relevant even today, as currently around half of all migrants in today's world are Christians (p. 418: note 39).

Migration and the Making of Global Christianity is composed of two main parts. The three chapters of Part One provide a "conceptual overview" and deal with key issues of human migration, while the seven chapters of Part Two focus on examples of migration which were important for the expansion of the Christian faith in selected areas of the world.

The first chapter describes the role of migration in human history in general. Different types of migration are to be distinguished – such as migration of people within their own community or the establishment of new communities modelled on their home community (p. 21) – and also different types of migrants. Captives, slaves, refugees and other settlers join existing communities. Seasonal labourers, exiles and other sojourners often join a community on a temporary basis. In addition, there are nomads, monks, and other itinerants who seek no permanent residence. Invaders and colonizers may seize control of other communities, sometimes displacing them (p. 26). Political disturbances can lead to large-scale people movements. Babylonia and Assyria made it their policy to move peoples around.

The next chapter is entitled “Understanding Conversion” and deals with important religious aspects of migration. Migrants carry their religious beliefs and practices with them (p. 42). The “conversion” of individuals and groups, whether in the context of migration or in some other situation, is usually a complicated, process-oriented, phenomenon with social, cultural and religious dimensions (p. 53). It often takes several generations to be completed. Moreover, “migration ... does more than facilitate the cross-cultural expansion of the Christian movement; it often provides the impetus for historic transformations of the faith” (p. 71). “The historical study of mission and migration in the Christian experience requires theological understanding and insights” (p. 77).

Chapter 3 completes Part One with an examination of the role of migration in the biblical tradition, especially in the Torah. In the biblical stories, migrant categories tend to overlap. The migration theme not only dominates the patriarchal narrative but continues to play an important role in Old Testament times. The Israelites were migrant-outsiders (strangers and foreigners with no homeland) when they allied themselves with Yahweh (p. 109). Significantly, the Israelite laws contain many rules about the treatment of foreigners. Mass deportations by the Assyrians, and the exile of Judah by the Babylonians, are particularly noteworthy. In the New Testament the migrant theme continues: Jesus constantly crosses borders, Paul becomes a “perennial migrant” (p. 136), and early Christians disperse from Jerusalem after the death of Stephen.

The historical assessment in Part Two begins with a discussion of the immigrant factor in the Roman Empire. Most literature, Hanciles argues, prioritizes the institutional and organizational development of the early church, but, in reality, migrants and their networks provided the major impetus for the spread of the Christian faith within the Roman Empire (p. 142). The numerical growth of the church was “mainly due to the “unregulated missionary efforts of ordinary believers” (p. 147). Diaspora Jews, utilizing synagogue networks and Greek speaking merchants were important agents (p. 162). As time passed, theological controversies in the church, often resulting in expulsions and/or the exile of leaders, led to new missionary activities (p. 182). Arianism, though condemned as a heresy by several councils, played an important role in the transnational spread of the gospel.

This is where the next chapter continues the story and moves to developments in the border regions of the Roman Empire, where vast migrations took place. Hanciles focuses, in particular, on the Christianization of the Goths and their role in the spreading of the faith – mostly in its Arian variant. Missionary activities beyond the Roman frontiers tended to be “disparate, haphazard and unstructured. The main agencies were Christian migrants: traders, soldiers, refugees, exiles, slaves, captives, emissaries, and self-designated or official missionaries” (p. 190). “The story of how the Goths turned to Christianity provides important glimpses into the role of migration in the global spread of the Christian movement in the first millennium ...”. It “took place against a backdrop of widespread invasion, popular resettlement, seizure of Christian captives, piracy and pillage, expulsion or exile, expanding trade networks ... and extensive intertribal warfare” (pp. 213–214). “In many parts of Europe the dissemination of Christian ideas and practices to non-Christian populations began long before the arrival of official missionaries or formal efforts at Christianization.”

In chapter six we follow the beginnings and extensive growth of the church eastward (before the ascent of Islam), in the region that would be known as the Sassanian Empire. In a way, Persian Christianity benefitted from numerous Roman-Persian hostilities, which resulted in large-scale migration (p. 221). A major proportion of Persian Christians arrived as migrant-outsiders (p. 225). Many had been strongly influenced by monophysite teachings, and this meant that Persian Christianity soon received a Nestorian label (p. 231). Hanciles points out that assumptions about what exactly constitutes

orthodoxy (as encapsulated in the Nicene teaching) to a major extent depend on a Eurocentric understanding of history and theology. Eastern Christianity must be studied in terms of its own historical and cultural setting (pp. 234–235).

Next, the book turns to the spread of Christianity among the peoples of Europe, in particular Scandinavia. Here also migration rather than any institutional missionary program played the key role. The Christianization of these lands was a long, often fluid process that defies easy analysis. The improvement of long-distance travel (especially by sea) inspired pilgrims, monks, and other religious travellers. Among the migrants who went North, women should not be overlooked. Christian wives, and in some cases Christian queens, had a major missionary influence. (Queen Clothilda – 5th century – who married King Clovis of the Franks, and Queen Bertha who married, ca. 580, the Anglo-Saxon prince Aethelbert, are well-known examples.)

At any rate, the medieval world was a world of extensive migrant movements with innumerable opportunities for missionary work. However, in addition to the migrant element (e.g., Christian captives brought back from Viking raids) the monastic missionary program was also important for the establishment of Christianity in Northern Europe.

Chapter eight chronicles how in the pre-Islam era Christianity spread eastward along the Silk Road. The book emphasizes that, here also, Christianity did not spread as a result of empire building (political factors), but through the missionary efforts of Christian migrants (p. 321), with merchants playing a pivotal role (p. 322). Like in the Persian Church, Nestorianism flourished. Citing church historian Alphonse Mingana, Hanciles affirms that the Nestorian Church in the East was “by far the greatest missionary church the world ever produced” (p. 328). Citing Samuel Hugh Moffet (another, more recent, authority on Asian church history), he states that the missionary successes of eastern Christians exceeded those in Europe because formal missionary work was supplemented by the influence of widely travelled merchants” (p. 324). This eastward spread of the Christian faith through indigenous converts, merchants and a variety of migrants was an Asia-wide phenomenon. The fascinating story of the (temporary) success of missionary work in China during the T’ang dynasty (9th–11th century) is told at some length.

In chapter nine, the author rounds off his treatments of Christian mission and migration in various regions of the world with some general comments, in which he points out that in more modern times almost all major religions were at some stage adopted as an official religion and that the expansions of these religions (including both Christendom and Islam) were in part due to conquests and colonization (p. 359), but that migration remained an important element. Merchants played an important role in spreading the Muslim faith. On the other hand, we see how large groups of Christians left Muslim territories. The chapter ends with a short treatment of the period of the crusades, with the establishment of the Latin kingdoms in the Middle East, and with some remarks about the Christian presence in Mongolian society.

In the short final chapter (chap. 10), Hanciles suggests that church historians in the West, with their “narrow historiography of the Western tradition,” seem to suffer from a form of serious amnesia about the unparalleled missionary expansion in Asia prior to 1500 (p. 402) and about the dominance of Syrian Christianity, in the period under discussion, as the dominant branch of faith in Asia (p. 403). He also reiterates that the influence of “empires” in mission expansion “should not be assessed in isolation from other historical forces, such as large-scale migration.” It must be kept in mind that migrants were often committed Christians, who manifested a “lived faith” and that this explains much of their success.

The final paragraph of the book is a concise summary of its content: “Taken as a whole, the cross-cultural expansion of the Christian faith to societies and peoples throughout the world – from Scandinavia to the Sassanian realm, from Constantinople to Chang’an – in the pre-1500 period owed little or nothing to state sponsorship or the projection of empire. Institutional authority and agents that are commonly considered indispensable for global Christian expansion, also played a minimal role. When all is said and done, the rise of Christianity as a world movement has been predominantly through the agency and activity of migrants – individuals and communities living as strangers and outsiders in foreign lands” (p. 420).

Migration and the Making of Global Christianity is an impressive work. At times, the multitude of details makes the text rather dense. The extensive footnotes are a bonus, with often very pertinent additional information. Some of this material could perhaps have been part of the main text. This reviewer prefers footnotes (as in this book) over endnotes, as footnotes make it much

easier to check the sources. In some sections, Hanciles is perhaps too combative, as, for example, when he takes issue with the opinion of E. A. Thompson, an authority on early Gothic history, in sections about the Goths.

It came as a surprise that in a book about migration the element of famine as a cause for migration was hardly mentioned. And, also, that very little is said about the meaning of accepting the biblical faith and about the inner experience of conversion. Although the acceptance of the Christian faith – both individually and collectively – is, as has been emphasized in this book, a complex, multifaceted, and often multi-generational, phenomenon, there is also the element of radical individual renewal because of the power of the gospel. That aspect, unfortunately, gets little attention in this book.

One of the rewards of reading this book is the insight that too much study of church history is done from a Western, Eurocentric, perspective, and that “Nicene orthodoxy” is far too often regarded as the absolute theological standard, while large segments of the Christian Church absorbed the Christian faith in its Arian or Nestorian form.

Perhaps Hanciles’ stress on the role of migration is somewhat one-sided. It requires more knowledge about the origin and development of Christianity throughout the world than most readers can claim to possess, to be able to determine this. But, whether or not the author of this valuable book has in places overstated his case, we owe him a great amount of gratitude for making his readers aware of the enormous role of migration in the founding and strengthening of the church in many regions of the world in the pre-1500 period. This seems especially relevant in the third decade of the 21st century, when migration is a powerful force in the revival of the Christian faith in many places where it has lately been losing much of its influence.

Reinder Bruinsma, Ph.D., is the General Editor of *Spes Christiana*. He is a retired pastor and church administrator and author of several theological books in various languages. E-mail: reinder@bruinsmas.com