

Adventists Told
to Keep Sunday

In Reaching the Lost,
Anything Goes—Except...



The Greatest
Show on Earth

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Adventist *Today*



Contextualizing

THE GOSPEL



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Breaking the Rules

By J. David Newman

Life without rules would be impossible; but what happens when rules get in the way of growth? Robert Quinn, professor of Organizational Behavior in the Business School at the University of Michigan, recounts the following:

"A colleague once told me about a group of executives in a large state government who were interested in leadership training. They were particularly interested in teaching transformational leadership. They wanted to develop public administrators who would take initiative, who would make deep change in their organizations. Given the negative stereotype of public administrators as resistant bureaucrats, they wondered if there were any transformational leaders in any agency of their government. They decided to investigate and find out.

"Their analysis revealed a number of cases of people who had made dramatic transformations within their various organizations. One person took over an office renowned for long lines and offended citizens. A year later, it was the best office in the system. Another person took over a hospital where conditions had long been scandalous. Two years later, it was a nationwide model.

"Eventually, they decided to make a video about some of these transformational leaders. Teams went out to interview the leaders. They returned with bad news. The video could not be made. In every single case, the transformational leader had, at least once, broken a state law. To transform the ineffective organization into an effective one, required forms were not turned in, regulations were ignored and directives were violated.

"Does this mean that to be a transformational leader and make deep change in an organization, one has to break the law? No. It does always require, however, that someone must take some significant risks."¹

Ellen White has some great things to say about innovation and rule breaking. Some of them are found in the quotation below. She is speaking in the context of evangelism, but the principles she gives can apply to everything we do.

"There are some minds which do not grow with the work but allow the work to grow far beyond them.

... Those who do not discern and adapt themselves to the increasing demands of the work, should not stand blocking the wheels, and thus hindering the advancement of others."

"There must be no fixed rules; our work is a progressive work, and there must be room left for methods to be improved upon. But under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, unity must and will be preserved.

"Means will be devised to reach hearts. Some of the methods used in this work will be different from the methods used in this work in the past; but let no one, because of this, block the way by criticism."²

In this issue we are publishing several articles on contextualization. It is difficult for some to discern what is cultural and what is universal. Thus, when we go to other countries we import our own ideas based on our culture, which sometimes retards rather than helps what we are trying to do.

Some Adventist churches follow the *Church Manual* slavishly. They are more interested in keeping the rules than in growing the work of God. But as shown by Robert Quinn in the illustration above, there are times when we need to break the rules.

How do we decide? We ask the question: Does this rule in the *Church Manual* advance the work of God or hinder it? If a church or organization is not growing, it is probably because the *status quo* is more important to it than change and growth.

Jesus was once asked why his disciples were not following the same rules as the Pharisees regarding fasting. He said, "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matt. 9:16-17, NIV).

Wine never changes, but the container does. May God give us wisdom in changing the containers within the church.

¹ Robert E. Quinn, *Deep Change: Discovering the Leader Within* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), pp. 4-5.

² Ellen G. White, *Evangelism* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1946), pp. 104-105.

If a church or organization is not growing, it is probably because the *status quo* is more important to it than change and growth.



Kudos

Again you did it, David. Thank you for your article “Is Ellen White REALLY a Lesser Light?” (Summer 2011 issue). It’s just as you said: “If we would teach this [the fallibility of Ellen White], we would take away a huge argument from the critics of the Adventist Church.” Do you think it will happen? Likely not!

And this latest issue (Fall 2011) is really full of good stuff. Hats off to Rob Erwin for his article, “Diversity As an Asset.” Every SDA should read this article! As he pointed out, uniformity is NOT REALISTIC, especially when you are dealing with tens of thousands of people and involving years and centuries. It’s a given.

And Eric Webster’s “Holding the General Conference President Accountable.” Hello! Amen! God has always had a remnant people upon the Earth. Has it ever been a denomination? I think not. Do we have a corner on the truth? How haughty can we get!

Lastly, David, your question I have asked myself: “Is There a Mystery

About the Sabbath We Haven’t Yet Discovered?” A probable answer is YES. It definitely was kept differently in the Old Testament (breaking it punishable by death, etc.). Who knows? It sure is a mystery why many of the prominent non-SDA theologians have not been able to accept it.

I hope I never have to do without *Adventist Today*. It makes me feel normal instead of like a rebel! Keep up the good work!

BARB KONRAD
Loveland, Colorado

Your journal is invaluable. Kudos particularly to Eric Webster’s article “Holding the General Conference President Accountable” (Fall 2011 issue). Especially relevant: “No. 12 encompasses far more than the Adventist Church” (page 20); associating with ministers of other churches; and interaction vs. isolation. I believe it particularly wise to have humility regarding our understanding of TRUTH. After all, there will be a great deal to unlearn and get corrected when we reach the hereafter. Another pregnant point is that the object of worship and veneration is God, not our particular church.

MARILYN HALSELL
Keene, Texas

Diversity

Regarding the *Adventist Today* (Fall 2011 issue) article “Diversity As an Asset,” by Dr. Rob Erwin, I so enjoyed the thoughtful chart on page 18 outlining his description of 13 aspects categorized into four political categories of Adventism from Historic, to Conservative, to Evangelical, to Progressive. What a great discussion item.

I would suggest another (14th) “vital” aspect/subject for his thoughtful description: stewardship. His additional

description with commentary would be interesting and informative. I do not think our church would survive if it became overpopulated with the Progressives.

I believe your readers would look forward to such an addendum in the next issue of *Adventist Today*. Thank you, Dr. Erwin, for a very good article.

RICHARD LANE
Livonia, Michigan

Sabbath Mystery

In the Fall 2011 issue of *Adventist Today*, you end your editorial titled “Is There a Mystery About the Sabbath We Haven’t Yet Discovered?” by saying you would like to hear our (the readers’) answers to this perplexing question.

I don’t see it as a mystery, but actually a very logical answer that some have alluded to; yet it is not the first answer we give about the Sabbath. It seems clear to me that the Sabbath represents the rest we have in Christ. It is a symbol of His righteousness that gives us eternal life. We cannot work our way to salvation. There is nothing we can do to save ourselves. We need not worry about our salvation when we give our lives to Christ. We can rest from such works; He gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us and the fruits of that Spirit.

So I see the Sabbath as a symbol of our rest and trust in Christ. I also believe that the seal is not the keeping of a day, but is given to all who follow Christ. The Spirit will lead His followers to understand the meaning of Sabbath when it is presented to them, not as a work for salvation, but as a symbol of rest from our works.

I have believed this since I worked for Dr. Edmund Janss in the 1970s, when he was director of child sponsorship at

World Vision. When he talked to me about Sabbath, he said that it wasn't needed because Christ was our rest/Sabbath. It came to me at that moment that he was partially right; I told him that we not only need to recognize that truth but that the Sabbath is the symbol of it and a weekly reminder. He liked that answer.

Yes, the Sabbath is a reminder of our creation, but it is even more a reminder of our re-creation. It is also a reminder of how our spiritual ancestors were saved from the Egyptians on their way to the Promised Land. But after that, they still distrusted God and had to wait and wander for 40 years.

There are so many of these parallels and metaphors in the Bible. It makes studying it thrilling.

ELLA RYDZEWSKI
Clarksville, Maryland

It is for the following reasons—factual, biblical, reasoned, and fundamentally Christian—that there have been “no converts from the ranks of large-church pastors and theologians” (Fall 2011 issue).

Because: for most Christian theologians, “The Lord’s Day,” Sunday, rather than the Jewish “Feast of Creation” is the Christian Sabbath. The article on Sunday in *The Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1891 ed., vol. 4, states: “Sunday ... was adopted by the early Christians as a day of worship. . . . Sunday was emphatically the weekly feast of the resurrection of Christ, as the Jewish Sabbath was the feast of creation. It was called the Lord’s day, and upon it the primitive church assembled to break bread. No regulations for its observance are laid down in the New Testament nor, indeed, is its observance even enjoined. Yet, Christian feeling led to the universal

adoption of the day, in imitation of the apostolic precedence. In the second century, its observance was universal.”

There is a biblical reason why “no prominent non-Adventist pastors or theologians have accepted the seventh day as the Sabbath.” Because: “One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord” (Rom. 14:5-6, NIV).

There are rational reasons why “no prominent non-Adventist pastors or theologians have accepted the seventh day as the Sabbath.” Because: we live on a round planet. Consequently, a man-made dateline determines days of the week. In addition, days must be determined by arbitrary 24-hour periods in places near the North and South poles. In these localities the Sabbath, of necessity, is an arbitrarily determined 24 hours.

There are profoundly Christian reasons why “no prominent non-Adventist pastors or theologians have accepted the seventh day as the Sabbath.” Because: the attempt by Adventists to persuade other Christians to become “Sabbath-keepers” upon threat of eternal condemnation is anathema. The Christian community must “stop passing judgment on one another,” must not “put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way,” and must “make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification” (Rom. 14:13, 19, NIV).

ANDY HANSON
Chico, California

Exception to Book Review

It appears to me that David Pendleton’s review of Joel C. Rosenberg’s book *Inside*

the Revolution (Summer 2011 issue) is partially a review of the book and partially Mr. Pendleton’s personal comments. It is sometimes hard to tell which one is speaking.

I take exception to the apparent assumption in this review that Islam is the most radical and the most militaristic of the three Abrahamic religions. There have been many cases throughout history where both Judaism and Christianity have been extremely evil. The Old Testament God is a very vindictive one as portrayed, for example, in Hosea 13:16 and Psalm 137:9, regarding the bashing of babies’ heads against rocks. Another example: the killing not only of all men, women, and children, but also the livestock of the Canaanites.

The expulsion of the peaceful Moors and Jews from Spain in 1492 is another example of evil under the guise of Christianity.

The present persecution of Christians in the Holy Land by the government of Israel is contrary to the tenets of Judaism, but it is being very well tolerated.

Mr. Rosenberg’s proposal that Muslims be converted from Islam to the more “peace-oriented” Christianity is, in my opinion, not likely to get us anywhere. There are millions of Christian-Zionists in this country and throughout the world who are salivating over the Apocalypse, the final war, so that they can have the Second Coming of Christ, which is predicated on Israel’s getting rid of all the Palestinians, by whatever means.

Obviously, there are elements in all three of these religions that one would like to ignore. It is not fair to point out these negative elements in one religion while ignoring them in others.

DORIS RAUSCH
Columbia, Maryland



Contextualization: Something to Avoid, or Something to Embrace?

BY MARCEL PICHOT

IN 1998 MY FAMILY AND I MOVED TO WEST AFRICA TO LAUNCH the Fulani Project. It was an Adventist Frontier Missions project to plant a church among the Muslim Fulani people of Guinea. With four years of pastoral experience, my Master of Divinity from Andrews University, cross-cultural ministry training through Adventist Frontier Missions, and six years spent growing up among the Fulani in Cameroon, I felt well prepared for the project.

In my original project timeline, I was going to work with the traditional Adventist church in Conakry to create a Fulani Ministry. By our fourth year in Guinea, I would have planted our first Fulani church in Conakry and started training Fulanis in theology, mission, and leadership for the next church plants. I envisioned three churches in Guinea by the end of its eighth year. With each church planting another church every two years, the Fulani Adventist work would be established with 12 functioning churches by 2010.

Once in Guinea, I realized that the Fulanis would never be accepted in the Conakry church. Its members were mostly refugees from Liberia and Sierra Leone, very traditional Adventists who had done church the same way for the past 50 years. The Fulanis would have to denounce Islam, Muhammad, and the Qur'an, turn their backs on their friends and families, and adopt the superficial Western Christian values of that

church—as well as Ellen White and the early history of Adventism in America.

Four years into the project, after two years of chronological Bible study, we still didn't have anyone even considering baptism. People were usually impressed that I didn't eat pork, drink or smoke, or practice immorality. They would ask, "Why do you keep insisting that you're a Christian? Christians bring weapons, pork, alcohol, tobacco, and pornography wherever they go! You can't be a Christian; you're a Muslim!"

We prayed. We wrestled with the challenge. A friend suggested contextualization, but I disagreed. Contextualization was for countries where Christianity was illegal. Then I visited a close Fulani friend and asked him if he could ever become a Christian. I expected an offended "Astafullai!" (which means: "God forbid!"), but he got serious and said, "I will never become a Christian. God caused me to be born into a Muslim family. I believe in him, I respect Prophet Muhammad, and I love the Qur'an. I would never want to sin against him by becoming a Christian."

I got similar responses from other Fulanis. One Fulani had asked several different imams how he should relate to us. Their answer: "Christian missionaries have awesome truth to teach us. Learn all you can from them, but don't become a Christian." Wow! When you pray, get ready for God's answers! At least the

situation was clear: we either needed to pack up and go where we could be useful to God, or we needed to completely revisit our mission philosophy. It was time to look into contextualization.

What Is Contextualization?

To *contextualize* means to put a word or activity into a specific context. In cross-cultural evangelism, contextualization is the process of modifying the form or shape of a message in such a way that the meaning its originator intended is clearly understood by any recipients of a given culture, without needing any prior understanding of a culture other than their own.¹

Ever since the 1990s, when contextualization gained prominence in Adventist missions discussions, it has been controversial. Its opponents have warned that contextualization leads to syncretism.

Syncretism is the integration of beliefs that are incompatible with the Bible but are accepted as valid within a culture, with the gospel message, in such a way that error prevails over Biblical truth in the minds of those receiving the gospel. Essentially, basic

elements of the gospel are lost and replaced by religious elements of the receiving culture.²

Words, symbols, behaviors, and practices may vary with contextualization, but God's unadulterated truth shines forth with clarity. With syncretism, God's truth is obscured and corrupted wherever the gospel is preached, leaving local erroneous beliefs unchallenged.

Contextualization Opens the Way

From the moment I acknowledged contextualization as necessary to any cross-cultural evangelistic work, the barriers to leading Muslims to embrace Biblical truth were gone. I realized that the greatest barriers are our "Christian" attitudes toward Muslims.

With contextualization, the Fulani followers of Jesus could remain in Islamic culture. They could reject only the aspects of Islam that were contrary to the Bible. Understood cross-culturally, Islam has a lot in common with Adventist faith.

With contextualization, we could baptize polygamists who were converted and encourage them to be good husbands to all of their wives—and not to take on any more. The Bible upholds monogamy as an ideal, but it does not call polygamy a sin. We could comply with Ellen White's counsel in her book *Education*: "Every true teacher will feel that should he err at all, it is better to err on the side of mercy than on the side of severity."³

While stories about our American Adventist pioneers could encourage the Fulanis, contextualization led us to help them see God at work in their ancestors, leading them from animism to Islam, and now working to lead them to a deeper understanding of him through the Bible.

To contextualize, we replaced Western analogies that Americans understood well with local analogies the Fulanis could identify with. The analogies used by our denomination's Sabbath School quarterlies are a good example. When I translated for James Cress at the Ministerial Council of the African-Indian Ocean Division in 2002, I remember contextualizing his illustrations to make sure that his point was understood by the West African pastors.

Top 10 Reasons for Cross-Cultural Missionaries to Contextualize

1. Contextualization enables missionaries to communicate intentions and meaning accurately to people in cultures other than their own.

Years ago at the Adventist University of France (known then as Campus Adventiste du Salève), an American church leader

While stories about our American Adventist pioneers could encourage the Fulanis, contextualization led us to help them see God at work in their ancestors, leading them from animism to Islam, and now working to lead them to a deeper understanding of him through the Bible.

thought his French was good enough for him to preach without a translator. He had barely introduced the story of his conversion when the congregation broke out in hysterical laughter, and his listeners never fully recovered until the service was over.

A good English translation of what he said would be: “When I look at my behind, I can see that it is divided into two parts.” The speaker meant to say, “When I look at my past...” so that he could establish the difference Jesus made from his conversion onward. He thought he understood the meaning of the word he used, but his listeners attributed a very different meaning to that same word!

The same is true with culture, which gives specific meaning to words, expressions, gestures, signs, actions, etc. People in a host culture watch missionaries closely to figure them out. They attribute meaning to their words, decisions, dress, and even the looks on their faces. Contextualization enables missionaries to be on the same page as their hosts.

2. Contextualization keeps missionaries focused on the recipients of their message.

Contextualization shifts the missionary’s responsibility from what he says to what his listeners understand him to be saying. The missionary shifts his concern from fulfilling his own agenda to helping his listeners’ spiritual growth. When the focus truly shifts to others, the missionary’s role changes from that of a “church standards police” to that of a servant and friend—and a true leader.

Some non-Adventist missionaries in Guinea had put tremendous pressure on the Fulanis they had studied with to eat pork as evidence that they had accepted salvation by faith instead of works. What a test of faith! Had they practiced contextualization, they would have understood that the change that had happened in their Fulani converts was that now they shunned pork out of love for God instead of out of fear of him.

3. Contextualization enables missionaries to assess the needs of others.

The Bible is amazing in its ability to answer people’s questions—no matter what gender, ethnic background, generation, region, class, or culture they are from. Unfortunately many missionaries, evangelists, and pastors are giving answers to questions that previous generations asked, or questions from cultures that are either past or foreign to their audience.

Culture study and immersion help the missionaries understand their host culture. Contextualization enables them to deliver a message that fills a real need, to provide satisfactory answers to honest questions, and to make their messages relevant.

Culture study and immersion help the missionaries understand their host culture. Contextualization enables them to deliver a message that fills a real need, to provide satisfactory answers to honest questions, and to make their messages relevant.

The result? More than simply appreciating what is being communicated, the people get excited because it changes everything when they can finally connect the dots they never could within their cultural context. That’s when we see that God’s truth transcends all cultures.

While missionaries are driven by a desire for their hosts to be saved, contextualization enables them to see that their Muslim hosts’ most pressing need is to be accepted as friends and treated with respect and dignity. Without contextualization, missionaries often turn against their hosts and demonize them for not accepting their message.

4. Contextualization shapes the missionaries’ ministry to fit local circumstances.

Some self-supporting Adventist institutions consider veganism to be a testing truth. Occasionally their missionaries place adherence to veganism as high in their priorities as leading potential converts to accept Jesus as their Savior.

In countries where dry seasons and depleted soil leave poor people without any fruits or vegetables for several months, veganism is simply not an option. I suggested that in order to survive, they really needed to eat some of the animals they raise every year.

No one in Guinea knew what grape juice or fig trees were, so

Today most children of Seventh-day Adventist church members are growing up in a culture that is different from that of their parents. Their parents and grandparents have a hard time relating to them and accepting the differences.

we suggested that people instead make juice from the Bissap flower to use for communion. And we proposed reading Micah 4:4 this way: “Every man will sit under his own banana tree and his own mango tree.”

5. Contextualization generates trust.

In 1852 Joseph Bates went to Battle Creek to plant a church. God impressed him to ask for “the most honest man in town.” That man, David Hewitt, was instrumental in establishing the Seventh-day Adventist church in Battle Creek, where our denominational headquarters was located for many years.

Contextualization requires finding trustworthy people in a host culture. They can be invaluable in helping a missionary understand that culture, and they become the key to enabling others to trust a missionary they might otherwise abuse or fear. Maybe that’s why Jesus told his disciples, “Whatever town or village you enter, search for some worthy person there and stay at his house until you leave” (Matt. 10:11, NIV).

In Guinea my illiterate mechanic, Mr. Barry, was a very honest man. I referred a new missionary to Mr. Barry, whose garage was under a mango tree. Unfortunately the missionary felt he was getting ripped off, so he found a “real” shop with fancy hydraulic lifts. There, the Lebanese mechanic charged him 40 times more and replaced his good engine with one that was on its last leg. Unable to understand the cultural context, my friend could only trust his Western perspective, which the Lebanese mechanic used to take advantage of him.

6. Contextualization leads people to be favorable toward missionaries.

Every culture has a predefined set of categories. In the Fulani culture, God and anything associated with him fits into the “Islam” category. Because I was seen as a believer in God, the Fulani put me into the “Islam” category and didn’t understand why I would want them to put me into the “Christian” category—the category of apostasy, pork, immorality, hatred of Islam, alcohol, illicit drugs, misrepresentations of God, etc.

In a very real sense, I was misleading them when I told them I was a Christian and insisted on their seeing things from my perspective. Contextualization enables missionaries to put themselves into the categories that people favor, instead of the categories they shun or revile.

7. Contextualization enables missionaries to find common ground and build on it.

One day a Muslim police officer pulled me over to try to get a bribe. He knew I was a missionary and told me that I was wrong to believe that God was not one but many. He was referring to our Christian belief of the Trinity.

I asked him to explain what Christians believed. He said: “You guys believe that God had a blasphemous affair with Mary and that she got pregnant with Jesus, his bastard child!” I acted very offended and answered “Astafullai! I would never insult God or Jesus, the Messiah he sent, like that! Catholics might believe such things, but I believe the Bible, and the Bible does not teach such blasphemy!”

The bond was immediate! A big smile spread over the police officer’s face, and he gave me the Guinean equivalent of a high-five. He waved me back on my way without the bribe, and from then on we were friends. Contextualization enables missionaries to find common ground, and it changes debates into dialogue.

8. Contextualization leads people to accept missionaries as insiders.

Successful contextualization actually enables a missionary to establish such a level of trust with her hosts that she will be considered an insider. Intentional cultural study and the resulting contextualization of the gospel enable the missionary to see the concerns of people’s hearts, instead of just reacting to the external aspects of who they are. As a result, people feel understood and develop a deep appreciation for the missionary.

I joined my Fulani friends in their fasts during the first Ramadan we spent in Guinea. Every evening I broke the fast with them and attended the mosque for the evening prayers. Though I bowed with my forehead to the ground as Jesus most likely

did, while my friends prayed surahs, I prayed for them and their journey toward God.

While some Muslims thought I should not be allowed to enter their mosque, others thought they should never forbid someone to join them for prayer, even if he was a Christian. After that experience, several people from the neighborhood told me, “Even though you are White and call yourself a Christian, we know you really are one of us.” They viewed me as an insider.

9. Contextualization keeps missionaries from getting in the way.

Without contextualization, missionaries are all about getting their hosts to become like they are. American missionaries often want their hosts to dress like Americans, worship like Americans, sing like Americans, eat like Americans, believe like Americans, etc. Basically, it's all about the missionary. Ultimately, contextualization becomes the only way others can hear God without the missionary getting in the way.

Contextualization allows the missionary to realize that the host does not have to become like him to be acceptable to God. He should be a catalyst enabling his hosts to find God and connect with him, starting their spiritual journey from within their own culture and thus giving the gospel tremendous meaning within their cultural context. When that happens, the gospel spreads rapidly from one person to another within the host culture.

10. Contextualization prevents syncretism.

It is ironic that several of our denomination's leaders believe that contextualization leads to syncretism, when the opposite is actually true.⁴ Traditional evangelism, however, always leads to syncretism in cross-cultural contexts. People who are baptized and join the church end up adopting American forms and learning the same answers we use in American evangelism.

The result is a disconnect between their professed beliefs and the needs they face in their everyday lives. When people embrace only outward forms and learn the right answers to get baptized, yet the core values of their worldview are not addressed with appropriate knowledge and expertise, their old worldview simply assimilates the new forms, practices, and answers they were given, resulting in syncretism.

When missionaries are mission-driven and follow sound accountability practices, contextualization prevents syncretism.⁵


Is There a Need for Adventists to Contextualize the Gospel in America?

It is crucial for Adventist missionaries to contextualize the gospel when they lead people of other cultures, living in foreign countries, to become disciples of Jesus. But we can no longer ignore the ever-

increasing cultural diversity that is challenging our traditional American Adventist worldview right here at home. Our culture is being constantly transformed by globalization, new technologies, communication trends, entertainment, politics, economic realities, medical breakthroughs, social challenges, shifts in values, etc.

Today most children of Seventh-day Adventist church members are growing up in a culture that is different from that of their parents. Their parents and grandparents have a hard time relating to them and accepting the differences. Most Adventists also have a hard time relating to their neighbors and prefer to escape from their communities into the safety of their churches.

Adventist churches across America are aging and dying. As each member of the generation that paid tithes and offerings systematically and unconditionally is laid to rest, the financial crisis from local congregations to our General Conference looms bigger just ahead. There is no way around contextualization if we are to connect with those who have quit attending our churches—to say nothing of those who have never attended.

As we reflect on our need for contextualization, let's remember that Jesus contextualized the gospel for sinful humanity when he came to this earth more than 2,000 years ago. And may Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:22 inspire us: “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.” 

POSTSCRIPT: Because the Adventist Church has rejected the C5 model of contextualization, the Fulani Project was aborted after only seven years, and the Pichots returned to the United States in 2005. God has continued to bless the people they ministered to, however, and today 34 baptized Muslim Adventist believers meet together every Sabbath in Guinea as a result of the Pichots' contextualized work. Unfortunately, there is no mechanism for the denomination to recognize them as legitimate Seventh-day Adventist church members at this time.

Marcel Pichot is interim pastor for worship at New Hope Adventist Church in Fulton, Maryland. He spent nine years working with Muslims in Guinea, West Africa.

¹ Tan, Felipe Jr., *Contextualizing the Gospel Message in Asia: An Adventist Approach* (Institute of Christian Teaching: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Education Department, 1993).

² Reinder Bruinsma, “Contextualizing the Gospel—Option or Imperative?” *Ministry Magazine*, December 1997, p. 16.

³ Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 293.

⁴ “Guidelines for Engaging in Global Mission,” General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, July 2003. See www.adventist.org/beliefs/guidelines/main-guide7.html.

⁵ Dale Goodson, “Exchanging, Not Mixing: Contextualization vs. Syncretism, Part 2,” *Adventist Frontiers Magazine*, July 2009.

ONE OF THE GREATEST REVIVALS IN THE ADVENTIST CHURCH HAS taken place since the year 2000 among the lowest class of Hindus in Andhra Pradesh, central India. The key to this revival has been prayer and a proper enculturation of the gospel.

For most of the 1900s, Christianity was considered a foreign religion brought to India by British colonial rule. Churches and church buildings, Adventist included, were built in Western style with pews, an organ, a piano, and ceiling fans for comfort during worship. The hymns sung were traditional English songs translated into the local dialects.

All of this changed around the year 2000 when a group of

sudden personal, Christian caring began to count for something to those formerly labeled “Untouchables.”

Revival meetings were held in cloth tents with seating on the ground, Indian style, with the women on one side and the men on the other. Traditional Indian drums were used to call the people for worship, and several drummed-out hymns to Jesus and the Holy Spirit were composed and passed down orally to the people.

Miracles at Momen Peta

As a local evangelist for the Southeastern California Conference,

I was asked by Mark Finley (then director of the *It Is Written* television program) to go to India just after the turn of the millennium, along with six other evangelists. I held four campaigns with selected teams of helpers in India. These meetings resulted in the building of four new churches, which served as schools during the week. We also made provision for a full-time pastor and teacher to work for a year after we left.

Momen Peta is located in the foothills, about three hours by Jeep from Hyderabad, capital of the Indian province of Andhra Pradesh and site of the denomination's union headquarters. This area became the most interesting and fruitful of those Indian outreach meetings. Dozens of former Hindu lay evangelists began prayer walks and group Bible studies with the people six months prior to the planned tent meetings.

God sent 3,362 newly baptized members

into the care of the Adventist Church at that time. As the meetings opened, our teams were out daily baptizing in rivers, lakes, and streams with groups of 20 to 60 in each baptismal service. We would then end up at the meeting tents in the evening and run the program until around 8:30 p.m. But the most important aspect of the nightly presentation was the laying on of hands in prayer, following the Bible messages.

Healings and conversions occurred by the hundreds through one-hour prayer services that followed the preaching. For the pastoral team, this was a highly significant opportunity to touch the people because, from a Hindu standpoint, they had been

Beat the Drums for JESUS

By Phil Jones

national Adventist leaders, including Pastor C.H. John, the union president, and Pastor Dalkumalla Thyagaraj, the union secretary, created a worship service that was truly and totally Indian.

Worship Indian Style

Revival broke out when prayer warriors began marching around Indian villages, praying daily for the people. The Adventists, though few in number at the time, began to show a genuine concern for the lower castes. The caste system was officially abolished in India in the late 1940s with the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi, but in actuality it still existed out in the villages. This

labeled as “Untouchables.” Every one of the approximately 5,000 persons in attendance each night wanted to be touched and prayed for individually. During the message I would often ask the people three questions: (1) “Was Jesus British?” They would shout, “No!” (2) “Was Jesus an American?” Again they would answer, “No!” (3) And then I would shout at the top of my voice, “Was Jesus Asian?” “Yes!” would come back the answer, with a force almost strong enough to blow the tent walls down.

As a part of the program, I showed the Telugu version of The JESUS Film produced by Campus Crusade for Christ and Warner Brothers Studios, which was filmed in the Holy Land and follows the Gospel of Luke story faithfully. When the movie showed Jesus coming forth from the tomb, the entire audience was on its feet clapping and shouting for joy. I broke out in tears of excitement and had to pause the film for a bit until the audience calmed down. It was one of the most unusual moments in my 43 years of ministry, 28 of which have been in full-time public evangelism.

The Attractiveness of Adventism

Hindus are raised to worship a pantheon of gods, numbering literally in the millions. There is no thought of a personal god, especially one willing to bear the penalty of sin by his own death on a cross for us. This is a startling new idea to these poor fieldworkers. And coupled with Christians caring for them as people, the gospel of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection is irresistible.

They have been taught to be vegetarians for theological reasons. In the Hindu religion, there is no such thing as death, but rather an endless cycle of reincarnation. So for them to kill a chicken and eat it would be unthinkable, as they might be eating a departed aunt, uncle, or even grandpa or grandma. Therefore, when they receive Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, they look for Christian people who are vegetarians; thus, their receptivity toward Adventist vegetarianism for health reasons is a perfect cultural match.

Another irresistible aspect of Adventism is the commitment of our church to Christian education. Each new church building becomes a school during the week. Under the caste system, children from low-caste families have little chance for a proper education. At the time I was preaching there, typical parents earned the equivalent of 85 cents per day, working a 10-hour shift in the fields. However, when young Adventists were able to graduate with a good grasp of English, they could go to the

city and earn \$10 per hour answering computer-support and marketing phone calls for businesses. Thus, they would make \$80 per day, while their parents worked the same number of hours yet earned only 85 cents.

This is an example of the concept in missiology known as “Redemption and Lift,” which means that when a low-class Hindu becomes a Christian, he or she does not just receive eternal life in the distant future. Life and economic status on Earth are also made better. This is especially true in the Adventist churches. Education and the doing away with alcohol and tobacco do wonderful things for personal finances. Add to this the blessings of tithing, and you will seldom meet an Adventist who remains financially strapped for very long.

Enculturation, Drums, and Salvation

I have heard some Adventists be very critical of the use of drums, either in India or American contemporary Christian music. They refer to drums as “of the devil” and denounce all usage of drums as devilish. I thoroughly disagree with such a position. Good or evil depends entirely on the way drums are used. All music has melody, harmony, and rhythm. The rhythm comes from percussion, usually drums. But remember, even our body has rhythm; it is called a heartbeat. Drums and percussion become a tool of evil only when they take away the message of a song by overpowering the melody and harmony, thus appealing only to our baser human emotions. This is how heavy-metal and hard-rock music is used by Satan to destroy spirituality.

How we Christians use drums and percussion is the important thing. In India the enculturation of drums into Christian music has been a wonderful blessing and has brought many souls to salvation. The fruits of this modern revival are definitely Spirit-filled and heaven-sent. Jesus has told us in Matthew 7:20, “By their fruits you shall know them.”

Will these new converts stick? Many ask if these former “untouchables” are just making the Adventist church of India into a nest of poverty. I would simply remind the skeptics that Jesus always welcomed the poor. The gospel in history has usually spread from the masses to the classes, and not the reverse. The way Christianity reached Caesar’s household was through the servants and slaves.

God is acting! Hang on, and enjoy the ride! 🚀

Phil Jones, now retired, was in full-time evangelism for most of his life in the Southeastern California Conference.

HAVE WE FAILED IN CONTEXTUALIZING THE GOSPEL?

By Jim Brauer



“EXCUSE ME, DO YOU HAVE A COAT?”

I pretended not to hear, as I glanced down at my already soaked shirt. I had just arrived in the country. No, I did not have a coat—nor did I want one. But I came from the division office and therefore was expected to speak, but only if I had a coat.

When the worship leader said, “Don’t worry, I fix,” I worried! Thoughts of serious heat exhaustion crossed my mind. Back he came with a nice “one size fits all” black coat and clip-on tie. Ah, yes, really cynical people do wear ties. I must learn not to be so spiritual (or, is it...cynical?).

Not too far away, I encountered a church that is still singing the same five hymns that the original missionary taught them 30+ years ago. The definition of worship must be to sing those hymns, in that order and in that manner—slowly!

In another country English is little known; yet when it comes time for worship, all of the hymns are sung in English, even though the people do not have a clue what they are singing.

I keep noticing this blonde-haired, blue-eyed Jesus hanging on the walls. But when I ask why they think Jesus was Norwegian, I get these strange looks!

The Mission Field Myth

Writing this article turned out to be much harder than I expected. I would love to say that everything is perfectly fine here in the mission field. It isn’t. The challenges facing this division are huge! But I want to be very careful in both how I write and what I write about, because I have no interest in discouraging anyone, exposing anyone, or embarrassing any tribe or people group. Neither do I (from a Western culture) have the answers. I don’t. The longer I am here, the more questions I collect.

Are we asking the right questions? In a complex, diverse missiological world, finding the right question just might be far more important than most suggested answers. Are we wrestling with the real issues, the hard issues, the issues that determine whether we are on track with our mission? Do we periodically stop and really question our progress, our methods, our mission, our gospel?

So this article is not going to even attempt to provide any answers, except maybe one: keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, while you and I stay in dialogue on these huge issues facing the church.

Is it okay to admit that the older I get, the less I seem to really know? Is it okay to ask questions? Sometimes I honestly wonder. Too often the question can be loaded, or perceived to have an agenda. I have an agenda, it's true: to lift up Jesus and to call people to a life of discipleship, because God first loved us. Salvation is by grace, through faith in Christ, alone! Is my agenda the same as the church's?

Recently the Lord decided, through his own sense of humor, to help in my education by sending me halfway around the world.

My wife and I landed in the Philippines to discover a vibrant variety of Adventists who come to church at 8:30 on Sabbath morning and stay until noon. They sing hymns, all six stanzas, slowly.

Is this worship? I am afraid that I've died and been resurrected in the '60s. But wait, the Filipinos are happy, smiling, vibrant, and in love with the church. How can this be? My education is just beginning ...

My responsibilities as the Adventist Missions director for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division are to make sure that the mission funds are being utilized appropriately. What does "appropriately" mean? We recently concluded a survey of our territory with Clyde Morgan. By the most generous of standards, we know we have hundreds of people groups without a single church, and hundreds of millions who have never heard of Jesus, let alone participated in a Bible study. For example, Islam is the dominant religion in Indonesia, which also has a larger Muslim population than any other country in the world, with approximately 202.9 million identified as Muslim as of 2009.¹ So when I ask, "Are we using the funds appropriately?" I really do mean it. Are we being strategic? Are we wrestling with being clearly missional? Or do we keep on using the funds to reach the tribes and people groups that are "easier"?

The Problem With Money

Everyone is always happy to receive funds, but the longer I am here, the more I discover the welfare mentality of those on the receiving end. "Free" money results in a growing resentment of their dependence. The Adventist Church must at some point wrestle with the significant dependent "welfare" mission field it has created, or else when the Western supply of money slows down, chaos and real suffering will inevitably follow.²

Due to recent baptisms, one country appealed for additional funds. There was a critical need for a pastor to be present to lead, support, and grow the new believers. But adding pastors is not a simple fix! In many parts of the world, you might expect a church of 150 to be able to support its pastor. Alas, the members in this country are so poor that the tithe from 150 people may amount to \$45 a month. The local pastor is paid the gigantic sum of \$150 a month, but that is barely enough to cover food and housing. Most of the pastors do not have cars or motorcycles. While they are paid way above their members, it still isn't enough for them to live on what anyone in the West would consider minimal. Do the math, and you'll quickly understand why the people in these countries struggle to just stay alive!

How do you grow a church if every church plant makes the organization more dependent on outside funding? How do you keep them from sliding into a welfare mentality? Is preaching the gospel only for countries with enough resources to support themselves? These are tough questions. But we must ask ourselves: do we keep on giving additional funds, knowing that we are exacerbating the problem?

There is a growing effort on the part of missiologists to investigate self-supporting initiatives. Instead of directly subsidizing monthly stipends, the church—like most other mission organizations—is recognizing the need to teach the people how to fish (sometimes literally) rather than pay them to purchase fish.

This is an area where businessmen from the West could be a

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great help to the local churches. Expertise in identifying business opportunities and training individuals in the basics of successful business development is desperately needed! Capital? Yes, startup capital is also lacking!

I thought I was a pastor. Now I am attempting to learn business 101? Lord, where are you taking me?

The Underlying Worldview

One of the best things the Adventist Church does for individuals heading for mission service is to first send them to Mission Institute, a very practical experiential preparation for dealing with the stresses and strains of moving to a new culture.

At Mission Institute, author Paul Hiebert was highly recommended. It took a few months before I got around to reading one of his books.³ I was immediately impressed by both the depth of his insights and their practical implication for the world church. I am intentionally mentioning Hiebert in this article for two reasons: first, because I am heavily indebted to his insights, and second, because I hope others interested in the practical issues of missiology will also read him.

In his book *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts*,⁴ Hiebert reviews vital historical progressions in thinking. The age of enlightenment gave way to the modernistic worldview of positivism. With the Western linear thinking pattern, science continued its relentless march bolstering the positivistic worldview that anything was possible. Positivism suggests that with careful analysis of any challenge, careful examination of various alternative solutions, and exhaustive testing of possible results, any problem can and absolutely will be both surmounted and eliminated.

If you have been reading any of the current argumentation (I wish it *were* dialogue) taking place between the creationist and the evolutionist camps, you will recognize the positivistic mindset. The evolutionists are “positive” their view is the only sane one, too quickly countered by the creationist camp attacking back with equal ferocity and positivist tone. I find myself growing tired of the positivist mindset and wonder if the Lord might be attempting to help me grow past being so certain I am right?

Missiology’s Dirty Secret

But Hiebert raises a far more disturbing reality. The positivistic worldview in the West gave rise to the age of colonialism, in which Western societies considered themselves superior to Eastern cultures. In the 1800s, some Western countries began to colonize, enslave, and subjugate countries, tribes, people groups, and world-views considered beneath them.

Hiebert next exposes missiology’s dirty secret: the missionaries who followed the colonialist powers did not speak up and protest this imperialistic, positivist approach to domination. They both couldn’t and wouldn’t, because they too were locked in the same positivist worldview. The Baptists fought with the Adventists, who fought with the Catholics. These missionaries couldn’t *speak up*, because when you are locked in Western linear cultural positivism, you see the world through black and white lenses. The West is not only right, but we have an exclusive claim on truth! We alone have properly exegeted the text! If you join us and are converted by our missionaries, then you too can be assured of salvation! Although we have been so convinced we were right, is it possible that we were simply being European-enlightened linear positivists?

Because I was born in Egypt to missionary parents, I had long heard of and experienced firsthand the failure of early missionaries to recognize their Western bias. Too often converts were simply converted to American cultural habits and American money, rather than to a new life as real disciples of Jesus Christ.

Hiebert points out that often missionaries relinquished control of the indigenous churches only after native-born leaders completed degrees in Western seminaries, colleges, and universities. I must admit I had not connected these dots. Native-born leaders are allowed to lead only once they are certified as being able to think in a Western, linear, positivist worldview, and have been trained to remain faithful to the Western linear positivist denominational policy, created and voted in Western headquarters!

A Deeper Question

There is another implication of this Western linear positivist orientation of reality. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has done relatively well in countries that were previously dominated by colonial powers. The church in the Philippines is a prime example of where evangelism works, baptisms result, and the church grows! At first blush, it does indeed appear to be a win/win.

The problem is that adoption of this Western linear pattern of thinking creates nearly insurmountable barriers for reaching the Asian and Middle Eastern religions of Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Hinduism. Buddhists, for example, have no interest in Western “decadence.” Christianity is dismissed as lacking morals, discipline, and values. These religions are often surprised when they hear the story of Jesus from an Eastern relational, story-based perspective.

However, there is a deeper question we must ask. (By asking this question, I know I might make some of the saints nervous.)

Has the Adventist Church failed to recognize that what it is preaching and teaching may not be the gospel that Scripture suggests?

We attempt to convert people to our modern Western linear, didactic (28 statements of truth) worldview rather than introducing all nations, kindred, tongues, and peoples to the

gospel of a relationship with Jesus, who is the truth. Instead of a near-Eastern relational, Biblical, story-based church culture, we have sadly transmitted our linear, hierarchical, positivist culture.

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Adventists either, who describe truth as 28 fundamental beliefs, laid out in a nice linear, analytical fashion. Are our 28 beliefs the truth? Or is Jesus the truth, as he said?

Have you noticed how Scripture—in an Eastern relational, story-based worldview—often forgets to tell what the specific

meaning of a story is? It trusts instead in the vital relationship between God and his people—that he will lead them! He will convict of sin. He does all of the work!

So What?

What if God just might have to save us as Western positivist, linear thinkers, since that is where he started up this Advent movement? I think he most probably will have to! Why? Most people are not even aware of the worldview they live in, let alone that it does not reflect a Biblical worldview! You can't move away from something you are not even aware of!

God loves people! And he is looking for our hearts, our love, and for a personal relationship with us, no matter our worldview, culture, tongue. In other words, God speaks to us in the midst of our worldview, and we don't have to change!

But there's a flip side to this coin, which will make some very uncomfortable. God also speaks to those who aren't like us in *their* own worldview, and he calls them to a life of discipleship in *their* context, which can be very, very different from ours!

Is the Adventist Church wrestling with its modern Western, linear, positivist worldview? Who should be asking these questions? Is our education system attempting to allow people groups to gain higher degrees from their culture and worldview? How do we help each other begin to recognize our own bias? How do we carefully learn to hold each other accountable without attacking or feeling like we are being attacked? Are we learning how to dialogue, so that we can engage in these and many other difficult questions?

Yes, I have questions. And I hope that the questions of significance will be wrestled with until some clarity begins to emerge! 🇸🇩

Jim Brauer was the Adventist Missions director and project consultant for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division when he wrote this article. He has just been appointed president of the Bangladesh Adventist Union Mission.

¹ Miller, Tracy, ed., *Mapping the Global Muslim Population: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population*, Pew Research Center, October 2009.

² Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* (Moody Publishers, 2009).

³ See Paul Hiebert, *Anthropological Insights for Missionaries* (Baker Academic, 1985). As Gottfried Oosterwal said, "This excellent book offers indeed what the title suggests: insights—deep, comprehensive, and very practical."

⁴ See Paul Hiebert, *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts* (Trinity Press, 1999). While foundational philosophical thought might not be everyone's "cup of tea," the insights raised and the questions addressed make this book one of the most important missiological books in my library.

In Reaching the Lost, A

BY J. DAVID NEWMAN

I arrived at the church in Madagascar and was immediately asked, “Where is your coat, pastor?” It was so hot that I had left my jacket at the hotel. No one in the audience was wearing a jacket, but before I could preach, I had to borrow a jacket from another pastor.

Before preaching in a church in the Philippines, I specifically asked if I had to wear a jacket. The answer was no. So I preached in a barong, but seated behind me were two Filipino pastors dressed in Western suits.

A visiting preacher in South Africa was asked in the vestry if he was circumcised. He answered in the affirmative, but the elders were not satisfied. He had to drop his pants for them to see before he was allowed to preach.

Three different countries. Three different approaches to preaching.

Local Customs May Vary

In 1989 *Ministry* magazine published the great variety of standards in the Adventist Church.

“In some areas Adventists express their awe before God by demanding that people take off their shoes when they enter the sanctuary; in other areas custom requires that women wear hats in church, and in still others that men and women sit in separate areas of the sanctuary. ...

“In some places local Adventist understanding of modesty and simplicity of lifestyle demands that no gold or silver be worn in any form, that women not wear pants, always cover their arms and legs, never cut or curl their hair, and enter the sanctuary behind their husbands or fathers. In other areas women enter the sanctuary first, and in yet others they may

wear certain ‘ornaments’ as part of their dress in honor of God and celebration of their salvation in Christ. ...

“In some areas Adventists think nothing of going mountain climbing, driving their automobiles to church, riding bicycles, or using public transportation on Sabbath—activities that Adventists in other areas frown upon, if they don’t outrightly [sic] condemn [them] as transgressions of the fourth commandment. ...

“In some areas Adventists regard dating, holding hands, and even kissing in public as acceptable Christian behavior. In other areas they reject these practices as outrightly [sic] immoral, even adulterous. There Adventist men and women would not even think of publicly touching each other’s hands or sharing food together, which is considered the most intimate form of relating to each other.”¹

A Theology of Contextualization

How do we understand what is right and what is wrong in winning people for Jesus? Paul explained his approach when he wrote to the church in Corinth.

“Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God’s law but am under Christ’s law), so as to win those not having the law. To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for

Nothing Goes—Except...

the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9:19-23, NIV).

Paul says that to win people to Jesus Christ, we must climb out of our comfort zones and become like the people whom we are trying to reach.

“Wait a minute,” I can hear someone saying. “You mean that we must drink and smoke and gamble and do whatever they do?” No, I am not saying that. Paul makes it clear in this passage that it is not a free-for-all in winning people to Jesus.

Paul said that while he would become like one not having the law to those not having the law, he was not free from law. He is still under Christ’s law. What does that mean? Paul makes a distinction between that which is moral, eternal, and absolute and that which is cultural and relative. He will do whatever it takes to win people as long as it does not violate moral absolutes, such as the Ten Commandments.

It means that we will look at things from other people’s point of view, from other perspectives. We will understand the other person first, before we try to be understood.

Here is an example directly from the life of the apostle Paul. He participated in the Jerusalem Council, which decided that the Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to become Christians. Church leaders then sent him with others to announce this decision to the churches (Acts 15:22-31), to let people know that circumcision was NOT required.

However, when Paul traveled to Lystra and met Timothy, he decided to take Timothy with him on his missionary journey. There was one small problem: although Timothy’s mother was a Jewess, his father was a Greek, so he had never

been circumcised. I am sure that Timothy was relieved that this was no longer a requirement. But Paul wanted to witness to Jews, who still believed in circumcision. So, true to his philosophy to live under the law with those who lived under the law, he told Timothy that he would have to be circumcised since they would be witnessing in Jewish territory. Timothy probably lost much of his enthusiasm for missions at that moment. But he agreed, so as to live as they lived (Acts 16:1-3).

On the other hand, Paul resolutely refused to circumcise Titus even when pressured (Gal. 2:1-5) because, while they traveled to Jerusalem, Titus’ responsibility was in Crete in Gentile areas. He identified with the people he was trying to reach.

For Adventists, this can be rather scary. It means getting out of our comfort zones. It means listening to and playing music that is not what we are used to. It means participating in sports and recreational activities that have often been seen as “off limits” to Adventists. It may mean going to places such as movie theaters, bowling alleys, skating rinks, dance halls, and even bars—if that is where we must find the people we are trying to reach.

Paul said: “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel” (1 Cor. 9:23, NIV).

What are we willing to do for the sake of the gospel? What individual and corporate sacrifices are we prepared to make in order to win as many people to Jesus as we can?

Accommodation vs. Compromise

So how do we apply this passage from Paul? First, Paul is giving us a principle called

This view has serious difficulties.

Where do we draw the line? How do we stop being seduced by the culture and finally assimilated by the culture? How far do we adopt the scientific viewpoints, such as regarding origins? Many believe that being a Christian means being successful and often wealthy.

accommodation. This principle strikes fear into the hearts of many Christians, because they automatically link it with the word *compromise*. However, accommodation and compromise do not necessarily go together. H. Richard Niebuhr is famous for his book *Christ and Culture*, in which he lays out five scenarios for looking at the culture around us.

Jimmy Long, in his book *Generation Hope*, has spelled out these five ways of looking at the culture in an easier language to assimilate, and this is where we begin to try and understand what Paul is saying to us today.

1. The Assimilating Church: In the World and of the World

In this view the church makes itself relevant to the surrounding world by adopting some of the culture’s

characteristics. In order to be heard by the culture, there need to be some common points of contact. The church takes the culture seriously and identifies almost completely with the culture.

This view has serious difficulties. Where do we draw the line? How do we stop being seduced by the culture and finally assimilated by the culture? How far do we adopt the scientific viewpoints (i.e., regarding origins)? Many believe that being a Christian means being successful and often wealthy.

This viewpoint wants to be inclusive, but it gradually loses its distinctiveness. And in the end, it no longer attracts people to Christ because the church has become too much like the people it is trying to reach.

2. The Protecting Church: Not of the World and Not in the World

Many Christians and Adventists consider the culture to be so powerful that we must set up a parallel culture, a subculture. Thus we support Christian schools, colleges, bookstores, novels, entertainment and recreational industry, church gyms, etc. The present culture is seen as beyond saving. The church becomes a fortress, and we try to keep the world outside. The Christian is not part of this world and tries to be as removed from touching the world as he or she can.

3. The Unchanging Church: Not in the World and Oblivious to the World

This group ignores culture altogether. It takes the previous model, the Protecting Church, to the next level. It is similar to the preceding group, except it looks more to the past than the Protecting Church, which simply isolates itself from the culture without idealizing the past. This view has nothing to do with the present culture. The church is viewed as above and beyond culture. The *King James Version* is the only version to be used.

The Unchanging Church looks to the past more than to the present. It idealizes the past and believes that the forms of the past are the true ones. This group forgets that most of these forms did not begin with Jesus but were established centuries later. Examples of this mindset are found in the Mennonite, Amish, and Quaker communities. Examples in Adventism would include some of the self-supporting movements, as found in their dress codes.

G.K. Chesterton once stated: "Tradition is the living faith of those now dead. Traditionalism is the dead faith of those now living."²

Churches following this model eventually lose all relevance to the culture. You see this in the business world, where Walmart has become the biggest retailer in the world, whereas Woolworth, which once boasted 4,000 stores, no longer exists.³

4. The Battling Church: In the World and Over the World

This perspective fears annihilation and fights back with all of the weapons it can muster. Moral authority must be brought back into society.

Cultural conflict is "political and social hostility rooted in different systems of moral understanding. The end to which these hostilities tend is the domination of one cultural and moral ethos over all others."⁴

In the United States, Pat Robertson (of *The 700 Club*) and others see it as their role to reform society, even if it means seeking political means. Abortion, homosexuality, and other sexual issues become important debating points. They forget that just because Jesus is king over this world does not mean that the church should rule society. Not all Christians are united in this area, anyway. These people see the United States as the New

Israel. But there are many Christians who disagree with both the presuppositions and the strategy of the battling church.

5. The Influencing Church: In the World But Not of the World

This viewpoint sees the culture as a mission field, not a battlefield. It is a place for love, not hate. A place to pray for people, not to destroy them.

In the United States, Focus on the Family founder James C. Dobson sees the issue as battling the culture. Dr. Dobson takes issue with John D. Woodbridge, a research professor at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, who sees it as a mission field.

Dobson replied in this way: "May I ask you to extend a little charity and grace to those of us who feel called to this cause? We are often outgunned and undermanned. We don't have all the answers. We, like you, are simply trying to serve the Lord to the best of our ability, and sometimes we do it poorly. Sometimes in our zeal we may fail to show the love of Christ, which is central to everything we believe. You are justified in criticizing us when that occurs. But while you're there on the sidelines, I ask that you not make our task any more difficult than it already is."⁵

Those who see culture as a mission field would deny that they are "on the sidelines" in this endeavor. Instead of battling the culture, they are befriending individuals in the culture with the gospel. They believe that you change the culture by first changing people through the gospel. In their view, churches are not military bunkers, but homes with a welcome sign at the door. They see the battling church as persecuting its enemies instead of loving them.

Where to Draw the Line

Now let us come back to the big question:

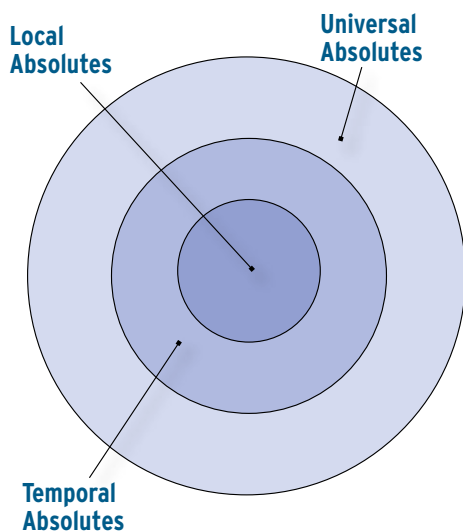


Figure 1

how do we determine where to draw the line? Paul makes it clear that we need to accommodate to the culture if we are to be relevant to the culture. His key point is: “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.”

As you examined these five ways of looking at culture, I am sure that you identified with one or more of them. The one I identify with most is the last one, The Influencing Church: In the World But Not of the World.

To try to make sense of this, I have formed three circles to help me decide what is appropriate and what is not. I am a strong believer that there are moral absolutes. An absolute is a principle or behavior that knows no exceptions. Look at Figure 1, which is made up of three circles.

1. Universal Absolutes

Universal absolutes are for all places, all times, all cultures, and all peoples; they are worldwide in scope. The Ten Commandments are an example of universal absolutes. It is always wrong to murder someone, regardless of where

you live in the world. It is always wrong to commit adultery. It is always wrong to take God’s name in vain. Love, mercy, justice, unselfishness, and joy are just a few examples of universal, absolute principles.

Universal absolutes can be divided between principles and application of principles. It is easier to agree on universal principles than on specific behaviors, but this is where the Ten Commandments are most helpful. At the heart of the Ten Commandments is the principle of love. The first four commandments tell us how to apply that principle to God, and the last six tell us how to apply that principle to fellow humans.

2. Temporal Absolutes

The next circle within the larger circle contains temporal absolutes. These are practices and beliefs that are absolute, but only for a particular group of people and for a specific period of time. Circumcision applied only to Jews and only until the cross, yet to be part of Judaism you had to be circumcised if you were a male; there were no exceptions. Everyone who was a Jew celebrated the Passover. Christian examples would include the Lord’s Supper and baptism, which apply to all Christians in all places.

3. Local Absolutes

The innermost circle concerns local absolutes, which apply only to a particular location and may change over time and culture. I gave some examples at the beginning of this article. Order of worship, how you dress, how you keep the Sabbath, and so on are considered absolute in a particular culture but do not apply in other areas of the world. I submit that most of our arguments over desired behavior occur on this third level of cultural absolutes, which too often we confuse with universal absolutes.

Remember, we are here to carry out the two greatest commandments (see Matt. 22:37-39): to love God with all your heart and strength, with your whole being, and to love your neighbor as yourself. And then we are to carry out the great commission (see Matt. 28:18-20): taking the gospel to all of the world, baptizing people into God’s kingdom.

Within this framework of the three circles of absolutes, we find six principles to guide us.

1. Relevant—We must be culturally relevant.


2. Incarnational—We must identify with the people around us, just as Jesus gave up being God and became like us in order to win us.

3. Flexible—We must be flexible, not rigid, and able to adapt to different situations.

4. Creative—We must utilize the God-given gift of creativity.

5. Methods Neutral—We must remember that methods are neutral unless immoral, unethical, or illegal.

6. Easy—We must not make it difficult for people to come to Christ (see Acts 15:19).

Remember that in our evangelism, we should follow the example of the apostle Paul. “I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. I do this for the sake of the gospel.” 

J. David Newman is editor of Adventist Today and senior pastor of New Hope Adventist Church in Fulton, Maryland.

¹ Gottfried Oosterwal and J. David Newman, “Differing Adventist Practices,” *Ministry* magazine, October 1989, p. 24.

² Quoted in Jimmy Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (InterVarsity Press, 1997), p. 26.

³ Matt Haig, *Brand Failures: The Truth About the 100 Biggest Branding Mistakes of All Time* (London: Kogan Page, 2011), p. 198.

⁴ Long, p. 28.

⁵ Long, p. 32.

Seventh-day Adventist

The Official View

Uili Solofa

When Samoa woke up on the morning of Saturday, December 31, it found itself sharing the same day of the week, Saturday, December 31, with countries such as Australia, New Zealand, and other Pacific island nations.

Samoa time will have moved forward by a whole 24 hours, having skipped Friday, December 30, entirely. The change is the result of the Samoan government's decision to change the positioning of the International Date Line (IDL).

In so doing, Samoa will be in the Eastern Hemisphere in terms of the reckoning of time, together with its near neighbors and trading partners. For most purposes the change will have no practical effect on people's everyday lives. But by sharing the same time zones with these countries, the conduct of business and travel will be more convenient and less disruptive.

SAMOAN CHURCH: the Lalovaea church, one of the largest Seventh-day Adventist churches in Samoa, is based on the compound on the Samoas-Tokelau Mission.

For the Christian community, however, the change will have implications for the weekly day of worship. Sunday worship will continue uninterrupted for the majority, even though the day Samoans call "Sunday" will have moved from the first day of the week to the seventh. For Seventh-day Adventists, who observe the biblical Sabbath, the change presented challenges because of the longstanding association of Saturday with the seventh day of the week.

As its name suggests, one of the distinguishing features of the Seventh-

day Adventist faith is its observance of the biblical Sabbath, which, according to Scripture, is on the seventh day of the week: "By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done" (Gen. 2:2, 3).

Until the change, the seventh day of the week fell on Saturday, as it did everywhere else around the world. When Samoa repositioned the IDL on December 29, 2011, it also reallocated the days of the week so that the seventh day of the week will fall on Sunday instead of Saturday. The numbering of the weekly cycle remains as before, but the names of the days will change.

In line with biblical precepts on the subject, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Samoa will continue to observe the biblical Sabbath on the seventh day of the weekly cycle, irrespective of the change of name to Sunday. The naming of the days of the week after pagan gods is a relatively recent human invention, after all. The biblical record of creation refers only to: "And there was evening, and there was morning—the first day"; "And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day," etc. This formula for recording the days of the week repeats itself until the seventh day, when the Lord rested from all his labor (see Gen. 1:8-31; 2:1-3).

In arriving at this challenging decision for the average church member, the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Samoa has taken every opportunity to consult its membership at home, as well as the wider church. The decision is grounded on Scripture and guided by established

church policy. Similar changes to the IDL have already taken place with Samoa's near neighbors, Kiribati and Tonga.

Consistency has been the hallmark of the church's position in dealing with government-inspired changes in the recording of time. The biblical command of observing the seventh day of the week as the Sabbath of the Lord has been the guiding principle all along. That's why in Tonga today the biblical Sabbath is observed on Sunday, following the Tongan government's decision to change the position of the IDL.

In Samoa this will be the second time that governments have introduced changes in time in relation to the IDL. When the Wesleyan and London Missionary Society missionaries first arrived in Samoa in 1828 and 1830, respectively, they adopted for their work in the South Pacific the British system of determining time. It meant that in Samoa, as well as in Australia, New Zealand, and other British territories, the seventh day of the week fell on Sunday.

In 1844 the IDL, the prime meridian, and the 180-degree meridian were established as the universally accepted way of recording calendar days by the International Meridian Conference held in Washington, D.C. In 1892 Samoa adopted the universal system for itself, and as a result the counting of days of the week fell into line with the rest of the world, with the seventh day falling on Saturday.

For faithful Seventh-day Adventists in Samoa, Sunday will coincide with the biblical Sabbath, the day of worship as commanded by Scripture.

Uili Solofa is the president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Samoa (reprinted from the Adventist Review Intouch, January 25, 2012).

s Told to Keep Sunday

The Dissenting View

By Milton Hook

Thousands of Seventh-day Adventists are now worshipping on Sunday in Western Samoa. The tiny group of islands in the South Pacific boasts approximately 40 organized Adventist churches with a membership of more than 8,000 believers. They were advised by South Pacific Division administrators that they should worship on Sundays because the International Date Line has recently been moved east of Samoa.

The calendar change came at midnight on Thursday, December 29, 2011. Friday, December 30, was dropped and the following day was tagged Saturday, December 31.

Everyone foresaw the necessary adjustments, especially regarding Sabbath observance. Sunday-keepers simply observed Sunday according to the new local calendar. Adventists were faced with a dilemma. Should they abide by the new calendar, skip Friday, December 30, and remain distinctive by continuing to worship on Saturday? Or should they treat the missed Friday of December 30 as a government imposition and count the usual seven days from when they last celebrated Sabbath, bringing them to the Sunday on the new calendar as their new day of worship?

In the months leading up to the change, the South Pacific Division executives voted that Adventists in Samoa should worship on Sundays. (Tongan Adventists have followed the habit since American Adventist missionaries arrived in the 1890s.) Doctors Barry Oliver and David Tasker, president and field secretary respectively of the South Pacific Division, visited Samoa to vigorously argue the

adoption of the executive decision.

Many Samoan Adventists, especially those living overseas, were not persuaded by the Division's judgment. They mounted an email campaign, outlining cogent reasons why the church in Samoa should follow the new calendar and worship on Saturdays. Their links to their homeland relatives remain strong, enabling these same messages to percolate among the island membership.

A small delegation of Samoan ministers from America, Australia, and New Zealand flew to Samoa in November to urgently exhort their fellow believers to hold the distinctive line and worship on Saturdays. Pastor Solofa, the Samoan Mission president, told them the South Pacific Division's decision was non-negotiable.

The administrative style of the South Pacific Division attracted murmurings that colonial attitudes were interfering with the rights of Samoans to make their own decisions. One person made the point via email that Samoans are inherently loyal to authority figures—so loyal they may appear to agree with an expatriate but at the same time disagree in their own minds. He found it difficult to believe that Samoan Mission administration had capitulated to the South Pacific Division administrators without having contrary opinions of their own. Another complained that the grassroots membership in Samoa was not consulted prior to the executive decision.

The entire saga has in it the seeds of schism.

The first day of the new calendar was Saturday, December 31. The entire church group at Samatau, on the southwest shore of the island of Upolu, defied the executive vote and worshipped that day

rather than the following one: Sunday, January 1. A handful of like-minded members traveled across the island from the capital, Apia, to worship with them. None of them feel they want to establish an independent church. (One already exists in Samoa). Their intentions at present are that their tithes and offerings will continue to flow to the Samoan SDA Mission headquarters.

Those making the journey from Apia did not wish to travel the distance every Saturday, so they made alternative arrangements. On the second Sabbath of the new calendar, they met at the Government Prayer House in suburban Apia. Solofa, risking a reprimand from the South Pacific Division, had graciously signed a letter of request on behalf of the Apia group, seeking permission from the government to use the facility on a regular basis.

These Apian members were joined by a few from the nearby island of Savai'i, who plan to make the ferry trip each Saturday until they organize their own separate group.

At the same time, the Adventist group at Matatufu, on the southeast edge of Upolu, split into two groups, one worshipping in their church on Saturday and the other group meeting in the same building on Sunday.

All reasons aside, the executive decision remains a tad hypocritical. Church administrators themselves frequently cross the International Date Line, gaining or losing a day in their personal calendars but continuing to worship according to the local calendar in whatever country they find themselves. At the same time, they are now insisting that local Samoans should ignore the

Continued on page 31



THE GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

by Greg Prout

“The Light shines in the darkness ... And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory” (John 1:5, 14, NASB).

And the Circus Came to Town

JAWS HANGING, EYES POPPING, THE CROWD WATCHED A PETITE woman in a sparkling, pink- ruffled tutu doing back flips on a galloping horse as it did laps around center ring; then she did front flips from one galloping horse to another. The audience gasped in unison, riveted as if frozen in an ice storm. Children with eyes like moon pies, their bodies nailed to their seats, incredulously followed the bouncing somersaulting acrobat around the ring.

The onlookers find themselves enraptured, for the circus has come to town, bringing transcendence. The circus has always captivated the communities in its itinerary; an icon of joy and fun, the circus is sunshine lifting darkness from crusty souls; magical revelry rolling into neighborhoods, transporting its inhabitants and delivering good news.

Recently I watched an hour-long program on public television about a small circus making the rounds in New York State. It was a compelling story about the true lives of performers who live an ordinary existence on one hand (well, almost ordinary), yet do extraordinary things on the other—all in front of an excited and transfixed crowd. When the circus comes to town, everyday citizens learn that “the heart of the universe is a smile not a frown.”¹

Another View of Life

Metaphors like the circus offer insights into our sometimes-murky world. Like opening a window in a stuffy room and breathing in cool, sweet air, we feel refreshed by another view of

life. When the circus arrives with its three-ring show of laughter, awe, tingle and twitter, it wipes the tears from our eyes and offers us momentary relief from death, mourning, and pain, for the things of earth are outside the tent.

“Send in the Clowns”² to make fun of the lives we live; paroxysms of laughing reprieve from futile attempts at illusion and self-worship. Ludicrous expressions and silly antics dressed in absurd proportions mock my self-importance; I see myself tangling like a goofy marionette from the strings of my own deluded self-reference. Any analogous symbol that lifts and sends us up and away from our provincial tribalism is a divine effort to get us out of our box. The circus and its extraordinary fanfare remind me that there’s more to life than my puny ego; I am not in center ring. And yet, by its very presence, its tents pitched in my neighborhood, I know the circus has come *for me*, offering its gift of fresh air.

Through culture and smile, the lens of the circus, I am pointed to a reality separate from ours, a place of the other, a refuge of promise, a ride on the trapeze, and a journey into transcendence. The laws of certain beliefs tell us Incarnation brings Transcendence, and with Presence comes Transformation; the circus reveals one of Life’s many reminders of our need of redemption. The circus parts the heavens, through which I see life free of sorrow, pain, and the darkness of the soul. Instead, I’m thrust into the world of music and laughter, children’s squeals of hooray, the beauty of form and precision; the laughing antics of the clown, the suspense of the high wire, the amazement of the jugglers, elephants that dance, and trapeze artists that spellbind. The circus is transportation from the mundane, the arduous, the task, the time clock, life’s general angst; it’s a time to forget worry and embrace freedom of spirit. The circus is sabbatical, a come-away-and-rest-from-your-labors event, and an opportunity to find the smile.

Other than the admittance fee (no metaphor is perfect), the circus asks nothing of me except to show up. I do not earn the show; my performance is irrelevant to the glory received. There’s nothing I can do to make the clowns funnier, the high-wire act more thrilling, or the dancing elephants more spectacular. I choose to be a spectator, a recipient of sheer grace. And what a bargain! Mind-boggling suspense as the trapeze performer, painted in leotards of canary yellow, sails through air like lightning splitting the sky, flipping and twisting, then is snatched suddenly from freefall by the partner. Wild cats roar in protest at the snap of the trainer’s whip, leaving children’s eyes saucer-like with fear and anticipation. And as if it couldn’t get any

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make the clowns funnier, the
high-wire act more thrilling,
or the dancing elephants more
spectacular.*

better, there’s the taste of salted peanuts, mustard, and hot dogs, mingled with smells of fresh popcorn.

Total Immersion Into My World

The circus is where the Other, like an adoring parent, watches his children enchanted by wonder, laughter, and music. Grace is the Style and the Miracle, and the Gift that saves us.

As an adult I realized that, like the circus, Jesus came to town; he “moved into the neighborhood,”³ as Eugene Petersen puts it. I discovered a God who embraces my humanity; he arrived in our world and our cultures to demonstrate his love for us, to thoroughly understand us from the inside out. He came not to condemn, but to include and accept. He throws his big arms around my culture, the context of my existence, and says, “Strike up the band and dance; get this party going!”

God doesn’t sit outside or above our world and pluck us out for his keeping. The very notion that he would be against human culture rends the fabric of the Incarnation; it lessens his sacrifice of setting aside his divinity to become one of us. The master Writer became the main character of his monumental story; the Painter painted himself into his masterpiece. He became a man in my world, in my culture; otherwise, if something about my world is excluded from his touch, the Incarnation is half-baked and incomplete.

Either the “Word became flesh and dwelt among us,” or he didn’t. Either he’s my neighbor, or else the house next door is vacant. The Incarnation is more than selected engagement; it’s a

The smells and aromas of an Italian kitchen or a sizzling steak on a Fourth of July barbecue can send us out of our skin. Pick your favorite composer, from Handel to McCartney—it doesn't matter. The gift of lyric and song lifts us out of ourselves and shows us a side of redemption we'd miss otherwise.

total immersion into my world. His love envelops me. But for me, it wasn't always like that.

The Myth of Christ vs. Culture

In the 17th century, a Jesuit named Louis Lallemant said, “We should feel wonder at *nothing at all* in Nature *except only* the Incarnation of Christ” (italics mine).⁴ That sentiment dominated the Church for centuries. I grew up on this idea that culture was bad and that only Christian themes and subjects should be studied and enjoyed. Richard Niebuhr's classic book *Christ and Culture* (1951) examines the various relationships of Christ versus culture. One chapter entitled “Christ Against Culture” described the very church in which I was raised. I was told to shun the theater (cinema), novels, jewelry, science fiction, Catholicism, Pentecostalism, gays, hippies, dancing, card playing, long hair, flashy clothes, and rock and roll music. Anything outside my church subculture was unhealthy, even dangerous, and should be adamantly avoided, as if Christ's incarnation missed these cultural manifestations. In other words, culture was bad and church was good.

Glimpses of His Goodness

I now see God's handiwork everywhere. In our world, juggling triumphs and defeats, celebration and execution, invention and extinction, flying between manger and noose, richness and loss, we come to the Show. The tent of paradox and mystery leave us speechless, divining what's behind the curtain yet ready to

swallow the two-edged sword of risk and adventure. We paint and we burn; we balance longing and rest while chasing dreams around the ring. We are born unprepared, and we die at the brink of understanding, each choosing a Ringmaster.

It is precisely into this three-ring circus that Jesus arrives. The very nexus of my culture is where God finds me; it's where he reaches out through whatever means he chooses—even the circus—to bring me a peek of heaven, a warm glow of something better, and a look at his goodness. His fingerprints are on every thing; his footprints I see daily. The colors of Van Gogh, Monet's “Water Lilies” series, or the exquisite detail of Vuillard or any other inspiring work of art; the insightful writing style of Richard Rodriguez or the zany stories of Flannery O'Connor; the brutal realism of Steinbeck and the lightning prose of Kerouac—all of these gifts reflect the presence of Another. The smells and aromas of an Italian kitchen or a sizzling steak on a Fourth of July barbecue can send us out of our skin. Pick your favorite composer, from Handel to McCartney—it doesn't matter. The gift of lyric and song lifts us out of ourselves and shows us a side of redemption we'd miss otherwise.

Nothing cultural escapes God's attention and his efforts to reach through it to touch our lives. Whether it's a cross dangling from the neck of a rock star, the architecture of a Howard Roark,⁵ or Homer Simpson walking into the sunset holding God's hand,⁶ through hints and nudges, God lets us know he's with us—abiding in every crack and crevice of our fractured and damaged world, Immanuel (“God with us”). Instead of looking for what to avoid or shun (there's plenty of that), we can look every day for those glimpses of a God yearning to make himself known by reassuring us that there's more to this life than inhaling and exhaling while waiting to die.

Culture is God's palette and canvas, his prose and poetry, his clay, his unforgettable recipe, his playground, and his tent where he comes to hang with us.

“He'd fly through the air with the greatest of ease/That daring young man on the flying trapeze.”⁷ The Show must go on.

Greg Prout is a realtor who writes from Sierra Madre, California.

¹ Philip Yancey, *What Good Is God?* (New York: Faith Words, 2010), p. 136.

² “Send in the Clowns,” lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, 1973.

³ Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message: The Bible in Contemporary Language* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002), p. 1916.

⁴ Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1954), p. 47.

⁵ Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1943).

⁶ “The Simpsons,” season 4, episode 3 (10-8-1992).

⁷ “The Flying Trapeze,” lyrics by George Leybourne, 1867, Bruce Springsteen version.

Living Stones

By Aletha Gruzensky

“YOU MEAN MY SALVATION IS DEPENDENT on this bunch of yahoos?”

My sentiments exactly, I thought. How could my salvation possibly depend on those whose rough edges occasionally scraped my soft spots?

But wasn't that what the quote said? It rolled off the speaker's tongue: “When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own.”¹ I'd



heard people use the statement to imply that each one of us must be perfect. Any individual imperfection held Christ back.

In a moment of insight, someone commented: “We’ve always thought that quote was about individual salvation. It’s not. It’s about the church and the timing of Christ’s coming.”

“What did you say?” I asked.

“Go back and read it again. The quote has nothing to do with individual salvation.”

But I didn't read it—not yet. An image of stones flashed into my mind.

Three blocks north of downtown Walla Walla, Washington, a stone wall skirts the parking lot of a business. I'd often admired the handiwork, the way the rough stones fit together into a work of artistic beauty. Within hours, camera in hand, I went to look at the wall.

On the face of the wall, no mortar showed. The stones had not been cut to fit together. They still had many rough edges. But a master stoneworker had

fit the stones together in an intricate design. The wall looked impermeable yet accentuated the beauty of the flowers growing on the street side.

“This is what you want to do with your church?” I silently asked God. *“You want to make even our rough edges look good? Together?”*

In the Bible Peter talks about Christ, the living cornerstone, and then brings humans into the picture. “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to



God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 2:5, NASB).

Jesus, the holy priest, wants to live in a spiritual house that he will make from his imperfect people—people so different from each other that sometimes they think the differences among them are the sin. But Jesus, the cornerstone and master stoneworker, sees us differently. He sees what we could become together.

Jesus doesn't have an easy task. I imagine him looking at a pile of rough stones—stones that he has somehow given life. He picks up one and puts it in place. As he turns for the next stone, the first stone vaults itself off the wall. He turns back, picks up the wayward stone, and puts it once more into place.

He turns back to the pile. He picks up a stone that is jumping all over the ground, trying to knock off its own rough edges. “No, no!” the stone screams, “I’m not perfect yet.” Jesus places it on the wall, where it cowers in fear. He turns back to the pile. He chooses the next stone to fit precisely into the rough edges of the last.

Finally, when Jesus has turned his stones into a collective work of beauty, when each stone brings beauty to the whole, when the world can see Jesus living in his temple, when he has finished his work, then he will come to get us.

Aletha Gruzensky writes from College Place, Washington, and is the author of But God, I'm So Humble Already.

¹ White, Ellen G., *Christ's Object Lessons* (Takoma Park, MD: Review and Herald, 1941), p. 69.



Contextualization: A Gentle Twist on the Terrors of Sinai

By Alden Thompson

“I have become all things to everyone,” exclaimed Paul to the believers at Corinth. That’s a literal translation of 1 Corinthians 9:22.

Literal translations are often dangerous, frightening to gentle people who aren’t as brave as Paul—or as God, for it was God who taught Paul. Indeed, through a host of examples in the Bible, God teaches us how to work with all kinds of people in all kinds of circumstances.

“Contextualization” is a technical, missiological term used to describe this process of adapting to the needs of a people within a given culture. “Meeting people where they’re at” is an earthier way of putting it. The older, classical words are “accommodation” or “condescension.” But all four words—contextualization, adaptation, accommodation, condescension—mean roughly the same thing.

The idea is scary for many devout conservatives. For example, when I wanted to publish my book *Who’s Afraid of the Old Testament God?*, the late David Wright, the left-of-center evangelical church historian at the University of Edinburgh who helped me get it published by Paternoster Press, said that the UK branch of InterVarsity Press would never touch the book because in it, “the note of accommodation was far too strong.”

Maybe Ellen White can help us gather courage here. She uses two of the key words—adaptation and condescension—in this brief description of the ministry of Christ: “The evidence of His divinity was seen in its adaptation to the needs of suffering humanity. His

glory was shown in His condescension to our low estate.”¹

So let’s sample a biblical illustration of contextualization, remembering at the outset that gentle Jesus, the God who came to die on Golgotha, is the same God who came to kill at Sinai. Is that language too strong? Read on. And if you’re brave, read the story from the book of Exodus, too.²

For hundreds of years, God’s special people had been slaves in Egypt. Now with a strong right arm, God Almighty had shattered the enemy and set his people free. Defiantly Israel marched out, equipped for battle. This was a fresh start and a new life with God.

Yet this was a God they scarcely knew anymore. The crack of the taskmaster’s whip had driven him beyond their horizon. Or so it must have seemed.

They had groaned in their bondage and cried out for help. God heard and remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The Hebrew Bible puts it very simply: “God saw the people of Israel and God knew” (Ex. 2:25).

Yes, God knew. And he knew what to do: plagues on the Egyptians, a path through the sea, water for their thirst in a barren land.

And a mountain. A mountain he would rattle and shake ’til every bird and beast had fled and the motley crew of ex-slaves stood transfixed before him in joyful terror.

Joyful terror? Well, almost. For three months, Israel had plodded through the boiling wilderness. God had promised a land flowing with milk and honey—to the north. But flying in the face of all logic, he

led them through the deserts of the south, toward Sinai.

Now they had arrived. Camped expectantly before “the mountain,” they watched and waited. Their leader Moses, a fearless negotiator with both God and man, had disappeared into the rocky crags of Sinai. He said he had an appointment with God.

No place to hide, pointless to run, no one to fight. There wasn’t much else to do but gaze uneasily at that mysterious mountain and ponder the fate of the man who had gone to talk with God.

“Go back and tell the people I’m ready to make a deal,” said God. “I’ve shown them some of the things I can do. But there’s more. I’d like to make this people my own, in a very special way. I know they’re a lively bunch. But this is what I’ll do: If they will obey me, I will cherish them above all the other nations on earth. Do you think that’s something they’d like, Moses?”

“Sounds good,” he replied. “I’ll ask them.”

And it sounded good to the people, too. “All that the Lord has spoken we will do,” they promised. And the Lord was pleased.

“Now there’s one thing more,” said God. “We need to make sure that the people take us seriously. When I tell you the words of the covenant, Moses, I’ll put on a sound and light show they’ll never forget. They’ll know this thing is for real. And they’ll also know they can trust you to speak for me.”

Moses took the word back. In three days, God would come to Mt. Sinai before all the people. This was serious business,

Joyful terror? Almost. Slaves steeped in violence and hardened by years of abuse listened to a message in a language they understood. No, they probably didn't understand the words, regardless of whether God spoke Hebrew, Egyptian, or English. But they understood the thunder. Here was a God who could rattle a mountain, make it smoke and dance just for them. Israel was impressed. This was a mighty God they could trust.

serious enough for God to give specific instructions for the people.

"Give yourselves and your clothes a good scrubbing immediately," warned Moses. "And stay clean until that day has passed. What's more, that mountain is holy. So we're putting a boundary around it. If any one of you dares to cross that boundary, we'll stone you and leave you for dead. The same goes for your animals. God has forbidden us even to touch anyone who crosses that line. In three days when the trumpet sounds, we'll come to the boundary, but not a step further."

One day for washing, one day for

waiting. Then the trumpet.

"On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain."

Scripture says that "Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly."

As the trumpet blast grew louder and louder, Moses stepped out in front of the people. Cupping his hands, he shouted at the mountain and at God. "And God answered him in thunder."

Moses headed to the top. God had asked for another appointment. What were his thoughts as his foot slipped over that boundary between life and death? He didn't tell us.

In any event, God sent him right back down again: "Warn the people not to come close, or they'll die."

"Don't worry, I already told them," returned Moses.

"That's alright," said God. "It won't hurt to tell them again. And by the way, bring Aaron your brother back with you—yes, across that boundary between life and death."

Moses obeyed. And then God spoke. He addressed Moses personally, but turned up the volume so all the people could hear. For Moses' benefit, I suspect God spoke Hebrew. But his words have been translated for us, too. We call them "The Ten Commandments."

And the people? Scared stiff. "You speak to us, Moses," they pleaded. "We'll obey every last word. Just don't let God speak to us, or we'll die."

Joyful terror? Almost. Slaves steeped in violence and hardened by years of abuse listened to a message in a language they understood. No, they probably didn't understand the words, regardless of whether God spoke Hebrew, Egyptian, or English. But they understood the thunder. Here was a God who could rattle a mountain, make it smoke and dance just for them. Israel was impressed. This was a mighty God they could trust.

In time, God would show his gentle side; even little children would sit on his lap. But tough people need tough love first. So God shook heaven and earth until even slaves understood.

There's a word here for our day, too. Most of us are more likely to be attracted to the gentle God revealed in Jesus, the God who never killed anyone, never even laid a hand on anyone except to bless them and to gather the little ones into his arms.

But when necessary, God can be big and strong and tough. Even today, that can be a great encouragement. Are you, perhaps, a slave to forces beyond your control? Do you long to know a God who is strong and mighty to save? There is One who can rattle mountains. He will make them smoke and dance just for you, if that's what you need. With what joyful terror we can turn to him and know that we (and the universe) are safe in his hands.

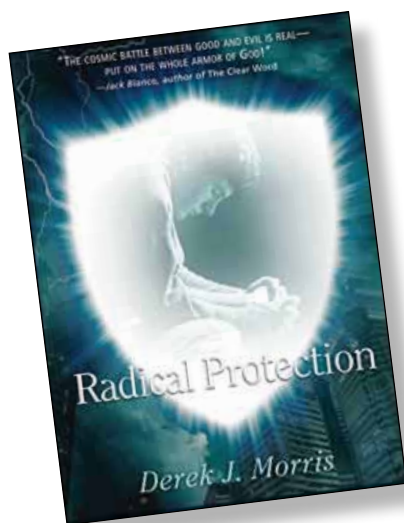
¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898), p. 217.

² Except for personal adaptations, Scripture quotations are from the Revised Standard Version.

Fighting Supernatural Forces

by Rajkumar Dixit

Morris, Derek J., *Radical Protection* (Hagerstown, MD: Autumn House Publishing, 2011), hardcover, 94 pages.



Do you believe in spiritual warfare? While most Christians would readily agree that there is a supernatural battle taking place in the heavenly realm, it appears that little is taught on this subject in Adventist circles. In *Radical Protection*, Derek J. Morris writes about the power of shielding yourself from evil forces.

Morris, who served as a popular minister at Forest Lake Academy Church, recently accepted the post of Editor of *Ministry Magazine*, the denominational journal for ministers.

The premise of *Radical Protection* reminds the reader that every person is under attack by Satan and his angels. If we can recognize and accept that truth,

then, it is possible to protect yourself from the snares of Satan's plan.

In the first part of his book, Morris reminds his readers that the fight between humans and cosmic forces is a reality. "Satan and the angels who joined him in his open rebellion against God still roam the earth. You and I live in the midst of the intense conflict, finding ourselves contending with spiritual forces of wickedness." This is a refresher course on Satan's evil plan to derail God's relationship with his creation. Once the reader accepts this truth, the author provides tools and resources on fighting against evil in our daily lives.

Morris uses stories from his days of serving as a campus pastor to illustrate the drama of tormented people who had been under the grasp of evil. He recalls a story about a young academy student: "When we walked into Michael's room, we found him slumped on a couch with blood oozing from cuts on his left arm. The atmosphere was heavy, dark. I reached out for his shoulder. He spoke almost immediately in a low monotone voice: 'Don't touch me.'"

Morris relies heavily on the book of Ephesians as his exegetical centerpiece. His ability to parse the original language in Scripture and easily explain it to the novice Bible reader may be his greatest strength. In chapter four, Taking Up the Taser of the Spirit, the author explains Paul's word choice of *machaira* when writing, "take up the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). Morris explains that the word *machaira* should really be thought of as "dagger," instead of the long sword most people envision. This is an important differentiation, because

a short fighting sword is designed for close-quarters combat. In the same way, Christians must be prepared for "close-quarters" spiritual warfare.

In addition to providing tools for protecting yourself from Satan's evil plans, Morris passionately advocates the parents' responsibility to pray for protection over their children. "If you are a parent, you have the responsibly and privilege of praying for your children. Satan attacked children of the first human family and wreaked havoc and heartache. His diabolical plans to destroy the family have not changed." Morris adds that a parent's moral failure affects not only his/her spouse, but also opens the door for evil to enter the home, which then exposes all of the family members to wickedness.

Radical Protection is the second book in the series that began with Morris' popular *Radical Prayer*. This book will remind the reader of the realities of the supernatural and unseen forces that exist in this world. Perhaps Morris' greatest contribution in this short, pamphlet-size book is his recommendation to memorize short scripture verses as a source of protection. *Radical Protection* is also peppered with fantastic prayer promises and Bible references that will encourage the reader.

Rajkumar Dixit is an associate pastor at New Hope Adventist Church in Fulton, Maryland. He also teaches courses in public relations, advertising, world religions, and theology at Washington Adventist University and Griggs University and is a frequent guest lecturer and speaker.

Adventist Man

A SATIRICAL LOOK AT ADVENTIST LIFE

I immediately thought of three needy people-groups I had observed on my travels, and I hereby share them with you, along with my ideas as to how our message can fulfill their needs.

Hipster Skateboarders. You've seen them—stern young adults riding skateboards down the street, swerving to avoid pedestrians with contemptuous ease, never turning a hair unless the desire seizes them to leap into the air, completely flip their skateboards, and land on them again with casual grace. Perhaps you, like me, can put your finger on what's most pathetic about these people: their solemn facial expressions.

It's obvious that they need Joy. But how to cause those pinched lips to spread with giddy grins? I would suggest that concerned churches deploy "tickle teams" to stand at stoplight intersections. When the skateboarder rumbles up and pauses, one team member digs his or her fingers into the target's ribs with a cheerful "goochie-goochie." Meanwhile, the other shouts jokes from ring-bound note cards containing such classics as: "An apple a day keeps the doctor away—if you aim it straight and throw it hard!" or "Waiter! There's a dead fly in my soup! Sorry, sir, I'll take it away and bring you a live one," or "Why, you ask, am I staring fixedly at this frozen-juice can? It says on the side, 'Concentrate!'"

Impossibly Large Men Who Walk Impossibly Small Dogs. What draws these two disparate life forms together is impossible to say, but you see them all of the time: men shaped like up-ended Goodyear blimps preceded by teacup Chihuahuas staggering under the weight of their neoprene leashes.

What's the need here? You're way ahead of me—the Health Message. The dogs, constantly tensing their little muscles against their harnesses, are presumably in their prime. But how to help their bulbous owners?

Step 1 is to have the Dorcas ladies knit fire-hydrant covers with "Hydrate!" printed on them. The dog stops, the owner stares, and a health nugget is communicated.

Step 2 is to start those Dorcas needles clicking again, this time to create gifts sets of little doggie-sweaters, each embroidered with the name of one of the eight natural remedies. Each time the owner gazes fondly down to make sure that little Sammy, or Aloysius Worplesdon III, hasn't been snagged by a passing seagull, the little jacket communicates "Sunshine" or "Exercise" or whatever.

The Petition Gatherer. I saw a representative from this people-group at a Trader Joe's not long ago. She was a woman in her 30s with a pixie grin, holding a large petition-tablet labeled "Marijuana" and swooping down on customers as they entered the store. What to do? First, contextualize the marijuana out of her psyche, and then switch out that petition for a church foyer guestbook. Then shout, "Seek!" and off she goes.

Do you have a tough question? Adventist Man has "the answer." As a former member of "the remnant of the remnant," Adventist Man was ranked 8,391 of the 144,000—and working his way up. Now he relies solely on grace and friendship with Jesus. You can email him at atoday@atoday.org.

Contextualizing the Message for Different Cultural Groups

Late the other night, shivering in my humble garret up beneath the eaves of the gothic *Adventist Today* building, I heard a whispery sound from the direction of the door, followed by retreating footsteps. A folded piece of paper protruded from the crack between door and sill, a hastily scrawled note written on the blank side of a Mergenthaler Linotype ad—which should (along with my pitifully tiny garret) convince *Adventist Today* subscribers and donors of our staff's commendable frugality.

In all of your getting around, said our editor's masterful script, keep an eye out for ways Adventists can contextualize their message to different cultural groups.

Snapping a quick salute to the still-audible footsteps, I went to the window and allowed the fresh night air to stimulate my brain cells.

The Dissenting View *continued from page 23*

local calendar and worship on Sunday as if it were the Saturday Sabbath.

Media coverage of the story has been extensive in Samoa, serving to highlight the convictions of both Adventist parties. Generally speaking, the mood of Samoan Adventists remains amiable. That is their nature. Only one expressed himself histrionically, drawing a parallel to the situation when Dietrich Bonhoeffer

defied Adolph Hitler. Echoing the joys of paranoia, another claimed that Samoan Adventists could never be classed among the persecuted in the last days if they worshipped on Sundays!

How will the South Pacific Division executives react to the Saturday-keepers? Will they attempt further pressure to get them to worship on Sundays? And what does the future hold for Adventists who have chosen to worship on Sundays? Will their numbers be significantly depleted,

as more members inevitably gravitate to the Saturday-keepers? It is a reality that in the Pacific islands, much depends on family loyalties. In their cultures a chief will consult widely among his family, and if he decides to step over the line, then the whole family—with few exceptions—will follow.

Milton Hook is an Adventist religion educator, author, and church historian. He writes from Sydney, Australia.

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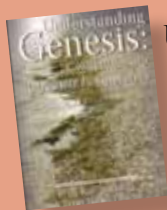
Who Watches? Who Cares?

— Douglas Hackleman

A 2007 compilation of meticulously researched chapters about some of the major financial calamities faced by the church in the past 30 years. Instructive and useful as a foundational text for helping us protect the church from such mismanagement and

opportunism in the future. Published by Members for Church Accountability.

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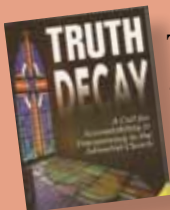


Understanding Genesis: Contemporary Adventist Perspectives

— Brian Bull, Fritz Guy, Ervin Taylor, editors.

The Bible's Book of Origins posits God as a directing influence in the development of the world. Can science coexist with the Bible's interpretative treatment of human history? This is an excellent book for Christians who wish to better understand Genesis and its proper relationship to science—and to speak intelligently on the current controversy about the place of evolution in Adventist colleges' curricula.

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Truth Decay: A Call for Transparency and Accountability in the Adventist Church

— Albert Koppel, D.D.S.

Why does Adventism so readily seem to resort to secrecy and manipulation in its acquisition and use of donated money? Published three years ago, its second edition of 8,000 copies is nearly exhausted. A best-seller, it is the first book ever published in Adventism dealing specifically with the financial mismanagement of donated funds at all levels. Written by a dedicated Adventist who seeks not revenge, but change, for what happened to his family.

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Where To? The Adventist Search for Direction

— J. David Newman

Adventist Today editor J. David Newman looks at both history and the current condition and leadership of Adventism. Trying to return to the past is neither possible nor prudent, he writes. The world is changing, and ministering to end-time society requires more than simply replicating past approaches.

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— Milton Hook, Ed.D

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