Journal of the Adventist Theological Society, 27/1-2 (2016): 175-208.
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Adventist Theological-Missiology: Contextualization in Mission and Ministry

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The Issue of Methodology: Theology and Mission in Dialogue

Several methodological presuppositions influence the disciplines of theology and mission, affecting not only those who are directly involved in them, but also the product of their work.[1] Some scholars and practitioners advance their work unaware that they are being influenced by different methodologies and continue their theological and missiological endeavors without reflecting or evaluating such presuppositions, which often results in undesired outcomes for both the discipline of theology and the practice of mission.

Concerning the overall involvement and activities of the church, one finds that on the one side of the spectrum there is theology, and on the other side there is mission practices. And then there are methodologies that help to carry the Adventist message from one place to another, one person to the other, from one culture to the other. Much has been done in theological reflection and also in mission practice, but less has been done in regards to the methods in the middle, methods that are connected directly with the believer as well as institutions which help to carry the gospel to the whole world.[2] Both disciplines could profit if there would be more discussion and

[1] See Carmelo L. Martines, "Teologia y Contextualizacion." In *Mision y Contextualizacion: Llevar el Mensaje Biblico a un Mundo Multicultural*. Gerald A. Klingbeil, editor. Entre Rios, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata (2005): 233-234.

[2] There have been a good number of articles written in regards to methods in biblical interpretation. They can be accessed from the Biblical Research Institute (https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org); see for example Richard M. Davidson,

reflection about the way theology and mission are practiced. It is disadvantageous when theology and mission work alone in their peculiar sides apart from each other.

In the Bible, the message and mission given by God comes from his revelation and initiative to seek and save (Gen. 3: 9, 15, 21). This revelation (message) gives meaning, content and direction to both the study of theology and the practice of mission. Theology and mission are always present in the salvation process initiated by God. He takes the initiative and reveals himself, providing a message (theology) and a mission to his people. His message and mission are based on the revelation of his character and his initiative to save (*Missio Dei*).[3] The example of Moses illustrates this case; God speaks to Moses from the burning bush and from this experience and revelation that takes place by divine initiative, Moses grows in understanding God's will and plans for his people. The message Moses receives from God provides the content and method for his mission.

The vision and encounter that Paul has with Christ provides perhaps one of the best examples of the unity of theology and mission and how these two disciplines (facets of God's revelation) walk hand in hand. In the knowledge of God (theology) and the preaching of the gospel (mission), the knowledge and salvation of God is transmitted, is given to the Gentiles. Paul writes and transmits theology in mission, and this mission (Acts 9) is also the factor that drives Paul's theology. In preaching—he writes; and in writing—he preaches! It is theology and mission walking hand in hand.

Peter also receives a vision (Acts 10), wherewith God reveals his plans for the salvation of the Gentiles, an all-encompassing mission to him and to the early church. His reality and worldviews are shaken and changed.

"Interpreting Scripture According to the Scriptures: Toward an Understanding of Seventh-day Adventist Hermeneutics" (https://www.adventistbiblicalresearch.org/sites/default/files/pdf/ interp%20scripture%20davidson.pdf). An important article is the official statement on "Methods of Bible Study—Bible Study: Presuppositions, Principles, and Methods." This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, October 12, 1986 (http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/0/methods-of-bible-study/en/service/).

[3] Samuel F. Rowen, paraphrasing Abraham Kuyper says that "the knowledge gained in theology, a knowledge of God, is obtained because the object of study is active in making himself known. God actively communicates this knowledge in creation and the redemptive revelation in Scriptures." Rowen, citing Elias Medeiros dos Santos, a Brazilian missiologist comments that "there is a 'missiological movement' in God in which He is making himself known. God is on a mission and the mission is to make his glory known throughout all the earth. The only knowledge of God we have is the knowledge of a God who is on a mission" (1996:97).

This revelation of God's mission and His plan of salvation that includes people of all races, languages and nations, led the apostles to expand their theology and to contextualize their mission methods. The vision broke barriers, prejudices, traditions, and human rules, and provided a broader understanding of God (theology) and his mission, and also determined the mission of the church.[4]

In Christ, theology and mission are joined together perfectly. In him (Isaiah 7:14), we receive the knowledge and mission of a God who is not only eternal and divine, but also a loving and personal God (John 1:1, 14).[5] In the incarnated Christ—the gospel and good news of God, we have the example, the method, and the principle *par excellence* of God's mission and the mission of his disciples and the church.

This pattern of integrating theology and mission is clearly provided to us in the Bible. Thus mission is not the mother of theology[6] as some advocate, nor it is more important. Theology likewise, is not superior or more important than mission. The entire Bible gives us a balanced understanding of theology and mission and how they are joined together. This becomes evident in the life and ministry of Christ, as God unites himself with man to save the fallen human race. When theologians or missiologists "sit in ivory towers (meaning, in their offices) and understand/do theology without engaging in a practical missional way, then that theology is impractical,"[7] inappropriate and unrealistic, as it does not integrate life as it is lived out in all its dimensions. When mission practitioners do not engage in serious Bible study and in dialogue with theologians and the discipline of theology, their work is without foundation and direction.

Furthermore, the purpose of theology and mission is to demonstrate in word and deed, in theory and in practice, the everlasting gospel (Rev. 14). It is to aim at the cross of Calvary, declaring and presenting with power and effectiveness the "Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (Jn.

[4] The council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 is a good an example.

[5] Ellen G. White, in the book *The Desire of Ages*, expands this understanding: "It was to manifest this glory that He came to our world. To this sin-darkened earth He came to reveal the light of God's love,–to be 'God with us'. . . . By coming to dwell with us, Jesus was to reveal God both to men and to angels. He was the Word of God,–God's thought made audible" (1898: 15).

[6] In his book *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission, David J. Bosch says that contemporary New Testament scholars claim that the systematic theologian Martin Kahler said at the beginning of last century (1907), that "mission is the mother of theology" (Orbis, 1991: 16, 489).*

[7] Petras Bahadur. E-mail message. October 08, 2014.

1:29). Paul demonstrates this theology and this mission by getting as close as possible to people in order to save them for Christ. He says: "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22).

This is the methodology of Paul, who by word and deed integrates into his ministry both the knowledge and the preaching of the gospel. He says, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). He takes the example of Christ and contextualizes it in his own apostolic life. Paul's theology and mission relate to each other not just as theory and practice, in the sense that his mission flows from his theology, but rather in the sense that his theology is mission oriented, and his mission is fully related to his identity, vocation and calling. Both his theology and mission are birthed in God's revelation, and as such God's revelation propels Paul's mission and drives his theology. Paul is a theologian, but above all he is an apostle, a servant, a missionary.[8]

Brief Personal Mission Background

When my wife and I lived and worked in Central Asia, during the second term of our missionary assignment[9] we noticed that parents, especially mothers, did not engage in family worship in their homes. Actually, we realized that Bible teaching and home worship that engaged babies and young children was almost non-existent, especially among those who had joined the church just after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Sabbath School program in one of the only churches of the country did not prioritize children, mostly because parents had a strong belief that very young children could not understand or grasp anything taught to them,

[8] See David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 1991: 492-496, and 123-124. In the article entitled, "Doing Theology in Mission," Jon Dybdahl "suggested that Paul was a missionary before he was a theologian." In *Faith Development in Context: Presenting Christ in Creative Ways*. Bruce L. Bauer, ed. Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission (2005): 1; see also Peter M. van Bemmelen, "Reponse to Jon Dibdahl's Paper," ibid., 29.

[9] During our first mission assignment we lived and worked in a very remote place in the formed Soviet Union, where we were the only Christians or Seventh-day Adventists in the region. There we had to seriously think about issues of how to contextualize our lives, methods, and approaches in order to properly communicate the Adventist message and be witnesses for the gospel to people of a Muslim background. The third part of my doctoral dissertation contains a case study that examines this experience. See Wagner Kuhn, "Toward a Holistic Approach to Relief, Development, and Christian Witness: with Special Reference to ADRA's Mission to Naxcivan, 1993-2003." PhD Dissertation, (Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA).

especially spiritual or religious subjects. It was very difficult to sit at church Sabbath after Sabbath without being able to do much.

We talked about this issue several times with church officers, and after several attempts from my wife to offer help in this area, a small room in the basement of the church building was given, so she could start a Sabbath School for very young children. She made intentional efforts to engage with mothers and to have their support, but little was achieved. Mothers did not believe young children could be taught and understand biblical teachings even through stories. It was very challenging, to say the least. Finally a breakthrough happened when my wife invited a couple of very young mothers to visit our home. During this one visit, many changes took place, as these young mothers watched how my wife conducted a home worship with our two daughters (4 years, and 6 months old) and how engaged and attentive the kids were, including even our 6 months old baby.

My wife intentionally tried to adapt and contextualize the message of the Bible not only to our kids, but also to these young mothers who were not of a Christian[10] background. We had to contextualize the methods so the teaching of the message and the discipling of these mothers and their children would be appropriate and effective.[11] We also had to understand them, their culture, and their way of thinking and to adapt and contextualize our lives accordingly. Also, to be understood by them, as we shared the gospel, was of paramount importance, especially if we wanted them to believe and practice the biblical message as espoused by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.[12]

The Challenge of Foreign Missions

Appropriate methods and specific skills are needed as the church shares the gospel cross-culturally, especially to non-Christians. The Christian

[10] Most of the new believers were from a Muslim (and secular) background.

[11] My wife engaged in intentionally helping these young mothers by letting them observe her style, methods, and content as she taught our own children during home worships, and by also teaching and discipling them and their children during the Sabbath School time. She had to contextualize the message and methods, along with resources as well in order to be effective and relevant in the context she was ministering. Not only was she a foreigner, she did not know their background, their language, customs, and way of thinking. We had to contextualize our lives as well as the worship form and style in order for them to be able to understand and participate in the learning and sharing of the gospel.

[12] I was particularly blessed to have completed an MA in Missions at the SDA Theological Seminary (Andrews University) before going to serve and minister as a cross-cultural missionary in a post-soviet atheist and secular context and in a country whose religion was traditionally Muslim.

mission enterprise has had its share of failures and challenges as it tried to advance the gospel to the world. The Adventist Church has gained significant growth in regions where Christianity is widespread, but has faced major challenges in preaching the gospel and making converts in least evangelized areas of the world, like the 10/40 window, especially among major world religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam. It has also faced enormous difficulty to evangelize in those places where secularism and post-modernism are predominant among the majority of the population.

The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is carried forward in the context of the great controversy and the soon coming of Jesus. Under the guidance and empowerment of the Holy Spirit, members from all parts of the world accomplish the church's mission[13] through the following four main methods: preaching, teaching, healing, and discipling.[14] These overarching methodologies are further subdivided into a multiplicity of methods and practices to effectively "translate" the gospel message to all in both theory and practice, and word and deed.

This translation or communication of the biblical message involves all members and entails intentional efforts by all departments operated by the church. Institutions have also played an important role in carrying forward God's mission, specifically publishing houses, clinics and hospitals, and schools and universities. Educational institutions have been established to

[13] "The mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to make disciples of all people, communicating the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels' messages of Revelation 14:6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and unite with His remnant Church, discipling them to serve Him as Lord and preparing them for His soon return" (Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. GC Official Statements; October 13, 2009).

[14] "*Preaching*: Accepting Christ's commission (Matthew 28:18-20), we proclaim to all the world, in these last days, the everlasting gospel of God's love, most fully revealed in His Son's life, ministry, atoning death, resurrection and high priestly ministry. Recognizing the Bible to be God's infallible revelation of His will, we present its full message, including the second advent of Christ and the continuing authority of His Ten Commandment law with its reminder of the Seventh-day Sabbath. *Teaching*: Acknowledging that development of mind and character is essential to God's redemptive plan, we promote the growth of a mature understanding of and relationship to God, His Word and the created universe. *Healing*: Affirming the Biblical principles of the well-being of the whole person, we make the preservation of health and healing of the sick a priority and through our ministry to the poor and oppressed, cooperate with the Creator in His compassionate work of restoration. *Discipling*: Affirming the continued spiritual growth and development of all members, we nurture the newly converted, instruct them in righteous living, train them for effective witness and encourage their responsive obedience to God's will" (Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. GC Official Statements; October 13, 2009).

provided the necessary education for those engaged in the challenging task of evangelizing the world. Battle Creek College, Loma Linda, Avondale, and many others, were founded to provide training and preparation for missionaries as they worked in their homeland and overseas.

About the middle of the twentieth century, preparation for mission service included a call and commitment to God, thorough Bible knowledge, and understanding of languages. As the task of witnessing and working cross-culturally became more complex and challenging, it was increasingly evident that missionaries needed specific training and orientation before going overseas to live and work.[15]

Cross-cultural Training and Mission Resources

More specialized missionary training and preparation for cross-cultural work was made available through the official establishment of the Department of World Mission (DWM) during the 1965-1966 school year. This new department became part of the SDA Theological Seminary located at Andrews University and was given the primary responsibility of conducting mission institutes for the specific purpose of training overseas missionaries. The DWM was funded mostly by the General Conference and continued to train missionaries along with the teaching of mission classes to seminary students until 1981. At this time the training of missionaries was assigned to the Institute of World Mission (IWM), a more separate entity tasked and focused entirely on the preparation of missionaries. The DWM continued its work but now assuming a more specific responsibility of mission research and academic teaching within the Seminary functions.[16] For many years now IWM has worked in close cooperation with DWM and has produced an excellent curriculum and also several resources for mission education and training and thus has contributed significantly to the discipline of missiology. Some of these mission resources are *Mission Possible: The Challenge of Mission Today*, by Gottfried Oosterwal (1972); *Student Orientation Manual*, by Madeline Johnston and Nancy Vyhmeister (1984); *Missions: A Two Way Street*, by Jon Dybdahl (1986), *Re-Visioning Adventist Mission in Europe*, edited by Erich Baumgartner (1998); *The Community of Faith: The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Contemporary World*, by Russell L. Staples (1999); *Adventist Mission*

[15] See Pat Gustin. "Institute of World Mission: Forty-five Years and Counting." *JAMS*, Vol. 7, No. 1:3 (2011).

[16] See Staples as cited in Gustin, 4.

Facing the 21st Century, edited by Jon Dybdahl (1999); and *Passport to Mission* (1995, 1999, 2009), by IWM faculty.[17]

Passport to Mission, the IWM textbook, published initially in 1995, is in its 3rd edition (Cheryl Doss, ed. 2009) now, and has been published in English, Portuguese, Spanish, Russian, and Korean, with translation in French. It has greatly helped in the cross-cultural training and preparation of short-term volunteers and long-term career missionaries and it has become an integral part of the curriculum of the Institute now for about 20 years.

The book reinforces the integrated pedagogical content of the IWM curriculum, which aims at effective cross-cultural mission practice and experience. The content is comprised of five main areas, and its purpose is that missionaries will be able to share the Adventist biblical message by continuing to *Grow Spiritually*, *Think Biblically*, *Reason Missiologically*, *Live Holistically*, and *Serve Incarnationally*. Hundreds, if not thousands, of students, missionaries, and other church workers have benefitted from this curriculum, becoming more aware and better equipped to face the many challenges of living and working in multi-cultural and religious contexts.

For nearly five decades now, the faculty of the DWM and the IWM has provided a steady and significant contribution to Adventist missiology through the publication of several books and hundreds of articles in a variety of journals and books. In 2005, the first issue of the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* was published. This journal is a timely and much needed academic and professional mission publication. Since then, many relevant articles written by different authors of various backgrounds and mission expertise have been published. From 2005 to 2014, the DWM has also published 16 books dealing with a variety of missiological issues and challenges that have confronted the Adventist church around the world.[18]

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[17] See Gustin, 15.

[18] *A Man with a Vision. Mission: A Festschrift Honoring Russell L. Staples*. Rudi Maier, ed. (2005); *Faith Development in Context: Presenting Christ in Creative Ways*. Bruce L. Bauer, ed. (2006); *Adventist Responses to Cross-cultural Mission*. Global Mission Issues Committee Papers. Vol. 1. Bruce L. Bauer, ed. (2006); *Adventist Responses to Cross-cultural Mission*. Global Mission Issues Committee Papers,Vol. II. Bruce L. Bauer, ed. (2007); *Working with the Poor: Selected Passages from Ellen G. White on Social Responsibility*. Rudi Maier, ed. (2007); *Comfort My People: Towards a Growing Adventist-Jewish Friendship*. Richard Elofer, ed. (2009); *Encountering God in Life and Mission: A Festschrift Honoring Jon L. Dybdahl*. Rudi Maier, ed. (2010); *Diversity: Challenges and Opportunities.* Second Adventist Mission in Africa Conference. Bruce L. Bauer, ed. (2010); A Man of Passionate Reflection: A Festschrift Honoring Jerald Whitehouse. Bruce L. Bauer, ed. (2011); *Africa—Adventist Mission in Africa: Challenges and Prospects*. First Adventist

Adventist Mission Methods and Contextualization

Andrew F. Walls, in his award-winning book, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* wrote: "Politics is the art of the possible; translation is the art of the impossible."[19] The impossibility of translating the Word of God and the good news of the gospel into human reality and language becomes possible in Christ and through the Holy Spirit. And mysteriously, this is exactly what God in Christ has done, as the Word becomes flesh and incarnates into humanity.

In a way, the incarnation of Jesus was the method God used to "translate," to "contextualize," salvation into human reality, and to a dying world. He came close to his people, identifying himself with those he wanted to save. He became a servant in order to minister and serve to those he came to save, thus setting an example to his followers. In his life and ministry we find the best example and the most effective methods to guide our theological reflections and mission practice. It has been written: "Christ's methods alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.'"[20]

In the Old Testament times we see the incarnation as a principle for contextualization exemplified in each occasion God came close to his people to be with them, helping and providing for them. The sanctuary is a very clear example of the incarnation prior of Jesus coming in human form. There, God came down and dwelt with his people. The sanctuary and its service was the method God used to contextualize his very presence among his people, to translate the process of redemption to humanity.

Mission in Africa Conference. Gorden Doss, ed. (2011); The Book and the Student: Theological Education as Mission: A Festschrift honoring José Carlos Ramos. Wagner Kuhn, ed. (2012); *Toward a Bright Future: Economic Self-Reliance in Africa. Third Adventist Mission in Africa Conference. Bruce L. Bauer, ed. (2013); Revisiting Postmodernism: An Old Debate on a New Era*. Bruce L. Bauer and Kleber O. Goncanves, eds. (2013); *Redemption and Transformation Through Relief and Development: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives of God's Holistic Gospel*. Wagner Kuhn (2013); *Shame and Honor: Presenting Biblical Themes in Shame and Honor Contexts*. Bruce L. Bauer, ed. (2014); *Church and Society: Missiological Challenges for the Seventh-day Adventist Church*. Rudi Maier, ed. (2015 forthcoming); and *Mission Models of the Church in Urban Contexts*. Bruce L. Bauer and Kelvin Onongha, eds. (2015 forthcoming).

[19] Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996), 26.

[20] Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (1905), 143.

Christ exemplified and commended four major mission methods (preaching, teaching, healing, and discipling[21]), which have been followed by the church and can be sub-divided into categories. These categories describe more specific ministries such as personal Bible studies (one-on-one), public evangelism, publishing work and literature evangelism, health reform, medical missionary work, radio, TV, and media evangelism, mission through educational institutions, small groups, integrated evangelism, community services and ADRA, to name a few.

These various methods have worked well in many places, especially where most of the population has been predominantly Christian, as in the territories of the North, Inter and South American Divisions, for example, but have not yielded significant results in areas where Christians are a small minority or non-existent. As such, there will always be the need to try new approaches of evangelism and to develop new missionary methods that work in these more challenging contexts, especially where most people are non-Christians.

The more recent method called contextualization[22] is a careful approach to cross-cultural evangelism and has received a lot of attention not only in North America. Other regions of the world started to advance publications on this method or approach for engaging in transcultural mission. In 2005, a pertinent book was published in Argentina: *Mision y Contextualizacion: Llevar el Mensaje Biblico a un Mundo Multicultural*. From an interdisciplinary perspective, the book explored the interrelations of mission and contextualization within the context of a multicultural world, both at local and regional levels, as well as in global contexts.[23] It is a more academic and theoretical book as a good number of its articles are dealing with historical, exegetical, and theological studies.

In Asia, the Mission and Society Research Institute of Sahmyook University has started the *Asia-Africa Journal of Mission & Ministry* in 2009, and from its beginning it has published several articles dealing with the subject of contextualization. In the same year, an important symposium

[21] See Matthew 28:18-20. Discipling has not been effectively done through our church system. For many decades our church has emphasized the preaching, teaching, and healing aspects only.

[22] See the issue "Contextualization: Presenting the Gospel in Culturally Relevant Terms. *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*." Vol. 1, No. 2 (2005).

[23] See *Mision y Contextualizacion: Llevar el Mensaje Biblico a un Mundo Multicultural* (*Mission and Contextualization: Bringing the Biblical Message to a Multicultural World*). Gerald A. Klingbeil, editor. Entre Rios, Argentina: Editorial Universidad Adventista del Plata (2005): xiii-xiv.

took place in Brazil, which later resulted in the publication of a book dealing with various theological and methodological aspects of mission (*Teologia e Metodologia da Missao*. 2011). The work is theological and biblical, but deals also with the many practical realities of ministry, as several of the articles presented focus on more practical methods of mission and evangelism. The consensus and commitment declaration # 5 of the symposium (19 July 2009) states: "We reaffirm the necessity of contextualization, that is, to adapt the methods to the different cultures, without altering the content of the message."[24]

The fact that the subject of contextualization has received a considerable amount of attention in several conferences and publications around the world attest to the reality that without proper and critical contextualization of the gospel message, people will not be able to properly understand what is been communicated to them.

So, what methodologies must Seventh-day Adventists use as they engage in preaching the gospel and witnessing cross-culturally? How has the church relate to some of these methodologies and how they have influenced our mission thinking and practice? Moreover, what has been the engagement and contribution of both the Institute of World Mission and the Department of World Mission in regards to these issues? What have been the strategies the church has employed in order to reach the adherents of the great world religions (Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Animism)? And to what degree these methods have worked or not?

The Discipline of Missiology and Contextualization

There have been various methods that Christians in general have used to preach the gospel in order to advance the kingdom of God throughout history. For over 50 years now some of these methods or strategies have received a lot of attention amongst Evangelicals and other Christians. Among these, for example, are the church growth movement, the homogeneous unit principle, people groups and people group movements, church planting, contextualization, small groups, insider movements, missional church, to name a few.

Contextualization in particular has been a topic of discussion and study by some Adventist church leaders, missiologists, and theologians, for about

[24] *Teologia e Metodologia da Missao*. VIII Simposio Biblico-Teologico Sul-Americano. Cachoeira, BA, Brasil: CePLiB–Seminario Adventista Latino-Americano de Teologia (2011): 686.

two decades now.[25] However, outside of the Adventist church, and in the context of the discipline of missiology, the discussion has started much earlier.[26]

Let's look at four main missiological journals: *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (*EMQ*), *Missiology*, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* (*IBMR*), and *International Journal of Frontier Missiology* (*IJFM*). The first two articles on contextualization appeared in these journals in the 1960s, another 11 in the 1970s, and about a dozen in the 1980s. In the 1990s there was a major increase and a total of 47 articles were published on these journals. The years 2001 to 2010 saw yet another increase and 58 more articles focused on the subject of contextualization were published.[27] As one can observe, this trend shows how much attention this contextual approach to mission has received and continues to receive.[28]

With the establishment of the Global Mission Strategy in 1990, and the subsequent creation and/or permission for more contextualized ministries to be developed through the Global Mission Religious Study Centers, the need for reflection and discussion about these new approaches to mission became evident. It is important to note that these more contextualized ministries came into existence not because of the articles on contextualization, but because the church intentionally tried "to move from reaching mainly Christian populations to reaching non-Christian" peoples.[29] The missiological reflections in books and articles came later, and were an

[25] See specifically *Faith Development in Context: Presenting Christ in Creative Ways* (2005); *Adventist Responses to Cross-cultural Mission*. Global Mission Issues Committee Papers from 1998 to 2005, published in Vol. 1. (2006) and Vol. II (2007); *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*, Vol. 1, no. 2 (2005); and many other articles printed in the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies* and other venues as well.

[26] See *The Word Among Us: Contextualizing Theology for Mission Today*. Dean S. Gilliland, ed. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers (2002). Previously published by Word Publishing (1989).

[27] Kenneth Nehrbass, "The Half-life of Missiological Facts." *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. 42, No. 3, July (2014): 286.

[28] As examples see the articles of Volker Kuster, "Intercultural Theology Is a Must." *IBMR*, Vol. 38, No. 4. October 2014: 171-176; Richard Hibbert and Evelyn Hibbert, "Contextualizing Sin for Cross-Cultural Evangelism." *Missiology*, Vol. 42, No. 3. July 2014: 309-321; and Craig Ott, "The Power of Biblical Metaphors for the Contextualized Communication of the Gospel." *Missiology*, Vol. 42, No. 4. October 2014: 357-374.

[29] Gary Krause, as cited by Rick McEdward, "Adventist Mission Theology: Developing a Biblical Foundation." *JAMS*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2011): 71.

attempt to understand and provide guidance to what was happening in practice in the mission field.[30]

These reflections have been presented in form of articles at the Global Mission Issues Committee Meetings of the General Conference, starting in 1998. The faculty of IWM and DWM, church leaders, theologians, and mission practitioners have been heavily involved in tackling various mission issues and in writing papers to be presented at these meetings. The directors of the Global Mission Study Centers[31] have also been part of these dialogues and active participants of these meetings. Many of the subjects and discussions on various strategies and methods on mission that included contextualization and Faith Development in Context and that were dealt with in these meetings were latter published in specific books as well as in the *Journal of Adventist Mission Studies*. These articles tried to respond to a variety of missiological issues and challenges that confronted the Adventist church around the world.

Contextualization and Faith Development in Context

Since 1998, members of the Global Mission Issues Committee have studied and discussed the issue of contextualization from a variety of perspectives, which has also included the perspective of the Faith Development in Context (FDIC) approach.

Although the FDIC approach was developed by the leaders of the Center for Adventist Muslim Relations (GC-AMR), Jerald Whitehouse is the one to be credited as the principal contributor to this contextual approach to reaching Muslims. Influential mentors to Whitehouse were Drs. Robert Darnell and Kenneth Oster. Darnell worked as field secretary of the Middle Eastern Division in the 1960s and also as the president of the Middle East Union in the 1970s. Oster worked as director of the TEAM

[30] This means that the Global Mission initiative was not a result of missiological reflection but rather a reaction to the statistical fact that the world's unreached was a huge number. There are still major challenges in the Global Mission initiative along with a great need for more missiological and theological reflection.

[31] The Global Mission Study Centers of the General Conference currently are the following: Global Center for Adventist-Muslim Relations, World Jewish-Adventist Friendship Center, Center for East Asian Religions (focus on reaching Buddhists), Center for Secular and Post-Modern Studies, Center for South Asian Religions (focused on reaching Hindus), and the more recently added Global Mission Urban Center (2013).

(Trust for Evangelism Among Muslims) in the Middle East Union in the 1970s.[32]

The FDIC approach has been the focus of a lot of attention in various venues and meetings. It has been criticized and supported by mission practitioners, church leaders, missiologists, and theologians alike. The FDIC is an approach that promotes,

> a system in which new Adventist believers would not be extracted from their culture and would be able to remain within their Muslim context. Rather than promoting a rejection of the new believer's background, the Faith Development in Context (FDIC) approach sought to critically sift that culture and religious background through the biblical message. . . . This type of ministry begins where people are in their context, leads people to believe in Scriptures as the basis for faith and religious life, and encourages the believers to accept Jesus (*Isa*) as Lord and Savior as they live out their life of faith within the Islamic context.[33]

In 2001, Wolfgang Lepke concluded a PhD dissertation in the School of Education at Andrews University, entitled, "An Evaluation of a Contextual Witnessing Project within a Resistant People Group." [34] This research was written in order to assess the FDIC mission experiment that

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[32] See Peter Roennfeldt, "Faith Developmen in Context: an Overview." In *Faith Development in Context* (2005): 31-48; also, Wolfgang Lepke, "The Story of Jerald Whitehouse." In *A Man of Passionate Reflection* (2011): 19-36.

[33] Rick McEdward, " A Brief Overview of Adventist Witness Among Muslims." In *A Man of Passionate Reflection* (2011): 246.

[34] The research indicated that Lepke "observed a movement, organizationally separate from the local Adventist church structure. While its beliefs resemble the SDA doctrines, the believers are culturally still Muslim. The identity of the believers remains connected to Islam, which enables them not to be viewed upon by the Muslims majority as traitors. This identity makes it possible for them to stay in their context and witness. Evidence of the effectiveness of this approach is the rapid growth of the movement, having reached nearly 5,000 baptized believers within the eleven years of the movement's existence (in 2001). An effective witness in this movement *must* be established within the community as trustworthy and credible. The effective witness shares first from the *Qur'ran* and later leads the inquirer to the Bible and finally to all of its truths, including the identity of Jesus as Protector against evil forces, Mediator, Lord and Savior. …Considering all the evidence found, this movement seems to be a promising approach to sharing the gospel with Muslims, notwithstanding challenges in the area of finances, leadership development, and persecution. This ministry is recommended as a model for future Muslim evangelism with adaptation to particular contexts. Wolfgang Lepke, "An Evaluation of a Contextual Witnessing Project within a Resistant People Group." Unpublished Dissertation. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2001. In "Results" and "Conclusions," from the "Abstract of Graduate Student Research."

had been carried out in an Asian country (Islamex[35]), under the leadership of Whitehouse, director of GC-AMR. Whitehouse himself had lived in Islamex from 1988 to 1992, and in November 1989 requested that the Far Eastern Division start a new and specific ministry among Muslims. About ten years later, Lepke went to Islamex to evaluate this mission experiment, which he called the "R-Movement" and drew a favorable conclusion about it, thus providing documented support for the FDIC approach.

From its establishment in 1995, and under the leadership of Whitehouse (until 2009), "the focus of the GC-AMR has been on experimentation, developing new methods [mostly FDIC), and starting new field initiatives." GC-AMR has also sponsored several conferences (2000 in Toronto, 2003 in Cyprus, and 2004 in Montenegro) to promote the FDIC approach, present case studies, discuss lessons learned, and also to work on guidelines for these contextual ministries.[36]

As some critics of the FDIC approach started to voice concerns about this ministry initiative, in 2003, the General Conference through the Global Mission Issues Committee meetings prepared guidelines to be used, as appropriate, by church leaders, educators, and other church members when proclaiming the gospel in non-Christian environments. These guidelines entitled "Engaging in Global Mission" deal with five main topics: 1) Use of the Bible in Mission Vis-a-vis "Sacred Writings"; 2) Transitional Organizational Structures; 3) Fundamental Beliefs and Preparation for Baptism (*Fundamental Beliefs and Non-Christians*, and *Baptismal Guidelines*); 4) Forms of Worship; and 5) Contextualization and Syncretism.[37]

Accordingly, in this General Conference document, contextualization has been defined as;

> The intentional and discriminating attempt to communicate the gospel message in a culturally meaningful way. Seventh-day Adventist contextualization is motivated by the serious responsibility of fulfilling the gospel commission in a very diverse world. It is based on the authority of the Scripture and the guidance of the Spirit and aims at communicating biblical truth in a culturally-relevant way. In that task contextualization

[35] A pseudonym for a real country.

[36] Roennfeldt, "Faith Developmen in Context" (2005): 35.

[37] "Engaging in Global Mission." General Conference. http://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements/guidelines/article/go/0/engaging-in-global-mission/ (retrieved September 26, 2014).

> must be faithful to the Scripture and meaningful to the new host culture, remembering that all cultures are judged by the gospel.
>
> Intentional contextualization of the way we communicate our faith and practice is biblical, legitimate, and necessary. Without it the Church faces the dangers of miscommunication and misunderstandings, loss of identity, and syncretism. Historically, adaptation has taken place around the world as a crucial part of spreading the three angels' messages to every kindred, nation, tribe, and people. This will continue to happen.[38]

Six years later, a follow-up policy document, entitled "Roadmap for Mission," was voted by the General Conference Executive Committee, at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland on October 13, 2009. This document builds on the "Engaging in Global Mission" guidelines, while at the same time trying to define and spell out more specific theological and biblical understandings on how the Church must conduct its mission. Here is a summary of the document:

> -Rationale—God's mission for this world motivates and informs our mission.
> -The Mission—Seventh-day Adventist mission is centered in God's loving gift of
> His Son to be the Savior of the world.
> -Fulfilling the Mission—Our mission remains unchanged wherever we find ourselves in the world. …Fulfilling the mission where non-Christian religions prevail often entails significant modifications in approaching the task.
>
> 1) The Example of the Apostles–The conditions Seventh-day Adventists face in sharing the message of Jesus to people of other religions largely parallel those that the apostles encountered.
> 2) Writings of Other Religions–Paul made references to non-biblical writings in his speech in Athens and his letters (Acts 17:38; 1 Cor 15:33; Titus 1:12), but he gave priority to the Scriptures (OT) in his proclamation and instruction to the new Christian communities (Acts 13:13-47; 2 Tim 3: 16, 17; 4:2).
> 3) Contextualization–Jesus, as our model, was the perfect

[38] Ibid. "Engaging in Global Mission."

example of love in His relationships with others.

4) Openness and Identity–Paul sought to be open and honest in his presentation of the gospel (2 Cor 4:2).
5) Transitional Groups–In some situations, Seventh-day Adventist mission may include the formation of transitional groups (usually termed Special Affinity Groups) that lead the people from a non-Christian religion into the Seventh-day Adventist Church.
6) Baptism and Church Membership–Candidates for baptism shall confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord (Rom 10:9), accept the message and mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church as summarized in the Fundamental Beliefs, and understand that they are joining a worldwide fellowship that is loyal to God and awaits the second coming of Jesus.
7) Opportunities and Needs–Today, because of immigration and other factors, followers of world religions are found throughout the world. In this new context, leaders in all the world divisions should develop specific plans to bring the Seventh-day Adventist message to these peoples.
8) Where Freedom is Restricted–Our mission takes us at times to societies where religious freedom is severely restricted.

Conclusion—The mission to reach followers of world religions poses substantial challenges. . . . Through whatever approach we follow, its end result is to lead men and women into membership with those who confess Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, who embrace the Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, demonstrating the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, and looking forward to the soon coming of Christ. They shall identify themselves with the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church in doctrine, life values, hope, and mission. [39]

[39] "Roadmap for Mission." General Conference. http://www.adventist.org/information/official-statements/documents/article/go/0/roadmap-for-mission/ (retrieved September 26, 2014).

It is clear from the document that a form of ministry initiative that is not visibly identified with the worldwide Church is questionable, and thus would not normally be acceptable. Thus, any approach that is implemented in parallel and in an invisible or unrecognized structure and that is not supervised or coordinated by the organized church does not fall within the suggested ways of doing global mission.

The same year (2009) that the "Roadmap for Mission" policy document was voted by the Executive Committee of the General Conference, a student from SDA Theological Seminary of Andrews University, Adefemi S. Adesina, defended his PhD dissertation (Department of World Mission), now with a much less favorable conclusion about the FDIC as compared to that of Lepke in 2001. The research, entitled "Faith Development in Context and Muslim Evangelization: a Biblical and Missiological Evaluation" (2009), was a follow-up evaluation of the R-Movement in Islamex. Adesina's research demonstrates that,

> While FDIC may have yielded results in terms of baptisms, the approach has not been able to successfully establish a Bible-based community of faith among Muslims in Islamex. The members of FDIC have no knowledge that they are part of the worldwide fellowship of Seventh-day Adventists, they have only a limited understanding and use of the Bible, and therefore have very distorted understanding of the Christian faith. . . However, in spite of its challenges, the approach could be used as a dialogical approach and may provide the church with an opportunity to present the gospel to Muslims, especially in gospel-resistant societies. Insider movements probably should be defined more as pre-evangelism rather than as a soul-winning approach.[40]

Sadly for some, and probably gain for others, the GC-Adventist Muslim Relations Center located in Cyprus was discontinued in November 2008. With the restructuring of the GCAMR Center, there was a subsequent decrease in official and/or direct attention of the church to the FDIC ministry initiative in Islamex. Administrative practices, theology, ecclesiology, and mission somehow came into conflict; the understanding of theology, church, and how mission should be done, along with the actual practice of this mission initiative (FDIC), and how it has been implemented needs continuing evaluation.

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[40] Adefemi S. Adesina. "Faith Development in Context and Muslim Evangelization: a Biblical and Missiological Evaluation." PhD Dissertation. Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University (2009): from "Abstract."

In 2009, the GCAMR Center was restructured, and has continued to operate under the leadership of Lester Merklin, but does not have a central location anymore; its three leaders have operated out of Nairobi, Kenya, and Andrews University. Currently the GCAMR does not focus on FDIC ministries anymore. It functions more as a team of pastors-educators, who are helping the church do its mission and ministry to Muslims as best and most effectively as possible. The center has been involved in training and in creating resources for Muslim outreach. FDIC is no longer a contextual method emphasized by the Center, rather, various other contextual approaches for reaching Muslims are considered as well. The Center's directors and its associate directors (Lester Merklin, Petras Bahadur, Samuel Lumwe, and Oscar Osindo[41]) have also guided and supported various church led ministry initiatives around the world whose purpose is to relate to Muslims in an effective way, present the message of salvation to them, lead them to Christ, and improve discipleship within these ministries.

Contextualization, Syncretism, and Dual Allegiance: The New Fundamental Belief

In this discussion of contextual approaches, worth noting has been the development of the new 28th Fundamental Belief. The initial discussion on the topic of contextualization as it relates to syncretism and dual allegiance (in relation to the new fundamental belief) started in Africa in a session of the Mission Institute in 2001. At that session an African missionary brought to their attention the issue that Africans could not talk about syncretism and dual allegiance as these major issues on African spirituality (animism) were not on the Church Manual and nor were part of the church's fundamental beliefs.

The faculty of IWM brought this issue to members of the GM Issues Committee, and in following years several articles about these topics were presented and discussed by missiologists, church leaders, and theologians, and as a result the new fundamental belief was finally voted in the 2005 General Conference session.

Recommendations on "Spiritual Life" and "Spiritual Powers" were made by the members of the GM Issues Committee on April 9, 2002, and were submitted to the General Conference ADCOM. Specifically on the issue of "Spiritual Powers" the recommendation reads:

[41] Since 2013, Oscar Osindo serves as an associate director of the Institute of World Mission (General Conference).

Inasmuch as

1. The 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventists were written in a Western context where belief in spirit is not a major issue, and
2. For the majority of the world, including traditional religionists, folk Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims, and New Age believers, the issue of spiritual powers and ancestors is an important day to day experience, and
3. The New Testament deals extensively with the issue of angels, spirits, demons, and Jesus' power over them;

It is recommended that the General Conference Administrative Committee give study to the addition of a statement to the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventists covering spiritual powers, which should include the following issues:

1. The victory of Jesus and his authority over all evil spiritual powers;
2. The role of good and evil angels (spirits) in the life of people;
3. The responsibility of the Church to follow Jesus' model of ministry in bringing deliverance and healing to afflicted people;
4. The role of the Holy Spirit and the Bible in giving guidance, victory, and indwelling power to believers in the day-to-day life.[42]

This recommendation was combined with the recommendation on "Spiritual Life" and approved by the 2005 General Conference session as the new Fundamental Belief "Growing in Christ" and is listed now as Fundamental Belief # 11.[43]

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[42] "2002 Recommendations and Approved Statements." Global Mission Issues Committee. In *Faith Development in Context* (2005): 96.

[43] "By His death on the cross Jesus triumphed over the forces of evil. He who subjugated the demonic spirits during His earthly ministry has broken their power and made certain their ultimate doom. Jesus' victory gives us victory over the evil forces that still seek to control us, as we walk with Him in peace, joy, and assurance of His love. Now the Holy Spirit dwells within us and empowers us. Continually committed to Jesus as our Saviour and Lord, we are set free from the burden of our past deeds. No longer do we live in the darkness, fear of evil powers, ignorance, and meaninglessness of our former way of life. In

A notable contribution that followed later builds on a similar discussion and topics that had previously led to the formulation and approval of Fundamental Belief # 11, as it relates to African contextual challenges. This would be the book, *The Church, Culture and Spirits: Adventism in Africa* (2011), edited by Kwabena Donkor and published by the Biblical Research Institute. It is a book that not only arises out of a need for a revised theology on the subject of animism, syncretism, and dual allegiance, it also responds to the challenge of spiritualistic manifestations in the African context and Adventist mission within a global environment. This book is an example of mission driving theology and theology informing mission on how theology and mission can work together to answer relevant questions and issues in the field.

Cross-Cultural Training for Critical Contextualization[44]

Missionary training includes the important and often misunderstood topic of critical contextualization as it relates to cross-cultural evangelist and mission. A small portion of the curriculum of the Institute of World Mission has developed a progression of themes tackling the subject of contextualization from various angles. Participants are asked several questions and they have to wrestle with these questions/issues individually and as a group. Examples of initial questions are: "What are the different cultures missionaries have to deal with as they present the gospel? Historically, what are the various ways missionaries have dealt with the unfamiliar customs and beliefs they have encountered and why?"

Students are then asked to study the five different types of contextualization[45] missionaries will have to deal with and decide which

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this new freedom in Jesus, we are called to grow into the likeness of His character, communing with Him daily in prayer, feeding on His Word, meditating on it and on His providence, singing His praises, gathering together for worship, and participating in the mission of the Church. As we give ourselves in loving service to those around us and in witnessing to His salvation, His constant presence with us through the Spirit transforms every moment and every task into a spiritual experience. (Ps 1:1, 2; 23:4; 77:11, 12; Col 1:13, 14; 2:6, 14, 15; Luke 10:17-20; Eph 5:19, 20; 6:12-18; 1 Thess 5:23; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:18; 2 Cor. 3:17, 18; Phil 3:7-14; 1 Thess 5:16-18; Matt 20:25-28; John 20:21; Gal 5:22-25; Rom 8:38, 39; 1 John 4:4; Heb 10:25)."

[44] In this session I have adapted and used much of the content from the "Mission Resources" worksheets and curriculum of the Mission Institute as they related to the topic of contextualization. Silver Spring, MD: Institute of World Mission. General Conference. January 2013.

[45] Different types of contextualization: 1) The contextualized life (adapting the life of the missionary): missionary identification, incarnational life, learning culture, learning language; 2) The contextualized approach (adapting the ways we reach people meaningfully

ones are easiest to do and why, and which are the most difficult and why. Follow up discussions on the reasons why critical contextualization is of particular importance to the church at this time in history is needed and crucial as many do not think of the implications and challenges of living in a cross-cultural and religious environment.[46]

Scripture presents models that can be used as examples to the study and practice of contextualization or adaptation. In the biblical examples that follow, 1) Matthew, Mark, Luke, John; 2) John 1:1, 14; 3) Matthew 26:17-19, 26-28; 4) Luke 16:19-31; 5) Acts 15:1-29; 6) Acts 17:16-31; and 7) Genesis 15:17-18, the questions posed to participants are: what was contextualized or adapted, how, and with what effect? Another example is in 1 Cor. 9:19-23 where Paul summarizes his approach to people of other cultures and religious beliefs. How does this approach relate to contextualization?

In Acts 15, Paul worked hard to convince the church to have different requirements for Jewish and Gentile Christians in regard to many of the Jewish laws (including circumcision). He felt this was necessary because of the context from which the Gentiles were coming. Then just a few verses later (Acts 16:1-3) he insists on circumcising Timothy before taking him with him on his next missionary journey. Questions that need to be asked are: Why did he do that? What principle is there for us in this story ("case")? Again, we see Paul's advice to the Corinthians (1 Cor. 10:23-33) in regard to foods offered to idols in the temple, and in this case, what principle can be learned from his advice as we deal with challenging mission issues?

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within *their* context): witnessing and evangelism methods that work, methods of dealing with conflict; 3) The contextualized message (adapting our message to the questions and needs of the people): prioritizing and sequencing of the message, adding as needed–beyond "the 28", focusing–emphasis, waiting–John 16:12, 13 "I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear. But when he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth;" 4) Contextualized worship (adapting the ways we worship): buildings–architecture, music, prayer modes, styles of teaching, ways of showing reverence, types of service; 5) contextualization of the old culture (evaluation of elements from the old culture—what do we keep? what do we discard? what do we modify?): uncritical acceptance, uncritical rejection, critical and faithful contextualization.

[46] The issue of "non-contextualization" is of importance here. From the end of the 19th Century to the middle of 20th Century, the Western (Christian) church carried the gospel to the rest of the world from the perspective that the Western (Christendom) world with its culture, science, and technology, was superior and better. Thus, Western culture was good and the cultures of non-westerners were bad. Even things that were clearly not biblical in Western culture were by default considered good; and things that could be qualified as biblical in non-western culture were bad, and thus rejected.

The challenge in cross-cultural contexts is that people will understand the gospel in the terms of their own language and culture.[47] And this is not an option; it is a fact. Therefore, it is the obligation of the missionary to assist new believers to understand the relation of gospel and culture: 1) they need to understand the gospel message; 2) they need to find appropriate ways to express the gospel in their culture; and 3) they need to learn to discern what the gospel condemns and affirms in their own culture.

The three common responses to culture include: 1) wholesale acceptance (uncritical contextualization): uncritical acceptance of local customs, often based on a deep respect for culture, with its inherent weaknesses; 2) wholesale rejection (denial of the old): virtually all cultural forms are thought to be linked to traditional religions, often ethnocentric at heart, with inherent weaknesses; and 3) critical contextualization: to communicate the gospel in a new context in ways that it is understandable to people there, including the development of church life and ministry that are biblically faithful and culturally appropriate in that context.[48]

The process of critical and faithful contextualization[49] is of major

[47] Petras Bahadur comments as follows; … "whether Allah is the same God like the biblical God, is another discussion. However, no matter how beautifully I describe my "God" but as long as it is a word that is foreign/white/western & Christian, their ears are closed and their minds are shut out. But if I say, 'What does Allah want us to do'? Immediately ears are raised and attention is drawn. I was invited to an Adventist family's party where their Muslim relatives also came. Their Muslim family was mainly seated on one side, and the rest of the Adventist crowd was over-powering. I struck conversation with the Muslim group and introduced myself and talked generally. At that point I was called…, to come and pray before they eat. The Muslim family was immediately turned off, and they continued to talk to each other quietly, because they knew this is going to be a Christian prayer and they have no part in that. However, I raised my hands (like a Muslim) and began to say 'Bismillah i rahman i Rahim…' (Arabic Muslim prayer–translated means 'I begin in the name of Allah, most gracious, most loving)…' and immediately this family stood up, raised their hands and began to pay attention. After prayer, they asked to speak to me. We spoke for two hours that evening, all on a positive note. Later on the Adventist family told me that that Muslim family wants to meet me again… they also confessed that their relationship with the Muslim lady (relative) has become much better whereas before she was always arguing about their wrong Christian practices. Now we are looking forward to meeting the family again. The Muslim lady is a professor at a University in Birmingham." E-mail message. October 8, 2014.

[48] See Scott Moreau, et al. 2004. *Introducing World Missions*, p. 12.

[49] Paul Hiebert has used the term "critical contextualization" to mean the intentional, selective, disciplined, thoughtful incarnation of the normative gospel into particular cultures; Gorden Doss has adjusted to faithful contextualization" and builds on Hiebert, but adds the emphasis that being faithful to the Bible is primary and adaptation to culture is secondary, though essential; and Charles Kraft refers as "appropriate contextualization" where he emphasizes, and perhaps over-emphasizes, the role of culture.

important in the cross-cultural missionary enterprise. In it, old beliefs and customs are first analyzed in terms of meanings, and then evaluated in the light of biblical principles and norms. The need to deal biblically with all areas of life is recognized, and this will lead the church to avoid adopting dating, wedding, funeral practices, music, entertainment, economic structures and political traditions from around itself or other places indiscriminately.

In order for missionaries to avoid a wholesale acceptance or a wholesale rejection of the culture he/she encounters, four steps in critical contextualization are advanced:

First–gathers uncritically all information about the meaning of all traditions, customs, and the different practices related to the issues at hand (without criticizing people, otherwise they will not open up); this focuses on understanding the old ways, and it involves both the expatriates (cross-cultural workers) and members of the local community; it is a group effort with people from both sides.

Second–a critical Bible study on the tradition, custom, or practice under scrutiny.

Third–evaluates the custom (or tradition) in light of biblical understandings. In this process the congregation has to be involved; they will grow in their own abilities to discern truth, as they get involved in biblical exegesis as well. The missionary helps as a hermeneutical bridge. It needs to be noted that people are in a better position to evaluate critically their own past customs in the biblical light; they know their culture better than anyone else. They know the deeper, hidden meanings of old customs and their significance in their cultural context.

Fourth–application and practice of the new ethic. Acceptance and rejection needs to take place. People will have to make a decision: with freedom (encouragement) to experiment, following evaluation, and adjustments as needed. It is possible that in this process some things will be maintained, others will be modified, and some will have to be rejected. As required, functional substitutes will need to be developed or borrowed, and perhaps there will be the need for the creation of new forms as the church understands and practices the biblical message and engages in mission as well.

As people engage in their new Christian experience as Adventists, there is always the risk that some form of syncretism[50] will happen. As seen above, the theological principle in faithful and critical contextualization is that the Bible is the final authority for both belief and practice of church members everywhere.

Critical Contextualization in Practice

Following the steps for critical contextualization as outlined above and putting them into practice is oftentimes very difficult for missionaries, even experienced ones. The examples or case studies below are aimed at providing a picture of this challenging reality. These case studies are not intended to define theology or to set a model for all to follow. They are just illustrations of the difficulties missionaries face as they study the Bible and at the same time, have to deal with contextual local realities as they engage in preaching the gospel cross-culturally.

[50] Syncretism is a blending of elements from non-Christian and Christian belief systems in such a way that they retain their non-Christian meaning and power. It is the blending of elements from another belief system or from another kind of Christianity in a way that distorts or dilutes biblical truth. It is written that: "Even while these people were worshiping the Lord, they were serving their idols." 2 Kings 17:41. There are several examples of different types of syncretism described in the Bible and/or found in the Christian church today. Faithful contextualization can aid in the process of avoiding syncretism. Some religious practices may have syncretistic elements in them: 1) Using incense in church (Buddhists, Hindus, Orthodox, and Catholics); 2) Raising hands in worship (Pentecostals); 3) Prostrating face down in prayer (Muslims); 4) Removing shoes to enter a place of worship (Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims); 5) Clapping hands as a part of worship (Jews); 6) Having meditation as a worship practice (Buddhists, Hindus, and some other Christians); 7) Singing songs that were originally non-Christian, but now have Christian words (i.e. bar songs); and 8) Cremation (Buddhists and Hindus). Syncretism can be avoided by: 1) openly, seriously and critically study the various elements of the culture and determine what needs to be rejected and what can be accepted. This must be incorporated as an integral part of the life and work of the missionary as he/she works and interacts with the host culture; 2) Look at the Bible for "Principles" to guide the members in the process of faithful and critical contextualization; watch for biblical texts where there were circumstances in which there was risk of syncretism, but avoided; Let the Holy Spirit guide the process, and submit to Him; 4) Submit the issues to the community of believers (local, regional, and international); 5) Work in the context of the local culture / local people. Respect and value the people and their culture; 6) Focus on conversion at the worldview level: we tend to only to focus on changing behaviors, beliefs, and values (more visible products of culture); we need to go deeper and focus at the worldview level, at the level of biblical, eternal principles, if we expect conversion and transformation. See also the article of Jon Paulien, "Dealing with Syncretism in Insider Movements" (217-251), and "Response to Jon Paulien's Paper" (252-258), by Angel Manuel Rodriguez; in *Faith Development in Context* (2005).

Case Study One:
Contextualizing Mission Towards Jews

There are three main points for a successful contextualized ministry to Jews advanced by Richard Elofer. They are the following:

Theology—Israel is the firstborn people of God and has not been rejected. The Jewish people are not one of the non-biblical religions (Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, etc.). It is to the Jewish people that God has made the first promises and the everlasting covenant. That is why a contextual approach to the Jewish people should be very respectful of these facts. 1) It is to the biological descendant of Abraham that the promise of blessings has been made (Gen 12:2; 18:18; 22:17); 2) The blessings and love of God are forever; for a thousand generations (Ex 20:6; 34:7; Deut 7:9; 1 Chr 16:15; Psa 105:8); and 3) God promised to Israel that the covenant will never be removed and they will stand as a people before him as long as the earth will exist (Is 54:7-10; Jer 31:35-37). Thus in this contextualized mission approach to Jews, the fact that Israel is still loved by God and there is no "replacement theology" in the Bible as some have advanced, should be recognized.

Identity—The Jewish people have their own identity, which includes worship, lifestyle, traditions, history, culture, education, and much more. Thus the reason why a Jewish Adventist contextualize ministry should respect Jewish identity in all aspect of life. Jewish-Adventists accept the biblical aspects of Jewish worship: Hebrew language, *kippa*, *talith*, 7 branches candelabra, lighting candles before Sabbath, traditional readings of the Hebrew Bible (*Parasha, Haftara*), and included in their style of worship in Jewish-Adventist
congregations. The Jewish identity is not in opposition to the Bible, and this will help them to be comfortable among Seventh-day Adventists.

Mission—Mission to the Jews should be done through the development of genuine friendships. That is why Adventists have to be acquainted with the Jewish community in order to befriend them and then be able to share the Adventist message.[51]

Another interesting example is what Reinaldo Siqueira is doing in the territory of the SAD, for the past 15 years promoting an excellent contextual mission approach related to Jewish work. There, the Adventist-Jewish Friendship center, is implementing what is being called a "new way" of witnessing to Jews and it involves an in-depth contextualization process.

[51] Adapted from Richard Elofer; World Jewish-Adventist Friendship Center director. E-mail message. October 03, 2014.

The focus of this missional endeavor is not directly on the Jewish community as such, but on the assimilated Jews, and these are those who become part of the larger society through inter-religious marriages. The approach works with a majority of Jews who are indifferent to their Jewish heritage (and assimilated into mixed marriages) and helps them to recover their Jewish identity through the Adventist message. This is an open approach that aims at promoting a positive impact on the Jewish community and family as well. It creates respect and trust and Jewish families see their "children" returning to Jewish values and practices that were forgotten and abandoned. The assimilated Jews who in turn accept the Adventist message become witnesses to their relatives and their Jewish communities.[52]

Inviting Jews to celebrate their special Jewish feasts or holidays in an Adventist-Jewish Friendship center or at a center of influence is an opportunity to get acquainted with a good number of them, and then invite them to a special *Kabbalat Shabbat* (Sabbath welcoming). There, appropriate language and content of worship is done in a way and sequence that resembles their own Jewish worship style, but at the same time is Adventist and biblical in essence. Usually those who accept invitations have had some previous contact with Christianity and Adventist believers and are also living disconnected from the Jewish community. These are mostly those who have married non-Jewish spouses.

In Brazil, for example, the assimilated Jews (from inter-religious marriages) are about 70% of the Jewish people, whereas the traditional Jewish community is comprised of only about 30% of the local Jews in a given community. Assimilated Jews are usually more open to the Adventist message, and it is easier to integrate them into a small group, usually as part of a family house Bible study. From there they become part of the Adventist-Jewish Friendship center, where an Adventist Jewish style of worship is followed in order to contextualize the communication of the message and worship services to them.

Usually Friday evening is the most effective occasion for witnessing, as the Center contextualizes the welcoming of the Sabbath (*Kabbalat Shabbat*), and there both worship and evangelism takes place. The assimilated Jews—now Adventist believers, are the link to their relatives, other assimilated Jews, as well as to the traditional Jewish community, and

[52] See, Reinaldo Siqueira. "Jewish and Adventist Issues." In *Comfort, Comfort my People: Towards a Growing Adventist-Jewish friendship*. Richard Elofer, ed. Berrien Springs, MI: Department of World Mission, Andrews University (2009): 38-40.

become witnesses of this new and important identity and message.[53] This approach serves as a bridge that connects assimilated Jews and Adventists, and becomes the basis of a biblical identity for both communities.

Case Study Two:
The Indian Bride

In the figures below we have a picture painted by Vinita[54] of an Indian bride. The missionary, local members, and new Adventist believers need to decide what is appropriate for a bride to wear in her wedding day as a Seventh-day Adventist and taking into consideration their Indian traditions and culture. The significance, value, and meaning of marriage are taken into context as well.

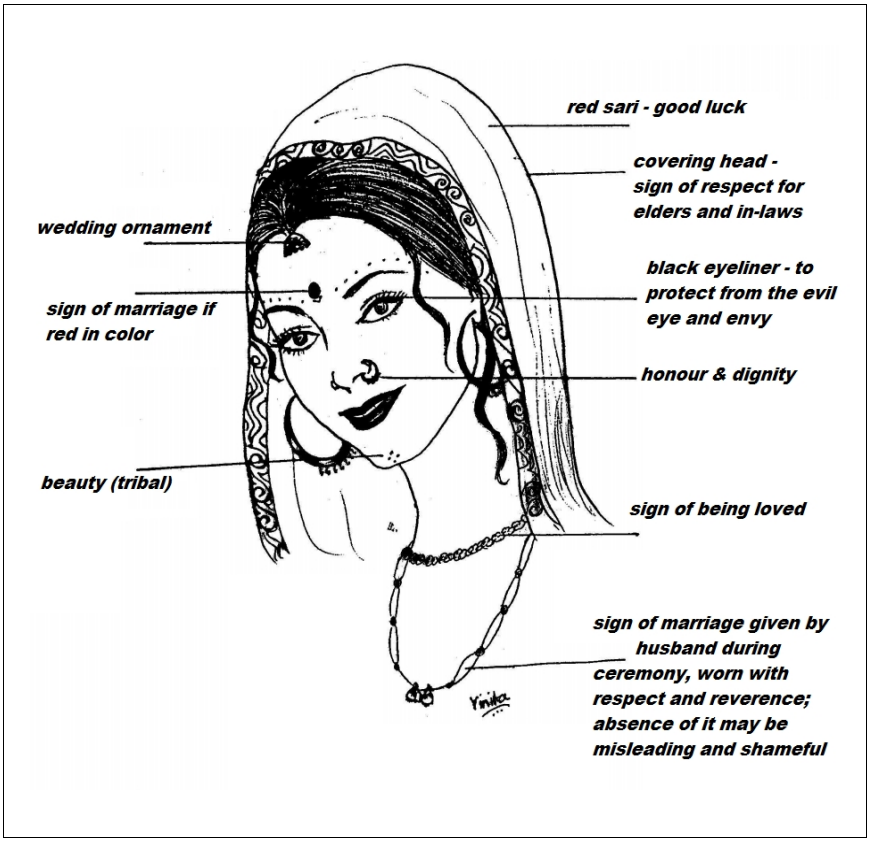
An Indian Bride:
With no descriptions of items
and symbols



[53] Personal communication with Reinaldo Siqueira. October 10, 2014.

[54] Vinita, a Seventh-day Adventist missionary, painted this picture in a session of the Mission Institute to illustrate an Adventist Indian bride in her wedding dress and ornaments. Institute of World Mission Resources, (n.d.).

An Indian Bride:
With descriptions of items and symbols



Following the first step of critical contextualization, those involved in the process need to look at the picture of the Indian bride and uncritically review it making a list of the various elements and symbols present there, and then ask questions about their meaning accordingly as it relates to the meaning of marriage in their culture. The second step involves studying the Bible to know what it teaches in regard to this particular subject, symbol, element, event, item, etc. Since this issue deals with brides—dress, marriage, and adornment, etc.—the following biblical texts could help in understanding what the Bible has to say in this regard (Ps 45:13, 14; Songs of Solomon 1:9-10, 4:9; Is 49:18, 61:10; Jer 2:32; Eze 16:8-12; Rev 19:7, 8; 21:2, 21).

The third step in critical contextualization evaluates the elements and symbols discussed in step one with the biblical teachings discovered in step two. If needed, the group could gather additional information or further Bible study before making a final decision. It is possible that some things (forms, elements) will have to be rejected (decide which ones),[55] some would have to be modified, others be substituted, and some will need to be changed.

Case Study Three:
Developing an Adventist Funeral Service for Cambodia[56]

In the late 1960s a struggling Seventh-day Adventist Church was started in Cambodia. In 1975 when Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge took over the country, forcing Adventist missionaries to flee, there were fewer than 40 members—all in Phnom Penh. During the war that followed, most of the Adventists were killed, with a few escaping to the United States. In 1992/1993 hundreds of thousands of Cambodian refugees who had spent years in refugee camps in Thailand were repatriated back home after the Khmer Rouge was defeated and some sort of normalcy returned to Cambodia. Among those returning home were several hundred Seventh-day Adventist Cambodians who had become followers of Jesus Christ and Seventh-day Adventist members in the camps.

Bruce Bauer and his wife, Linda, moved to Cambodia in 1997 to give leadership to the Cambodia Adventist Mission (CAM). At a workers' meeting late in 1997 the pastors mentioned that one of the challenges they were facing was what to do for funerals. Many times when members died they just went along with the traditional funerals that followed Buddhist practices. Therefore, it was agreed that at the next workers' meeting they would develop guidelines for an Adventist Cambodian funeral.

As part of this process, during the workers' meeting (in 1998), a full day was set aside to deal with the issue of funerals. Bruce explained the approach that Paul Hiebert had developed, called critical contextualization that involves a four-step process. The first step is most important—those working on a cultural issue must make the Word of God the basis for deciding lifestyle or cultural issues. Since CAM was working with a group of 17 pastors, they were in complete agreement with this basis.

[55] The black eyeliner, which represents protection from evil spirits, will have to be removed, and if possible replaced with an appropriate and biblical symbol.

[56] Adapted from Bruce Bauer, "Developing an Adventist Funeral Service for Cambodia." E-mail message. October 03, 2014.

Second, the group spent the rest of the morning looking at the cultural issue uncritically to understand the importance and significance of the issue. Bruce divided the pastors into groups of four or five and asked each group to list all the activities that happen in a typical village from the time a person dies until the last ceremony.[57] Just before lunch they compiled a master list with all that was involved in a typical Buddhist funeral ceremony and the deep cultural meanings of the various events and practices.

Third, in the afternoon, Bruce asked the group to list any activities that they felt went against biblical principles. The group listed biblical passages that suggested biblical themes or principles that should be used to decide what aspects of the Cambodian funerals could no longer be followed, which ones could be altered, and which ones needed to be discarded because they went against Bible teaching. This part of the process was spent praying, reading relevant biblical passages, and discussing the deep cultural meanings.

The fourth step in the process was to allow the local Cambodian pastors to decide what could remain, what could be altered, and what had to be discarded from the traditional practices. The group prayed, asked for the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and then decided how to deal with the issue.

Some of the things that were discarded included having Buddhist monks chant—an activity that was replaced by having an Adventist pastor present a message from the Bible about death and hope in Jesus. The typical Cambodian funeral music that was blared out over speakers to alert the community of a death was replaced by Christian hymns that spoke of hope in the resurrection. Many of the other practices were left without much change, so that community members would not call the funeral activities *foreign,* but would at the same time realize that it was Cambodian with an Adventist Christian emphasis.

In the end, the group of pastors was very happy that they had come up with an Adventist funeral ceremony that still had a Cambodian flavor. Another benefit from following this process was that the foreign missionary did not impose a ceremony on the Cambodians, so it was the local pastors who took ownership of promoting a Christian and biblical approach to funerals.

[57] Bauer. Ibid. In Cambodia and in many Buddhist countries there are ceremonies that take place after one year, after three years, and after seven or eight years.

Reflections: A Way Forward[58]

An Adventist missionary in Asia felt the need to contextualize, and in the process it took time for him to really understand and address the main issues. After interacting with a number of Adventists who were former Hindus he realized that their worldviews had not changed in the slightest, even though several of them had been SDA's for a decade or more. The primary reason for this was that the gospel had been presented to them in ways that they struggled to understand and/or to apply in their daily lives. The gospel had been presented to them through Western logic, methods, and often even using Western examples of application. As a result he spent considerable time studying the Bible in conjunction with learning the language and culture, and thus found many areas where their daily lives and biblical guidance coincided, including most of our 28 Fundamental Beliefs, although not as we had normally understood them.[59] Therefore theological reflection combined with everyday living in a cultural context created the necessary atmosphere for appropriate presentations of the gospel that could be easily understood and applied in very practical ways in people's daily life.[60]

It seems that some of us faculty teaching at SDA theological seminaries have done the church a tremendous service by carefully trying to dismantle the Greek presuppositions or philosophical assumptions that have plagued the Christian church for centuries. We've recognized that this has often led to bad theology and a distortion of Scriptures on key issues like the doctrines of God, Creation, and the Bible. We can strongly agree with each other as faculty that the Bible and the Bible alone is our source for good theology and that good contextualization is impossible without a really strong biblical foundation and serious bible study, research, and reflection. And in this area Adventist missiology can definitely improve.

Where we are weaker is in our own attempts to develop a system, by ourselves and alone, in our SDA theological seminaries. And it seems that at times, we are attempting to build a theological system believing we can actually develop theology in a vacuum (disconnected from the mission field). A question should be asked in this regard: in our missio-theological

[58] Adapted from personal correspondence with a missionary colleague, that shares in these reflections. E-mail message. October 7, 2014.

[59] The few times application was stressed, most of the time beliefs were stressed and very little time was spent on demonstrating how this could be lived out.

[60] This missionary is currently writing a paper on the Sabbath in an Asian country context in which he is trying to demonstrate this process, and he hopes theologians will be willing to review it once he completes it.

discussions, do we also think that before a theologian or a missionary 'leaves the house' he/she needs to have all his theology correct, only then is it safe for him/her to enter the 'outside world'? If this is the case, and it seems that sometimes it is, then this goes against the witness of Scripture in which theology and mission have to be in constant interaction for either to be true to God and to bear fruit for his church. Paul's life, work, and writings demonstrate this beautifully, and so do the writings and mission of Moses, David, Peter, James, and John, to name a few. One discipline does not lead the other, but both must always be done together. It is only in real life contexts (mission) that good theology can be developed. Only when good theology and mission, born out of the revealed Word, reach people in their real life contexts are they transformed and saved for God's glory.

Conclusion

Since the Adventist movement, which has been raised by God with the special purpose of bringing people back to the truths of his Word, and to proclaim the everlasting gospel as it is found in the Three Angels' Messages, it follows that understanding and communicating the singularity and uniqueness of the Adventist message is of utmost importance. Not only are there things that are unique about Christianity, and that differentiates it from other major world religions, there are also important things that are very unique about Adventism. The uniqueness and singularity of Adventism sets it apart from all other Christian denominations and non-Christian religions. The critical and faithful contextualization approach to cross-cultural mission presented above takes the singularity and uniqueness of the Adventist message and movement seriously.

More cooperation between theologians and missiologists, church leaders and pioneers, is needed, so that the uniqueness of the Adventist message[61] will continue and effectively be communicated. The result will be that more people will hear and understand the gospel in their own culture and geography. Missiologists and theologians must work together to

[61] Petras Bahadur adds the following: "One area of contextualization has to do with preparing our members to contextualize. The unique Adventist identity needs to be emphasized if we are to take the message to other non-Christian religions. My first presentation for an AMR training or a weekend program is entitled – Our Adventist Identity: The Key to Muslim Evangelism. Since all religions did not follow God's given instructions in his Word or even to them in moral value system, then we have a message based on Rev. 14:6-7 for every nation, tribe, tongue and people… Then we have an eternal message to bring to every religion including the religion of Christianity." E-mail message. October 8, 2014.

produce a more robust theology of mission, which in turn will provide the foundation for effective methodologies for mission and ministry. This cooperation will also foster the development of a missionary theology, suitable for theologians, church workers, missiologists, and pioneers. Thus our Adventist mission will be biblically and theologically sound and our Adventist theology will be biblically and contextually appropriate.

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