The growth of African Christianity in the twentieth century is one of the most significant developments in world Christianity. This growth is characterized by a strong sense of identity and a commitment to social justice. The church has played a vital role in providing education, healthcare, and other social services to many communities.

From Here, Where?

What can be learned from the spread of Christianity in Africa? This question is important for understanding the current state of Christianity in the world. Christianity has faced many challenges in Africa, including political instability, economic hardship, and cultural resistance. However, the church has continued to grow and thrive, despite these challenges.

In Search of a Paradigm

Interpreting African Adventism

The growth of African Christianity has been accompanied by the development of a unique theological perspective known as African Adventism. This perspective emphasizes the importance of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and a commitment to social justice.

Theological Reflections

Several key themes emerge from the African Adventist perspective. First, there is a strong emphasis on the personal experience of salvation. Second, there is a commitment to social justice and the need to address the systemic inequalities that exist in society. Finally, there is a focus on the role of the church in building a just and compassionate society.

Conclusion

The growth of African Christianity is a significant development for the global church. It offers valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities of spreading the gospel in different cultural contexts. As we continue to learn from the success of African Adventism, we can work towards building a more inclusive and just global community.
still scarce; a major reason for this "obscenity" is presumably that one generation ago the number of its adherents represented only one-fourth of its present membership. Interestingly, there is also a remarkable difference in approaches within the small body of literature. The following is an attempt at evaluating the perspectives that have been used in these studies in search of a paradigm for interpreting African Adventism.²

Diachronic Perspectives

Missionary History: Reporting Pioneers' Stories

The earliest works on Adventism in Africa fall into the category of missionary history. Such mission stories, missionaries' reports, and popular history represent an era in which the interests of American and European church representatives were naturally paramount in the portrayal of emerging African Adventist communities. Although these works contain rather few interpretative attempts that would meet the concerns of today's academic scene, they do provide a wealth of material that is indispensable for further historical inquiry. Thus, they should not merely be understood as testimonials of the colonial era but should also be seen as giving evidence of both the astounding evangelistic fervor inherent in Adventism and a plethora of types of denominational encounters with traditional societies and political systems. Moreover, the missionary history type represents a period in which Adventism was rather well-defined in the Euro-American context but not yet in Africa. This implies that crucial dynamics which contributed to the acceptance, rejection, and modification of Adventism in African communities can be discovered in these early documents, even if they often appear only between the lines. Several observations can be made about emphases in this first generation of writings.

1. Missionary history typically portrayed the great battle between "heathenism" and the Christian Adventist faith, which was a new experience for a denomination that had cherished a somewhat sectarian identity back home. Of course the "Adventist style" imported in this mission church, i.e., strictness in lifestyle matters and emphasis on certain doctrines that distinguished the movement from other brands of Christianity, was not entirely lost in this new situation. At the same time, the peculiarity that Adventism enjoyed in the North American and European contexts as a Christian reform movement was largely replaced by a confrontation of general Christian and African traditional identities. Thus, the denomination's missions operated in a similar way to the host of missions from other denominations, and likewise the nascent African Adventist functioned, in principle, like other Christian communities.

2. One cannot fail to notice a certain degree of triumphalism in the missionary history type of documents. Since Seventh-day Adventists operated in a colonial framework, they often took on an identity that differed markedly with the kind of Adventism that had existed in North America and Europe. W. H. Anderson, for instance, could bluntly report, "The late Mr Cecil Rhodes once told me that he found missionaries to be much better for keeping the natives quiet than soldiers, and certainly a good deal cheaper." Privileged by a government that needed this church to fulfill its civilizing goals, the former minority church became a junior partner of colonial governments.

3. The Adventist encounter with traditional culture and religion was usually negative and was consciously depicted as such. On the practical level, missionary reporting on "heathen customs" on the "dark continent" served the purpose of stimulating the faithful back home to give offerings for the missionary cause; theologically, it corresponded to the goal of obliterating syncretism in the mission field. This attitude was often so perva-

1 Abraham A. Kuranga, "Seventh-day Adventism in Western Nigeria, 1914-1981: A Study in the Relationship between Christianity and African Culture from the Missionary Era to the Introduction of African Leadership" (Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 1991), iv, has employed this term to characterize historiography on Seventh-day Adventists in general. This is a somewhat one-sided judgment, but for African Adventist church history it may be justifiably applied.

2 I would like to thank Dr. Daniel Heinz, a church historian and the archivist of the Adventist European Archives at Friedensau, Germany, for his helpful comments on several points in this paper, and Guido Delameelliére, librarian at Salève Adventist University, Collonges-sous-Salève, France, for his assistance with bibliographic information.

3 See, for example, William H. Anderson, On the Trail of Livingstone (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1919); Ludwig R. Connell, Freund und Leid der Missionare des S.T.A. Missionstitles am Viktoriassee (Hamburg: Internationale Traktatsgesellschaft, 1919); Valdemar E. Toppenberg, Africa Has My Heart (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1958). This genre naturally continues until the present; see, e.g., Virgil Robinson, The Sudan Story: Times of Peace, Times of Peril (Washington, D.C.: Review & Herald, 1979); James L. Fly, Africa Adopted Us (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1987). Countless missionary reports from Africa may be found in church magazines such as Review and Herald, the British Missionary Worker, the North European Advent Survey, and the German Zionsbote, Adventbote, and Adventbote in der Heidewelt.

4 Anderson, On the Trail of Livingstone, 173.
sive that Adventist missionary approaches would later be characterized as a *tabula rasa* policy aiming at “wiping out and replacing” the local cultural heritage. Although the interactions between Africans and the denomination was much more complex than this simplifying assessment suggests, Adventists in their zeal to proclaim their message often betrayed little interest in cultural understanding, for their main determination was to produce “remanent” communities of saints ready for the second coming of Jesus, not well-adjusted church bodies to provide religious care for the masses. At the same time, missionary Adventism came to be regarded as a community of “progressives,” which was attractive for those who were ready to experiment with a new way of life. In these processes, the writing of missionary history served to reinforce the boundaries in what was held to be the battlefront between good and evil and what was often also the controversy between traditional and “modern” identities, a function that it fulfilled well.

Mission History: Charting Organizational Growth

A second phase of historiography dealing with Adventism in Africa may be called mission history. Here it is no longer the individual missionary and the events at a local mission that are in the center of interest but the great lines of development in an expanding denomination.

In this body of literature, several distinctions can be made. Some, like Agboola’s account of Adventism in Yorubaland, Elineema’s study of the church in Tanzania, and Owusu-Mensa’s short history of the denomina-


6 For an exception to this attitude, see the ethnographic writings of Ernst Kots, especially Ernst Kots, *Im Banne der Furcht: Sitten und Gebrauche der Vögele in Ostafrika* (Hamburg: Advent-Verlag, 1922), and idem, *Schorn* (Hamburg: Advent-Verlag, 1925).


10 The major college textbook on Adventist history was originally published when the center of Adventism was still in the United States. It devoted a total of seven pages out of 630 to Africa, spread across half the book. Its new update adds material from recent decades and from each region of the world, but Africa still does not receive much attention; see here Richard W. Schwarz, *Light Bearers to the Remnant* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press, 1979); Richard W. Schwarz and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 2000). Four of 270 pages deal with Africa in C. Merryn Maxwell, *Tell It to the World: The Story of Seventh-
There is, however, an Adventist kind of mission history in the best sense, i.e., studies of historians who take the dynamics of Adventist missionary activity seriously and explore the impact on the societies that this religious movement reached. One outstanding author of this genre is Balder Pfeiffer with his studies on Adventist mission in Eastern Africa and the Middle East, including parts of North Africa. Pfeiffer conceives the denomination's attempts at spreading through Muslim and Traditionalist societies as a transfer of identity with its social, cultural, and political aspects, and proposes to view Adventist mission as a contribution to society rather than merely a proselytizing activity. Pfeiffer's studies and those of the other contributors to the book on Eastern Africa that he edited deal with large territories; therefore, the analyses presented in them mainly concern the macro and organizational levels. Along the same line, Gershom Amayo in his doctoral dissertation on the denomination in Kenya, extols the positive impact of Adventist education upon the "Africans' social, economic, religious and political development" during the colonial era. Understandably, his focus is on institutional growth, which implies that other aspects of the missionary encounter with traditional society are not highlighted.

Several insights may be derived from the writings in the mission history category.

---

11 Balder Pfeiffer, *The Evangelical Adventist Mission in the Middle East, 1879-1939* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1983); idem, ed., *Seventh-day Adventist Contributions to East Africa, 1903-1983* (Frankfurt: Lang, 1985). The latter contains chapters on Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Madagascar, and reflections on the future by several authors including Pfeiffer. Doris Pleniceanu, "L’implantation du mouvement Adventiste en Algérie, 1905-1962" (M.A. thesis, Adventist Faculty of Theology, Collonges-Sous-Salève, 2002), reports the growth of the denomination in Algeria, where the church was composed almost exclusively by French immigrants.

12 The title says East Africa, but since Ethiopia is included, one would prefer it to read Eastern Africa.


period, and one generation later, Alwen Makapela published a passionate inquiry concerning racism inside the Seventh-day Adventist denomination. Yet in accordance with its tradition the movement had kept more distance from European governments in Africa than some Christians of the bigger denominations, and thus the revisionist mission history perspective would have seldom been appropriate in assessing major developments within this church.

General History: Observing African Adventists in the Public Arena

Although Adventism did not deliberately play a role in the political arena, the Adventist influence on the general public in new environments could also emerge as a paradigm of its own. In a few cases Adventists did not only quietly conduct their religious and educational activities in Africa but unwittingly inspired individuals and movements that made a striking impact on history in general.

Given the fact that the converts to this denomination were usually few (at least initially), such instances are relatively rare; besides, Adventism tended to teach converts to abstain from activities deemed political. Yet one case which reveals the substantial if unintended effects of Adventist teaching on the public sphere is the first Northern Rhodesia African Congress, an early nationalist movement in pre-independence Zambia founded as early as 1937. Mac Dixon-Fyle identifies Seventh-day Adventism as the crucial catalyst in this movement, which was established mainly by members of this denomination through which people were empowered and which was the bond in their quest for economic progress and political aims. He stresses that the Adventist industriousness and individualism were the very elements needed for African self-assertion to be channeled into a successful nationalist organization. Moreover, Dixon-Fyle argues that the Adventists’ “almost puritanical devotion to economic self-advancement” and the fact that they rejected predestination made them the logical major players in early protest politics in the Tonga Plateau and, indeed, in all of Zambia. One might want to add that the Adventists’ critical attitude to society in general also indirectly contributed to this development.

A similar development occurred in neighboring Tanzania. In the 1945 Mtiro protest movement against a newly introduced graduated tax, which involved several thousand men, the Adventist Paulo Mashampo played an outstanding role as the organizer of the masses, their spokesman, and the intermediary between government representatives and the African protesters. They camped near the District Commissioner’s office for two full months and ultimately succeeded in frustrating the government until the tax was abolished. Although most accounts of these events do not particularly emphasize the Adventist input in these events, Mashampo’s Christian identity and Adventist-inspired reasoning and peaceful methods must not be overlooked.

Much later, Samson Kisekka, an Adventist physician, was one of the top leaders of the National Resistance Movement in Uganda during Milton Obote’s regime. After this movement took over power in 1986, he became Prime Minister and Vice President. In contrast to the denomination’s tradition of political abstention, he had justified a revolutionary movement and even participated in it. That an American Adventist writer could then publish a book on Kisekka in a church publishing house indi-


20 Makapela, The Problem with Africa in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. This study mainly deals with South Africa, North America and the Caribbean.


icates that Adventism had arrived at a stage where public involvement was viewed as exemplary, and not as an exception.25

The fact that Adventism emerged as a significant social and political force may be unexpected in view of the movement's otherworldly concerns. However, the few works that utilize this perspective do justice to the fact that African individuals interpreted Adventist values in the light of the problems that they encountered. Thus, this strand of Adventist history in Africa must not be underrated. The enormous impact that Adventist missions made through their educational and medical services were to some extent already public matters. Yet the results of these activities combined with conclusions drawn from the denomination's strict ethics and a theology, which focused on the individual and his personal responsibility before God, made occurrences where Adventists played public roles plausible, even though this seemed to diverge from earlier Adventist tradition.

Church History: Understanding an African Religious Community

While missionary history focuses on the foreign emissaries of the Advent cause, it also emphasizes the development of denominational organization. A general historical perspective views Adventism as a force that influenced events in the public arena. However, a church history outlook probably does more fully do justice to the history of emerging African Adventist churches. This perspective necessitates a consideration of all aspects important to the life and development of Christian communities. Thematically, this includes such items as theology, church organization, and leadership; spirituality, holy days, festivals, literature, worship, and music; ethics, women's issues, marriage, and youth; the relation to society, culture, particular groups of people, and governments; as well as evangelicalism and growth.26 Rather than regarding the developments of African Adventism as an appendix to Euro-American expansionism, as an instance of institutional growth, or as the background of the interplay between political forces, this way of reading history takes the multifaceted nature of a church and the life of its members most seriously.27

It should not come as a surprise that such an approach was undertaken mainly by African authors whose concern was to comprehend the plurality of factors in the development of their respective churches.28 An outstanding example is Abraham Kuranga's dissertation about Adventism in Western Nigeria.29 While he discusses missionary services such as education and health provisions at length, Kuranga also devotes considerable space to the period of African leadership and to cultural issues such as drumming, shoe removal, polygamy, and other problems related to marriage. Thus, he focuses on debates that characterized the life of the church and that were determined by the members themselves, and not by outsiders.30

Like Kuranga's dissertation, Nehemiah Nyauンド's study on Adventism in Gusi is an attempt at grasping historically the comprehensive picture

---


28 My own dissertation also belongs to this category; see Höschel, "Christian Renan—African Folk Church". One work that could be included in this category is K. B. Edeyie, ed., The Development of the SDA Church in Eastern Africa (Dar-es-Salaam: The Seventh-day Adventist Church, Tanzania, 1995). It contains papers about a large variety of themes with different degrees of usefulness as far as interpreting African Adventism is concerned.

29 Kuranga, "Seventh-day Adventism in Western Nigeria".

30 A study that resembles Kuranga's is David O. Babalola, "The Seventh-Day Adventist Church in Yorubaland, Nigeria" (Ph.D. diss., University of Ilabab, 1988). Babalola, however, devotes more than half of his study to an account of the history of educational and medical institutions and reflections on enhancing church growth. The other half presents a historical skeleton of Adventist history among the Yoruba and short reflections on a variety of cultural, religious, and public issues that the church encountered.
that the denomination presents in this part of Kenya. By dealing with themes as diverse as education, mission villages, camp meetings and Christian nurture, revival, literature evangelism, youth, contemporary Adventism in Gusii, and splinter groups, Nyauudi succeeds in presenting a narrative that encompasses the whole diversity of this growing African religious movement. Although popular in style, this book contains such a wealth of information that it must be considered one of the most well-rounded portrayals of an African Adventist church and its story.

On a more limited scale, Ronah Matembera’s *Matandani* provides insights into the development of Adventism around a local mission in Malawi. The merit of his work is the detailed account of the ups and downs in this expanding Christian community, which includes crises such as an African teachers’ protest and the secession of Wilfred Gudu, the later founder of a religious movement called Ana a Mulungu (Children of God). Matembera also tackles other sensitive issues in a sensible way, e.g., national leadership and the development of folk churches and their problems after four generations of denominational presence.

This last generation of African Adventist historiography is without doubt the most well-balanced in that it deals with the whole breadth of church life. Parallelising a trend in the writing of African church history in general, it includes but surpasses the earlier mission history perspective and tends to be “holistic” historiography because of its wide scope.

---

31 Including children, Gusii Adventists count more than 500,000.
33 Ronah Matembera, *Matandani: The Second Adventist Mission in Malawi* (Zomba: Kachere, 2004). The title, which indicates that Matandani was a mission station, does not imply that this is mission history. Rather, Matembera writes about the emerging church at the mission and around it while obviously including the development of mission administration. The study was originally submitted to the University of Malawi as an M.A. thesis.
36 Interpreting African Adventism: In Search of a Paradigm
37 emphasizes African initiatives and religious aspects as opposed to an accent of political dimensions in earlier accounts of general African church history. Thus, it discerns the distinct importance of several aspects of African church history: the mission complex, conversion dynamics, popular evangelism, struggles for control in the church, spirituality, and enthusiastic phenomena. Moreover, this approach tends to view the history of African Adventism realistically in that it emphasizes the peculiar features of this denomination while, at the same time, recognizing that it shared many dimensions with African Christianity in general.

**Synchronic Perspectives**

**Sociology: Tracing Collective Continuities and Transformations**

Considering the wealth of researchable features that a religious movement entails, it is only natural that historians did not remain alone in their interest for African Adventism. After all, even the writing of general African history and history at large, according to P. D. Curtin, underwent a “transformation [...] from chronicle into a social science” after World War II. Thus, several approaches with a synchronic tendency developed alongside the various historical perspectives. Following the growing attention of sociologists to the denomination in general and to Adventist communities in other parts of the non-Western world, a

---

40 See here, for example, Ted C. Lewellen, “Deviant Religion and Cultural Evolution: The Aymara Case,” *JSASR* 18.3 (1979): 243-51; and B. E. Aguirre and Jon P. Alston, “Organ-
sociologist who also examined various other facets of Adventism, devoted one study to Adventism in Africa and came to the conclusion that African Adventism is less sectarian than expected. His analysis suggests that the movement on the continent combines conversionism, which fuels a highly committed clientele of first-generation adherents, with the striving for prestige in society and friendly relations with the state, which relativizes the separatist strand in the denomination's tradition. Lawson adds the theory that Adventism is seen as an opportunity for upward mobility, the observation that the socialization of members diminished in the 1980s, and the claim that member commitment has since weakened significantly. By doing so, he construes contemporary African Adventism as a movement that is rather comfortable with the place it has in society and that aims at keeping harmony with the environment almost at all cost.

Although Lawson's points are derived from actual data, his article combines the diverse Adventist communities of a continent; yet what is true in some regions may not be confirmed by accounts from others. Even if the implications that he proposes are tendencies that one can accept in general and that have backing in some areas, there are significant instances where they do not apply. Thus, a larger number of area studies like Nehemiah Nyauadi's dissertation on Seventh-day Adventism in Kenya are much needed. Nyauadi employs the Resource Mobilization Perspective, which pertinently illuminates the growth dynamics of Adventism as a social movement. Combining historical and sociological perspectives and viewing the denomination as part of the missionary complex in the colonial era and in the context of independent Kenya but with its very own specialties as assets and liabilities, Nyauadi provides a balanced picture of the activist nature of Kenyan Adventism.

As this short summary of the only two items employing a sociological perspective shows, little has been done in this line so far. Several phenomena would be worthy of investigation in their own right, such as the relationship between Adventists and governments in African countries, the attitude towards and competition with other denominations, and the "upward mobility" that has been observed in the denomination in North America. Moreover, sociologists dealing with particular countries or regions would certainly discover considerable potential for differentiation inside this church.

Anthropology: Appreciating a Peculiar Kind of People

The sociological perspective is particularly suitable for a look at the larger picture and for the study of factors that the historian and the theologist tend to ignore due to their lack of concern for social scientific theory. However, sociology may tend to disregard factors determined by local communities and the fact that the human side of religion is not necessarily determined by larger societal structures. Religiosity is always a truly local affair and a matter of personal inclinations and preferences, which necessitates approaches in the realm of anthropology of religion, a field of growing importance in the study of Christianity in Africa.
There are only two studies, apart from anthropological studies of Seventh-day Adventism in other non-Western environments that reveal different degrees of insight into the life of the denomination. In an article that compares Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses in one area of Zambia, Karla Poewe comes to a surprising conclusion. According to her, Adventists were often initially attracted to their faith because of the prospect of education; they joyously keep the Ten Commandments and other “taboos”, but Adventism is less successful in “restructuring” the behavior of its adherents than the Jehovah's Witnesses, who appear to be much stricter in enforcing discipline. Poewe's study is remarkable in that it exposes the option of a “relaxed” type of Adventism when it encounters stricter alternatives. However, this may be a rather atypical situation, for often the denomination exhibits the very strictness that seems to be lacking in the Zambian community that Poewe researched. Still, her research is instructive since it confirms the multi-faceted nature of an Africanized Adventism.

The major work that employs the anthropological paradigm is a study on Adventists in a rural area of Madagascar by Eva Keller. She provides an astute analysis of the complex links between Malagasy Traditional Religion, cultural issues, and Adventist identity. The validity of her most empathic investigation is evident in the way that she grasps many peculiarities of this faith community and particularly underlines the “intellectuality” of the Adventist religiosity that centers around Bible study in church as well as at home. According to Keller, this is the defining element of “doing religion” among Adventists in Madagascar, a dimension that often attracts adherents to this faith and typically keeps them attached to their denomination.

Her insights are of paramount importance. By using Adventists as an example she succeeds in rehabilitating so-called “fundamentalist” groups from the general reproach of being narrow-minded. Rather than doubting the intellectual capacities of such religious groups, she suggests viewing them as doing “Normal Science”, i.e., a game of knowledge inside a firmly constructed framework. Moreover, according to Keller, the “fundamentalist” type of religion implies the persuasion that there should be no separation between the “religious” and the “secular” spheres. Adventism, with its tradition of holism, serves this understanding well. Whether Adventism forms part of the “New Churches” sweeping over Africa in the last two decades, as she assert, may be debatable, but that it provides an appealing alternative to established Christianities in many regions through the kind of religious activity it offers is a crucial point. Since anthropologists of religion are able to comprehend the communities they research in a profound manner, one would wish that more investigations of this kind will be undertaken among African Adventists.

Missiology: Investigating an Expansionist Movement

Adventism is a movement that emphasizes evangelism, and the recent proliferation of studies on aspects of Adventist church growth, mission, and proclamation in Africa is a logical outcome of this nature. Although many of these works are not primarily interpretative but aim at proposing ways for even more success in the expansion of the denomination, they must not remain unmentioned here since they reveal a vital part of the African Adventist mosaic. Besides, almost all were written by Africans,

---


50 Keller borrows this term from Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1962). "Normal Science" is a concept at the background of Kuhn's well-known theory of scientific advance; he argues that most science is "Normal Science", and only at certain times do scientific paradigms change and thus produce a new Normal Science in the new paradigm.
which indicates the significance of the missiological perspective in their eyes.51

These studies have several features in common: (1) they view Adventism as a missionary movement, (2) they recognize the fact that the denomination faces challenges in proclaiming its message in many contexts of contemporary Africa, and (3) they adopt an optimistic outlook; their motto appears to be, “it can be done”. Yet ironically, the very unity in these common assumptions also contributes to a diverse outcome of the studies. The multiplicity of suggested strategies imply different persuasions regarding the extent to which denominational identity may or must be “adapted” or even transformed in different societies and thus betray somewhat divergent interpretations of the essence of Adventism.52


52 Some like Joseph Kilongo, “Islam, Indigenous Traditions, and Adventism in Kenya: A Comparative Study to Determine Effective Approaches to Evangelize Kenyan Muslims” (D.Min. diss., Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 2001), suggest far-reaching attempts at inculturation while others advocate more or less traditional programs of evangelism; see Ebenezer O. Sackey, “An Approach to Seventh-day Adventist Radio Evangelism in Ghana” (D.Min. diss., Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary, Andrews University, 1999); or Henry Mandoo, “A Strategy for Pastors to Mo-

Theology: Interpreting Adventist Faith in Africa

This leads to the question of how the denomination’s theology is supposed to be interpreted in Africa. One must, first of all, remember that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has always insisted on the world-wide unity of faith among its members. At the same time, an awareness has grown that theological thinking may not only serve to safeguard harmony but also to state legitimate, and at times necessary, variety in the expression of Adventist faith, especially in the dissimilar contexts of a world church.53 Yet few voices have been heard advocating African impulses in rethinking the gospel as interpreted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.54 Still, individual authors have embarked upon theological tasks such as the analysis of Adventism’s encounter with traditional culture, the correlation of Adventist and African holism, the theological critique of the apartheid system, and Adventist ecclesiology in an African context.55 In each case, missiological or ethical challenges are discussed as fundamentally theological issues that compel the denomination to interpret its heritage in novel circumstances.


Still, in contrast to the dynamic Christian theological scene in Africa in general, no major theological work has yet been published that addresses faith from a decidedly African Adventist perspective. This relative lack of theological productivity may be an effect of the general Adventist preoccupation with evangelism and the need to administer the growing flock, but it should probably also be interpreted as a sign of loyalty to inherited ways of articulating denominational beliefs. Still, the African Adventist voice may be heard indirectly at times, as is the case in the proposed introduction of a twenty-eighth Adventist article of faith dealing with spirituality and the power of God over evil forces, which arose partly from concerns on the African continent.

By and large African Adventist theology has tended to reflect the main thrust of the thinking in the denomination in general, to support the ongoing operation of this church, and to deal with theological issues as they appeared along the way.


55 The few works of this kind written by African Adventist theologians deal with general theological issues and reaffirm traditional viewpoints; see, for example, Samuel Konenzi, Frühchreter, Recreating the Word: How New Approaches to the Bible Impact Our Biblical Faith and Lifestyle (Benzien Springs, Mich.: Berean, 1996); and Lassew D. Reddy, The God of Daniel (Nampa, Idaho: Pacific Press, 1998). A notable exception is Mary N. Getui, a theologian teaching at Kenyatta University, Nairobi. She is a well-respected scholar who has edited several books, not to mention her own contributions; see, e.g., Mary N. Getui, ed., Theological Method and Aspects of Worship in African Christianity (Nairobi: Acton, 1998); Mary N. Getui and Peter Kanyandago, eds., From Violence to Peace in Africa: A Challenge for African Christianity (Nairobi: Acton, 1999); Mary N. Getui, J. S. Maluleke, and Justin S. Ukpong, eds., Interpreting the New Testament in Africa (Nairobi: Acton, 2001); Mary N. Getui, Victor Zinnhauare, and Knut Holter, eds., Interpreting the Old Testament in Africa (New York: Lang, 2001); and Mary N. Getui and Matthew Theuri, eds., Quests for Abundant Life in Africa (Nairobi: Acton, 2002). As a woman theologian outside the denominational structure, she has obviously more opportunity to engage in novel theological thinking than her male colleagues who all serve in some church function. However, her writings hardly deal with Adventism.

56 Roswith Gerloff, "Adventisten: Zwei Missionen," in RGG 1:129-30, claims that Adventists in the Two-Thirds World demand a renewal of Adventist theology from Reformation sources and that they de-emphasize the denomination's distinctive teachings. However, this assertion is without a factual basis. One may indeed suggest that the peculiar Adventist identity is even more markedly stressed by Adventists in Africa in some respects.


Diverse Perspectives and the Quest for a Paradigm

How should one evaluate the various perspectives presented above? I would like to propose the following three arguments: (1) they all represent legitimate approaches to such a multi-faceted phenomenon as a church that originated in North America and mutated to a successful religious movement in Africa. (2) Some approaches focus on a limited portion of the whole while others tend to view the bigger picture. Among the diachronic approaches, the missionary history, mission history, and general history perspectives constitute selective readings of the data; only a church history perspective takes into account the breadth and depth of the life of a faith community. The sociological and missiological perspectives focus on outward facets of church operations, while anthropological and theological perspectives aim at exploring the inside of a religious movement. Thus, these latter four complement each other and are all indispensable components in the task of investigating African Adventism in a synchronic manner. (3) In many cases, perspectives overlap, and yet their peculiar interests may produce divergent results. These results at times reflect local and regional variations but also reveal the very fundamental disparities of perception that scholars of different fields employ.

Can the various perspectives in some way be combined to create an all-encompassing paradigm? Certainly one cannot analyze a complex phenomenon like African Adventism from several viewpoints at the same time; after all, the fundamental distinction between diachronic and synchronic perspectives is set by the subject matter itself. Nevertheless, it is instructive that the rather comprehensive church history approach deals with dimensions that are important for other approaches as well. The same might be true, to some extent, for the synchronic approaches. An anthropologist, for instance, has to understand the theological basics of the community he researches in order to comprehend how the church and its people "function." A missiologist will inevitably come across sociological and anthropological issues in addition to his obvious theological engagement, and a theologian must take into account that the other approaches contribute to the issues on which he reflects. Thus, what takes place ideally is a cross-fertilization that does not replace the various perspectives but recognizes their correlation, even if specific concerns must ultimately be treated within a limited methodological scope.
An "inclusive paradigm" recognizes the variety of possible perspectives and learns from them all. As the life and story of African Adventists still awaits a comprehensive attempt at interpretation,60 and as there continues to be a lack of academic literature of any kind on the denomination in some countries and regions,61 an inclusive paradigm might at best lead those who contribute to the further elucidation of a religious movement whose impact is increasingly felt on the continent.

The overview of perspectives has also shown that the study of African Adventism has yielded findings in some fields but has neglected others. Many more detailed studies of the denomination's interaction with governments, indigenous cultures, other religious groups, and the development of Adventist church life would enlighten the nature of the movement in Africa. Fields that almost completely lack interpretative attempts are women, holy days, literature, music, ethics, marriage, and youth. National church histories of Adventism must still be complemented with more comprehensive accounts, and mission histories, which continue to fulfill an important function, still wait to be written, especially with a focus on the African engagement of Adventist missionary activities.62 Moreover, since Adventists were unsuccessful in planting churches in some areas despite serious attempts, one important field of investigation would be the study of the failure of missionary activity. Lastly, given that belief was generally professed to be the core of traditional Adventist identity, a thorough examination of popular Adventist religious thinking in the African context would be particularly illuminating. Such thematic studies would undoubtedly reveal much about the concerns, the life, and the values of contemporary African Adventists, and they would probably indicate the need of employing an even greater variety of perspectives. Thus, they would certainly confirm the need for a comprehensive paradigm of interpreting African Adventism.

---


61 To date, there appears to be no published item or major unpublished study on Seventh-day Adventism in several countries, including Liberia, Mozambique, Namibia, the Sudan, and several French-speaking countries in West Africa.

62 For a fine example of such a history of another denomination, see Anne Marie Stoner-Eby, "African Leaders Engage Mission Christianity: Anglicans in Tanzania, 1876-1926" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2003).

---

"THE WORD HAS GONE FORTH TO EUROPE, 'GO FORWARD!'” ELLEN G. WHITE AS AN INTERCULTURAL MISSIONARY1

Martin G. Klingbeil, D.Litt.
Universidad Adventista del Plata, Libertador San Martín, ARGENTINA

Resumen
La misionología del siglo XXI no solamente se enfoca en la misión, sino también en el misionero. Mientras la contextualización fue el Latinoam de la década de 1980s, estudios más recientes reconocen la importancia de unificar la tarea misionera con la persona del misionero. Este artículo está basado en un modelo para misioneros en el siglo XXI desarrollado por Lois McKinley que resulta de la practica (acción reflexiva) y practic (actividad creativa), lo que corresponde respectivamente a la contextualización teológica y la espiritualidad misionera alrededor de los conceptos palabra, mundo, adoración y testimonio. Elena G. de White sirvió como misionera intercultural por dos años en Europa (1885-1887); el estudio presente evaluará su ministério durante este periodo a la luz de estos cuatro conceptos.

Abstract
Missionsology in the twenty-first century focuses not only on the mission, but also on the missionary. While contextualization was the *Latinoam* for missionsology during the 1980s, more recent studies recognize the importance of bringing together the missionary task and the person of the missionary. The present study is based on a model for missionaries in the twenty-first century, as developed by Lois McKinley, which grows out of practica (reflective action) and practicus (creative activity), corresponding respectively to the contextualization of theology and the missionary's spirituality around the concepts of Word, world, worship, and witness. Ellen G. White worked as an intercultural missionary for two years in Europe (1885-1887); this study will assess her ministry during this period in the light of these four concepts.

Introduction
Mission in the twenty-first century does not focus on the what and the how of the mission alone, but also on the who, i.e., the missionary. While

---

1 Arthur L. White, *Ellen G. White, Volume 3: The Lonely Years, 1876-1891* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review & Herald, 1984), 373. I would like to thank my wife Thandi who took the time to sift through the biographical material on Ellen G. White's stay in Europe and sorted it according to the four concepts mentioned below.