

UNDERSTANDING CHRIST'S MISSION IN A SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The initial focus of this paper is on the crucial importance of understanding Christ's mission in a South African context. It should be noted that the South African Seventh-day Adventist Church membership of +- 189 000 is worrying and concerning as compared to 1.2 million Seventh-day Adventist Church membership in Zambia and 1 million membership in Zimbabwe respectively. Evangelism apathy in South Africa is clearly a huge challenge, let alone secularism in the 21st century setting. Therefore, the Seventh-day Adventist Church problem with regards to slow growth is dual, namely, the misunderstanding of Christ's mission by pastors and the laity and the secular mindset of the most people of South Africa. Based on this problem, relevant interventions and strategies should be sought out, found, and implemented with immediate effect. The main focal point of this paper is to suggest and foster evangelism and mission methods, motivation for all stakeholders' involvement in mission to occur as opposed to the lack of mission drive and vision. Pastors and members should be encouraged to learn the secret of success of both Zambia and Zimbabwe regarding exponential membership growth.

Purpose: *The purpose of this article is to explore the impact of evangelism apathy to the Seventh-day Adventists in South Africa. Developing evangelism skills and strategies for the mission to thrive, and church growth moving forward.*

Findings: *An examination focused on recognition of slow South African Adventists growth in urban, peri-urban as well as rural areas is vital. Lack of involvement in both Christ's mission and evangelism should not be taken for granted. Probably, fiscal challenges affecting most conferences which cannot provide salary increments according to the South African Union salary scale, and also failing to employ most young pastors who are still looking and hoping for ministerial jobs may be resolved by the growth of membership.*

KEYWORDS: *Mission, Evangelism, Church Growth.*

INTRODUCTION

Literature review on various aspects of church growth, mission and evangelism will be considered in this article. The church speaking and involvement on social issues is one of the utmost importance strategy of doing mission in order to positively impact church growth. The following assumptions regarding the mission is hoped to be achieved and the goal of this article, is

based on both the purpose and findings mentioned in the abstract. “The church is to comprehend as a missionary or missional church, appreciating the church as part of God’s mission to the world, and whose existence and action is primarily determined by God’s mission, *missio Dei*, as part of the God’s task of establishing His reign on earth, (Christ prayed, let your reign come; the kingdom’s has masculine connotations, therefore, reign of God or Christ. Mission is regarded as a task of the members of the local church, and the emphasis is on evangelization as part of mission. In this context it is not seen, in the first place, as sending missionaries to other areas or groups, or even overseas. Evangelization or mission is appreciated against the background of the general Mission Statement of the Adventist Church (internet: Mission Statement of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 2010/07).

Mission: The divine task given to believers to share with the public, which may not know the whole biblical and prophetic truth.

Evangelism: An act of evangelizing the nations for the purpose of their salvation by faith through grace. This may be public or personal.

Church Growth: Deep understanding of spiritual matters by believers, as well as numerical growth as new converts are won through some form of mission and evangelism.

Methodology: The study utilizes the qualitative approach in order to investigate problems pertaining Christ’s mission in South Africa. Literature review, online articles are the foundation of this study, in order to validate information with regards to mission task.

The assumption

With such assumptions in mind, it is believed that the Seventh-day Adventist Church membership situation, in South Africa may improve. The issue of membership is not just numbers, but souls saved by grace and the truth as it is in Jesus and His teachings in the Bible. The main challenge facing the Seventh-day Adventist Church at present is a lack of involvement in mission by its members. This article serves as a catalyst to try and solving this problem. The researcher believes that this setback is not insurmountable and the task of the research is to show how this would be possible. The hypotheses is that evangelism for the church should be appropriate for the mission of Christ to have an impact upon the negative world and to create a positive whole church. Evangelism is to be a continuous effort.

Southern Africa Union Conference (SAU) Secretary’s Statistical Report 2022

Numbers do not lies, now let’s look at the SAU stats report, which gives the picture of Seventh-day Adventist Membership in South Africa.

Code	Churches & Co.	Membership	Baptisms	Profession of faith	Letters received	Deaths	Missing
CAPC	504+116	43,678	64	12	99	54	0
KNSC	190+80	20,050	51	1	30	15	0
TSVC	116+44	21,844	91	0	168	67	0
TORC	382	58,253	21	3	5	4	3

The codes provided means the following conferences, CAPC- Cape Conference, KNSC, KwaZulu-Natal Free State Conference, TSVC- Northern Conference, and TORC-Trans-Orange

Conference. It must be noted that the out countries outside of South Africa are not included in the statistical report for the limitation of the study pertains only South Africa. These countries are Lesotho Conference, Namibia North Conference, Namibia South Conference, and Swaziland (Eswatini) Conference. The 189, 844 membership includes these countries, meaning that South Africa alone is far below this statistics. So, the South African Union Conference is actually a shame regarding membership, and one is ashamed of even sharing our membership with newcomers and those who are not yet Adventists. A critical question is why such a sluggish growth in South Africa? What is the secret of Zambia, Zimbabwe and other African Countries in the North and West Africa? Kenya, for example has huge church membership, Nairobi Central the last time one checked was +-4000, Lovington SDA Church was +- 2000, and New Life SDA Church membership was 5000 in 2019.

In Kenya, there one pastor per church because of the large membership they have versus numerous church per pastor in South Africa, especially, the black populated conferences. Again, in Kenya, there one Camp meeting per church and this is because, membership is huge enough for each church to run it by themselves. Comparatively speaking South Africa with population over 66 million cannot afford to have such a shameful Adventist membership. Something must be done quickly to change the status quo. Effective mission outreach should be the main area of focus in South Africa in order to embark on Christ's mission as quick as possible. Dynamic witnessing also should resume as early as yesterday. Evangelism should truly involve all members young and old otherwise, no meaningful changes will be realized.

Judging by the number of churches per conference as well as church membership, the following suggestions must be considered by the SAU leadership, each conference administration, and each local church and company too.

1. Our colleges and universities should zoom in to missiological studies, and mission orientation so that pastors from training are infused with evangelism mindset.
2. Pastors in the field should also be alerted to zero in their focus on evangelism.
3. Leadership and administration should ensure that evangelism is a priority.
4. Pastors waiting for employment should be planted in un-penetrated areas so that they may keep busy with soul winning work, with a stipend to keep them going.
5. Global Mission Pioneer Volunteers should also be placed strategically in un-entered areas for a single purpose of spreading the truth we hold so dearly.
6. Each church member should also be self-motivated as much as evangelism strategic plans and slogans are promoted by the Personal Ministries directors.
7. Proper and practical training regarding mission, evangelism, witnessing, healing, restoration, etc., should also be prioritized, including discipleship training of old and new members.
8. In reach programs should be reduced in local churches, and outreach programs be increased. Such that Sabbath afternoons, mission should be done almost every Sabbath. Literature distribution also must be an order of the day. There is power in Adventist literature.
9. Interpretation of books and tracks from English into African languages as it would be indicated later in this study should be a priority. The Adventist Church has not done justice in this regard.

10. Provision of funds for well-planned evangelism outreach should be made available at all levels, be it at Division, Union, Conferences, and in the local churches.
11. Cost effective strategies such as online preaching, and populating ourselves to the communities should take precedent. Cell phone evangelism, such as voice notes, video clips, you tube, etc. must be our area of focus.
12. The Voice of Prophecy Bible Schools should be prioritized in each and every local church. Enrolling the public to Voice of Prophecy may be done in shopping centers, malls, towns and cities, as well as in rural areas. Each Adventist member should always carry VOP enrollment cards in their bags, or cars, and enroll interested people at any given moment.
13. Prison Ministries should also be prioritized.
14. Centers of influence such as health care facilities, rehabilitation centers, pre-schools, primary, high schools, and universities should be established. Currently, recovery plans in South Africa challenges Adventist students and learners who are compelled to attend schools on Sabbaths. This problem could be resolved by refocusing on Adventist Education schooling system, which mixes faith and learning.
15. City-shaped churches in urban context should study plans and strategies to work the cities of South Africa effectively. The element of sending the best out there is the right thing to do. Church planting, new districts should be a priority.
16. Studying the world view of the people, such as knowing the religious mindset of each Christian church, African religionists, and the secular mindset may horn our approach and win more souls for the Lord. How to reach and win Pentecostals? How to reach and win Jehovah's Witnesses? How to reach and win mainline churches? How to reach and win African Traditional adherents? How to reach and win youth? Such questions should be answered by the Seventh-day Adventist scholars, pastors, lay preachers and all church membership.

More strategic plans may be discussed in the future, but for now these 16 suggested ones are sufficient for the limit of this study. This article will be good news if it could reach all stakeholders who may learn a few things from it and add more strategies to effect a positive change in South Africa. The prayer is that Adventists in South African context may catch the vision and embrace the mission as fast as possible. Lack of involvement is observed to be the main problem responsible for the sad state of affairs in our developing country.

One is not too sure whether the SAU statistical report is a true reflection of church membership, in South Africa, and also some improvements may have occurred since the stats were made. However, judging by a number of baptisms, we still have a long way to go. Number of deaths may not be correct, and the missing members may not be adequately reported. The new ASCMS may improve membership reporting and probably it may be accurate. But still, what we have so far is not reflecting effective mission is happening. Thus, there is great need of understanding Christ's mission in urban, peri-urban and rural areas of South Africa. South Africa consists of these three areas and all of them have to be prayed for and the gospel should reach them all.

Ministry or mission to the Cities

The messenger of the Lord, Ellen White wrote and counsel extensively regarding this ministry to the cities. Here, the researcher will refer to some of the carefully selected statement, which if

well understood may assist the Adventist Church in South Africa do justice in ministering to the cities. Such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Tshwane, Mbombela, and the rest of the cities in the country.

“Work for Higher Classes Needs Our Best Capacities-We have to present the truth to those in the highways. This work has been neglected. We have a work to do for the higher classes, and this work needs all our capacities. While we are in no case to neglect the poor and destitute, we have neither men nor money for the work among the very lowest classes. We point our workers to a higher grade. All reasons for this I cannot explain now. The fields ripe for the harvest have been spread before me. We must work for the higher class of people. Then we shall have strength and ability with which to carry forward in the lines which God has pointed out.” –White, Ellen G. Letter 164, 1901, p. 2 (Manuscript Releases, vol. 4, pp. 420, 421).

The prophetess, got it right, we have neglected working for the gated communities, as we call them today, in South Africa. Our cities have more church membership than rural areas, but, this is not so because we are winning more souls there, it is simply because, most people have moved from townships, and rural areas, and increased membership in the cities. Also, others are foreigners who come from other African countries. All our capacities and abilities should be employed in the work for the higher class who also need salvation in Christ. The good news is that fields ripe for harvest was shown to her, meaning that only if we can do our part, God will do the rest. Lower classes also need to be worked for, but not to the neglect of the higher classes.

Furthermore, White, denotes to methods, which could be used for all classes, “The gospel invitation is to be given to the rich and the poor, the higher and low, and we must devise means for carrying the truth into places and to all classes of people. The Lord bids us, ‘Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that My house may be filled.’ He says, Begin in the highways; thoroughly work the highways; prepare a company who in unity with you can go forth to do the very work that Christ did in seeking and saving the lost.”- Manuscript 3, 1899 (Medical Ministry, p. 312).

It cannot be said better than this. Working for all classes is the way to go for Christ’s mission to develop and grow far and wide. God’s house has to be filled with souls saved for the kingdom. Beginning in the highways is crucial bearing in mind that most people live in cities today. The Adventist Church must heed to call from God and go to highways and hedges. This being said, the researcher calls for Adventists to read widely about what the Spirit of Prophecy says about ministry and mission to the cities, because that is needed. Modern scholars also have written extensively on urban mission. So reading is invite again so to capacitate ourselves and prepare ourselves for the work at hand. And if after studying, we apply principles, certainly, we shall rejoice at last having faithfully fulfilled the will of God in our space. For instance, Bergquist and Crane write, “Although we would not recognize them as cities now, urban areas emerged on the stage of history from a very early period. There is something intrinsically human about dwelling in proximity to other people. From the fourth chapter of Genesis to the last chapter of Revelation, cities are found everywhere on the pages of the Bible. At first glance, we might think of cities as incubators of iniquity (like Sodom and Gomorrah) or symbolic of concentrated lust for power (like Babylon or Rome). However, a biblical understanding of cities does not leave us in despair but always moves towards a hopeful future.” Bergquist, Linda & Crane, Michael D. City Shaped Churches Planting Churches in the Global Era. Urban Lost Publishers. United States of America. 2018.

Apart from the writings of Ellen White scholars have emphasized the importance of working the city. These two writers have just affirmed this truth. According to them, the Bible records cities from Genesis to Revelation as places of mission and ministry. They are correct, hence, one agrees with them fully. Yes, evil is much in cities, but we are not to despair because, cities have bright future by the grace of God. The gospel shall cover the cities like the water covers the seas. Isaiah and John the Revelator state that the city of God will finally descend from heaven with the redeemed of all ages and forever to dwell in peace on the New Earth. We can safely say that the Bible begins with the first two chapters of Genesis depicting perfect sinless life in Eden and end with the last two chapters of Revelation again painting a beautiful picture of the saints, dwelling with God in person in New Jerusalem. Meaning, therefore that from the third chapter of Genesis to the twentieth chapter of Revelation, Christ mission must go forward to highways and hedges until, Christ says, well done my faithful sons and daughters. Mission context in South Africa dictates that right people for the job are needed, right attitude towards this work of Christ is imperative, and also the right amount of time spent on mission is crucial.

The Effect of Mission in South African setting: The 13th chapter of Seventh-day Adventist Believe, addresses the Remnant and its mission, which entails the following: “The universal church is composed of all who truly believe in Christ, but in the last days, a time of widespread apostasy, a remnant has been called out to keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. The remnant announces the arrival of the judgment hour, proclaims salvation through Christ, and heralds the approach of His second advent. This proclamation is symbolized by the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14; it coincides with the work of judgment in heaven and results in a work of repentance and reform on earth. Every believer is called to have a personal part in this worldwide witness. (Isa. 1:9; 11:11; Jer. 23:3; Dan. 7:9-14; Micah 2:12; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Peter 1:16-19; 14:17; 2 Peter 3:10-14; Jude 3, 14; Rev. 12:17; 14:5-12; 18:1-4).” Seventh-day Adventists believe, an exposition of fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Review and Herald Publishing Association. Since 1861/ www.reviewandherald.com

This profound statement resonate well with the focus of this article in that the mission is a direct call of the remnant church to get involved in practical ways. Apparently, the remnant and its mission is given a unique message to warn the world just before the second advent of Christ. The Bible verses referred to here show this unique calling to the remnant church to increase God’s knowledge in South Africa and plant His divine character in the secular community of this beloved country. Certainly, no other Christian denomination preaches such gospel given to the remnant church. Salvation in Christ includes commandments keeping as well as the faith of Jesus. A direct opposition stance towards many Christian churches, which renounce the Ten Commandments of God as if it was abolished on the cross of Calvary, which is a biblical and hermeneutically error.

The effect of mission in South African context is believed to revive the mission and evangelism by all Seventh-day Adventist believers. The previous General Conference slogans or strategies, such as one member one souls, total member involvement, and total Sabbath School involvement are to be kept in mind and put into practice. Evangelism revives not only the recipients, but more so the presenters, who consistently get involved voluntarily and not coerced by any one in anyway. The spirit of evangelizing the world displayed by the Early Church as recorded in the New Testament, especial, the book of Acts demonstrates what needs to be done by the Adventist Church presently. The Former Rain was a secret of success back then, so the Later Rain would prove to be effective in expanding Christ’s mission.

This gospel of the kingdom, according to Jesus will be preached throughout the whole world as a testimony before the second advent of Christ (Matt. 24:14), and this gospel is also known as the everlasting gospel according to (Rev. 14:6-12). The threefold messages must be proclaimed by the Seventh-day Adventists in South Africa in the context of Bible prophecy prophesied by Christ Himself and confirmed by John the Revelator. A call to worship God, the Creator, and the law-giver is seriously lacking in South Africa in so far as the reality is concerned. A Sabbath observant revival is pertained in the first angel's message. One is making a call to all pastors and the laity to embrace this mission and revive the mission as was the case during the early church mission era. A call out of Babylon, which is spiritual confusion is proclaimed in Revelation 14:8 as well as the 18th chapter, verses 1-4.

A renewed understanding of Christ's mission and evangelism would ensure that all stakeholders get involved in mission. This task of knowing and making God known is imperative, and not optional. The third angel's message concludes the remnant's work on earth. The church is called out to proclaim and sound the last warning to the dying people of South Africa. It must be noted that the apathy regarding evangelism is detrimental to the remnant church, in that it ceases to be missionary but remain sort of a religious social club. The researcher believes that for the mission to be effective the endowment of the Holy Spirit is required (see Acts 1:4, 8, and Acts chapter 2 in reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon Christ's followers and disciples in South Africa. Praying for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit has been offered over and over again. Probably, one thing lacks, that to pray in one accord. Theology and practice of unity within the Seventh-day Adventist is missing, and by this study, it is desirable to see it reigning especially within the ministerial fraternity.

Practical Strategies to effect Church Growth: A wholistic growth is anticipated in South Africa provided the following is happening: Witnessing, which is proclaiming the gospel to individuals, or a group of people in the community we serve. Preaching, preaching in proclamation of the gospel in congregations, rallies or groups usually by a trained pastor, but it is not limited to pastors only, it includes the laity as well. Teaching, includes encouraging the development of Christian minds and character, proclaiming the mature understanding of, and relationship to God, the gospel and the created universe. Healing, assisting and praying for, the wellbeing of the whole person, and promoting health as a priority. Restoration includes ministering to the poor and oppressed in their emotional and spiritual needs, and correspondingly for renewal and transformed social and economic conditions. In cooperating with Christ in His compassionate work of all-inclusive renewal and restoration. The Seventh - day Adventist Church understanding of restoration is informed by the first two steps in salvation matters. That is in Christ, we are justified by grace through faith, and being like Christ we are sanctified by the same token of faith and grace, and finally, glorified when He comes to take His own to be with Him in glory. That is indeed restoration. Disciples making, which is nurturing the spiritual growth and Christian's development. This matter refers especially to new converts, initiating them to righteous living, and training them for effective witnessing and embolden their responsive obedience to God's will. Ultimately, church growth calls the church to mature in all its mission aspects including spiritual, and numerical.

There is a certain amount of growth in South Africa compared to some decades ago. Once upon a time, the entire KwaZulu-Natal for example, was having one camp meeting due to lack of church membership. However, comparing the population growth, the church grows very sluggishly. Addressing the issues of lethargy, Douglass articulates: "This attitude, which I dare say is fairly

common among Adventists, (especially those who work in secular sphere), is lamentable. It suggests a deep need for the church to develop a theology of work so that church members who are investment brokers or farmers, agronomists or garbage collectors will see that their particular work is indeed the place God expects them to serve, love and honour Him and to fulfill His mission.” Dauglous, W. Vocation as Mission. Review and Herald Association. United States of America. 1999.

This statement confirms the assumption that mission should be part and parcel of everyday life of believers and that they should witness wherever they are, also in their work situation. On top of this profound statement, White adds that laypersons, men and women alike, as God’s messengers, “...are commissioned to take up every work that Christ did on earth. They are to give themselves to every line of ministry that He carried out.”.... This mission of Christ is the business of all believers to be concerned about the reign of God in the world, which Christ came to initiate. In order to fulfill Christ’s work on earth, the status quo of lethargy, especially of the members needs to change if the church is to take part in a comprehensive way of mission.

The Gospel Affects Everything

The Adventist Church in South African setting needs to fully comprehend the following important concepts: According to Keller, the gospel affects everything,’ that is, a Christian life should be governed by the gospel principles, and certainly, one of them is involvement in the remnant mission. Keller declares: “We have seen that the gospel is not everything, meaning it must be distinguished as an announcement of news, distinct from its results and implications, and that the gospel is not a simple thing, meaning it cannot be packaged in a single standard form. My third contention, that the gospel affects virtually everything...” Keller Timothy. Center Church, Doing Balanced Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City. Zondervan, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2012.

One fully agrees with Keller regarding the previous notion that the gospel affects everything, a point of departure rises against the notion that the gospel is not a simple thing and that it is not everything. As far as the researcher is concerned, the gospel is a simply thing in that it may be revealed by grace of God to all who have the capacity of receiving it. Be in simple people who are not much educated and the elite alike. Yes, people’s understanding may differ due to their level of education, but still the gospel is everything in that it affects everything. The gospel affects the belief system of every true believer, and also it affects ethics, and morals. The gospel as the content remains the same while, context as the container takes the shape of the container. One argues that the Adventist pastoral practitioners, as well as every believer should be affected by the gospel such that after the close encounter with it, no one remains the same.

A positive change the gospel brings is the good news for everyone to proclaim to the world in the last days in which we live. With this understanding in mind, Greear adds, “The gospel is not just the diving board; it is the pool.” It is true that not everybody can swim in a pool, but if people are interested they can be taught how to swim and even become expects in swimming. The idea Greear is sharing with his readers, including the researcher is that Christians should know that the gospel is a pool, not just a diving board. It is that simple. And the nest way to learn how to swim is not by standing far or near the pool, but to jump into it. Of course, for starts the shallow waters are safe, but for the expect swimmers even the deep end is not a problem. The idea therefore is that the Adventists in South Africa should be swimming in the gospel for the mission and evangelism to succeed.

Experience with the Gospel is mission motif

Furthermore, Greear says, “Motivation for mission grows out of deep, personal experience with the gospel...The cross of Christ provided Paul with the motive for sacrifice (love of Christ), a measure for his sacrifice (Christ’s death on the cross), and a mission in his sacrifice (seeing people reconciled to God; see 2 Cor. 5:14-21)...The fire to do comes from being soaked in the fuel of what has been done...Everything in the Christian life grows out of the gospel. Thus, the deeper you and your people go in the gospel, the higher you will soar in the mission.” Greear, J.D. *Gaining by Losing, Why the Future Belongs to Churches that Send*. Zondervan. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2015.

These two authors justify the researcher’s claim that South African can grow missions which would grow the Adventist Church. Local churches, conferences, unions and division have a challenge to focus their attention to gowning the work here in South Africa. Swimming in the gospels serves as a motivation for mission, while all relevant leadership and followership get involved personally in Christ’s mission, which should be clearly known and understood by all. More could be said about the concept of an experience with the gospel as a motive for mission. Here, one argues that maybe the church is wasting time trying to motivate pastors and members to reach out and win souls for Christ. Therefore, one suggests that a paradigm shift occurs and that is allow the gospel itself to motivate the people. Honestly, no one who loves Jesus deep enough have no burden for the lost. Like Paul, the cross of Christ provides motivation for us to sacrifice ourselves and work for Christ as much as we know how.

One agrees with the concept, which says, ‘everything in the Christian life grows out of the gospel.’ Understanding this may be the correct element of eliminating fears, lack of involvement in Christ’s mission and effectively evangelize our beloved country as if our lives depend on it. Therefore, the lethargy, observed over centuries and decades as a stumbling block and impediment to church growth is here dismissed. Another important concept for mission growth is that ‘our God is a ‘sending God.’ If God calls, definitely He sends the called whom He qualifies for mission. According to Kaiser Jr. There is mission in both the New and the Old Testaments. We have argued that Genesis 12: 1-3 is foundational to the missionary vision of the whole Bible and for all the people of God through all the ages. This promise that God would bless ‘all the families of the earth’ is repeated in various forms in Genesis 18:18; 22:18; 26: 4; and 28: 14. The Hebrew phrase for ‘all the families’ is *kolmisphehot*, which is rendered in the Greek translation of the Old Testament in Genesis 12:3 and 28:14 by *pasai bai phulai*, ‘all the tribes.’” Kaiser Jr. Walter C. *Mission in the Old Testament Second Edition, Israel as a Light to the Nations*. Baker Publishing Group. Grand Rapids, Michigan, 2012.

With such a reminder the Adventist Church should focus its mission to all the nations of South Africa, of which it is a light. The concept of the light to the Israelites being the nations extends to the Seventh-day Adventist church in the 21st century until the end of the world’s history. Hebrew and Greek phraseologies expressed above means that the Adventist Church is blessed with the true knowledge of God just like Abraham and later the Jews. Such rich blessing is not supposed to stay with us, it must reach all the nations.

11 spoken Languages in South Africa

One argues for narratives approach to mission in South Africa, meaning that reaching the people effectively through story telling demands that we speak the language of the people. Regarding

this matter, Adventists are guilty of become to western to the neglect of their own native languages when it comes to preaching in societies. Evidently, even Pictorial Aids used in public campaigns reflect of western approach and yet images common to the predominant culture are within the reach. Mission dynamics demands balancing the gospel axis, culture axis, and the movement axis. Keller puts it emphatically this way:

1. “The Gospel axis. At one of the axis is legalism, the teaching that exists or the spirit that implies we can save ourselves by how we live. At the other end is antinomianism or, in popular parlance, relativism-the view that it doesn’t matter how we live; that God, if he exists, loves everyone the same...
2. The City axis (which could also be called a Culture axis. We will show that to reach people we must appreciate and adapt to the cultures, but we must also challenge and confront it. This is based on the biblical teaching that all culture have God’s grace and natural revelation in them, yet they are also in rebellious idolatry...
3. The Movement axis. Some churches identify so strongly with their own common cause with other evangelical churches or other institutions to reach a city or work for the common good...” Keller Timothy. Center Church. Doing Balanced Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City. Zondervan. Grand Rapids. Michigan, 2012.

This scholar got it all right in saying that the three axis should balance in reaching the people in a given context. Be it in urban, peri-urban, and rural areas. Putting our house in order calls for a biblical balance between legalism and relativism, and both extremes have no room in the Adventist Church and its mission. Adaptation to the culture is good in terms of enculturation, but there is always a limit, otherwise, we may adapt to idols of the culture and mess-up pure gospel message as it is in Christ and Scripture. Correcting and confronting cultures need tactful approach otherwise, people may reject the gospel if poorly presented as far as their culture is concerned. Language is the culture, therefore, missionaries must learn the people’s language and present the gospel with cultural setting. This is exemplified by Christ in Scripture, for example, in approaching Nicodimus, He spoke the relevant language, which he could identify with, (See John 3), and in reaching to the woman at the well, He asked for water, and that was relevant to her context (see John 4). Once again narrative approach was a dynamic methodology Christ used in reaching the people in His day and age, we can learn this tact from Him, and He is our perfect example in reaching the people. This quota may conclude by citing that in missiology, two extremes are avoided, that is total rigidity, which some Adventist pastors and lay preacher still employ to the detriment of mission. And other are total fluid, and also mess up with the gospel of Christ.

Addressing cultures spoken in South Africa, the researcher by the name of Alexander, articulates: “The main languages of each province are:

Eastern Cape- isiXhosa (78.8%), Afrikaans (10.6%).

Free State- Sesotho (64.2%), Afrikaans (12.7%)

Gauteng-isiZulu (19.8%), English (13.3), Afrikaans (12.4%).

KwaZulu-Natal- isiZulu (77.8%), English (13.2%).

Limpopo- (Sesotho sa Leboa (52.9%), Xitsonga (175), Tshivenda (16.7%).

Mpumalanga- siSwati (27.7%), isiZulu (24.1%), Xitsonga (10.4%), isiNdebele (10.1%).

Northern Cape-Afrikaans (53.8), Setswana (33.1%).

North West- Setswana (63.4%), isiXhosa (24.7%), English (20.3%).

Western Cape- Afrikaans (49.7%), isiXhosa (24.7%), English (20.3%).

Analyzing the above given demographics, ones sees some serious loopholes in terms of the Adventist Church being very much off the point. Understanding Christ's mission includes understanding the correct approach to each and every people's group. For examples, in KwaZulu-Natal, we have the kingdom of the Zulus, and when we get there, right in the Palace of the King, we speak English and expect the King to address his people in foreign language, when in actual fact he has to promote the culture and the language of his people. Here we have to adapt to the culture or language being mindful of the 77. 8% of the isiZulu being spoken in this province. How could we win the Zulus when speaking English in their backyard? Traditional people wonder what kind of a church is this. What kind of black people are these?

In order to win such traditional people of Zululand, Adventists need to be careful which language they use, one understands the issue of being a merged conference whereby English is the medium of communication, but contextualization is crucial. A white speakers may be fine, and speak very well, but before the Zulu Monarch, and expectation would be the Zulu or African person who would speak the native language may be preferable. This does not mean that English is problematic, but the culture is the issue here. And this is just a typical example of contextualizing the gospel of Christ. So is in all 9 provinces, let the predominant language be a priority for the mission of Christ to succeed. Issues of relevancy is critical. Thus, speaking the language of the people balances the culture axis, and also ensures that the church like Christ is incarnating with the society. Incarnational ministry is a good strategy for reaching the lost with the everlasting gospel of Christ.

In addition to the discussion about language as a culture, Bergquist and Crane elucidate, the following statement: "Advantage of being native to the city include the fact that people trust natives and believe they will plan to be engaged in the new church for the long haul. There is so much population turnover in some cities that long-term residents are cautious about beginning relationships with newcomers." This important matter refers to all people, be it in a city, township or rural areas. Native people nowadays trust their native people more than newcomers. As a church planter the researcher recalls in Tugela Ferry, that native people were reluctant to join the new Seventh-day Adventist Church citing reasons such as, we can't trust this young man because he may leave anytime. One was still young back then, however, one agrees with the notion that church planting may happen frequently, if native people were involved. Like Jesus in Mark 5, He told the former demon possessed missionary not to follow Him, but to go to His home and tell them what the Lord has done for him being merciful, the bottom line therefore is that local members are the ones who could do Christ's work wherever they live.

The researcher's imagination is-how great it will be when local church members visit their neighbors, distribute literature, and tracks, befriend the community by mingling with them during the bad and the good times, such as funerals and weddings. Truly, if the Adventists were visible in the community they serve, guided by the Holy Spirit they can achieve more in terms of finishing the work on earth. We talk about the apocalyptic period in which we live, but, will Jesus really come when billions of people have never heard about Him and His salvation story?

We are quick to say He is coming soon and yet the very condition of His coming is not met, that is this gospel of the kingdom must be preached in the whole world, to all people as a witness and then Jesus will come.

Recommended strategic plan for Christ's mission to thrive in South Africa

Having discussed many factors that impeded Christ's mission in South African setting and the possible way forward, we now critically look at some recommended strategic plans. Below are these user-friendly strategies, which are believed to be a solution to sluggish growth of Seventh-day Adventism in our beautiful country across all 9 provinces. As indicated by the SAU statistical reports of 2022. The first one is swotanalysis of the church operations as this would help it to be brutally honest in dealing with evangelism lethargy as indicated in this study so far.

Swort analysis is defined as: Strength, weakness, opportunities, risks, and threats.

Seventh-day Adventist Opportunities to succeed in South Africa

Church structure and organization- The Seventh-day Adventist is well organized church, which if it were serious about succeeding in Christ's mission would bank of this wonderful structure. As far as the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, this church is the Church of the Living God. "Scripture uses various expression to describe the church, such as "the church of God." (Acts 20:28). "The body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12, and the church of "the living God" (1 Tim. 3:15). To belong to the church of God is a unique and soul-satisfying privilege. It is God's purpose to gather a people from the far corners of the earth to bind them into one body of Christ, of which He is the living head. All who are children of God in Christ Jesus are members of this body, and in this relationship they may enjoy fellowship with each other, and fellowship also with the Lord." The Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual...2022.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church needs to be reminded of this fact. Knowing this and putting it into practice, would be an amazing strategy for the church to use it as its strength. A sense of belonging is vital, and all members which such a unique privilege, are called for this church to seeks, find and keep new souls, discipling them for Christ's mission in their own setting and areas. The church is not supposed to be a castle church, whereby the culture becomes more important than the mission of Christ. A castle church aims at keeping the tradition at any cost, and this is not welcome in the Adventist Churches. This means that all Seventh-day Adventist congregations are to be community oriented and calling people from all corners to join this wonderful movement. A movement is best described as moving forward to the world with a message of Christ's death, resurrection, mission and His soon coming. The best description of the Church in biblical terms is the body of Christ. The body has different parts, functioning properly for the movement and well-being of the whole person. The head alone has ears, eyes, nose, and brain. All these if properly functional, may keep the body moving or doing anything necessary happening naturally. Applying it to Christ's mission, it calls for all Adventists institutional heads to lead by example in embarking in Christ's mission. Keeping in mind that the true head of the church is Christ Himself. Whose love for the world is so much so that He died for their salvation to be realized on earth (see John 3:16).

The relationship with Christ and one another is the strength of the Church of the living God. The church should have an open door policy, whereby everybody is welcome and is made to feel at home. Local churches needs to overcome all infights, power struggles, and focus on Christ's mission. So are the headquarters of all the conferences and the pastors at large. A theology of

unity is a dynamic strategy, which can strengthen the mission of the remnant church in South Africa. It is sad to admit that, unity is seriously lacking in the Adventist Church, and that professional jealousy among the pastors hinders Christ's mission terribly. While the church has the strength, it has to work hard and smart to uproot all negative energies existing with it today. Praying in one accord is the strength of the church and it would unleash the Holy Spirit to come down and empower us to do our mission, which is Christ's effectively and successfully. In the same Church Manual, we are told that the Church is Christ's supreme regard, meaning that despite being feeble and imperfect, Christ still regards His church so highly. With this the church is good to do forward doing the mission like in the Old and New Testaments times. The having put on the beautiful garment of Christ's righteousness can achieve His mission of earth, particularly in South Africa.

The church being complete in Christ, is "provided with capabilities and blessings, that it may present to the world an image of His own sufficiency, and that His church may be complete in Him." Ibid, 2022, p. 23. The structure of the Seventh-day Adventist beginning from the local church to the General Conference is tailor-made for mission. Each five-year term has a specific mission focus. Unfortunately, beautiful slogans remain as such, never put into practice for the mission of Christ to cover the world like waters cover the sea. The very same church manual says, "Our mission remains unchanged wherever we find ourselves in the world. "The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been organized for the purpose of mission. However, the way in which we fulfill that mission will of necessity take variety of forms due to different cultural and social norms." Ibid, p.26. Obviously one encourages the church to read the church manual in order to understand its mission as stipulated there. Many other literature and articles also need to be read for the sole purpose of equipping the church members to get involved in the mission of Jesus Christ.

Having discussed briefly, the strength of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which if utilized can make a meaning difference, now we are looking at opportunities, this church may have in South Africa. Understanding native languages, cultures, and the norms are opportunities the church may use to reach to the people of the soil. As argued in this study that local languages should be used, even literature should be made available in the language of the people if we wish to make a significant difference. Toning down of Westernization a bit might be good for the sake of mission. Flexibilities in approach of different peoples and classes is therefore of paramount importance. For example the high class need a different approach from the lower class. Fitting the mission well to the right people at the right time, for the right purpose may prove to be benefitting the work of God. One of the Adventists missiologist, Burrill, R. Rekindling a lost Passion. Hart Research Center. United States of America, 1999, states. "People are not rejecting faith-they crave faith."

In getting involved in mission and through observation one argues that this is true. Of course not all the people crave faith, but as a starting point, we ought to reap the ripe fruits first, while praying for the green ones to get ripe also. However, pastors' and churches need to take note of this opportunity and capitalize on it and win souls while they are craving faith. The danger of non-involvements of the Seventh-day Adventist is that many other gospels, which are not necessarily based on Scripture utilize the opportunities and indoctrinate the people with some falsehood, which becomes hard to uproot with the true biblical message later on. An approach even to those who reject faith has to be developed for the sake of their salvation. One of which would be meeting them at their point of need, such as feeding the poor, clothing the naked,

providing health care services, and schools to the community of South Africa. Spending quality time with those who crave faith is wise. Adventists being wise people would indeed capitalize on such opportunities. Some places in South Africa are more than ready for harvest, but reapers are few. We must pray the Lord of harvest to give us more harvesters who could be sent to around in South African cities, townships and villages.

If and only if, each district pastor is mission oriented and is training, equipping, and sending the members out to the world, a huge positive difference would be seen. Some opportunities are enrolling the public to the Voice of Prophecy local Bible schools, giving out Bible studies to individuals, homes and groups of people. Again if from the local conferences, and union leadership were mission-driven, again that would be golden opportunities to win many souls in South Africa. One have argued somewhere in this study that an experience with the gospel, in which we swim, is able to motivate each and every one of us better that we do the promotions seasonally. One's testimony is evident in this regard. Not one motivated the researcher in his youth to love evangelism and evangelize the local communities. The love of God constrained him back than prior to becoming a pastor and even now, he is still zealous for mission, and he does a lot of training of members and sending them out for mission of Christ.

Adventist Weaknesses to mission of Christ

Evangelism apathy is real in South Africa, and this is counterproductive in mission. None-involvement resulting from such an unfortunate situation is therefore inevitable. The church has lost its first love for mission, which was there during the early stages of its existence on earth. Our pioneers worked hard to grow Adventism in the world, but where is that spirit today? It is dead. In order to change this weakness in mission, the church has to be reminded of how this church was born, grew and become a world-wide organization that it is today. "Adventism was born as a dynamic, mission centered movement. Passion for sharing the message reigned in the minds and hearts of the early pioneers. They labored until bone weary-they sacrificed health and possession in an attempt to reach the world with the saving news of Jesus Christ...Mission drove them! Mission motivated them! Mission was the flame that burned within them...Adventists in modern days have to ignite the fire and the zeal of the pioneers, to be mission motivated and – driven." Burrill, R. *Revolution in the Church: Unleashing the Awesome Power of the Lay Ministry*. Hart Research Center. United States of America. 1993.

It cannot be said better than this. Burrill's challenging statement does not only speak to the laity, but to pastors as well. The good news is that our laity has some awesome power, which if unleashed can accomplish much. Looking back to how mission drove our early pioneers, should motivate modern Adventists to do more, for the time is running fast and the world is not warned according to the biblical and Spirit of Prophecy prophecies. Laboring for the world is our call today, and in so doing, Christ's mission will reach every corner in South Africa. Again, the way to beat weakness in mission is to pray that the mission should drive all pastors and lay people to play their part. Souls that are won today are not many as they should, reason being that we still do the hit and run method of reaching the world, we are not staying long in a given area like the apostles of old (see Acts 18:11, 18).

Apart from laziness regarding outreach programmes, lies ignorance of some basic biblical doctrines. Those who do not participate in mission fail to store in mind what we believe or teach. If they do soon it fades because it is unused. Certainly, the mind becomes sharp by a good use of it in mission. Even if giving moral support to those who preach, teach and evangelize, might

sharpen the knowledge of such basic doctrines such as the sanctuary service on earth and in heaven, prophecies of Daniel and Revelation also. It is a serious weakness for any Adventist not to share a word or book or enroll people to Voice of Prophecy for the whole weeks. Let alone the whole life. Again, modern day Adventists are lazy to read the Bible and live by its principles, today, some Adventists are confused by the world since they are not deeply rooted into the pure teachings of the Bible. Even on Facebook, arguments made there are a shame to the pure gospel that should purify the minds. Most of precious time is wasted watching television movies, no quality prayer time in the families, and social media also has stolen the minds of the Adventists nowadays. Tracing our roots would remind us of what drove our pioneers to do God's work under some difficult times at times. They sacrificed all for the sake of mission, and this has to be revived today.

Risk Factors and Treats to the Adventist Mission

Due to the serious lack of biblical faith in South Africa, the risk is that secularism is really advancing such that ancestor veneration is now equated to spirituality. According to the Bible teaching on the state of the dead, dead people are unconscious until the first or second resurrections. But most people, even the most learned one now worship and praise their dead ancestors as if they are living somewhere. And are able to communicate with the living. This risk may be viewed as an external one, but for the Adventist mission to thrive, Adventists ought be very clear about the state of the dead, and be able to teach the public and other Christians also about it. The following texts, if studied correctly help us and the community we serve full understand what happened when we die. (Job 19:25-27; Ps. 146:3, 4; Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10; Isa. 25:8, 9; Dan. 12:2, 13; John 5:28, 29; 11:11-14; Rom. 6:23; 1 Cor. 15:51-54; Col. 3:4; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 1 Tim. 6:15; Rev. 20:1-10). The Adventist Church has to formulate a well-crafted strategy around spiritualism since we live during the end of the time crisis. Our mission is threatened by such false teaching of the existence of the dead, such that some of the Adventists members suffer demonic attacks from time to time. The church has to be fully equipped as to how to pray for the demoniacs in South Africa as it is on the increase in some parts.

Another serious risk in South Africa, is syncretism, a mixture of Christian faith and ancestor worship. This one is overwhelmingly affecting most Christian Churches. It threatens Adventist mission because it provides an alternatives for people to choose. Once people have this option, Adventism is no longer attractive to them. The world needs to know that "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). This Jesus alone saves all nations, (see 1 Peter 2:9; Titus 2:14; Acts 15:14). Like James Simson, who once said, "My greatest discovery was that I am a sinner, but that Jesus a is a great Saviour." Richards. H.M. S. The Promises of God. Review and Herald Publishing Association. United States of America, 2003. Simpson is correct in his discovery of who he was and who Jesus was to him. With such understanding in mind we obtain freedom from sin, its power and its results. Solomon also admonishes us, In all your ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct your paths"(Prov. 3:5, 6). Richards's arguments carries weight, which encourages us to trust only in God, and not in anything else. If God is not in all our ways, He is not in our ways at all. In little things, as well as the large, we are privileged to acknowledge God. He is interested in us 24 hours a day, 60 minutes of the hour, and 60 seconds of the minute. He is watching over our life's journey, from the first uncertain step of babyhood to the last uncertain step of old age." Ibid. p. 30.

In spite of the risks and threats to our mission, there is hope on the horizon. Our God is with us all both night and day. His vested interest in us satisfies us with Him alone. No syncretism, nor ancestor veneration, Christ is all to us, and this mission must go throughout the whole country of South Africa.

CONCLUSION

The matter concludes by reemphasizing the importance of Christ's mission in South Africa. It has been argued that this mission is at risk due to syncretism, and ancestor veneration as an outward challenge to the mission affecting negatively, the Adventists mission, however, throughout the article, the arguments indicate that within the church itself, there are certain problems which the church under discussion needs to resolve, such as none-involvement in Christ's mission as well as the general lethargy to evangelism in all its forms. It is believed that a renewed understanding of the remnant mission may transform the Seventh-day Adventist Church in South Africa into a dynamic missionary movement. A call to all headquarters of the conferences and the Union, includes all pastors, and lay preachers to take this mission upon themselves and in so doing, the mission will go forward. Striking the cultural balance also is argued that it informs the Adventist mission in South African setting. The findings show that Christ's mission is doable only if it is better understood, and applied accordingly. Let Jesus reign in South Africa for the sake of the gospel. Mission is motivated by looking back at our early pioneers, as well as the progress made so far, and yet there is still a long way to go. May God bless our beloved country.

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