

Can Anything Good Come Out of the City?

Chapter 8

“Philip found Nathanael and told him,
‘We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law,
and about whom the prophets also wrote —Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’”

‘Nazareth! Can anything good come from there?’
Nathanael asked. ‘Come and see,’ said Philip” (John 1:45-46).

Could it be that just as Nathanael found it hard to believe
that anything worthwhile could come out of a small village,
that some would find it difficult to swallow that anything good could
come out of a large urban area like Los Angeles?

Urban Missiologist Harvie Conn has postulated that
“The American city has always functioned as a preview of coming attractions.”¹

He further sees that Los Angeles offers a unique insight:

“One of the most fundamental and dynamic change in cities
is the emerging multiculturalism of large urban cities around the world.
“And Los Angeles offers probably the richest sampling. It is the new Ellis Island.”²

Could it be that just as Ellen White at the start of the twentieth century
said that the work in Greater New York could “be a symbol of the work
the Lord desires to see done in the world”³

Los Angeles could now serve as a case study of what is happening world-wide?

In this essay we first look at the spiritual dynamics of church growth
and then explore how the Seventh-day Adventist Church
has ministered in the urban area of Los Angeles.

The Spiritual Dynamics of Urban Church Growth

An urban Seventh-day Adventist Christian Church has been declining for years and decides to bring in the very best church growth consultants to see if anything can be done to fill-up the now mostly empty pews. Like a team of highly trained specialists in a teaching hospital, the consultants spend time diagnosing the patient by asking questions and giving a multitude of tests. In the context of church growth this would include looking at the Biblical, theological, historical, sociological, contextual, demographical and institutional factors.

After adequate time and study had been given to understand the local church, the consultants present a good growth plan to the members. Charts are produced. There are numbers aplenty. In clear and understandable terms the members are presented with both a diagnosis and cure for their situation.

However, as in the world of physical care, the best recommendations are only as good as the patient's willingness to follow the doctor's orders. For while it may be true that the church might greatly desire to grow, the steps that lead to greater health are often steeped with difficult choices.

One of the main purposes of this essay is to clearly show that a willingness to do the Lord's will lies at the very heart of both the individual and corporate Christian life. The Lord cannot truly be the Lord until we are willing to lay self aside and allow Him to rule over our surrendered hearts, churches and institutions:

God cannot connect with those who live to please themselves, to make themselves first. Those who do this will in the end be last of all. The sin that is most nearly hopeless and incurable is pride of opinion, self-conceit. This stands in the way of all growth. . . . "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick" Matthew 9:12.¹

The result of leaving out the spiritual dynamic of surrendering to the Lordship of Christ, leaves us with nothing more than a merely human-generated diagnosis and cure for the challenges facing urban churches today. It is important when examining every issue that the critical spiritual foundation of surrendering to the Lordship of Christ be recognized. The next section outlines how the institutional success and the doctrinal developments of the Seventh-day Adventist church can tend to divert attention away from the real essence of the Christian faith.

The Institutional and Doctrinal Complex of the SDA Church

The formal organization of the Seventh-day Adventist church was established in the 1860s and has now grown to over eight million members in 208 countries around the world. The ratio of Seventh-day Adventists to the world population has grown from 1 member for every 367,143 people in the world in 1863 to 1 for every 669 people in 1994.²

The church has developed in a number of diverse and dynamic ways. From humble beginnings, the church now operates church and humanitarian work in 208 countries through a network of 38,816 churches, 482 medical clinics and hospitals, 5,698 educational institutions and 56 publishing houses which print in 219 languages.³

Besides the institutional growth, the denomination has also come to crystallize its teachings into twenty-seven well-defined doctrinal beliefs. These succinct statements encompass a broad range of topics such as the Bible as the Word of God, the Trinity, Salvation, the Second Coming, the Sabbath, the Sanctuary, the Spirit of Prophecy, the church as well as Christian lifestyle teachings.

In a book entitled, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom*, George Knight, professor of SDA Church History at Andrews University, attempts to understand the realities of institutional growth and its affect on the mission of the Church. He quotes John Wesley to show the pattern of growth, institutionalization and decay:

Whenever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long. For religion must necessarily produce both industry and frugality, and these cannot but produce riches. But as riches increase, so will pride . . . and love of the world in all its branches. . . . So although the form of religion remains, the spirit is swiftly vanishing away.⁴

Seventh-day Adventists, with their emphasis on health, education, the discipline of time (Sabbath observance) and the discipline of money (tithing) are susceptible for confusing worldly prosperity with spiritual growth. Knight comments: "Seventh-day Adventism currently faces the secularization problems inherent in its success as both the individual and the corporate levels. Its success threatens its goal orientations."⁵

Knight traces the development of what he calls the Adventist missiological quadrilateral which consists of "the publishing, medical, educational, and conference aspects of the denomination's work."⁶ These four phases of the mission work were first developed at the denominational center at Battle Creek and then exported around the world.

In the context of studying the Seventh-day Adventist urban mission in Los Angeles, it is of interest to note that the "first mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church outside of the

Northeastern United States was to far-off California.”⁷ Knight reports that in just one decade (1873-1882), all four elements of the quadrilateral were in place and that “the California mission replicated the fourfold work of the church in Battle Creek and thus provided a pattern for Adventist missions around the world.”⁸

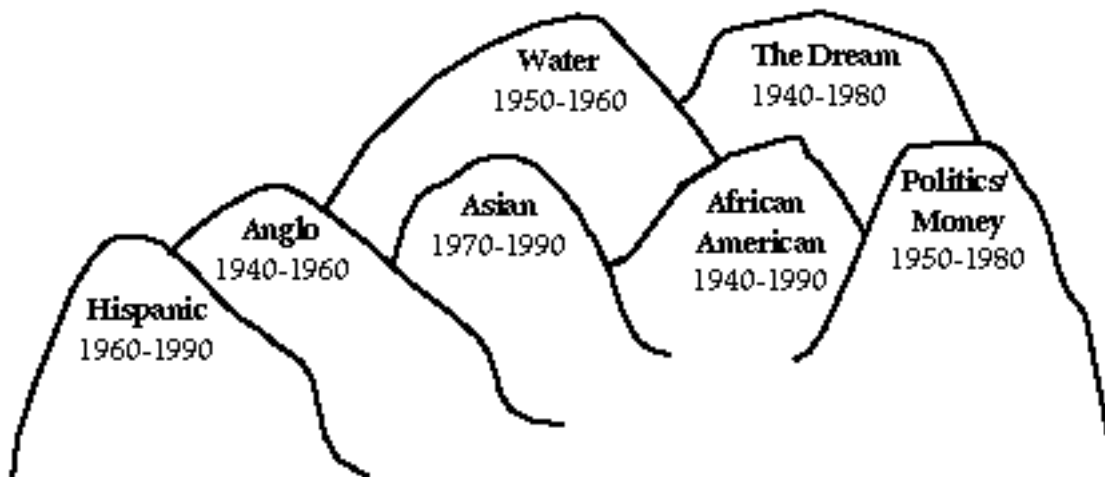
The worldwide growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church has attested to the success of this four-fold work. However, the question must be asked: With its myriad of institutions and a well developed belief system would it be possible at times for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to lose focus on what really constitutes the essence of the Christian faith” Could the endless round of committee meetings, financial statements, institutional and local pressure possibly lead us to forget the very reason for our being as a church and Christian organism? Knight answers this concern by writing:

“The challenge in the 1990s will not be to change the pattern, but to make every effort to keep the various aspects of the missiological model effective for mission. . . . Beyond contributing to the daily needs of local communities, Adventist institutions must lead men and women into a better understanding of and a stronger relationship to Jesus Christ and the message of the three angels”⁹

Knight seems to be saying that the solution to the current institutionalization is not to change the pattern of mission work but the rationale for the Adventist institution. The mission of our institutions is not merely humanitarian but spiritual. The next sections applies the three views of the city as presented in the previous chapter and applies them to the urban environment of Los Angeles.

The City in the Wilderness

The relatively flat, arid plain of the Los Angeles Basin was filled through the influence of seven rivers which flowed from seven diverse mountains which could be pictured in this way:



Three important factors which caused the dynamic growth of Los Angeles since 1940 are:
1) The Dream; 2) The Water; and 3) The Politics of Money.

1) The Dream: The first migration west was fueled by the magical phrase “Eureka!” (I found it), used by the 49ers in their discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevadas. “Go west young man” was an invitation to fulfill the American dream of riches and prosperity. Since 1940, the dream to move West was prompted by a number of important factors:

- Western Living—The pictures of cloudless skies and the vast stretches of orange groves lured people to move West.
- Opportunity—The west was where new opportunities abounded, in contrast to the over-built and institutionalized east.
- Hollywood—The center of make-believe made Los Angeles the center of dreams-come-true.

2) The Water: In his epic book, *Cadillac Desert*, Marc Reisner traces the fascinating story of how water from a multitude of rivers was channeled in order to irrigate the thirsty desert and provide water for the Los Angeles Basin. The first group to irrigate the West were the Mormons, who soon after arriving at what would become Salt Lake, Utah began:

digging shovels into the earth beside the streams draining from the Wasatch Range, leading canals into the surrounding desert which they would convert to fields that would nourish them. Without realizing it, they were laying the foundation of the most ambitious desert civilization the world has ever seen.¹⁰

In California, water was brought from the Sierra Nevadas in the north and channeled and pumped into the Los Angeles Basin. The capacity of Los Angeles to increase population was in direct proportion to the amount of water which could be delivered to her borders. The California Aqueduct, the largest public works project ever undertaken, was completed in the 1960s and provided thirsty Los Angeles with the water it needed to support a growing population.

3) Politics and Money: California’s increase of population naturally gave it a growing political power in the House of Representatives and other legislative bodies. Since cold-war fears motivated the post World War II politics, it was only natural that California got more of its fair share in defense contracts which meant an increase of good paying jobs and money for the local economy. The agricultural, defense, housing, shipping and entertainment industries drove the stock of California upward. Relatively cheap, flat land made housing both affordable and appreciable in value as people continued to move in by the thousands.

The casting of a dream, plentiful water, political power and money provided the rich assets for a migration of people to move into the Los Angeles Basin. The increase of population

was fed by four rivers of African American, Anglo, Asian and Hispanic peoples. Los Angeles turned from a national city to an international city around 1975. From 1940 to 1975, the primary source of growth was from the east as both African-American and Anglo ethnic peoples migrated into the Los Angeles Basin. From 1975 to 1990, the primary source of growth was from the South (Mexico) and the Far East (The Pacific Rim). The pilgrims, drawn because of the dream of a better tomorrow, gathered to fill-up the Los Angeles Basin. The next section outlines the SDA church's response to the emerging international city of Los Angeles.

The City of Refuge

One of the important functions of urban churches is to provide a spiritual refuge from the ungodly influence of the city in the wilderness. The Lord has placed His truth within the borders of the church which needs to first leaven the lives of the citizens of Zion so they can go out to leaven the city in the wilderness.

The Seventh-day Adventist church already had a good foothold in Los Angeles County in 1940. There were 10,423 members in the county attending fifty-two churches. In addition, the Southern California Conference had two medical institutions and a number of educational facilities within the county.

Since 1940 the Conference growth has just outpaced the growth of the County. In the last twenty-five years the Anglo-cultured churches have declined, whereas the ethnic churches have prospered. There are three basic reasons why this growth trend within the Southern California Conference has occurred. They are: are 1) The Age of the Church, 2) The Type of Growth; and 3) The Constituency of the Church. By comparing and contrasting these three important factors an overall picture of the Conference and church growth principles can be seen:

1) The Age of the Church Leading church growth expert Lyle Schaller reports that: "the majority of all Protestant congregations in the United States founded before 1960 are reporting a numerical decline."¹¹ While the older Anglo churches were in the conference were aging, new ethnic churches were sprouting up. Peter Wagner tells us that, "the single most effective evangelistic methodology under heaven is planting new churches."¹²

Since 1960, ten African American churches, nineteen Asian churches and thirty-four Hispanic churches have been planted within the conference with a resultant increase in growth. On the other hand, the established Anglo church has only started two churches over the same period. In general it can be said that new churches tend to grow while older churches tend to decline. This seems to be a fact that cuts across denominational lines and must be understood by those who want to understand urban ministry.

2) The Type of Growth There are three basic types of growth within churches that must be distinguished in order to understand what is going on. The definitions are taken from James Zackrison's book, *Does Your Church Need a Doctor?*¹³

Biological Growth—This is the growth that comes as a result of keeping our kids in the church.

Transfer Growth—This comes about when people transfer from another church.

Conversion Growth—This is the kind of growth that really moves a church forward by bringing people in by baptism or profession of faith. Without this numerical growth is often only cosmetic, a matter of simply circulating Adventists around the system.

3) The Constituency of the Church: Churches can draw their constituents on a local or regional level. The definitions of these two types of churches are taken from Lyle Schaller's book, *The Small Membership Church*.¹⁴

A Local Church: "Identify the people who live within a mile or two or the building as the primary constituency."

A Regional Church: "In geographical terms this is at the other end of the spectrum. Instead of seeking to reach and serve a relatively large proportion of people living near the congregation's meeting place, the focus here is on a tiny proportion of the residents of a large geographic area."

Anglo churches were primarily regional in nature that grew because of transfer and biological growth. They were not tied or dependent upon the local community. When the neighborhoods changed, most did not respond and became isolated islands of religious activity.

Ethnic churches were primarily local in nature because of the congregating of certain nationalities in usually a well-defined area. The newly planted churches had to rely primarily on converting the new people who, like themselves, were also moving into the area. In the next section we'll look at some statistics and underlying dynamics which have shaped the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Los Angeles metropolitan area.

The City set on a Hill

Whereas the city of refuge attempts to protect from the corrupt city, the city set on a hill seeks to be a dynamic influence to the city in the wilderness. One of the indicators that can be used to measure if a Seventh-day Adventist church exists primarily for the benefit of the members or those outside its doors is to compare the percentage of baptisms to transfer growth.

The following four tables gives a breakdown of the members added by transfer, baptism/profession of faith and dropped from 1973-1990 for each of the ethnic groups within the

Southern California Conference. The percentage of change and is also noted along with the overall growth or decline of that ethnic group within that period of time.

Southern California African-American Growth—1973-1990

African-American			
Beginning 1973	9749	Percent Increase	County Increase
Added by Letter	5662	+58%	
Baptism/Profession	7550	+77%	
Dropped	(8653)	-89%	
End 1990 Net Gain	4559	+47%	+26%

Based on the figures in the above table, the following general observations can be made about the African-American Seventh-day Churches in the Southern California Conference:

- These churches showed a healthy growth. It's fifty-eight percent net gain in membership outpaced the twenty-six percent increase in African-American population for Los Angeles county.
- The growth was primarily due to the seventy-seven percent baptismal growth.
- With the apparent plateauing of the African-American population (the county only gained 4,000 African American population from 1980 to 1990), these churches will have to continue to rely primarily on baptismal growth to remain viable.

Southern California Anglo Growth—1973-1990

Anglo			
Beginning 1973	19,762	Percent Increase	County Decrease
Letter	21,223	+107%	
Baptism/Profession	11,714	+59%	
Dropped	(32,837)	-166%	
End 1990 Net Gain	100	+1%	-27%

Based on the figures in the above table , the following general observations can be made about the Anglo Seventh-day Churches in the Southern California Conference:

- These churches showed a static growth. The net gain of only 100 members did outpace the county loss of almost twenty-seven percent. (The loss of members would have been even greater if the Ventura County churches would have been factored out).
- These churches grew primarily from the one-hundred seven percent transfer growth.

- This transfergrowth came from two sources: 1) People moving to the conference and 2) other ethnic SDA members from within the conference moving to an Anglo-culture church.
- With the apparent decline in the anglo population, these churches can no longer rely on transfer growth but need to refocus their ministry and baptismal goals.

Southern California Asian Growth—1973-1990

Asian			
Beginning 1973	5826	Percent Increase	County Increase
Letter	5255	+90%	
Baptism/Profession	3117	+53%	
Dropped	(3634)	-62%	
End 1990 Net Gain	4738	+81%	+350%

Based on the figures in the above table , the following general observations can be made about the Asian Seventh-day Churches in the Southern California Conference:

- These churches showed a healthy growth. However, it's dramatic eighty-one percent net gain in membership did not outpace the three-hundred and fifty percent increase in Asian population for Los Angeles county.
- The growth closely reflected the same ratio of the Anglo churches with one baptism for every two letters of transfer in.
- The Filipino people have accounted for the largest percentage of growth and reflects the transferring of Seventh-day Adventist members from the successful work in the Philippines to this county to help fill both Filipino and Anglo churches.

The next shows that whereas the Filipino and Korean churches are reaching a greater percent of the LA county population whereas the Japanese and Chinese churches are under-represented.

1990 Major Asian Groups and SDA Churches

Asian Group	County	Percent	SDA	SDA Percent
Chinese	245,000	33%	384	9%
Filipino	220,000	30%	2000	48%
Korean	145,000	20%	1403	33%
Japanese	130,000	18%	417	10%
	740,000		4204	

The Asian population is the most rapidly growing segment of the society. The Asian churches must take advantage of this people movement by stressing baptismal growth.

Southern California Hispanic Growth—1973-1990

Hispanic			
Beginning 1973	7741	Percent Increase	County Increase
Letter	6992	+90%	
Baptism/Profession	16,477	212%	
Dropped	(15,810)	-204%	
End 1990 Net Gain	13,049	+99%	+322%

Based on the figures in the above table, the following general observations can be made about the Hispanic Seventh-day Churches in the Southern California Conference:

- These churches showed a very healthy growth. It's dramatic 285 percent net gain in membership almost kept up with the three-hundred twenty-two percent increase in Hispanic population for Los Angeles county.
- The growth reflected the opposite ratio of the Anglo and Asian growth by having more than two baptisms for every one letter of transfer in.
- The Hispanic churches had about the same drop-rate as the African-American churches of about sixty-seven percent.
- According to Daniel Rode, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor who did a case study of six Hispanic SDA churches in Southern California, the growth is primarily coming from the conversion of newly arrived Hispanics.¹⁵
- One of the major challenges facing the Hispanic church is the retention of the second generation of young people.¹⁶
- Another challenge is to adequately disciple and retain the people who have been baptized.¹⁷

Overall, the Southern California Conference has done an outstanding work in the establishment of growing, new ethnic congregations in the past two decades. Urban church planning is now faced with an ever-increasing segmentation of the society. Groups which were once generally seen to be homogenous are now perceived to be multi-faceted. Generic churches cannot serve a diverse population. The next section helps to unfold the important distinction between local and regional churches.

Local and Regional Churches

If a church truly wants to be a local instead of a regional church, then it must “constantly check the shape, form, and lifestyle of their missionary congregations against the matrix of the culture they wish to reach.”¹⁸ The combination of internal and external factors will determine the unique organism the Lord wants to emerge in a particular time and place.

Seventh-day Adventist urban missiologist Dr. Bruce Moyer suggests three models of the church in the city that can help transition the church from being a regional gathering place to one that serves the local community. Notice how this first category fits the description of most Anglo Seventh-day Adventist churches in Los Angeles:

The first is the church in the city. This is the shallowest relationship of the three. The church is simply there, with no particular attachment to the city or the specific neighborhood. The church in the city is superimposed upon the neighborhood, a ghetto in one building. Frequently the church in the city is a drive-in church, a congregation that drives in on Sabbath and then returns to the safety and tranquillity of the suburbs or farms. These commuting members generally have no stake in the community: they have no psychological ownership there, no concern for its schools and its families, no concern for what happens on Sunday through Friday as long as the church building is not harmed.¹⁹

The second model Moyer suggests is called church to the city. In this model the church seeks to understand the needs of the community and suggests ways to meet them. The difficulty with this approach is that the church presents itself as already knowing what is good for the community. However:

In reality, the people most affected by problems are the ones best able to deal with them. While this is a primary principle underlying effective urban ministry, it is also one of the most difficult insights for Christians to apply—even after we accept it intellectually. Because we know the gospel, we feel that we know what is best for the community. Programs under the “church to the city” model may thrive, but only as long as the congregation keeps committing people, materials, and funding. Effectiveness is limited, and burnout is inevitable. Eventually the programs will die because they were never the programs of the people. The people in the community were spectators or clients, not participants and goal owners. So the church to the city model is actually colonialist in nature, operating out of a paternalistic attitude.²⁰

The third approach is the church with the community. In this approach, the church seeks to incarnate itself in the community, becoming one with the people, and entering as a partner into the life of its neighbors.

The community, which understands the problems from personal experience, informs the church, while the church respects the people of the community, correctly perceiving them as persons of great wisdom and potential—the only potential agents of real change in the community. Few urban Adventist churches (with the exception of some largely Adventist neighborhoods) are community churches, acquainted with and responding to their immediate surroundings. Those that are know the excitement of being part of such a dynamic living organism.²¹

It follows that if our communities are diverse, the churches should be diverse as well. Instead of being generic Seventh-day Adventist churches which are islands of uniform religious activities, a rich tapestry of diverse worship and ministry should arise as the members interface with the communities they serve.

Our churches can no longer be culturally homogeneous religious clubs speaking one language and operating on a rural time schedule. Urban congregations must celebrate the three angels messages in a rich diversity of cultures and languages. One intersection near my church offers me the opportunity to eat Cuban, Salvadoran, Jamaican, Chinese, Italian, Vietnamese, West African, and Peruvian foods, but the music and worship style in my church—the membership of which reflects all these cultures—is still mostly Western. . . . How can we liberate our churches to serve in the new urban context? How can we minister to the culturally distant who live in the shadows of our existing churches? The needs of the cities require strong urban churches with experienced leadership. The traditional distinction between foreign and home missions is a thing of the past.²²

The following table was compiled from the decadal census reports which show the ever-growing list of ethnic groups which have been coming into Los Angeles County from 1940 to 1990:

LOS ANGELES COUNTY ETHNIC DIVERSITY 1940-1990

1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990
Native Foreign Born White Negro Other Races	Native-White Foreign-born White Negro Other Races	White Negro Indian Japanese Chinese Filipino Other Races	Native of Native population Native of foreign or mixed parents Foreign born United Kingdom Ireland Sweden Germany Poland Czechoslov. Austria Hungary U.S.S.R. Italy Canada Mexico Cuba Other America Other Spanish Puerto Rican	White Black Mexican Puerto Rican Cuban Other Spanish American Indian Aluetian Japanese Chinese Filipino Asian Indian Vietnamese Hawaiian Guamanian Somoan	White Black Amer. Indian Eskimo Aleut Chinese Filipino Japanese Asian Indian Korean Vietnames e Cambodia n Hmong Laotian Thai Bangladesh i Burmese Indonesian Malayan Okninawa n Pakastani Sir Lankan Hawaiian Samoan Guamania n Tongan Tahitian North Mariner Palauon Fijan Mexican Puerto Rican Cuban Other Hisp.

As impressive as the growing list of ethnic peoples is (especially the numerous Asian subgroups) , it only represents a small portion of the actual cultural plurality of our society.

Within ethnic groups there may be a diversity of customs and practices which define a diverse cultures.

For instance, in the Southern California Conference, the Hispanic ethnic group is allowed a certain number of representation based on its membership. Representation among this ethnic group is further divided among the Mexican, Central American and South American cultures. Even further, South Americans seem to have little problems with distinguishing a person from the Indian-like Peruvians with the more European-looking individuals from Argentina.

Lyle Schaller gives a listing of different groups within a diverse urban environment which might be ministered to by a distinctly focused regional church:

One example is the congregation designed for totally deaf and other hearing-impaired adults. Less visible are the congregations designed to serve (a) adults in their second or subsequent marriage; (b) Cantonese-speaking recent immigrants from China; (c) never-married professional and businesswomen who have chosen to become mothers; (d) people who seek a church in which the worship experience is built around drama, contemporary music and a high level of participation by the congregation; (e) parents who seek a bilingual nursery school for their children; (f) never-married adults in the 19-25 age bracket; (g) single adults on a serious religious pilgrimage who seek a church that addresses the questions of agnostics, seekers, pilgrims, and the curious; (j) parents who seek a church with an excellent ministry with families that include teenagers; (k) self-identified charismatic Christians; (l) adults who prefer a church that projects very high expectations of those seeking to become members; (m) parents of children with serious physical disabilities; or (n) people looking for exceptionally high-quality preaching.²³

As Schaller states, this is far from a complete list. These regional churches have recognized a very specific culture and have decided to focus its ministry to meet the needs of these people. They, “expect to draw people from a ten to twenty-five mile radius rather than from the neighborhood, and they project a distinctive identity. For many who come, the big bonus is that they are able to meet and make friends, with people with similar interests, concerns, value systems, and religious orientation”²⁴

Just how well are Seventh-day Adventists reaching diverse populations? In 1986, the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University did a study of Adventist membership across North America as profiled by the forty-seven socio-economic clusters taken from the Donnelly Marketing Information Services. A total believer list of 265,761 households was collected from the eight large Adventist Unions across North America. An additional list of 23,781 newly baptized members was also compiled from the 1983 baptismal reports.

As far as the total believers are concerned, the findings show the “Adventist penetration is above average in twenty-two of the forty-seven Donnelley clusters.”²⁵ The report goes on to say that the people at Donnelley Marketing “were surprised that the Adventist church would reach as diverse a set of clusters as huge corporations like Sears and K-Mart.”²⁶

New believers are primarily coming from two clusters in the graph which are both “heavily Hispanic.”²⁷ The findings also show that, “few New Believers are being added from group 1 of the Total Believers. This may mean that our church is not baptizing as many in this upscale group as before, or it may mean that our schools have educated second generation members into group 1.”²⁸ This finding substantiates three principles:

- A mobile population is more receptive to change and thus the gospel.
- Upper socio-economic clusters are less receptive than lower socio-economic clusters.
- The gospel tends to increase the socio-economic standing of individuals.

An indirect finding would substantiate this study’s earlier quotation from John Wesley noted by George Knight: “Whenever riches have increased, the essence of religion has decreased in the same proportion. Therefore I do not see how it is possible, in the nature of things, for any revival of true religion to continue long.”²⁹

The emerging picture suggests that the Seventh-day Adventist church is educating many young people to assume upper status, but is doing little to influence that status once the Seventh-day Adventist members arrive there. Perhaps one of the dynamics that inhibits growth among this cluster is that there are no readily available church settings that would allow this emerging Seventh-day Adventist group to freely function apart from their forefathers, who in most cases still control what goes on in the church.

The Seventh-day Adventist Celebration Center Church in Colton California is a recent case in point. About seven years ago the Celebration Church split off from the Azure Hills Seventh-day Adventist church in order to experiment with a participatory, contemporary worship service and felt-needs ministry. The church drew both great numbers and great criticism, especially from a certain branch within the church that perceived itself as the gatekeepers to the sacred traditions handed down from the fathers.

The point is, will the Seventh-day Adventist church allow the creation of new churches for new generations? Will the unique approaches necessary to reach the wide variety of ethnic groups and even greater richness of cultural diversity be allowed to flourish? Are we only going to foster generic Adventist churches—Adventist churches built by Adventists for Adventists—in the face of a worldwide gathering of diverse peoples within the growing cities of the earth?

Summary

The city has become the Mecca, “the spiritual gathering place of the lost outside of Christ.”³⁰ It gathers her pilgrims from every culture and from every direction. The lords of fame, fortune, sport and pleasure are routinely paraded before the masses for their thirsty consumption. The power and allegiance to a new and living Lord must be proclaimed in order to arrest the tide of evil and idolatry that resides in the heart of the urban masses. As Roger Greenway comments:

When we call people to come to Christ in faith and repentance, we are inviting them to turn their backs on the old gods they formerly served and on the Babylon of which they were a part. By this turning they join the new kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ and offer their lives, talents, and energy in service to him. That is what discipleship is all about. It means asking with Saul, “Lord, what do you want me to do?”³¹

The proclamation of “Jesus is Lord” to the city is the primary mission of the urban church. The living reality that Jesus has already been made Lord of All must be proclaimed to the pilgrims who have gathered together to worship other lords. The Lord not only gathers the church for worship but scatters it in order to carry the message of His Lordship over every area of the city’s life.

If institutionalized churches today are to overcome the same barriers they must be led to ask the same question Paul asked during the Damascus event: “Lord, what do you want me to do?” (Acts 22:10). Only a willing heart, who has submitted to the authority of “Jesus is Lord” is ready to look at any and all options.

Jesus is Lord of the Harvest and we must pray to Him for more laborers which must be trained and sent to gather people into the fold. It is only when Jesus is Lord that the church be both a city of refuge and a city set on a hill to the cities in the wilderness.

Endnotes

1. Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church, Volume 7*, (Mountain View, CA, Pacific Press, 1902), pages 199-200.
2. Taken from the 1994 General Conference Church Archives Report.
3. Taken from the 1994 General Conference Church Archives Report.
4. George Knight, *The Fat Lady and the Kingdom*, (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), page 32.
5. *Ibid.*, page 33.
6. *Ibid.*, page 81.
7. *Ibid.*, page 88.
8. *Ibid.*, page 89.
9. *Ibid.*, page 92.
10. Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), page 2.
11. Lyle Schaller, *Center City Churches*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1993), page 170.
12. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth State of the Art*, (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), page 11.
13. James Zackrisson, *Does Your Church Need a Doctor?*, (Lincoln, NE: North American Division Church Growth Materials, 1990), page 78.
14. Lyle Schaller, *The Small Membership Church*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994), pages 103-104.
15. Daniel Rode, "Los Siete Signos Vitales de Crecimiento Wagner en Seis Iglesias Adventistas Hispanos del Sur de California." D. Miss. dissertation, (Pasadena, CA: Fuller Theological Seminary Library, 1994), 256-280.
16. *Ibid.*, page 263.
17. *Ibid.*, page 263.

18. Charles Van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House) page 187.
19. Bruce Moyer, "The Challenge of the City," *Ministry* 85:16-17.
20. *Ibid.*, pages 16-17.
21. *Ibid.*, pages 16-17.
22. *Ibid.*, pages 16-17.
23. Lyle Schaller, *The Small Membership Church*, (Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1994), page 104.
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