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REFRAMING THE FOCUS

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The Seventh-day Adventist Church prides itself as the custodian of a specific message found in Revelation 14:6-13. The global scope of the proclamation embedded in the Three Angels' Messages aims to prepare the world for Christ's Second Coming. The introductory phrase, 'Then I saw another angel flying in mid-air,' expresses motivational haste for a dynamic activity encapsulated in the movement's evangelistic thrust. The Church's life and exponential growth are entrenched in the message's spiritual DNA, drawing attention to the proclamation of the eternal gospel, and calling on people of all nations to worship God, the Creator of Heaven and Earth (Revelation 14:6:7).

While the character of the message's evangelistic proclamation has been adjusted to a more profound and relevant response to human needs in the changing world, the eternal gospel's spiritually relational quality eludes its life-transforming influence. The traditional, cognitively grounded, and program-oriented sharing of religious information devoid of the spiritual heart-to-heart dissemination of God's love contributes to the formation of heartless religiosity.

Such an environment opens the floodgates to dogmatism, theological arguments, authoritarian control, a focus on oiling the organizational machinery's status quo, and congregational attrition. Bosch argues, "If the Church is to impart to the world a message of hope and love-of faith, justice, and peace-something of this should become visible, audible, and tangible in the Church itself."^[1] The eternal gospel's message has an all-inclusive application – not only to the world at large, but also to the Church. It calls on the Church to depart from the exclusive, judgmental mentality of triumphalism and step into the world of human brokenness, as Jesus did, to proclaim the message of hope and healing, justice, and mercy, not only in words, but also in the service of authentic witness.

The lack of contextualized adaptation of the eternal gospel to life in a progressively changing world confronts the Church with a dilemma. De Waal argues, "We are now living in one of the fastest periods of change in history, and the local Adventist church is in danger of becoming irrelevant, even outdated. The local church is at the crossroads and needs to biblically reinvent itself to stay relevant."^[2] He expands his argument by stressing the change's impact globally: "While the Church is growing rapidly in the Global South, it is stagnant or experiencing malaise in most parts of the Global North. Many churches are in maintenance mode. Even though transfer and biological growth are steady, kingdom growth is minimal or by only addition. In its mission work, our Church often seems to be servicing institutions more than engaging in frontline work."^[3]

It's painful and heartbreaking to pose honest, reflectively evaluating questions out in the open because it places individuals at risk of open criticism, silent exclusion, and even loss of employment. However, the contemporary emergence of authoritarian control and the dangerous pangs of fundamentalism in the ranks of the Adventist community, a community defined by Johnsson as "people of dream,"^[4] encourages many thinkers to ask genuine questions concerning the state of the Church. De Waal extends the question to the spirit of evangelism: "Will the local Adventist church continue in its same structural mode, resourcing a paradigm of audience-centered and program-oriented ministry?"^[5] In the depths of such heartfelt reflections, it's necessary to refocus on the meaning of Jesus' way, heart-to-heart proclamation, and sharing the good news of God's kingdom of grace. In his challenging book *Exiles: Living Missionally in the Post-Christian Culture*, Michael Frost muses, "All Christian missional and [I add organizational and evangelistic] activities must emerge from our relationship with Jesus.... It is the Spirit of Christ within each of us that gives rise to a missional lifestyle."^[6] How did Jesus announce and proclaim the presence of God's kingdom of grace?

Adjusting the Lenses

Space does not permit a detailed analysis of Christ's Messianic entry into the domain of human life, but a brief, thoughtful reflection highlights the waves of inspirational motivation that enrich the meaning of the 'eternal gospel' and its application to God's last invitation, calling people to step into the safe haven of God's kingdom of grace. Frost defines such moments as "God's songs." Such songs dispel notions of fear, judgment, and condemnation, for they "give birth to a new world and a new way of being his followers."^[7] This succinct rumination suggests that God's songs enhance the vision of healing, inspiration for life, and an unconditional acceptance.

Jesus announced the pathway of His redemptive ministry as "the good news for the poor. It aimed to proclaim freedom for prisoners, recovery of sight for the blind, and release of oppression" (Luke 4:18,19). His proclamation's evangelistic thrust was short and sweet: "Today, the Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21). John's gospel summarized its theological significance in another profound statement: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Christ's proclamation of the good news was not a top-down imposition of information shared from a distance. Moffett argues that in the kingdom's context, the evangelistic proclamation was never so narrow that it became isolated from the immediate pressing needs of the imprisoned, the blind, and the oppressed.^[8] It may be added that the presence of God's kingdom of grace extended its healing influence beyond the realm of physical needs, grounding its healing power in the spiritual domain of human experience. Christ's physical healings provided just a microscopic taste of the future glory, in which death and suffering would reign no more (Revelation 21:1-4). However, His journey to the cross displayed His attitude toward marginalized, spiritually wounded, and homeless people.

The selected narratives in the first three chapters of John's gospel are significantly intentional. He is the only gospel writer who refers to Christ's miracle at the wedding in Cana (2:1-11). While the other gospel writers described Christ's cleansing of the temple during the Passover Feast just before His death, John includes the story at the beginning of Christ's Messianic mission (2:12-23). The story of Nicodemus appears only in the gospel of John. The listed narratives outline the scope of Christ's relational attitude that guided the human heart to the place of spiritual healing-the cross.

First, life in Jesus' presence generated a spontaneous willingness to witness (1:35- 51). Jesus knew that His disciples did not understand His Mission's real purpose.^[9] Nevertheless, He was not hesitant to change Peter's name, for he knew his potential and uniqueness. Jesus was not afraid to provide encouragement, motivation, and unconditional acceptance, rather than criticism. He knew and understood Nathaniel's struggles with doubts, yet he encouraged him with a greater vision (1:51). The entire story opens our minds to the welcoming environment of acceptance that ignites human value.

Second, the wedding miracle at Cana reminded the disciples to focus on the unfolding presence of God's grace, for the best was yet to come (2:10). As Leon Morris suggests, "He [Jesus] changed the waters of Christ-lessness into the wine of the richness and the fullness of eternal life."^[10] Christ's miracle of changing water into wine unfolded the pathway of creative inspiration for life, reminding the disciples that the best comes last. Even though the disciples did not understand the spiritual significance of the miracle, they "put their faith in him" (2:11).

Finally, Jesus' dialogue with Nicodemus confronts all with the challenge of decisions – the challenge to be born from above to receive the healing and life-transforming power of God's grace (3:10-17).

This brief reflection suggests that the outlined character of unconditional acceptance, inspiration for life, and the life-transforming and healing power of the cross represents the spiritual depth of the "eternal gospel" to be shared with the people of all the nations (Revelation 14:6-7). Furthermore, the attitude role-modeled by Christ's witness safeguards God's message from any form of fiery and critical condemnation of the world (John 3:16-17). Instead, it challenges the community of faith to mold the footsteps of God's mercy on the pathway of human life, focusing on the victorious liberation accomplished by Jesus, the Lamb of God (John 1:35; 3:16; Revelation 5:6-13). So reciting Frost, "Why can't our corporate singing summon up a world where the poor are fed, and the marginalized are welcomed to the table of the Lord? Why can't we sing about the world that Jesus dreamed of on the side of the mountain? Why does our singing so often seem so trivial?"^[11]

Jesus is not just another story among many stories; HE IS THE STORY–He is the home of hope, peace, and inspiration in the messed-up world.

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[1] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 414.

[2] Kayle de Waal, "A question of mission," *Adventist Record*. (August 1, 2017), 1

[3] Ibid.

[4] William Johnsson, *The Fragmenting of Adventism* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 105.

[5] De Waal, 1.

[6] Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006), 29.

[7] Frost, 23.

[8] Samuel Moffett, "Evangelism: The Leading Partner" in *Perspectives on the World Christian Movement*, Eds. Ralph D. Winter and Steven C. Hawthorne (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 1992), D-208.

[9] Luke 18: 31-34; Mark 9:32; John 12:16; Luke 22:18-21.

[10] Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1971), 176.

[11] Frost, 23

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