**Fundamentalism and Mission: The Seventh-day Adventist Case**

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**Historical Background**

Bible conferences are rarely about mission. Such events focus on doctrinal topics that need to be clarified, on new interpretations to be checked in the light of new historical developments, or on responses to attacks on a religious body’s identity. Both Adventist bible conferences, in 1888 at Minneapolis and in 1919 at Washington, DC, dealt with issues of interpretation. After more than 30 years of turmoil inside and outside the church, and after the death of the prophetic voice of Ellen White, church leaders felt that issues of denominational identity and biblical interpretation should be addressed again. It seems that, historically, Seventh-day Adventists revisited periodically their fundamental beliefs.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Although mission was a driving force behind the growth of the Adventist church during the presidencies of A. G. Daniells and William Spicer, the topics at the 1919 conference had very little to do with mission directly. The face and content of mission would change more or less subtly over the second and third decade of the 20th century up to the point where evangelicals questioned if Adventist fundamentals were still Christian. Church leaders were then forced to reformulate some beliefs in order to be able to communicate with evangelical fellows and facilitate missionary endeavors.

The 1919 conference addressed topics such as the work of the Holy Spirit, the ministry of Christ in the Sanctuary, the two covenants, and several other prophetic topics. During the follow-up of the Conference, the Bible and History Teachers Council participants raised issues regarding infallibility and verbal inspiration, especially related to Ellen G. White. Schwarz and Greenleaf noted that

Underlying much of the concern in 1919 was a widespread belief among Adventists in verbal inspiration, that is, that the actual wording of Ellen White’s writings was inspired . . . they thus attributed infallibility to her; consequently, church members expected too much from her and made unfounded claims about her. The church was in difficulty. A. O. Tait observed that a higher-than-normal percentage of apostasies occurred among people who promoted such views.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Although at the beginning of the 20th century Adventists reorganized for mission, creating Unions and Divisions and organizing departments, by 1919 mission was taken for granted and a glorious vision claimed that Adventist mission was at its heyday. Even president Daniells believed that, “after a half century, Adventism was well enough established so that laymen, supplied with literature, could finish the mission of the church in North America. Supported by tithe, leaders could dispatch ministers to the millions who had never heard of Christ, let alone the Adventist message of the three angels.”[[3]](#footnote-3) The mission focus was on “financially competent” countries that would later serve as bases for mission on other continents.

In 1905 the General Conference Committee decided to function as a foreign mission board. As long as the presidents had mission experience and a clear vision, this approach worked. Both Daniells and Spicer fit the profile. In 1921, Adventists outside of North America numerically surpassed the ones in the New World.[[4]](#footnote-4) Schwarz and Greenleaf report that by the beginning of the third decade, 77 percent of Adventist evangelistic workers were focusing outside North America. It appears that later administrators were not so knowledgeable and comfortable with this approach. In addition, missionaries organized the work according to the church’s departmental model in the West. The approach did not work well because of the lack of qualified people to lead such departments.

After the first World War, more and more countries resented the colonial type of mission that facilitated mission on the back of colonial conquest. Prejudice against Western missionaries grew not only because of seeing missionaries as representatives of colonial powers but also because the missionaries were not sensitive to the local traditions and worldview and did not understand the different sets of values.[[5]](#footnote-5) The increasing tensions in the West impacted the rest of the world. Theological debates and trends were exported to the rest of the world, even in places where Adventism was barely making an entrance.

The second World War impeded mission not only in Europe but also in Asia and Africa. Adventist mission was driven by a geographic approach. Serious challenges were faced not only in non-Christian societies, but missionaries experienced opposition in Catholic and Orthodox countries. A lack of understanding of non-Western philosophies and logic, and the overwhelming spectrum of languages and dialects coupled with illiterate societies made missionaries look for help.[[6]](#footnote-6) The advice they received was to focus on preaching the fundamental beliefs of the church, as though these fundamentals had magic powers in themselves. Instead, language and cultural training was sorely needed.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The issues discussed at the 1919 bible conference should be placed in the larger historical context. Adventist mission was clearly impacted by the positions adopted at the meetings, as well as by the pressure of fundamentalists during the following decades. Although this paper will not analyze in detail the discussions at the conference and at the subsequent meeting with the Adventist educators, it will dissect the core issue that affected Adventist mission for most of the remaining of the 20th century and its impact and effects.

**The Issue: A Hermeneutic of Certainty**

In his book, *The Certainty Trap: Can Christians and Muslims Afford the Luxury of Fundamentalism*?[[8]](#footnote-8) Bill Musk raises the issue of the assumptions behind hermeneutics. The literalism with which holy books are read imply that the revealed text is considered literally dictated. The “hermeneutic of certainty” assumes that whatever one reads in the holy book is the direct and inerrant language used by God. There is no room for doubt since the reader believes one is told exactly what to do and what not to do in daily life. Christian fundamentalists, mainly evangelical, claim to take the Bible seriously, which in their view is inerrant and infallible. However, the hermeneutic of certainty goes beyond the inerrancy or infallibility of the text; it assumes that the text can be “made to pronounce on a subject totally outside of any consideration of the context of that verse. . . . ‘Reading the text literally’ can easily become a pretext for blindly and falsely insisting that a literalist understanding of poetic or apocalyptic literature is the only way to be faithful to what the Bible says.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

Musk noted that the dispensationalist view of history was also fueled by the hermeneutic of certainty, prompting the reader to claim an understanding of God’s hand in today’s world news. “Apocalyptic visions recorded in the Bible became the handmaid of a search through contemporary newspapers to discover how far along the road towards rapture or tribulation (depending on your millennialist view!) Christians and the ‘world’ had reached.”[[10]](#footnote-10) Adventists are prone to embrace such a fundamentalist hermeneutic and literalist reading of Scripture, especially when it comes to the scenarios of how the world will end. The prophetic understanding was a subject of debate at the 1888 conference in Minneapolis, as well as at the 1919 bible conference in Washington, DC.[[11]](#footnote-11) Millennialism and Millerism (Adventism) walked hand in hand.

However, God shook the certainty of the early Millerites when the initial dates set for the return of Jesus proved to be wrong. They could not function without certainty so they looked for details that may offer support for a new date. Although Jesus was very clear in the Scripture that “the day and the hour”—the certainty that even his disciples sought and it eluded them—cannot be taken as “certainty,” people stubbornly continued to employ such hermeneutic. Although not so prevalent today, date setting continues to lure those who embrace the hermeneutic of certainty.

What Musk perceives is that this hermeneutic of certainty takes the cultural aspects of the Bible as inspired and as an integral part of revelation. “The man is the ‘head,’ it’s in the Bible. Or is it? Or is that the only view expressed? Or is that simply an accommodation to certain cultural realities of the biblical times whilst God tried to sort out other issues in the divine-human matrix?”[[12]](#footnote-12) Is racial discrimination supported by the Scripture? Or is the holocaust and ethnic cleansing endorsed? What about slavery? The hermeneutic of certainty seems to take the context for granted, considering it authoritative.[[13]](#footnote-13) Musk poses the deep question: “What kind of ‘certainty’ might be valid, untainted by human, ethnocentric conditioning? And how might a sureness and confidence in God’s word find expression in a manner that is not strongly culturally driven?”[[14]](#footnote-14) Musk warns that “any present day Christian involvement in mission . . . that is non-understanding of this powerful undermining-from-within of its intentions is effectively working blind.”[[15]](#footnote-15) Although we should have certainty about the biblical fundamentals of our faith, we should not allow the hermeneutic of certainty to assume inerrancy in the relationship between text and context. The art of identifying what is fundamental and what is cultural needs to be rediscovered if mission is going to be effective and the message relevant to the audience.

**Adventist Mission and Fundamentalist Certainty**

The Adventist church faced many issues during the past decades, due to the missing or the mistaken context. Different people made particular interpretive claims.[[16]](#footnote-16) As a result, church leadership responded rather cautiously, with a desire for protection and uniformity – in contrast with the attitude of Adventist pioneers who were willing to accept diversity. The desire to protect the traditional understanding of inspiration and interpretation contrasted with the pioneers’ opposition to express fundamentals as a creed for a long time, allowing for learning and growing in understanding. The result of this protectionism led to a lack of pluralism inside Adventism, and as an indirect effect, to a rejection of contextualization attempts. As Schwarz and Greenleaf noted, “Adventists had widely accepted the abstract doctrine, or the theology of the gift of prophecy, but did not understand it.”[[17]](#footnote-17) The irony cannot be avoided—a movement/church originally made up of dissidents from different churches (1840-44), espousing different understandings of what is “fundamental,” ended up focusing on guarding uniform doctrines and disciplining those who think otherwise. A fundamentalist approach, although originally well intended, ended up impacting the effectiveness of mission and the quality of spiritual growth.

The reality of the global church is a wake-up call that fundamentalism in mission is dangerous and its long-lasting effects counterproductive. Let me share with you some of the issues missionaries face in the field and the impact of fundamentalism on each one of them.

1. *Sacramentalism*. Western missionaries taught the local converts that forms have the same value as the attached meanings, if not being even more important. As a result, the sacredness of form was raised above the meaning, and the form was venerated while the meaning was usually lost. Too often the Church Manual became the bible for form, while the Bible itself and its principles remained optional. Based on a sacramental view, in the Catholic environment of the Philippines, Adventist members often treat the communion bread and wine as magic, having power to bless or to curse them if treated or touched in an improper way. When their unbaptized children or even those who did not go through the foot washing are not allowed to partake, this sacramental approach to the communion becomes anti-missionary. No one is accepted for baptism wearing a wedding ring that is seen as an unmistakable symbol of defilement and pride. Ordination is practiced based on the belief that a special power is transmitted by the laying on of hands. The church building, the chairs inside the church, and many other items are by default sacred and cannot be used even for weddings, funerals, or other meaningful life events. When asked why they do so, the locals answer that this is what the missionaries taught them, and that is how things should be done. Unfortunately, these practices become the “fundamentals” that are preached and taught by evangelists and missionaries going from these parts of the world. The boomerang of the hermeneutics of certainty flies back in our face hitting us hard with the fundamentalism previous missionaries spread around the world. Mission “from everywhere to everywhere” is producing today unintended consequences.

2. *Syncretism.* Too often the fundamental beliefs are communicated as an intellectual understanding of faith rather than as principles requiring a changed life. In many places around the world, orthodoxy became more important than orthopraxy. The reality is that our model of evangelism without a sustained discipleship process places a veneer of Adventism over people’s old beliefs and practices. Syncretism is the natural outcome of requiring intellectual assent to a list of fundamentals without checking how local people connect orthodoxy with orthopraxy. I will detail later in the paper.

3. *Powerless gospel*. The reality of spiritual powers is unquestioned in the rest of the world, as well as in the Scripture. Unfortunately, the Adventist church has limited practical solutions in its fundamentals for people confronted with the world of the spirits. If and when Muslims become Adventists, they want to know when are they expected to pray or how to avoid the curse of the evil eye. For them, prayer has power and is should be scheduled. They need protection from evil spirits or from potentially damaging magic performed by shamans or witches. In other world religions there are clear mechanisms to cope with physical and spiritual emergencies and crises. Although Adventists teach that God is all powerful, when faced with a crisis people seem without power, especially when confronted with the world of the spirits. There are no instructions in the Church Manual on how to interpret miraculous healings or how to cast out demons. Although these are default issues in Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic societies, Adventist fundamentals do not seem to address them and the hermeneutics of certainty seems to produce confusion.

4. *Lack of contextualization*. Very little effort is done to both rediscover the original context of the biblical text and to contextualize it for the current various contexts. On the one hand, most biblical stories are interpreted from a Western perspective and with Western values. Tamar is considered a prostitute, although it is not clear how God can bless such a union with her father in law. Ruth is viewed as a temptress without moral values. Esther is presented as being taken by force and raped, ending up as a sexual slave in the king’s harem. All these stories need to be placed in the original context in order to make sense.

On the other hand, few evangelists take time to realize that in the pacific islands there are usually no sheep or lambs but plenty of pigs. How do you present the biblical metaphors of Jesus as the Lamb of God to people for whom a lamb does not mean anything? Those reading *Historical Sketches of Adventist Mission* will discover the heavy emphasis Ellen White placed on the context during her trips in Europe. She spent more time describing the particular contexts of the countries and places she visited than talking about evangelistic strategies. Interestingly, she preached very little to non-Adventists on evangelistic topics and fundamentals but presented mostly on the issue of temperance that people were so interested in. She even chastised the Adventist elders in a Scandinavian city for not renting a large enough hall to host all those who were interested to listen to her speaking about temperance. In *Testimonies to Southern Africa* Ellen White spoke again about the need for contextualization in that sensitive racial context.

It is concerning that today, in South and Inter America, the church has extremely few missiologists who could help with contextualization, but plenty of systematic theologians and biblical studies scholars who believe everyone knows how to do mission. Most Adventist Colleges and Universities’ curricula until recently did not include courses in contextualization or mission (with the exception of evangelism). Fundamentals need to be first placed in the original biblical and cultural context and then recontextualized in order to get quality membership around the world. Certainty has to be clothed in the familiar in order to provide faith in the unfamiliar.

Missionary strategies need to be contextualized, too. Work among the Muslims in the Middle East remains a challenge. Joining other Christians, Adventists used apologetics and attacks on Islamic beliefs. Most baptisms in the Middle East came in the beginning from among expats who did trade in the area, or from among Armenian or Coptic Christians. The only effective method of growth was education.[[18]](#footnote-18) In a world where miracles, dreams, and visions were common, and where religion was experiential, Adventists continued to offer intellectual truth and require intellectual assent. In Burma, due to the failure of literature evangelism and nursing skills, Eric Hare discovered the value of contextualization through storytelling.

There is no secret that the Chinese are attracted more by natural remedies and medicine than by classic evangelistic preaching. Unfortunately, too many missionaries were appointed or went by themselves to China attracted by the exotic mission field but unprepared for the Confucian philosophy and lifestyle people embraced. After 1949, when the Communists came to power, all foreigners, who were the leaders of Adventist institutions in China, were deported and the church was practically decapitated. Today, as a result of no leadership and of a lack of contextualization, Adventists in China are more divided than ever in terms of understanding fundamental Adventist beliefs (especially righteousness by faith), but they always welcome practical advice for improving physical life. Although the Chinese worldview is based on honor and shame, values found abundantly in the Bible, there is no contextualized approach offered to them along these lines. The “fundamentalist” debate of right over wrong plagues Adventists in China, each group blaming the others as departing from the truth. Secularism combined with Confucianism and Communism stalled the growth of Chinese Adventism that slowly learns how to contextualize the fundamental beliefs for a Chinese audience. A welcome development is the liturgy developed by the Chinese Adventists due to their isolation and persecution under the Communist regime. Allowed to function only if their religion is Chinese inspired, Adventists in China developed their own worship songs. In contrast, in neighboring Mongolia, most of the songs sung by the Adventists are slight adaptations of Western gospel songs taught by the initial missionaries. This reality is still found in too many parts of the world.

5. *Polygamy, prostitution, sex*. While Western societies are obsessed with sex, the Western church requires sexual purity all over the world. The Western church failed to maintain that fundamental standard at home where serial polygamists are on the rise due to the prevalence of divorce. Western missionaries still require converts from polygamous cultures to abandon all wives except one in order to be accepted for baptism. Fundamentalists fail to understand that narrowly upholding one fundamental—monogamy—teaches people that separation and divorce is acceptable in God’s eyes. Many times, potential converts become confused and decline the invitation to be baptized because they cannot accept to worship a God that is cruel toward their wives no. 2, 3, and 4 and their children, in order to bless the monogamous family resulted from separation. The church apparently fails to understand the difference between the ideal and the reality, and misses to see that the Bible is full of polygamous patriarchs whom God never reproach for such departure from the ideal. The history of Adventist leadership with the issue of polygamy reveals that for about 13 years between the two World Wars the church allowed missionaries to baptize polygamists. However, under the pressure of the fundamentalists, church leadership reversed the decision and the current policy is discriminatory even today. During a recent visit I made among the Maasai I noticed that churches where polygamists were accepted and baptized grew significantly, without lowering other standards or fundamentals.

In Thailand, there is official or tolerated prostitution. There might be over 30,000 ladies working on only one street of one of the Red-Light districts in Bangkok, and this issue does not seem to appear on the radar of the church, being considered plain immorality. When asked why they practice prostitution, most ladies explain that it is their filial duty to support the extended family back at home. The church uses moral fundamentals as basis for judgment, while for the ladies it is an issue of the survival of their clan. There is very little that the church does to minister, help, or support them. In the Philippines there are many trans-sexual or transgender people, and they are tolerated by the society. The same filial duty determines them to embrace such a lifestyle. The society understands them; the church doesn’t. In the name of maintaining the purity of the church and its moral fundamentals, mission to these categories of people is absent.

6. *Different concepts of sin and salvation*. Several societies have no concept or have a different understanding of sin than in the West. The Japanese feel offended if told that they are sinners because that means they have committed a grievous crime. For others, shame is the equivalent of Christian sin, and everyone will avoid at all costs to be shamed or to lose face. In communal societies, shame is felt in relation to the surrounding community rather than to an abstract moral principle or notion of God. Even more, for Buddhists, there is no God. For them, the equivalent of sin is to disrespect parents or persons of authority in the community. There is no need for a savior since the solution is in themselves. An intellectual war about the understanding of biblical perfection and Christ’s human-divine nature led to the wide spread of an unhealthy perfectionistic struggle. The practical result was syncretism. How do we translate our fundamentals in such a way to speak to peoples’ worldview and values and to offer relevant solutions for their condition? Is our understanding of fundamentals universal?

7. *Conflict resolution*. There is almost constant tribal warfare and tension all around the world. Missionaries tried to make peace between the parties involved in various conflicts but mostly failed because they did not understand local peoples’ worldview and culture. Too often missionaries used a disciplinarian approach where one individual or party was assumed or found guilty. They failed to understand that the conflict was not based on guilt but on lost honor and the desire for restoring it. Too often missionaries wanted to do justice when people were looking for reconciliation.[[19]](#footnote-19) Matthew 18 was often interpreted as requiring a witness against the perpetrator when the original context required a mediator to reconcile the estranged parties. The hermeneutic of certainty assumes that we are always right and that we know best how to create peace on earth. Where there is no humility, humiliation follows.

8. *Ancestor and spirit worship*. For non-Western cultures accepting Saturday as the Sabbath day is rarely an issue. Our typical approach and insistence on the right day of worship and explanations about how that was changed, becoming a seal of faithfulness, is redundant. People accept this fundamental Adventist belief when they are shown that the Scripture speaks plainly about it. However, their major problem is the belief in soul’s immortality. Ancestors’ spirits are believed to continue to live and influence the lives of the living. Countless rituals are performed and required in order to appease the spirits and get their benevolence. Adventist evangelists spend two or three nights talking about the Sabbath, and many more on the doctrine of the Sanctuary, considered distinctive fundamentals of Adventism, and only one night addressing the biblical teaching about the state of the dead. This latter belief is more important for non-Western cultures than most other fundamentals, and it is often addressed superficially.

Out of the three major Adventist type of institutions, health-care, education, and publishing, education was considered the most important and effective at the same time in preserving the Adventist identity through teaching the fundamental beliefs. Unfortunately, studies such as ValueGenesis, CognitiveGenesis, ValueGenesis Europe, and the Global Church Member Survey (2013, 2018) showed areas of concern in terms of belief in some of the most important fundamentals for Adventist identity. David Trim reports that the 2013 Global Church Member Survey revealed a significant uncertainty about the belief in the state of the dead. He indicates that 5 divisions recorded more than 10% strong disagreement with the statement that the body remains in the grave after death and that the soul sleeps until resurrection. If those who agreed more than disagreed to the statement are added, the percentage goes even higher. The church Divisions where these percentages have been recorded are the three African Divisions, Southern Asia Division, and the Inter-American Division, closely followed by the Southern-Asia Pacific Division. These territories comprise most of the continent of Africa, Inter-America, and a good part of Asia. The grim picture is detailed by the 2018 survey where 13 percent declared that they agree that “the dead have powers to communicate with and influence the living,” to which another 6 percent declared they were not sure about it. The most concerning percentage came from the statement regarding the dualism body-soul to which 33 percent strongly agreed and agreed that the soul is a spiritual entity beside the body and that it continues to live after death. To this statement, another 8 percent stated they were not sure about the statement. To have 41 percent agreeing or not being sure if the soul lives after death is an important warning about the lack of effectiveness of fundamentalist approaches especially in the mission fields. A break up of the picture for the latest statement by divisions shows that Southern Asia-Pacific Division, Southern Asia Division, and South Pacific Division are championing the chart.

Fundamentalists assumed that preaching the Word in evangelistic meetings or in Bible studies was enough to convince the students about the veracity of the belief and to produce a changed life. However, the results indicate that none of these assumptions were correct. Typical especially to Asian people, when asked during the preparation for baptism what they believe about the state of the dead, the candidates offered the answers they knew pastors and evangelists expected to hear. To save their own face and at the same time save the face of the missionary was one of their highest value. People continue to practice their old traditions and maintain their old beliefs. As part of AIIAS history, I witnessed even pastors and college or university religion professors illustrate this dualism in their lives. To place a red scarf, offered by a witch doctor, on the body of the deceased in order to facilitate the return of the soul, or to follow the advice of sacrificing a white hen for the same purpose is not unusual in Asia-Pacific territory. Fundamentalists can only remove from membership the people who practice these things, but they never address the deep level of worldview assumptions and cultural values that bear directly on what people believe. In George Knight’s words, “Two areas in which the denomination suffers from inner tension . . . are the doctrinal and the cultural.”[[20]](#footnote-20)

9. *Quality versus quantity*. Over time, most former frontier mission zones have become established Adventist mission fields or conferences. There is constant pressure on the local pastors and evangelists to baptize more and more people and this leads to numerical inflation and lower membership quality. Most pastors are busy baptizing people in order to meet the quota, but very few have the luxury of taking time to disciple the new converts. This leads in turn to a massive loss of members. Those who stay in the church are rarely trained for mission. A centripetal model of mission becomes the default in many places where Adventism is established. Most of our denominational statistical reports focus on numbers, membership, countries entered, institutions established, and literature sold. The fundamentalist hermeneutic of certainty assumes a triumphalist result of evangelism and mission. In Adventist mission the paradox of the theology of the remnant is that it encourages people to believe that quality belongs to a very small number of people while great numbers are useless. Adventists like to be surrounded by multitudes but at the same time worry if they will make it among the 144,000. Fundamentalism may create an implicit confusion when it comes to quality vs. quantity.

10. *Ethnocentrism and inequality*. In spite of Paul’s teaching regarding equality, Adventists followed their natural ethnocentric inclinations. Reading the Bible literally and using selected passages, fundamentalist church leaders instructed missionaries to shake the dust off their feet in areas that initially seem resistant to the gospel or looked harder to civilize. Initially, in South America, missionary work focused on elite and rich immigrant communities (whites, Europeans). Later, Fernando and Ana Stahl defended the poor and their rights showing that mission should include values such as equality and development of the poor and oppressed. Paradoxically, today, church growth in Europe and US happens mostly among poor and developing immigrant populations, other than Caucasian. Geographically, inter-American mission focused on English and Spanish-speaking countries and populations and neglected the French speaking ones that were considered inferior and harder to reach. In Schwarz and Greenleaf’s words, “One of the early problems of soul-winning in Inter-America was that of balancing the church’s efforts among the ethnically diverse populations.”[[21]](#footnote-21) Due to this mistake, anti-American sentiments in Haiti, Nicaragua, and the Dominican Republic, for example, made American missionaries’ work extremely difficult.

**Conclusions**

Literal interpretations and theories of verbal inspiration are born when the context is neglected. There is a human tendency to believe that eliminating the context will make the message more concise and thus easier to communicate or understand. However, a lack of context leads almost inevitably to an imbalanced view of the issues. The biblical text finds its original meaning only when readers recover the original context—a vital hermeneutical step. Church traditions, such as (women’s) ordination, cannot be properly understood and practiced unless the context is identified and explained. The more the context is recovered, the more the feeling of narrow certainty is set aside making room for fruitful application in multiple new contexts.

The hermeneutic of certainty, although initially attractive, arms the trap that produces inevitably unwanted results. Certainty is demanded by the desire for comfort, while mission implies discomfort. Adventist missiology should not simply accept comfortable approaches but make its voice heard when literal, assumed inerrant theological readings of Scripture and society distort God’s image and claim infallibility.

Mission belongs to God, and this fundamental belief should shape our missiological and ecclesiological understanding. Adventists will be the remnant only when their theology and missiology will avoid the trap of certainty and literalism, and follow the incarnational model of Jesus. Keeping the commandments and having the faith of Jesus is not an abstract set of fundamentals to agree to, but a way of life following in his footsteps. Adventists should become and remain Christian disciples, ready to learn from their Master.

This paper reflected on the unwanted effects of fundamentalism on Adventist mission after the 1919 bible conference. The past cannot be changed, but the lessons learned can help us change the future. I find Ellen White’s words relevant in this context, that our only concern should be to not forget how God led us in the past but apply the relevant lessons to the future.

1. Adventist fundamental beliefs, depending on the historical period, fluctuated in catechetic books from 12 to 39 to 52, most recently one more fundamental belief being added to the 27 voted by the General Conference in 1980. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Richard W. Schwarz, and Floyd Greenleaf, *Light Bearers: A History of the Seventh-day Adventist Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 2000), 629. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Schwarz and Greenleaf, 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Schwarz and Greenleaf, 294. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Adaptability, ingenuity, tact, and diplomacy were prime qualities in missionaries, but not always apparent” (Schwarz and Greenleaf, 275). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. “Initially, Adventists had little concept of the difficulties involved in meeting sophisticated non-Christian religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam. In Asia, too, Adventists faced a wide variety of languages and dialects” (Schwarz and Greenleaf, 275). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. One should only think about the challenges posed by the Cyrillic, Chinese, or Arabic alphabet. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Bill Musk, *The Certainty Trap: Can Christians and Muslims Afford the Luxury of Fundamentalism*? (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2008). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Musk, xviii. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Musk, xix. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. One may note that Fundamentalist Adventists endear a compilation of passages from Ellen White’s writings titled “The Last Day Events.” [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Musk, xx. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. “God’s word (in both Old Testament and New) is conveyed in certain contexts. How much does it endorse, or temporarily accept, or strongly challenge those contexts? How can one acknowledge the Bible as authoritative and yet not fall into the trap of harnessing its endemic authority to allow verses from different contexts to justify beliefs or practices that, with deeper reflection, might not appear to be so justified?” [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Musk, xxii. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Musk, xxiii. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. The following names are illustrative of some of the debates in Adventism: Ronald L. Numbers, Donald McAdams, Walter T. Rea, Desmond Ford, Collin D. and Russel R. Standish, or Ron Spear. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Schwarz and Greenleaf, 638. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. “Regardless of their best efforts, Adventist workers seemed unable to reach Moslem people in the Middle East except through schools, which brought some success in old Persia” (Schwarz and Greenleaf, 288). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. “The intention to confirm the faith of members in the certainty of salvation occasionally degenerated to rancorous exchange rather than bringing affirmation and peace. . . . While doctrinal was an ideal never to be relinquished, it was still secondary to the presence of the spirit of Christ in their hearts” (Schwarz and Greenleaf, 646). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. George R. Knight, *A Brief History of Seventh-day Adventists* (Tacoma Park, MD: Review and Herald, 2012), 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Schwarz and Greenleaf, 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)