

From Orthodoxy to Orthopraxis: A Theological Analysis of the Seventh-day Adventist Engagement with Development, Relief and Humanitarian Crises in Zimbabwe in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This article explores the role of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) in development and relief work in society, assessing whether it is guided by orthodoxy or orthopraxis in the wake of human rights violations. It traces the history of the SDA's involvement in Zimbabwe's development, relief and humanitarian processes, checking its stance on prevailing human rights abuses. It delineates whether or not the SDA's apolitical and non-social activism is due to the influence of the Millerites' theological and philosophical concepts within the SDA. We should do theology for the people, and that calls for orthopraxis more than orthodoxy. The SDA's missiological responsibility should not be limited to the pulpit, failing to cater for the prophetic voice challenging social ills. In pursuit of this, the article employs social sciences in unpacking structural societal functions of the church in its quest to be relevant. A biblical and doctrinal reflection of the SDA will be utilised in this analysis. The pastoral theology of the SDA, which is more grounded on the people's concrete experience, will be interrogated. This work will analyse socio-economic problems in Zimbabwe and show the efforts of the SDA to bring change and transformation to the lives of suffering Zimbabweans. The relevant question is: Could it be possible for the SDA in Zimbabwe to sustain a withdrawal and non-participation stance against the backdrop of this crisis? The SDA's withdrawal stance as a Christian denomination has not had much influence on the development and political processes compared to other Christian institutions in Zimbabwe. Because religion saturates the existence of Africans, the enquiry of religion and development is very significant. This article argues that the prophetic voice of the SDA and its missiological responsibility have been deployed during the crisis years in Zimbabwe.



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Introduction

Kambudzi (2000, 35) avows that by preaching and promoting peace, welfare and salvation, the church stands above national political issues and can easily be seen by any citizen or political party—and even political authorities—to be non-partisan, neutral and human-centred in its outlook. Thus, as a social institution, the church should not barricade itself from political, social and economic evils but should identify human problems and come up with appropriate action plans. Bosch (1979, 20) states that the church can either legitimate the *status quo* or call for its reconstruction and transformation. The church should continuously and faithfully allow its prophetic voice to be heard so that the Kingdom of God can become visible in all areas of life. Indeed, the church has a very important role to play in the development of Zimbabwe. From the onset, it is essential to note that the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA)—through its arm of service, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)—has dealt with the provision of development and welfare to the people in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

It should be noted that the SDA has upheld a seemingly apolitical stance since its establishment in 1863. As a worldwide Christian institution, the SDA has a history of keeping silent on critical issues that befall humanity;¹ for example, it was silent during Hitler’s holocaust in the 1930s, in which six million Jews were exterminated in Europe. The SDA was also inactive during the liberation movements that swept through Latin America in the late 20th century.

The SDA sought to apply religious beliefs by supporting the poor and oppressed people through political and civic affairs engagement. During the civil rights movement of the 1960s, which was led by Martin Luther King Junior and Malcolm X, the SDA did not participate in liberating the Black/African Americans (London 2009). The SDA rejected the social gospel movement, opposed integration, and criticised the civil rights movement for aligning with the social gospel movement. While some mainstream Christian churches were involved in mitigating these socio-economic problems, the SDA kept mum and preferred to remain neutral. This article attempts to define orthodoxy and outline the essence of orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is the transliteration of the Greek *orthodoxia*, which can mean either “right opinion” or “right praise.” The term is used in theology to refer to doctrines judged to be consistent with the gospel of Jesus Christ and thus “correct” from a specifically Christian perspective (McFarland 2011, 360). In this context, this article questions the missiological role of the SDA in the 21st century by concentrating on the Zimbabwean context.

1 <https://africansdahistory.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Church-and-Society-in-Adventism-Some-Reflections-by-Kwabena-Donkor.pdf>. Accessed April 7, 2021.

Methodology

Methodologies are necessary for organising and guiding research for efficient and reliable output. The study that directed this article utilised the historical, theological and library research methodologies. The primary methodological approach for this exploration was the historical method. Sharfer (1969, 3) points out that it is a systematic process of investigation and interpretation, aimed at securing the most accurate account possible of any event or series of events, providing a coherent and meaningful discussion. This method was very helpful in terms of acquiring information by digging through the past of the SDA. The historical method also gave a clear picture of what really happened to the SDA in its development, specifically regarding the church's stance towards politics.

The study also interpreted the SDA's involvement in development, relief and humanitarian processes in Zimbabwe from a theological frame of reference. Therefore, the theological method was considered because the research was located in the contextual discipline of liberation theology; hence, the theological method became key to this work. A biblical and doctrinal reflection of the SAD was analysed. The theological approach is biblical; it is a response to what God has done. It is Christ that Christians carry in their hearts. Theology is a dynamic discipline, an ongoing exercise involving contemporary insights into knowledge (epistemology), human beings (anthropology), and history (social analysis). The theological method entails discovering and forming theological truth out of a given historical situation. Since the Christian spiritual life belongs to the supernatural order as a life of grace and virtues, the most suitable method of investigation and study was the theological method. The science of theology seeks knowledge through causes and deduces conclusions from principles. The theological method is a systematic, critical clarification of the historical beliefs of the church (Crystal 2003). Historical beliefs are traditional beliefs passed from generation to generation. Unlike the science of religion, theology aims to investigate the contents of belief, employing reason as enlightened by faith.

In this study, the theological method enabled the researcher to proceed by analysing and interpreting secondary materials. This involved reading relevant literature—in this regard, debates and writings concerning the need for SDA involvement in the crisis. This article will focus on the community of faith since the theological method does not address people who are not religious; religion is foreign and unintelligible to people with a secular perspective. People talk and reflect on God in a particular historical context. From a theological perspective, the SDA does not just take on the role of the spectator but becomes a participant in the issues that affect holistic development.

The study also employed the library research methodology in which the researcher explored available documentary materials published on various websites, articles, newspapers, magazines and books to explain how the SDA development thrust had a bearing on its prophetic voice in Zimbabwe.

The History of the SDA before Coming to Zimbabwe

It is important to understand the history of the SDA to appreciate its stance on development and politics, as well as its prophetic voice or lack of it in society. The SDA was formed out of a movement known as the Millerites, named after William Miller (1782–1849). The Millerite movement, as the forerunner of the SDA, upheld apocalyptic historical eschatology and sectarian ecclesiology, which played an influential role in the SDA’s political and social theology. These were among other theological and philosophical concepts that influenced the apolitical and non-social activism within the SDA. The Millerites calculated (based on the prophecies of Daniel 8:14 and Revelation) that the second advent of Christ was going to transpire on October 22, 1844. After October 22, 1844, most Millerites were left disheartened after the great disappointment. Most ceased to have faith in the imminent return of Jesus to Earth. George Knight posited that the original, smallest post-Millerite groups came to see themselves as the “true successor[s] of the once-powerful Millerite movement” (Knight 1993).

Ellen G. White (1827–1915) was a dominant personality and cofounder of the SDA who helped shape the mission and vision of the church. She wrote articles, books and letters on numerous topics, including consecration, marriage, family, education, health, and stewardship. Currently, she is one of the most translated American authors. Her total literary output is approximately 100 000 pages, and at least 100 books have been published from her writings. Her most translated book, *Steps to Christ, a How-to Guide on Being a Christian*, has been rendered into more than 165 languages (Douglass 2018). The Millerite movement’s general perspective regarding politics is that the church and politics do not mix; the church should concern itself with development and leave politics to politicians.

Origins of Apolitical Stance and Social Theology in the SDA

The SDA’s stance on politics and its rejection of fighting for the rights of the oppressed can be traced back to its history. During the 1950s and 1960s, several SDA White leaders used theological and philosophical concepts within the SDA to discourage political activism among SDA members. The background of these concepts shows how SDA leaders incorporated them to oppose the denomination’s access to the civil rights movement of the 1960s (London 2009). Premillennialism—a Christian eschatological belief that Christ will return to Earth to gather His saints before the millennium, a literal thousand year period—influenced the SDA’s stance on politics. The SDA believes that Christ’s Second Coming precedes the millennium discussed in Revelation 20:4–6 (Whalen 2000). This notion is directly attributable to Millerite thought. Since the Millerites eagerly anticipated Christ’s imminent return, they accepted the idea that the millennium would occur after the Second Coming of Jesus. The Millerites, as precursors of the SDA, embraced the view that Christ’s return is the only remedy for society’s ills. Some SDA scholars view efforts to correct social and political retreat from social

activism problems as a waste of time since evangelism is the primary mission of the denomination.

Besides premillennialism, the SDA adheres to an apocalyptic historical eschatology, defined as a belief in the Second Advent of Christ, the destruction of the world and the heavenly sabbatical rest. As a result, some SDA members have lost interest in matters of socio-political reform. The experience of Joseph Bates, cofounder of the SDA, serves as an example. Before joining the Millerite movement, Bates worked to advance the cause of the abolition of slavery in the US. As an ardent Millerite, preparation for Christ's return eventually supplanted his zeal for socio-political activism (Plantak 1998). Like the concepts previously mentioned, the SDA adopted sectarian ecclesiology from Millerite thought. Sectarian ecclesiology believes that Christians should not conform to the secular world, which has also influenced the SDA's stance on politics. In expectation of Christ's looming return, Millerites considered political participation as a secular activity that distracts Christians from their spiritual development. Furthermore, they were of the opinion that Christ's Second Coming would coincide with the eradication of worldly government, which makes political activism pointless. Consequently, the SDA developed a political outlook favouring the separation of church and state. In fact, SDA leaders admonished members not to become involved in political affairs (Fisher 2003).

Some theological luminaries vehemently opposed activism. For example, Raymond Cottrell (1912–2003) condemned clerical participation in the 1963 “March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.” He was a former minister and associate editor of the *Review and Herald*, the official periodical of the SDA. He declared on behalf of the SDA that when the church appeals to the strong arm of the state to enforce its opinions by law, it goes far beyond the “example and the commission of its Founder. It abdicates its Heaven-appointed task and takes up a work God never gave it to do” (Cottrell 1963). In 1965, Raymond Cottrell (1912–2003) echoed the SDA's position that the main focus was evangelism rather than engaging in socio-political reform. Political questions not directly involving religion or matters of conscience are strictly out of bounds for SDA and her agencies (Cottrell 1965).

Eschatological Factors Affect the SDA in Zimbabwe

Teachings about the end of times were/are detrimental to social participation in changing the world. The SDA's support for the separation of church and state stems from sectarian ecclesiology and the belief that the United States of America will inevitably repudiate religious liberty (Dudley and Hernández 2001). According to SDA eschatology, based on Revelation 13 and 17, the federal government will enforce legislation demanding compulsory religious observance on a Sunday and not the Sabbath. After establishing this law, those persons who continue to honour Sunday, instead of the seventh-day Sabbath, will obtain the “mark of the beast” (White 2002). Accordingly, the SDA is suspicious of political movements that traverse the boundary of church-state separation. The SDA disapproves of member involvement in political

and social activism (Dudley and Hernández 2001). The same eschatological underpinnings are inherent in the SDA of Zimbabwe.

The SDA in Zimbabwe Inherits the Social Christianity Teachings

The SDA in Zimbabwe borrowed ideas of social responsibility from its history. The SDA identifies social Christianity with liberalism, defined as openness to new ideas like non-literal interpretations of Scripture and biblical higher criticism. Therefore, the SDA has rejected the social gospel. Francis David Nichol, a former editor of *Review and Herald*, castigated the social gospel component of the civil rights movement and presented evangelism as an alternative to social Christianity. In response to a question from a reader of the *Review and Herald* concerning the conspicuous absence of the SDA in civil right demonstrations, Nichol responds with a tinge of sarcasm and in his retreat from social activism, enunciates the denomination's position that the primary role of the church is evangelism (Nichol 1965).

SDA scholars like Roger Dudley and Edwin Hernández (2001) posited that prioritising evangelism over practical social concerns comes from Plato's dualistic understanding of the body and the soul. In his teaching, Plato (427–347 BCE) assigned the outstanding soul value over the physical body because he believed the soul to be immortal. Likewise, he esteemed the otherworldly over the earthly. This aspect of Platonic thought is evident in SDA thought (Dudley and Hernández 2001); however, the SDA's belief of the state of the dead runs contrary to the understanding of the relationship of body and soul, as articulated that the dead are unconscious (Conkin 2008). In this case, some SDA members tout evangelism as a reason for excusing themselves from the socio-political arena (Dudley and Hernández 2001)). In keeping with its conservative tradition, based on rugged American individualism, the SDA maintains that the ultimate responsibility for success or failure remains that of the individual. This outlook has contributed to the belief that everyone possesses the ability to improve their plight through self-determination (Dudley and Hernández 2001). When applied to racism, this notion blames the victim for their condition (Dudley and Hernández 2001). Consequently, individualism has desensitised some SDA members to racial injustice.

Several critics have argued that the SDA involves itself in political activity only to advance its own interests. In keeping with this, the SDA has supported religious liberty to maintain the denomination's sustainability. For example, in 1888, the SDA successfully opposed US Senator Henry William Blair's (1834–1920) Bill to establish Sunday as the national day for religious observance. Likewise, it championed the defeat of blue laws, state statutes restricting commercial activity and labour on Sundays, which posed problems for the SDA community. The SDA interest is also seen in the denomination's support for the temperance movement's retreat from social activism (Plantak 1998). The SDA supported efforts to suppress liquor consumption because they viewed alcohol's mind-altering effects as a hindrance to successful evangelism (Dudley and Hernández 2001). Critics further urged that, since the SDA only participated in causes that served its interests, it was possible that the SDA did not perceive social

injustice as a threat to its well-being. In advocating non-participation, withdrawal or behind-the-scenes involvement in matters of public interest, the SDA took a pragmatic approach to advance its interests (Plantak 1998).

The view of Francis David Nichol (1897–1966), on behalf of the SDA, substantiates the following conclusion: “We have ever felt that we can best reveal true Christianity, and thus best advance the Advent cause, by taking the quieter and perhaps indirect approach to problems that so often arouse human passions” (Nichol 1965). Reuben Figuhr (1954–1966), president of the SDA General Conference, in addressing the question of racial equality, pointed out that the race question was tense during his days, and that many people wanted to know the position of the SDA. SDA members also argued for the denomination to take an extreme position since it was felt (by not a few) that the question was a moral one. Others held and urged an opposite view. Figuhr said the denomination could not take a side on racial equality because the denomination could not articulate a statement satisfactory to all (Figuhr 1964). In assuming a neutral stance on social justice, the SDA was inconsistent in applying moral principles.

Furthermore, the SDA’s pragmatic approach placed it in a reactive position to world events rather than on the cutting edge. This development became apparent as the denomination responded to advances in race relations made through the civil rights movements’ efforts regarding apartheid in South Africa. At the 1965 spring meeting of the General Conference Committee of the SDA, church officials recommended that the denomination unifies its facilities and institutions. Undoubtedly, this action was a response to federal court rulings and legislative acts that struck down previous policies of racial segregation.

The Context of Development in 21st Century Zimbabwe

Development and democracy are interlinked. Peace and the promotion of human rights are prerequisites for any development and humanitarian endeavour. The SDA in Zimbabwe cannot foster development without first ensuring a peaceful environment conducive to development. Mudzengi (2014) avows that the SDA organisational structure discourages members from participating in politics. It is a factor that also explains its limited involvement in humanitarian and development engagement. Examples like the Rwandan massacre in 1994, which led to the sentencing of Elizaphan Ntakirutimana, a former SDA bureaucrat, by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (BBC News, February 20, 2003), to the conflicts in the Balkans in Eastern Europe, a series of ethnically-based insurgencies fought from 1991–2002 (Nation 2003), are instructive for Zimbabwe. In addition, the SDA in South Africa was criticised for supporting the apartheid regime. In addition, the SDA was not involved in the formulation of the Kairos Document (1985). This theological statement criticised the cruel political philosophy of apartheid. The SDA condemns all forms of racism, including the political policy of apartheid with its enforced segregation and legalised discrimination (Dabrowski 2005, 83). Several critics, however, point out that this official statement was issued only in 1985; and it was only in 1997, three years after the

formal end of apartheid in 1994, that the South African Union Conference of the SDA Executive Committee submitted a statement of apology to the Truth and Reconciliation Committee. It included a defence that the SDA community was a victim of the apartheid system (Crocombe 2007, 6).

The missiological behaviour of the SDA is being tested in the local Zimbabwean scenario, which has been affected by a deep crisis since 2000. While other mainstream Christian churches have been actively involved in mitigating the crisis, with this study we envisioned discovering the rationale of the SDA's stance in Zimbabwe. It must be noted that from 2008 to 2016, Zimbabwe has experienced both an economic and social meltdown. Historically, the current political crisis confronting Zimbabwe can be traced to the decision of President Robert Mugabe in the 21st century to accede to the demands of the war veterans for financial compensation and land restoration (Cox 2005). During the start of the 21st century, war veterans (outstandingly Joseph Chinotimba) posed as the leaders of the invasions of White-owned commercial farms with implicit support from the government of Robert Mugabe, which were later on called the Third Chimurenga. War veterans and young people, who had not fought the liberation war, led these raids (Chitando, Gunda, and Togarasei 2020).

In Zimbabwe, from 2008 to 2016, there was a striking increase in the number of prophecies and pronouncements regarding the country's future (*The Herald*, January 4, 2016). The examples cited show that religion, in one form or the other, has been responsible for the avalanche of social action; for instance, during the civil rights movements of the 1960s religion featured as a key contributing factor in other contexts, even in seemingly mundane matters such as fertility. While religion has contributed to development, social cohesion, and peace in some cases, it has led to instability and civil change wars. Likewise, while religion has been responsible for positive change in some contexts, it has been an agent of discrimination (McQuillan 2004, 29). António Guterres, United Nations Secretary-General, argues that there can be no development without peace and security.² Chitando and Manyonganise (2011, 77) posit that peace is a precondition for development. This work explores how the SDA sustained a prerequisite for development in Zimbabwe.

Orthodox versus Orthopraxis

The process of orthopraxis, as one of the hermeneutical paradigms of doing theology, is considered. Orthopraxis means "right action" or "right practice." The word is used in contrast to orthodoxy, which is the "right teaching." The word praxis comes from the Greek *prasso*, which means practice. It involves practical action on behalf of the poor and oppressed. Praxis also refers to discovering and formulating theological truth out of a given historical situation (Cleary and Garrido-Pinto 1977, 270). Doing theology, therefore, requires the theologian to be immersed in his or her own intellectual and

2 <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2018-09-26/secretary-generals-remarks-high-level-event-marking-70th-anniversary>. Accessed February 22, 2021.

social-political context—this makes theology to be dynamic. Critical reflection helps the church to fulfil its prophetic function by interpreting historical events and calling the church and theology critical of itself and society. According to Juan Luis Segundo (1976), praxis makes theology unique in the sense that, unlike others, it cannot be learned. However, instead, it is born out of the people’s experiences of life. The focal operational innovation of liberation theology is to do theology from the viewpoint of the poor and oppressed.

It is this context that leads to some suggestions which can potentially influence the realignment of the SDA’s apolitical standpoint. Today, in the Zimbabwean context, development, the prophetic voice and social responsibility of the SDA are contested in view of the split between isolationists who have little interest in the SDA’s participation with society, and activists who want the SDA’s voice to be heard on the critical issues of public morality that face society (Standish 2004, 4). There is a perceived gap in the way the SDA is involved in social activism. The apolitical stance accounts for this gap. For example, the General Conference of the SDA Sabbath and Personal Ministries Department highlighted that it was widely reported that worldwide, as of 2002, only about 29% of SDA members were involved in community development (Colon 2008).

George Campbell (1719–1796) argues that priests too often used the term “orthodoxy” as a weapon to intimidate the unthinking. Orthodoxy should not be considered a starting principle, for then it would already hold universal approbation and require no proof. Campbell (1776 [2003]) points out that orthodoxy is not a standard but a goal, the end of much questioning and uncertainty. Enlightenment suggests the development of humanity from the darkness of a former age. Already, the anti-Christian, secular agenda of the Age of Reason becomes clear. During this time, the adjective “medieval” suits a term of abuse. At this time, natural science arises to esteem theology as a straightjacket from which it will joyfully rid itself. Enlightenment replaces what remains of orthodoxy in the West.³ The heroes of this age are Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727) and John Locke (1632–1704). Both are believers, but not in the Orthodox Christian sense of that word. They believe in the natural law of creation and the sensibleness of Christian morals, not in miracles, revelation, resurrection, salvation, regeneration, and the church’s sacraments. Orthodoxy is different from Enlightenment in that its approach to human cognition is so fundamentally different. The Enlightenment was the unavoidable anti-Christian determination of this tendency. Enter orthodoxy, a quite unlike idea, or one should say a different ascetical practice, but now largely forgotten in the West.

Orthopraxis contrasts with orthodoxy, which emphasises correct belief. While orthodoxy uses codified beliefs in the form of creeds and ritualism, and more narrowly centres on the strict adherence to prescribed rites or rituals, orthopraxy focuses on issues of development, family, cultural integrity, ethical systems, and the enforcement thereof, to mention a few. Though traditionally, Christianity is seen as primarily orthodoxical

3 www.pravmir.com/orthodoxy-and-the-enlightenment/?format=pdf. Accessed March 12, 2021.

(as in the Nicene Creed's "I believe in ...") this article engages orthopraxis as a hermeneutical tool of doing theology by examining the extent to which the SDA has engaged its missiological responsibility in view of the prophetic voice it has provided during the crisis years in Zimbabwe.

Hermeneutic Mediation of Theology and the SDA in Zimbabwe

The SDA has drawn lessons from liberation theology. This work identifies three basic mediations of the practical theology of liberation: 1) the social analytic mediation; 2) hermeneutical mediation; and 3) mediation of pastoral action and the perception of social reality. In this context, the social analytic mediation is the denunciation of the capitalistic system as the source of evils. Secondly, hermeneutic mediation is the theological reading of social reality in the light of faith based on the Bible. (Boff 1985) suggest that faith aids the Christian to authorise and support those historical movements that have a greater affinity with the ideals of the gospel. Thirdly, mediation of pastoral service is the search for viable avenues for the praxis and embodiment of the theology of liberation in pastoral activity. Liberation theology stresses that the church should act as an agent of development (Boff L. and Boff C. 1987). This exercise recommends an SDA theology that moves from transcendental to anthropological, from above to below in the Zimbabwean crises. The three hermeneutic mediations of theology and society are interwoven, as discussed below.

Social Analytic Mediation Cascades to Zimbabwe

Social analytic mediation consists of observing social reality in society, followed by new thoughts and actions related to the circumstances of everyday communities. The experience of poverty and oppression (often termed life and reality) has to be grasped more critically. There are three levels of analytic perceptions. Firstly, an empiricism level, in which people see facts in society as they present themselves. You see poverty in society and you come to accept its reality as part of naïve awareness. You stop at this awareness before you tend to see this poverty as a natural reality. You don't see that this poverty is a scandal (Boff 1987). Secondly, the functionalism level proceeds from social-economic circumstances to critical consciousness. This level sees poverty in the context of how facts about poverty are interrelated. It sees society as a body with many functions that work organically, creating social harmony or social disorders. Liberation theologians see the rich-poor dichotomy as a social dysfunction (Boff 1987). Therefore, the goal must be to reform society to establish or restore social equilibrium. Functionalism is a level of critical awareness. Functionalism continues to analyse and probe society: Why, in the society where we live, do the poor grow poorer and the rich grow even richer? Yet we have developed: but it is development, for whom? Is it progress, for whom? Yet, as far as we can tell, development is too capitalistic to benefit everyone. Progress only benefits a few in society. The marginalised groups continue to swell in numbers. As far as we can see, functionalism, with its developmentalism and progressivism, reaches nowhere. It does not succeed in making society function well.

Thirdly, there is the dialectical structural level in the analytic mediation. It is a radical level of critical awareness that leads to liberation. It tries to uncover the structures of society that make some rich and others poor. This is a radical analysis and it is Marxist in its ethos (McGovern 2009). The perceived solution is not reform of society, but calls for a radical reorganisation of society. This means a complete reconstruction of society from the roots or foundations. Through sharing, this reorganisation for and of society is done by everyone's labour-power. This leads to liberation. As Assmann (1975) claims, liberation theology starts with this type of reading of social reality, i.e., radical analyses and dialectical structuralism. This type of reading gets to the bottom of poverty and marginalisation.

Bonino (1975) notes that God is clearly and unequivocally on the side of the poor. Gustavo Gutierrez argues that liberation theology is theology for people by people, an ongoing struggle of the poor to overcome oppression rather than a theology of the experts crafted in quiet libraries and then offered to the masses (Gutierrez 1979). It suggests that, as Boff would put it, "to accept a poor person is to accept a poor Jesus who hides behind each human face" (Boff L. and Boff C. 1987).

The common people are referred to as *Comunidades de base* or grassroots communities (Gutierrez 1970). Theology, for these people, is a give and take between action and reflection. It is a praxis theology, not textbook theology. Although educated in Europe, Gutierrez was to learn again from his own people of Lima. In most cases, the *Comunidades de base* are often without a priest, probably because their priest has no gospel for the downtrodden and the outcast, as they prefer to name them. In rural Peru and Venezuela, severe shortages of priests mean that residents of those areas do not have Mass even once a week (Gutierrez 1979). The lay people initiate programmes for them, yet they range over tens of thousands, spread all over the continent. The "struggle" served as a vehicle for liberation theology.

Gutierrez (1979) cites that "from the depth of the countries that make up Latin America, a cry is rising to heaven growing louder and more alarming all the time. It is the cry of a suffering people who demand justice, freedom, and respect for the basic rights of human beings and peoples." He then concludes that this type of doing theology is doing theology from the underside of history, for the poor and oppressed people whose social contexts have been exploited. To this end, he concurs with Bonino (1975), who talks of the view from below. In social analytical mediation, the encounter with the Lord of history takes place in the encounter with the poor person (Matthew 25:31–46). The poor love God simply because they are poor. To know God is to do justice; to fail to do justice is to deny God of justice. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945), a German theologian who also had an experience of suffering under Hitler's regime, sharpens this question with another: "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" The God of the Christian faith is God who suffers in Jesus Christ; to speak of God in a world-come-of-age means to speak of God who suffers. To live in a world without God, before God, and without God demands that a Christian shares in God's suffering (Bonhoeffer 1997). In light of this, this paper

aims to propose a pastoral role for the SDA in reforming society in the Zimbabwean crisis to restore social equilibrium.

Hermeneutical Mediation and the SDA in Zimbabwe

The SDA in Zimbabwe has benefited from hermeneutical mediation largely developed in South America. Hermeneutical mediation entails judging in the light of deeper faith. This is the art or science of interpretation so that meaning and understanding can be attained. Things can change due to time and space, but hermeneutics tries to reach the proper meaning in context. The word of God can be re-understood hermeneutically; in this, the word can incarnate. Hermeneutics tries to bridge things that one has lost or people that one has been alienated from (Chul Hyun Cho 2004). This is hermeneutic mediation. It asks among others: What is God trying to do in a situation of armed struggle? Or apartheid? Or Zimbabwean catastrophes? Faith is not enough—reason is also required. According to liberation perspectives, where there is structural poverty, there is structural sin (Dussel 2008). In the same vein, where there is a private accumulation of wealth, human selfishness is a mortal sin.

Liberation theology believes that God revealed himself in history and became history. When Jesus read Luke 4:16, he said: “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” For Jesus, total liberation must be in him. God cannot be anybody’s private property. He makes himself present in events; this God became history and love that ever transcends “... for in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28); “He is wholly other, the Holy One” (Hosea 11:9); “God at the bosom of his people” (John 3:16).

Mediation of Pastoral Action Helps the SDA in Zimbabwe

Mediation of pastoral action is the translation of theory into practice, i.e., concrete action is praxis in nature. What was observed and judged must now be acted upon. People are moved to action, not because of naïve volunteerism, but due to what the existential reality demands—this is where pastoral prudence comes into being. The church must take specific initiatives in line with its historical vocation as the voice of the voiceless. Christians must be involved in development activities. The church has the duty to act as a symbolic agent of liberation in terms of its word, kerygma, liturgy, catechesis, community intervention programmes, and so forth. The church must enter into dialogue with other social forces of qualitative change. This change is equally efficacious and vicarious in its ethos. This has been liberation, it envisions creating a new society which is just and more human. Importantly, when we notice tension within the denomination, it is not typically the consequence of problems of faith. Instead, we must see tension as generated by problems connected with different attitudes in the context of social reality.

Mediation of pastoral practice leads to societal development. The goal of this transformation is integral liberation. This is the ultimate goal of salvation history. Is it the same as the history of salvation? Salvation is a theological concept that means

human eternity, which is spiritually divinised. As is clear, salvation goes beyond the historical reality here on earth. It is trans-historical and eschatological in nature. For this reason, salvation is associated with the notion of redemption and reconciliation (Boff 1984). Boff also points out that salvation belongs to the order of the mystery, and no words can define it adequately. That is why so many words are used in order to be able to say at least something about it. Salvation and liberation are two issues that always go together. As far as we can tell, salvation is in liberation and liberation is also embedded in salvation (Boff 1984). In this same idea, St Augustine (354-430) once said: “*historia gravida christie*,” i.e., history is pregnant with Christ.⁴ Each incarnates in the other, so there is a strong relationship between salvation and liberation. There is an ethical bond between these two notions.

Church and State Interface in Zimbabwe

This exploration discusses the role of religious leaders in challenging the ruling elite. Selected Christian institutions and church leaders have engaged with politicians in their quest for a better Zimbabwe. Ezra Chitando (2013) notes that both religion and politics occur in space and time. People who live in society, practise religion. Although religion has a spiritual dimension, it remains a publicly observable phenomenon. Canaan Banana (1991) points out that Christian institutions in Zimbabwe used to be far from being at odds with tyrannical powers. Churches used to theorise hopes and promises without taking a critical stance on praxis. Christian institutions have a positive role to play in national development. They should exercise a prophetic voice by siding with the poor. The role of the church in the Zimbabwean crisis was connected to a fundamental stand against all injustice and corruption. Churches have been guided by universal solidarity and hopes for Zimbabwe’s future (Kaulemu 2010). Christian institutions in Zimbabwe have refused to be limited to prayer only by politicians, especially President Mugabe.⁵

The work of these personalities, like Bishop Levee Kadenge, Pius Ncube and Sifiso Mpfu, succeeded the efforts of other Christian leaders before independence. Church leaders, like Ndabaningi Sithole, Abel Muzorewa and Canaan Banana, participated in the struggle for Zimbabwe. However, from 1980 to date, ADRA Zimbabwe has been involved in profitable programmes targeting the empowering of people. Such programmes manifest in human resources training courses, youth empowerment programmes, women empowerment programmes, and others. ADRA Zimbabwe has contributed to building schools in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, including hospitals and clinics. The SDA and local church members must emulate the life of Jesus Christ (Dorn 1967). The church is a reflection of the kingdom of God on earth.

4 <http://fac-staff.seattleu.edu/schan/web/ChineseTheology/Lectures2/file/Revelation.htm>. Accessed March 13, 2021.

5 http://www.osisa.org/sites/default/files/sup_files/Prayers,%20politics%20and%20peace.pdf. Accessed March 7, 2021.

The church is a living and loving community; it is in the world to serve human beings to make this world a better place. For Bonhoeffer (1979, 127), the church exists for others, just as Jesus lives for the church. The meaning of being an authentic church is that the life and work of Christ must direct its ministry. At the same time, the church is called to solidarity with the battered and disfigured of God's children. Elements of activism are already observed in the church's call for righteousness and justice in the land (Amos 5:24). The church's ministry involves a variety of structures and offices of the church. These offices relate to church in society committees, social justice committees, peace and reconciliation fora, and justice desks. It is from this background that this article looks at whether the SDA understands her social context and discerns her historical and theological role in the Zimbabwean crisis from 2008 to 2016.

Evaluation

The SDA's apolitical and non-social activism is due to the influence of the Millerites' theological and philosophical concepts within the SDA. This stance presents a paradox for the SDA. The SDA promotes Christian values and evangelism as the remedy for society's problems, but on the other hand, posits that no activity can halve the progression of evil. The withdrawal and non-participation viewpoint has had an effect on total member participation, even in developmental activities in Zimbabwe. Theology should be by the people and for the people, for it calls for orthopraxis more than orthodoxy. The SDA's missiological responsibility should not be limited to the pulpit, failing to extend to its pews. The Zimbabwean crisis is an opportunity for the SDA to exercise its missiological responsibility instead of promising people a pie in the sky. The biblical way of looking at life is practical; the holy cannot look at life and remain silent.

Kwabena Donkor, an Associate Director of the Biblical Research Institute (BRI), wrote an article entitled, "The Church and Society in Adventism: Some Reflections," where he pointed out that the reason why an increased number of SDA members are resisting the political and social policy, is because SDA policy is not clear. Donkor posited that the SDA needs a social doctrine that is properly framed.⁶ Evangelism should not be seen to be the only remedy for society's problems, but on the other hand, the SDA is preaching that no activity is capable of halting the progression of evil. What is real evangelism or the Christian mandate, if not proclaiming "good news to the poor?" (Luke 4:18). Ellen G. White (2002) points out that social unjust, slavery, and oppression of the poor are grave evils that her Lord appoints the church of Christ to overthrow. Therefore, the SDA should facilitate constituency meetings where social and political policies are crafted from below.

SDA theology should not be limited to orthodoxy only, forgetting orthopraxis. The SDA Church Manual encourages church members in every community to be outstanding

6 <http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1047&context=jams>. Accessed March 7, 2021.

inhabitants, working for the common good of all (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual 2005, 173). The SDA should consider the development and humanitarian engagements as a process, not a one-day event. The work of assistance should not be left to just a single arm of charity, like ADRA. Jan Paulsen (2007), former president of the General Conference of the SDA, proposed a theology of connection as an essential value. Association with others means seeing the large problems of society as a collective human problem. Dialogue with other Christian institutions that have participated in critical issues of development and humanitarianism is key.

Conclusion

The analysis made by this paper emphasises the importance of human and material resources to be reorganised and utilised responsibly. The SDA needs a theological reflection glued by shared experience in the effort to develop a better society, more accessible and more human. The SDA should act more as an agent of liberation, as is expected by society. The SDA's theology seems to be transcendental, from above and not from below. SDA missiological theology presents a too heavenly-minded approach, but no earthly deployment. Historical facts surrounding apartheid in South Africa and the civil rights movement in the US, to mention a few, have unearthed that the SDA's missiological stance needs a review. It is not theology for people by the people; it is an ongoing struggle of the poor to overcome oppression. The SDA should be involved in development and the political process that sustains peace and humanitarian engagements, not as a political party, but as an agent of liberation in terms of its word and community intervention programmes. The SDA's apolitical stance should not be paradoxical and restrictive in nature to neglect pastoral responsibilities as mandated by the divine.

The political and humanitarian engagement of the SDA in Zimbabwe needs improvements, as it leaves a lot to be desired. Through one of its charity arms (ADRA), the SDA reaches out to those who are affected by economic challenges, drought, Murambatsvina, and floods, especially in rural areas. However, this outreach remains on a small scale. The SDA has played no role in critical issues of nation-building, like the formation of GNU and the land reform programme, among others. The SDA has never deployed a prophetic voice in Zimbabwe during the crisis period. However, the SDA benefited from the status quo, especially by accessing and retaining land. The nation of Zimbabwe is in an economic, political and social dilemma that needs the input of Christian institutions, like the SDA, to turn things around for the better of the society. However, the denomination has been hibernating in the soil, while the entire nation is bleeding.

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