

Mission in a Fragmented World: Creation, the Cross, and Hope¹

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Fragmentation resulting from prejudice, discrimination, favoritism, tribalism, casteism, and racial intolerance² is one of the most insidious results of sin. Since the day Cain murdered his brother Abel, the fratricidal inclinations of the human race have reddened the pages of history with conflict, war, oppression, slavery, and genocide. Much of the violence perpetrated throughout human history rests on certain assumptions, misperceptions, or misconstructions related to matters of identity—either real or constructed.³ Even violence perpetrated centuries ago by some groups against others has left scars that persist to this day—not to mention the major wars and conflicts of the twentieth century.

Interestingly, the segmentation of people into tribes is no longer a feature of only non-Western traditional societies. Indeed, Western society is currently undergoing a process of “tribalization,” spawning what has been labeled “neotribalism.”⁴ While contemporary Western culture makes a strong push for equality, people continue to perceive themselves and one another more in terms of their group identities than in terms of their common humanity.⁵

With the fall of the Berlin Wall and all it symbolized, coupled with technological advancements—notably the internet—some people thought that the world would somehow usher

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² These terms are taken in their broad, commonsense meaning as indicating unbiblical behavior or belief in the inferiority of others and their exclusion based on notions of social standing, economic status, ethnicity, caste, color, nationality, etc. (cf. Lev 19:14; Prov 28:21; Matt 5:45; Gal 3:27–29; Rom 2:11; Jas 2:2–4).

³ See Matthew Lange, *Killing Others: A Natural History of Ethnic Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2017).

⁴ Celia de Anca, *Beyond Tribalism: Managing Identity in a Diverse World*, IE Business Publishing (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), xxii.

⁵ See John Jovan Markovic, “The Idea of Different Human Races, Racialization, and the Kingdom of God,” in *Church and Society: Missiological Challenges for the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, ed. Rudi Maier (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Department of World Mission, 2005), 397–426; Jonah Goldberg, *Suicide of the West: How the Rebirth of Tribalism, Populism, Nationalism, and Identity Politics Is Destroying American Democracy* (New York: Crown Forum, 2018); and Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything About Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020).

in an age of global fraternity in which tribal, ethnic, and other prejudices would disappear.⁶ But three decades later, it seems the world has more tribalism and fragmented identities than during the previous millennium of human history! In fact, the internet—for all its good—has often become a tool to fabricate and promote prejudice and discrimination, often exacerbated by political maneuvering.

The above synthesis, as sketchy as it is, demonstrates that prejudice, discrimination, favoritism, tribalism, casteism, and racial intolerance are very much a part of society today—as they have always been. It does not require too much reflection to understand that God’s people are also affected by these unfortunate realities of human life under sin.⁷

This paper makes a modest attempt to address the missiological implications of this state of affairs. Given the obvious fact that the church is in the world and its members are a part of the larger societies in which they live, the fragmentation of contemporary culture can potentially affect the church and impair its ability to proclaim the gospel; in fact, church history shows that sometimes the church becomes part of the problem. Only Scripture reveals the ultimate cure for the ailments of the human race. Thus, mission—in a divided society where all kinds of prejudice abound—must be informed by the biblical story.

There are three major biblical themes—pivot events in the grand biblical narrative—that if properly understood, experienced, and proclaimed, can bring healing and hope to missionaries *and* those whom they strive to reach with the gospel message. These three themes should define the content and shape the method of mission: creation, the cross, and hope.

Creation

In its opening account, the Bible establishes the foundation for all human rights. By creating human beings in His “image” and “likeness” (Gen 1:26), God set the standards for how humans should live and treat fellow humans in the world. The very idea that humans reflect God’s image and therefore every individual is endowed with infinite value—so obvious a

⁶ Joshua Mitchell, *American Awakening: Identity Politics and Other Afflictions of Our Time* (New York: Encounter Books, 2020), Apple Books.

⁷ See, e.g., Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago, IL: Moody, 2018); and Scott D. Allen, *Why Social Justice Is Not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Credo House, 2020).

concept today that it is often taken for granted—was revolutionary in the ancient world. According to a Mesopotamian account, man was created to perform hard work for the gods.⁸ The Bible, in contrast, affirms that humans were created to till the ground and take care of the garden for their own benefit and pleasure. In the ancient world, the structure of society was supposed to mirror the hierarchies among the gods. Thus, some humans were born to be served while others existed to be servants. In such a context there could hardly be any upward social mobility because people were enslaved to the social structure from birth to death. Hardly anyone would challenge the status quo since it was understood to be a reflection of the heavenly realm.⁹ Even Aristotle, one of the more enlightened Greek philosophers, said, “From the hour of their birth some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.”¹⁰

When considered against the backdrop of the ancient world, the Bible’s teachings on the fundamental equality of all human beings stand out as something revolutionary. And it is on that basis that Leviticus 19:17–18 states, “You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the Lord.”¹¹ For Jesus, this was one of the two great commandments of the law, second only to the commandment to love God (Matt 22:36–40).

When speaking to the Greeks, who deemed themselves to be the most educated people in the world and thus labelled everyone else “barbarians,” Paul simply ignored their myths about the origin of humankind. The apostle just delivered a message based on Genesis 1 and 2, emphasizing the unity of human race by creation: “And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26a). All humans have one Father, and thus they must all be brothers and sisters.

However, the foundational unity of all humanity based on the image of God does not obliterate the ethnic diversity of Adams’s children. Indeed, ethnic diversity was a natural consequence of the divine mandate to “be fruitful and multiply” (Gen 1:28). As shown in the so-called “table of nations” of Genesis 10, early humanity was formed by seventy nations, which

⁸ Henri, H. A. Frankfort Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen, and William Andrew Irwin, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man: An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1946; reprint, Phoenix Books 1977), 182, 185.

⁹ Joshua A. Berman, *Created Equal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 20–23, Kindle.

¹⁰ Michael Levin, “Natural Subordination, Aristotle On,” *Philosophy* 72, no. 280 (1997): 241–257.

¹¹ All biblical quotations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise indicated.

according to Deuteronomy 32:8–9 arose under the gracious supervision of God. It is against this backdrop that God calls Abraham to bring universal salvation.¹² But the particularities of ethnic or tribal identities are not dissolved. God promised that Abraham would be “father of many nations” (Gen 17:4). And Israel itself was composed of twelve tribes with considerable diversity in their ethnic makeup. Both Isaac and Jacob married Aramean women from Mesopotamia (Gen 28:5), and Judah and Simeon married Canaanite women (Gen 38:2; 46:10). Joseph married an Egyptian woman named Asenath (Gen 41:50) who bore him two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Moses had a Cushite wife.¹³ Subsequently, two remarkable women Rahab—a Canaanite—and Ruth—a Moabite—were incorporated into Israel and became ancestors of King David. In the difficult time that preceded the exile, Jeremiah’s life was saved by “Ebed-Melech the Cushite” (Jer 38:7–13), probably a black man from Africa.¹⁴ He interceded for Jeremiah before the king and eventually rescued Jeremiah from the cistern. Thus, far from being a monolithic ethnic or racial entity, Israel—itsself composed of twelve tribes—absorbed Aramean, Canaanite, Egyptian, and other elements and through its history absorbed and interacted with many more foreigners.

But despite such varied ethnic makeup and tribal diversity, Israel’s ultimate identity lay in the fact that they were the people of YHWH. For as long as they remained faithful to this ultimate identity, they were united as one nation. But once they allowed particular tribal and family identities to trump their covenantal identity as people of YHWH, they became divided and exposed themselves to the enemy.

Turning the focus of this reflection to the foreign nations, it bears noting that the Old Testament prophets announced a future in which the nations of the world would flow to Jerusalem to learn from the Lord (Isa 2). This prophetic promise finds an initial fulfillment on Pentecost. Acts 2 depicts the whole world converging on Jerusalem. As the biblical text says, in Jerusalem there were Jews, devout men from “every nation under heaven” (Acts 2:5). There were also “Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs” (Acts 2:9–11a). All

¹² Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 193.

¹³ J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, ed. D. A. Carson, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* 14 (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity, 2003), 33.

¹⁴ For an exhaustive study of these and many more cases of African presence in the Bible, see Edwin M. Yamauchi, *Africa and the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004).

those ethnic groups, as diverse as they could be, heard in their own vernacular languages “the wonderful works of God” (Acts 2:12). This is a reversal of what happened at Babel. On the plain of Shinar, languages divided people; on the day of Pentecost, languages united people.

The reversal of the Tower of Babel began on the day of Pentecost and continued as the church carried out the Great Commission. However, it is the new Jerusalem—of the new creation—that constitutes the conclusion of that great reversal.¹⁵ After saying that the light that has illumined the city comes from God and the Lamb, John states that “the nations [*ethnos*] will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it” (Rev 22:24, NASB).¹⁶ That being the case, it is reasonable to suppose that ethnic distinctions and identities will be preserved in the new earth. The redeemed in the new Jerusalem form a multiethnic congregation in which “Blacks, Whites, and all other races will be mixed together, united through the redemption of the Lamb and in their worship of God.”¹⁷

So, it follows that because all people are created in the image of God, all ethnic groups hold the same status and unique value that results from the image of God. Racism, tribalism, and other kinds of racial discrimination are a denial that all people have been created in the image of God.¹⁸ Ethnic diversity arose as a positive aspect of the creation order. Thus, God’s overarching plan to redeem the world includes people from all ethnic backgrounds and will culminate in the multiethnic community of the redeemed in the new creation.

The Cross

If creation provides a foundation for the equality and diversity of all ethnic groups, then the cross provides the ground for reconciliation. It addresses the fundamental problem of sin, which is the ultimate cause of division, prejudice, and conflict. One of Paul’s most remarkable statements encapsulates the power of the cross to heal divisions: “God was in Christ reconciling

¹⁵ Jackson Richardson, “Genesis 10 & 11: A Theological and Geographical Framework for the Mission of Paul” (MA thesis, Liberty University, 2019), 34.

¹⁶ This is consistent with Revelation 5:9 and 14:6, passages that allude to the table of nations in Genesis 10.

¹⁷ Hays, 205.

¹⁸ In this connection it should be noted that the fringe notion that Noah’s curse caused Ham and his descendants (Gen 9:25) to become Black and enslaved is an exegetical and theological abuse. The fact that Noah cursed Canaan, not Ham, should suffice to dispel such a notion. In fact, the Canaanites are ethnically closer to the Israelites than the Hamitic peoples who populated Africa. Noah’s curse has nothing to do with Africans, Blacks, or slavery, but with the conquest of the land of Canaan, which would be given to Abraham and his descendants (Gen 17:8).

the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation” (2 Cor 5:19). But of course, reconciliation with God must entail reconciliation among humans. Therefore, in another profound statement, Paul says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28). In a similar vein the apostle also states, “For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (Eph 2:14).

Jesus began to break walls and bring reconciliation even before going to Calvary. He ministered to everyone and often gave special attention to those whose ethnic or social standing made them inferior in the eyes of the religious and political elites of the day. By interacting with Samaritans, women, the poor, and “sinners,” Jesus showed that the love of God is freely available to everyone (Luke 15:1–2; John 4:9). Severely criticized but never intimidated, He associated with all kinds of people, even making them heroes in some of His parables.

When Jesus says He has “other sheep” whom He wants to bring into one flock (John 10:16), it is a clear reference to the Gentiles. Jesus envisions one flock composed of both Jewish and Gentile believers. When Andrew and Philip tell Jesus that certain Greeks want to see Him, Jesus responds, “The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified” (John 12:20–26). Since the “hour” for Jesus to be “glorified” points to the cross, it is clear that Jesus sees the coming of the Greeks “as the heralds of the climax of his ministry.”¹⁹ And in the same context, a few verses later, Jesus says, “And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all *peoples* to Myself” (John 12:32). Both Colossians 1:20 and Ephesians 1:10 speak of God’s desire to “reconcile” or “gather together in one all things” in Christ.

So, at the heart of the biblical message is the claim that God makes promises and fulfills them. And the promise is made to all humankind that in Christ, God embraces human beings from all backgrounds and makes them a “new creation” in Christ. In Christ barriers of prejudice, discrimination, favoritism, tribalism, casteism, and racial intolerance are obliterated. This proposition can be justified by two major reasons.

First, in light of the cross, any ideology, lifestyle, tradition, or any way of thinking that reduces the dignity and worth of human beings is judged and condemned because at the foot of the cross everyone stands as sinners in need of God’s redeeming grace (Rom 3:23). Second, by offering grace and forgiveness to everyone regardless of race or social status, God sets the

¹⁹Hays, 160.

standard for how human beings ought to treat one another (John 3:16; cf. Matt 5:45). Third, the cross provides reconciliation by way of forgiveness.

One should bear in mind that humans are born into a world with a history of oppression, victimization, and all kinds of sinful discrimination. In recent years, there has emerged in the West a broad cultural awareness of the evils perpetrated over the last few centuries of human history and the conviction has grown that such wrongs—colonialism, slavery, and other social evils—must be rectified. On the one hand, some claim that justice must be implemented here and now by every means possible. On the other hand, some suggest that the evils of the past should be forgotten, and everyone should carry on with their lives without regard for past social tragedies. Upon reflection, neither solution works. For one, given the magnitude of the transgression, justice can never be fully implemented by human systems. As one scholar points out, “lingering hatreds and resentments going back many years, even centuries, are not likely to be overcome by any social or political policy.”²⁰ Even if governments were to issue apologies and provide financial compensation (which has been done in some cases), who could bring back the lives that were destroyed? Furthermore, to forget would be extremely unjust to the victims of such atrocities²¹ and would give evil another victory.

It seems obvious that only through the healing power of the cross can such intractable issues be properly addressed. This means that the fundamental solution offered by the gospel is forgiveness. The ancient rabbis used to say that “before the dawn of creation God, having seen all the evil humankind would commit, had to forgive the world before creating it.”²² This seems consistent with Revelation 13:8, which portrays Christ as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world” (Rev 13:8). “Between the complete disregard of justice and the relentless pursuit of justice lies *forgiveness*.”²³ Forgiveness is the foundation that leads to the pursuit of biblical justice that does not disregard or ignore injustice, but rather seeks a spiritual solution that transforms our motives and actions.

Jesus Himself modeled forgiveness as He experienced prejudice. After all, Jesus was a Jew living under Roman rule. He may have been discriminated against because of His

²⁰ John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life, A Theology of Lordship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 668.

²¹ Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2021).

²² *Ibid.*, 111.

²³ *Ibid.*, emphasis original.

connection with Nazareth (John 1:46) and doubts were raised about the legitimacy of His birth (John 8:41; cf. 8:48).²⁴ But responding with forgiveness, He never allowed this system of oppressor-victim relations to define Him, and He concluded His mission by giving unsolicited forgiveness to those who nailed Him to the cross: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). “To triumph fully, evil needs two victories, not one. The first victory happens when an evil deed is perpetrated; the second victory, when evil is returned. After the first victory, evil would die if the second victory did not infuse it with new life.”²⁵ Thus, by making a universal provision for forgiveness on the cross and by forgiving His enemies, Jesus “disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it” (Col 2:15). Jesus showed that the “mercy of forgiveness exceeds the justice of payment,”²⁶ and thus gave us a most effective tool to fight against prejudice, discrimination, favoritism, tribalism, casteism, and racial intolerance. As Martin Luther so well expressed,

a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbor. Otherwise, he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbor through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbor. Yet he always remains in God and in his love.²⁷

Hope

First of all, let us bear in mind that as long as the world lasts, it will be shaped by national and racial identity, and thus prejudice, discrimination, favoritism, tribalism, casteism, and racial intolerance will remain constant threats to God’s people. These issues are not like a virus that can be eradicated with a vaccine. Because they are so much part of our sinful human nature, we will always be tempted by these sinful thoughts and have to deliberately submit our thoughts and actions to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:5). Neither can the horrible ethnic cleansing and other horrors that have been committed throughout history be made right by human endeavors. Some injustices may be mitigated in the present, but the lives that have been lost, cultures destroyed, and families torn apart cannot be compensated by human justice. For this reason, to

²⁴ Andreas J. Köstenberger, *John*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 265.

²⁵ Volf, 9.

²⁶ “Conclusion,” in Mitchell.

²⁷ Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 31, *Career of the Reformer I* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1999), 371.

cope with the evils of ethnic prejudice and racism, it is necessary to explore the eschatological hope, which lies at the core of Seventh-day Adventists' distinctive message to the world.

This hope is encapsulated in the three angels' messages (Rev 14:6–13), which emphasize the eternal gospel that flows from the cross and is addressed to “every nation, tribe, tongue, and people” (Rev 14:6). These messages encapsulate the gospel of God's love, which invites persons from every people group to accept His offer of salvation and form one people united under the lordship of Jesus.²⁸

The first angel makes a global call to worship God that is motivated by judgment and predicated on creation. Judgment is often considered one of God's less dignified activities. But judgment is an indispensable component of the gospel proclamation. Judgment is God's response to the cry for justice that springs from intelligent beings when sin or injustice is committed. According to Scripture, judgment begins with the people of God (1 Pet 4:17) but eventually encompasses the entire world (Rev 20). The Bible makes clear that the passage of time will not cancel the wrongs that cruel oppressors have inflicted upon their victims. Evildoers will not prevail because God has not forgotten their victims. The righteous Judge will bring to light every wrong and punish each unrepentant sinner according to their evil deeds.

So, people must worship God because the hour of His judgment has come. But it is also important to note that worship must be rendered to God because He is the Creator. In this connection, it is also important to note that worship must be rendered to God because He is the Creator. And certainly, there is hardly anything more corrosive to racism and other evil prejudices than true worship; true worship unifies believers in a community of brothers and sisters around the Creator God. Significantly, the characterization of God in the first angel's message as the one “who made heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water” (Rev 14:7) reverberates with the Sabbath commandment, which refers to the Lord as the one “who made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them” (Exod 20:11). For this reason, worship as commanded in first angel's message must include the seventh-day Sabbath. As such, this special dimension of worship also fosters equality, solidarity, and unity. As expressed in the Decalogue, the Sabbath compels

us to accept and respect every person, whether rich or poor, black or white, as human

²⁸ For an in-depth exegetical and theological study of the three angels' messages (Rev 14:1–12), see Ángel Manuel Rodríguez, “The Closing of the Cosmic Conflict: Role of the Three Angels' Messages,” in *The Word*, ed. Artur Stele, vol. 2 (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, forthcoming).

beings created and redeemed by the Lord, the Sabbath breaks down and equalizes those social, racial, and cultural barriers which cause much tension and unrest in our society and consequently it makes it possible for the peace of Christ to dwell in our hearts.²⁹

After the first angel comes a second one proclaiming that Babylon has fallen. Throughout the Bible, Babylon stands in opposition to Jerusalem as the most formidable enemy of God's people. But as the historical Babylon was defeated, so the eschatological Babylon will fall. In Revelation, end-time Babylon represents apostate Christianity, which organizes itself into a confederacy of powers to oppose God in the final stages of the great controversy. Interestingly, Babylon is characterized, among other things, as an entity that along with the merchants of the earth profits from trading "bodies and souls of men" (Rev 18:13). Although the spiritual dimension seems to be at the foreground of this imagery, one should not forget that end-time Babylon stands ready to violate in concrete ways the dignity of human beings created in the image of God. So, the message that Babylon has fallen should alert us to not surrender to the values of Babylon. In other words, prejudice, discrimination, favoritism, tribalism, casteism, and racial intolerance are in line with fallen Babylon. In contrast, love and acceptance of different cultures and tribal affiliations in constant submission to God's character expressed in His law are in line with Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the city of inclusion. People from every nation, tribe, and tongue are invited to become citizens of Jerusalem. Speaking of Jerusalem, Psalm 87 beautifully expresses, "The Lord will record, When He registers the peoples: 'This *one* was born there'" (Ps 87:6).³⁰ This ideal will find its ultimate realization as "the nations" (Rev 21:24) join together in the new Jerusalem to worship the Lord. Thus, the conflict facing the church today must not be defined by race, ethnicity, or social status, but by a clear standing on the side of Jerusalem in opposition to Babylon.

Next, the third angel follows suit, warning against worshipping the beast and receiving its mark (Rev 14:9–11). From the fact that the seventh-day Sabbath is God's seal located at the center of the Decalogue as memorial of creation (Exod 20:9–11) and redemption (Deut 5:12–15), it follows that the mark of the beast must be Sunday, the counterfeit Sabbath promoted by false Christianity as a sign of its authority. This is significant in light of the fact that worship is one of

²⁹ Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness: A Theological Study of the Good News of the Sabbath for Today*, Biblical Perspectives 2 (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1998), 242.

³⁰ H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1959), 621–626; C. Hassell Bullock, *Psalms 73–150*, Teach the Text Commentary Series 2, ed. Mark L. Strauss and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2017), 112–118.

the major points of contention in the battle between good and evil. As clearly expressed by the third angel, the decision to receive the mark of the beast results in eternal destruction. So the message of the third angel shows that the line separating good from evil does not pass through social classes, ethnicities, or castes, but right between the Lamb and the beast.³¹ Ultimately, the only standing that matters is to whom one belongs.

In short, the three angels' messages are a proclamation of Christ's victory over evil. Thus, humanity has not been abandoned to the accidents of history. The Lamb of God entered the world and through His sacrificial death defeated the powers of Babylon. At the end of history God will finish the work He began in Christ. At the end of human history, only two categories of people will stand before God: "those who say to God, 'Thy will be done,' and those to whom God says, in the end, 'Thy will be done.'"³² Thus, by proclaiming this blessed hope, we make clear that in the light of God's offer of salvation, the future belongs to those who side with the Lamb.

Conclusion

To conclude, prejudice, discrimination, favoritism, tribalism, casteism, and racial intolerance all hinder true mission and are a stumbling block for the advancement of the eternal gospel. They do not reflect the creation view of humanity nor the salvific love of Jesus and the universal appeal of God's message of grace.

Missionaries ought to address issues of ethnic and racial prejudice from a robust biblical perspective that entails three major theological concepts: First, by reason of being created in the image of God, all humans are endowed with equal dignity and worth. Although ethnic and national identities are affirmed within the diversity of God's creation, the fact that all humans bear God's image makes us all children of God. Second, Jesus Christ broke the walls of separation between humans. The cross is a great equalizer, showing that every human is a sinner in need of forgiveness, for whom Christ gave His life. Therefore, every individual must be treated in ways that respect the dignity placed on them by the blood of Christ. Third, our

³¹ This is a paraphrase of Aleksandr Isaevich Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago* (London: Vintage Digital, 2018): "the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either—but right through every human heart—and through all human hearts."

³² C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce: A Dream* (New York: HarperOne, 2001), 75.

eschatological hope stands as a source of strength and encouragement. Even in the face of intractable challenges of injustice, cruelty, and violence in the world, we can harbor the blessed hope that the great controversy will find its resolution in the final obliteration of evil. The wrongs of the world will be made right, and God will establish a new creation based on love.

Therefore, let us be and make disciples whose primary identity is in Christ, making all other allegiances and identities secondary. We may constructively engage our own societies without forgetting that our strongest allegiance is to the people of God across ethnic, tribal, cultural, national, and political boundaries.

Questions

1. The issues of prejudice, discrimination, favoritism, tribalism, casteism, and racial intolerance can be approached from a biblical/theological perspective or from a social science perspective, among others. What are the main advantages of a biblical-theological approach from a missiological perspective?
2. Do you agree with the proposition that the three angels' messages inform an approach to evil discrimination that can make mission more effective?
3. Is the eschatological hope proclaimed by the Seventh-day Adventist Church a message capable of changing peoples' lives for the better here and now, or an escapist theology that prevents people from concrete action for the betterment of society? Explain and justify your answer.