

DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

A THEORY BASE AND MISSION-SENDING MODEL FOR THE SOUTH AMERICAN DIVISION OF THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Problem

Effective missionary work depends on a combination of three equally indispensable preconditions: (1) a body of committed and adaptable personnel who are prepared to transmit to another cultural group the relevance of the Christian message; (2) an organization that is equipped to recruit, train, fund, send, and care for such a missionary force; and (3) sustained access to international unreached areas. Throughout its history, the missionary movement has been based on these three factors and the absence of one or more of them has resulted in less than optimum achievement and has sometimes led to failure. In 2014, the South American Division of Seventh-day Adventists decided to actively engage in the worldwide mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church by sending twenty-five families to serve as frontline missionaries in different countries in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Even though the South American Division can positively identify the first and third requirements, it lacks the second.

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to provide a mission-sending model that will enable the South American Division to engage in cross-cultural missionary work as a growing and continuous activity.

Methodology

This dissertation analyzes biblical and theological principles, historical lessons, and successful practices of current mission-sending organizations in order to provide the South American Division with a mission-sending model that fits the organizational structure and theological presuppositions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. First, an attempt was made to provide a theological basis for the establishment of mission-sending organizations by conducting an analysis of the *missio Dei* through a literature review, observing the missionary-sending nature of God, and the missionary-sending nature of the church as fundamental principles of how God operates in His universal mission. Moreover, an exegetical study of Acts 3:1–3 pointed out the Holy Spirit's initiative in leading the Antioch church to cross-cultural missionary work, as well as to the formation of missionary bands, marking the beginning of the church's engagement in organized mission. Second, historical research

of mission structure manifestations in different epochs, formats, and locations was conducted through an analysis of primary and secondary sources. Five movements were observed: the Celtic Christian communities, the Waldensians, the Moravians, mission societies, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The purpose was to extract applicable missionary lessons. Factors such as the role of the leaders of these movements, beliefs, practices, training, and mission strategies were considered. Third, ethnographic research was conducted through observation, questions based on participant observation, and interviews. A description and analysis of the functioning of current successful mission-sending organizations in Europe, the United States, and Brazil was conducted in order to present best practices related to key aspects of the execution of missionary work.

Conclusions

The study suggested a mission-sending model for the South American Division that was based on three fundamental characteristics of mission-sending structures since the apostolic times: (1) flexibility; (2) decentralization; and (3) a self-reproductive system. In addition, special characteristics of the division, such as (1) number of members, (2) number of institutions, (3) finances, (4) qualified workers, and (5) youth were considered in order to orient the model. The suggested model proposed that, while the South American Division should remain the official voice of missionary work within its territory, universities, unions, and conferences of the division whose leaders felt called to engage in cross-cultural missionary activity should establish Mission Institutes. These mission-sending organizations will be equipped to perform all the crucial tasks related to the execution of mission work: (1) an organized structure, (2) recruiting, (3) training, (4) providing mission opportunities, and (5) funding. The envisioned Mission Institutes are expected to observe the fundamental principle of partnership, being both sending organizations as well as receiving communities, in order that the blessings of the worldwide church can be received back in South America.