

America (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Nebraska Teachers College 1967).

- 7 Boyd R. McCandless, *Children and Adolescents; Behavior and Development* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1961), pp. 174-205.

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In this comment on Werkman's article I shall concern myself with the problem of the effects of Seventh-day Adventist children being reared in a missionary family. One can hardly consider the plight of some of these children without making a few remarks about the parents and their reasons for accepting a missionary "call."

There is the mature couple responding to a deep religious conviction that they can serve God and the church most effectively in a foreign mission post. Unfortunately some answer the call for a variety of pathological reasons including, among others, "peer inferiority." These people feel inferior and "put down" when among their own peers, but they can feel competent and effective when working with persons they feel are their socioeconomic inferiors. Then there is the opportunist who needs a mission hitch to earn his missionary badge and collect a supply of mission stories in the hope of rising faster up the organizational ladder toward a position in the General Conference. And there are social misfits — the immature, the borderline psychotic, and others. But this is a comment on an article about the *children* of missionaries.

The child of an American Seventh-day Adventist missionary must often survive a combination of severe emotional impacts that frequently result in serious psychiatric problems. First, he suffers the shock of being separated from his own culture and having a foreign culture imposed on him. Second, he is exposed either to an artificial "compound culture" — an island of Westernism in a foreign sea — or to the native population, which imposes a different set of problems. Third, having made necessary adjustments to this new way of life in his early years, the child then faces a number of pos-

sibilities in his formal education. At different times he may find himself (a) taught at home by his mother with lessons from correspondence school, (b) in a special compound school for Westerners, (c) in a school for both Westerners and nationals, (d) sent away from home to attend a distant school in the same or another foreign country, to live with relatives or friends in the homeland, or to reside in a boarding academy or college. Fourth, there is a cultural shock to both parents and child when the family terminates its missionary role and returns home.

Erik Erikson identifies the various stages in personality development in his book, *Childhood and Society*. The growth of basic trust begins in the first year, followed in the preschool child by the development of autonomy and personal initiative. The first six years are the most crucial in the development of personality, character, and thus emotional health. In these years the strong foundations are laid that result in the formation of the well-adjusted, mature person — or conversely, the weak foundations of the unhappy, neurotic, antisocial, or psychopathic person.

The missionary child may very well face growing up in the crucial years in a family with a father absent for extended periods of time, a mother who turns the child over to the care of a native “nana” while she nurses her own misery because she is trapped in a compound with people she doesn’t get along with and with strange “natives” (and a stranger language) with whom she is less able to cope. In a situation like this, it is difficult for the child to develop trust, autonomy, and initiative. Because they are missionaries and are doing “the Lord’s work,” families attempt to conceal frustrations and anger; but under these pressures whole families disintegrate emotionally and must come home short of a full mission term. Following their return from mission service, many missionary parents have had to seek psychiatric help for themselves and (in some cases) for one or all of their children.

What can be done to protect these people from the cultural and emotional shock they may suffer? A few suggestions follow.

1. A thorough psychological study of Seventh-day Adventist missionaries and their children should be made to ascertain if there is indeed a difference in the mental health of missionary children and the children of Adventist parents who have never left the States.
2. Psychological testing and psychiatric evaluation of missionary applicants should screen out the emotionally unfit.
3. Only couples with no children, or with grown children, might be accepted for mission appointment.

4. A thorough program of education in the language and culture of the country of their appointment should be provided for mission families.

5. If parents with small preschool children are needed, only those able and willing to provide healthy parental guidance and supervision should be accepted.

6. Missionary parents should return to their country of origin when the oldest child reaches school age, and they should remain home until the youngest child finishes the twelfth grade.

Admittedly this is a controversial list of requirements and is not to be considered complete. Too many mission children have needed psychiatric treatment. We ought to define the problems and then bend our efforts to the preservation of the mental health of these mission families.

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I am writing these comments from the viewpoint of one who spent seven years (age four to eleven) as a child in the Congo, then seventeen more as an adult in East Africa, always in primitive areas. These thoughts are based on observation of the children of government officials, of other missionaries, and of our own in this situation.

In general, I would agree with Werkman's article. Especially for the newcomer, there is a dangerous ignorance of local customs which might involve the care of the child. If the parent could, and would, develop friendly communication with an intelligent national neighbor, this ignorance could be avoided.

The missionary's motivation for going overseas, it is to be hoped, is different from that of businessmen, those in military service, and those in foreign service. Most go with a deep concern for the spiritual and physical welfare of those whom they go to serve. Unfortunately, there are always the few who are there for adventure, a position of authority they might not achieve at home, or, very rarely, because they simply did not fit in anywhere else and were shunted out of sight.

A warm, loving family, with a mother who stays at home with the chil-

dren and a father who tries to spend some relaxed time with them, usually produces happy, well-adjusted youngsters, regardless of geography. When the mother is "busy doing good," flying from one worthy project to the next, the father is carrying the responsibilities of several people, and the children are in the care of a babysitter or "ayah," obviously, but for the grace of God, the home will have problems.

In mission life there is a tendency for the mother to fulfill her work capabilities — from the pressure of necessity because of lack of staff, or from the sheer joy of leaving the monotony of housework and child care in the hands of servants. The father is usually in a position of leadership and heavy responsibility as builder, teacher, maintenance expert, medicine man (whether or not he is prepared in that area), and peacemaker. Often his sweet temper has been used up before he gets home, and thus his infrequent encounters with the children are sometimes unpleasant. Naturally, this adds up to the child's feeling more at ease with his nursemaid, who never denies a wish or punishes him.

Because of the respect and fear of authority the servants and local children usually have, the foreign child is often treated like a small god, his every need anticipated and his wildest wishes fulfilled. It doesn't take long for him to become an obnoxious little tyrant who will have a good deal of trauma when he tries to fit into a competitive society.

In another area, the mission child's life can be badly damaged by the destruction of his confidence in church leaders. Especially in the mission situation, his whole world is centered around "the work" of the church. When parents (and their friends whom he respects) criticize and dissect the faults of the organization and its leaders from the top down, he loses his faith not only in those leaders but often in the church and in God as well. If he has already had his parents replaced by servants, his loss is very deep, and the ensuing insecurity causes all sorts of emotional problems.

On a more positive note, there are advantages for the child who is raised in a Christ-centered, loving home, with mother in charge and both parents honoring God and blessing the people for whom they are working by their kind, unselfish service. He gets a longer vision of the world — its needs, delights, problems, and challenges. He sees at a closer vantage point the effects of the gospel, and often he is inspired to go as a missionary himself.

In Africa, it was a rule-of-thumb that children should return to the home country, or at least to civilization, by age eleven. I'm inclined to agree, because the adjustment of even the best-raised children becomes more difficult with each year. If they come back to a relatively small, unsophisticated

school situation in a country setting, there are fewer problems. In a larger school they are plagued by their feelings of being "out of it." Their accent is amusing, their clothes are wrong, they are not familiar with the games, their values and outlook on life are totally different, and they miss the slower pace of most foreign lands. The social adjustment can be heartbreaking. By the teens, most of the circles of friends are pretty tightly formed. The new child goes through a period of feeling rejected, an object of charitable politeness, and then often withdraws until he can reshape himself to fit an acceptable pattern. This period seems to be the hardest on girls. If the child has been attending a school where there are others of his country and the school subjects are along the same lines as he will find when he goes "home," the adjustment is not quite so difficult.

Given a home where the parents love and respect God, each other, those in authority, and the people whom they are serving, a mission child has no reason for having *more* problems than his "home" counterpart. They will just be different problems. If the mother is at home, she can teach respect for individuals of all races, be aware of his playmates and their activities, have the child help with the work, and see that he has a balanced love for his home country without being obnoxious about the host land. As he grows older and notices for himself the imperfections of church and mission leaders, he can be taught to understand that as long as there are wheat and tares growing together there will be human inconsistencies and mistakes — that there is no point in being disillusioned and discouraged about situations that are always present in the affairs of humanity.

Having seen many children from foreign countries who seem to adjust to life as well as, or better than, their homeland counterparts, I think that the family and circumstances (which includes schooling) have a great deal to do with any problems that arise.