

## Repairers of Broken Walls and Restorers of God's Justice | BY ZDRAVKO PLANTAK

Let me begin with the story of my mother's childhood. Angela was born in 1931 in Eastern Europe to two blind parents—a father blind from birth and a mother who had lost her sight as a consequence of Spanish flu at the end of the WWI. They raised Angela and her sister Victoria on their own which meant that Angela had to grow up quickly; her parents could not even teach her to walk. When she was three years old, Angela would go to the neighbors to fetch the milk that her mother would then give her to drink as her main diet. Her father was a teacher of Esperanto and her mum was a poet. They also owned a little brush making company; and eventually they got a street corner shop that raised them out of abject poverty to survival levels.

As a seven-year-old, Angela noticed that everyone in school had ironed clothes except her. So she learned to iron her and her sister's clothes in order to not stick out or be different from others. She learned Hungarian, Modern German as well as old Gothic, Esperanto, and Serbo-Croatian languages to the point that she could continue self-educating until the present day.

Her school was planning to send her to Budapest to study at the University as an exceptional child; but the Second World War interrupted this adventure and she was instead sent to Austria with her family as a refugee during the Russian surges in 1944. During the train journey that lasted seven days, the Russians and the Germans bombed the train several times. In one instance, God placed her in a position to save the entire train of refugees. The train stopped in Mursko Sredisce, which is now a part of Slovenia, and, while they were waiting, Angela went to play in the woods nearby. A partisan woman with a machine gun approached her and told her to go and tell the train driver to let another train go ahead of them. That intervention saved their entire train of refugees because the first train



was bombed and many perished in the horrific train crash.

Until the end of the war Angela was "safe" in the refugee camp in the Austrian Alps. However, the lack of food and clothing meant that the entire family was starving and freezing. One day, some of the refugee children went sledding and skiing in the Alps. Even though she was barefoot, she was having lots of fun; then some people took pity on her and gave her a pair of shoes so she could play in the alpine snow in freezing temperatures.

In July 1945, the Löesching family was sent back to former Yugoslavia; and they ended up for eighteen months in a camp for German *Folksdojcers* in Gakovo, a foul place not unlike the concentration camps of the previous war years. From a beginning population of 18,000, only 9,000 survived this death trap. They were treated with hatred and contempt physically, emotionally, and mentally.

Angela contracted stomach typhus first. Though she survived, her father died there in the camp from the same stomach typhus. Angela, just under fifteen years old, had to

prepare her daddy's body by wrapping it in a sheet, putting it into a wheelbarrow, and taking it to a pit with 500 other bodies for mass burial. She actually climbed down after the corpse to sort it with the other bodies and lay it out in an orderly manner. In the blackness of that night, she then had to struggle for several hours to climb the wet, steep soil out of the pit to avoid being buried alive.

After that, Angela contracted an epidemic typhus, with excruciating headaches that would not stop for days. Her mother also suffered from typhus at the same time. Then her eleven-year-old sister Victoria got a disease called "water sickness" and was swelling until she died in horrific pain after five weeks of suffering. During the last stages of her sister's illness, Angela developed a third typhus called "Pjegavac" or what is now known as Scrub Typhus or *Boutenmeuse Fever*. This one was the worst of the three; and she had to go into isolation from which out of 361 patients only two survived. She was one of the two. However, on the night Victoria was dying Angela could hear her mum call for her to come and be with them; but Angela was delirious and could not stand up to go to her younger sister.<sup>1</sup> The next day Angela had to pull herself out of bed to go and bury her sister. In addition, she buried a neighbor who, out of desperation, had killed her newborn twins with needles and then committed suicide.

Three times, Angela avoided being sent to Siberia by sleeping in a chicken shed or inside the bread-baking oven or by hiding all night in the top of a leafy, oak tree. And that is all before Angela married my dad, when she was just two months shy of seventeen.

My dad evangelized to her and her mum, and she became a Seventh-day Adventist. And somehow, miraculously, she felt that this Adventist faith became a balm to heal her open wounds, *that* faith pregnant with hope and shalom like leaves for the healing of the nations soothed her open sores and bleeding wounds which were so deep that, even though healed, they continue hurting till today.

No, it was not suddenly a brilliant and rosy life. A year after they married and six weeks after my mum delivered my sister, my dad was called into a three-year army service to an unknown territory over 600 miles away on the Macedonian, Greek, and Bulgarian border. This was 1948 and the tensest time of the Stalin-Tito conflict when Yugoslavia refused Russia control of the Balkans. And my mum was just shy of eighteen when she was left penniless with a newborn baby and a blind

mother after the Great War and with a husband who-knows-where in the army for thirty-six months.

So, she took her newborn baby on her back, went to the *kolkhoz* of the Communist agricultural company called *Ekonomija* and, falling on her knees, begged for work so that they could have some food. And yes, she worked with a small baby on her back until my dad returned from the service.

The Adventist church helped her at that time by giving her milk for the baby and providing her with wood to burn during the bitterly cold winters. Our church community, with all its faults, became the body of Christ. It became in a small but tangible way what Isaiah describes in chapter 58: "a well-watered garden, a spring whose waters never fail...repairer of broken walls and restorer" of social justice. Indeed, this became the Sabbath of delight for a broken, young girl who experienced a community that acted as leaves for the healing of wounds—a community, described in Isaiah 58, that practiced the fasting that was loosing the chains of injustice, untying the cords of yoke, sharing food with the hungry, providing the poor with shelter, clothing the naked, spending itself on behalf of others and satisfying the mental, emotional, and yes, even physical and material needs of the oppressed.

Why this personal story? I believe that our stories shape us; and they give us theological center and meaning. If Angela can be healed out of the utmost despair and pain of the horrors of this sinful world—which are almost unimaginable to my generation—and if she could persist in raising all three of her children (and four grandchildren) to work in Seventh-day Adventist ministry today, then God's restoration and reparation of the world are real. And that is a point that I would like to share with you today.

## Prophetic Living

I have argued elsewhere<sup>2</sup> that today's church must have a much more "prophetic role" in the present age and that looking more closely at the biblical prophets would give us a much needed clarification as to how that prophetic role must be accomplished: less through our apocalyptic and time-line warnings and chart-ticking (in)securities, and more in the way that biblical prophets accomplished their tasks—through imaginative visioning and social activism in the socio-ethical, political<sup>3</sup> and economic sense, especially as they fought for the poor, the alien, the widow and the orphan, therefore for the least of the social, political, and economic strata that suffered the worst injustice. Further-

more, I have made in several places a strong call for our two major theological tenets—the Sabbath<sup>4</sup> and soon coming of Christ—to become significantly more socio-ethically relevant; and I have argued that the richness of this theological heritage should give us much greater interest in the “other,” whose human dignity, human rights, and human aspirations should be supported. Our Sabbatical attitude should include not only weekly Sabbaths that equalize us all before God but also annual Sabbaths that specifically call for social justice and are a moral call towards that great jubilee year that not only Levitical and Deuteronomistic texts point to, but that Jesus of Nazareth furthermore utilizes in explaining His mission in the inaugural messianic proclamation.<sup>5</sup> And the teaching of the Second Coming is indeed about the hope that we, in the time between the first and the last coming, proclaim not only by evangelism but by occupying until Jesus returns, as referenced at the end of His Olivet Discourse, by doing to the least of His sisters and brothers in social and moral terms what we would do if it was Jesus Himself on the receiving end of those actions.<sup>6</sup>

### Eschatological Living as Prophetic Living

However, I suggest one further point with which I have wrestled for several years now and through which I have, I believe, found a more helpful and satisfying conclusion. So far, I have been calling for more imaginative prophetic living; and I continue to think that this is a special calling for any prophetic community, especially a remnant prophetic community.<sup>7</sup> However, now I also advocate for what I want to term “eschatological living.” The seer in the book of Revelation<sup>8</sup> receives a vision of how that new world looks, directing our eyes to the lush garden with plenty of water springing and flowing freely and energizing the trees that give fruits in frequent cycle and produce leaves that are so therapeutic and homeopathic that they serve for the healing of the nations. My difficulty with this picture was that I always thought of it in terms of post-eschaton and therefore did not try to reconcile it with the invitation to the moral community of Christ here and now. And yet, eschatological living urges us to take seriously the aspirations of the New Jerusalem and project it to the eschatological living today; *that* living that is informed by what is soon to come.<sup>9</sup> In some way, as South African scholar Adrio König argued in his remarkable book *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology: Towards a*

*Christ-Centered Approach*, our view must reject on one hand “a completed and [on another] a one-sidedly futuristic eschatology in favor of an eschatology in the process of being realized.” He goes on to suggest that “full eschatological reality requires... a realized eschatology (‘for us’), an eschatology being realized (‘in us’), and an eschatology yet-to-be-realized (‘with us’).”<sup>10</sup> König then unpacks what he means by this middle stage of “eschatology being realized” between the first and the second coming of Christ:

*In the New Testament, God’s children are sometimes called strangers and pilgrims in the world (Heb 11:13ff.; 1 Pet. 2:11). It is even said that their citizenship (Phil. 3:20–21) and treasure (Matt. 6:20) are in heaven, and that they aspire to a realm above (Col. 3:2). But this estrangement between God’s children and the world is due to the fact that God’s children are already (at least partly) renewed, while the earth is still old and “lies in the power of the evil one” (1 John 5:19). Our alien status on earth is therefore temporary. It implies not that we are destined for some place other than earth, but rather that the old, un-renewed earth does not suit us yet. That is why the expectation of a new earth is a living hope for the faithful.<sup>11</sup>*

And that is why, having been born into a new life<sup>12</sup> and renewed by the living waters of the Holy Spirit,<sup>13</sup> we are already living the life that we are hoping for and implementing the principles of the kingdom of grace that we soon expect to become a new earth and a New Jerusalem reality in the kingdom of glory.<sup>14</sup> Jürgen Moltmann expresses it succinctly, “Time after the [first] coming of Christ must be seen as ‘fulfilled but not yet completed time.’ It is no longer the time of pure expectation, nor is it as yet the eternal present of the time of completion. That is why Christians live between the ‘now already’ and the ‘not yet.’”<sup>15</sup> And this “future-made-present” creates new conditions for possibilities in history; it becomes the ultimate in the penultimate, and creates a reflection of the possibilities of the “future of time in the midst of time.”<sup>16</sup> N. T. Wright, in his recent book *Surprised by Hope*, elaborates for several hundred pages on this same concept. Wright speaks about

*... a sense of continuity as well as discontinuity between the present world (and the present state), and the future, whatever it shall be, with the result that what we do in the present matters enormously... It was people who believed robustly in the resurrection... who stood up against Caesar in the first centuries of*

*Christian era. A piety that sees death as the moment of “going home at last,” the time, when we are “called to God’s eternal peace” has no quarrel with power-mongers who want to carve up the world to suit their own ends. Resurrection, by contrast, has always gone with a strong view of God’s justice and of God as the good creator. Those twin beliefs give rise not to a meek acquiescence to injustice in the world but to a robust determination to oppose it.<sup>17</sup>*

I have become fully convinced that the biblical imagery of the leaves that are given for the healing of the nations in Revelation 22:2 are indeed leaves that must be applied to our eschatological living here and now. And I have no doubt that the image is linked to previous passages in the prophetic and wisdom literature and to several other metaphors used to call a community of God-fearers to a prophetic living laden with social justice and concerned with the under-privileged and the most vulnerable.

Echoes of the wisdom poetry of Psalm 1 penetrate the vision of the seer: “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever [the righteous] does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.” The righteousness that we strive for in this life is similarly described as the final righteousness of the new world order that God establishes when His will is finally enacted on earth as it is already fully realized in heaven. And the tree in Psalm 1 whose “leaves do not wither,” seems to bear some connection to the original Edenic Tree of Life. “As the tree situated in the garden of God served to confer everlasting life to the primal couple, so the psalmist’s tree is the sign and symbol” of blessedness and happiness for the individual. Similarly, in wisdom literature elsewhere<sup>18</sup> and in Proverbs 11:30 and 15:4, texts explicitly associate the tree of life with righteousness and the healing properties of the speech. Willem A. VanGemeren indicates in his commentary on the book of Psalms that “Psalm 1 is a wisdom psalm, and shares many features common to the Book of Proverbs.”<sup>19</sup> On numerous occasions in the book of Proverbs, righteousness and wickedness are described with powerful imagery, and so when we think about the word pair “righteous/wicked,” the terms that are such essential “elements of the psalmic vocabulary,”<sup>20</sup> we cannot neglect the contrast that Proverbs 29:7 paints about these two



groups: “The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.”<sup>21</sup> So, the righteous that are planted like trees with deep roots and nourishing supplies of ever-flowing water are indeed the kind of people that care for the socially and economically disadvantaged. They are not like Isaiah’s “oak tree with fading leaves, like a garden without water” that will be so dry it will burn “with no one to quench the fire.”<sup>22</sup> If tree symbolism in Psalms, as William P. Brown suggests, “underscores YHWH’s creative power to bless, recalling the shalom of the primordial garden,”<sup>23</sup> it appears that the prophet Isaiah develops this metaphor further and adds additional parallel similes to paint a fuller theological canvass of the community that is watered by God and consequently produces God’s justice and enacts God’s righteousness.

So, in Isaiah 1, the community that is called to repentance from meaningless worship and evil Sabbath assemblies (vs. 10–15) because they do not “seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (vs. 17, 22–23), become “like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water,” so dry that it burns without being able to be halted (vs. 30–31). The anger of God is against those who have ruined God’s vineyard (God’s people, Is. 5:7) because “the plunder of the poor is in [their] houses [because they are crushing God’s people] and grinding the faces of the poor” (Is. 3:14–15). As a viticulturalist and botanist, God plants His vineyard on a fertile hillside, takes care of it and expects its fruit to reflect the gardener’s loving touch and restorative powers. However, the spiritual vineyard and

“the garden of his delight” (Is. 5:7) lack social justice and do distressful things. They are so materially possessed and commercially driven that they add “house to house and join field to field till no space is left,” and they stay alienated and alone in their “fine mansions” (vs. 7–8.). So a shoot comes from the stump of Jesse and from his root a Branch bears fruit. The Spirit of the Lord is on the Branch in order to judge the needy with righteousness and to give to the poor of the earth with justice (Is. 11:1–2; 4–5). “Righteous branch’ wields power to implement justice and, thereby, bring about peace and prosperity for his people”<sup>24</sup> and for the nations.<sup>25</sup> And “a remnant [is called to once more]... take root below and bear fruit above” (Is. 37:31–32), an invitation to deep rootedness that results in fruit-bearing trees and ever-green branches.

Isaiah’s most elaborate explanation of these metaphors is in chapters 58 and 61. Here is again a reminder of how in a sun-scorched land YHWH satisfies the need of His community and strengthens their frame. He makes His Sabbath-keepers to “be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins, and will raise up the age-old foundations, you will be called repairers of broken walls and restorers of streets with dwelling.”<sup>26</sup> Just like the tree in the New Jerusalem that expresses God’s magnificence, Isaiah 61 describes the community of believers who “will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated.”<sup>27</sup> This indeed is the splendid picture of the community of faith serving as the leaves for the healing of the world, as those who loose the chains of injustice and share their food with the hungry, provide the poor vagabonds with shelter, and clothe the naked.<sup>28</sup> Their light will break forth like the dawn and their healing will quickly appear. And the healing of the well-watered garden and the spring whose waters never fail of verses 7 and 11 is identified in terms of “spending yourself on behalf of the hungry and satisfying the needs of the oppressed” in vs. 10<sup>29</sup> just the way the sheep on the right hand at the entrance of the celestial Jerusalem are told that they have done to Christ Himself, who was on the receiving end with “the least of his brothers and sisters,” as described at the end of His Olivet Discourse in Matthew 25. Isaiah’s called community is, therefore, not dissimilar to Jeremiah’s righteous

person who “will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green.”<sup>30</sup> Nor is it unlike Jesus’ description in John’s Gospel that “whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, the living water will flow from within him.”<sup>31</sup> Nor is it unlike Ezekiel’s vision<sup>32</sup> “of a great river [that] is depicted issuing from the temple to fructify the land”<sup>33</sup> that the seer of Patmos replicates with modifications in Revelation 22.

In summary, my argument is this: “eschatological living” of the present-day followers of Christ is motivated by the vision of the seer of Patmos, so that we do not passively wait for Jesus to return to the earth and establish a just society in which flowing waters nourish lush gardens and trees that produce fruit and healing leaves, but rather we become in the present moment the hands and feet of Christ and act in such a way that we already do the bidding of that embodiment of Christ, of that well watered garden, of that arboreal imagery that the poet and the prophet and the seer boldly use, of that lush vineyard that is not scorched by the strong Mediterranean sun. We act here and now as the righteous green-leaf trees that care for the justice for the poor. We are called today to be watered by the Holy Spirit that flows from under the temple of Ezekiel’s prophecy—the temple that we no longer need and will no longer need in the new Jerusalem because Jesus became our temple after the first Easter. We therefore, with the help of the Spirit, become streams of ever-flowing waters of justice; and God accomplishes through us reparation of the broken communities and restoration and rebuilding of the much-needed justice.<sup>34</sup> In simple terms, our prophetic calling and prophetic living must also become our eschatological living.

In what way will I become a leaf for healing in the ailing national and international community today?<sup>35</sup> Will it be as a leaf of peacemaking in the war-hungry world of imperial domination and military obsession,<sup>36</sup> Will I be a leaf of justice to the millions who are voiceless and need our voice and our advocacy, or a leaf for the fifth of the world population that is barely existing in abject poverty?<sup>37</sup> Will I be a leaf to advocate basic health access to the poor and uninsured,<sup>38</sup> or a green leaf to the alien and immigrant who need compassion and support? Will I actually be a leaf that heals the environment which has become so polluted that we all need to start acting like good stewards or like good

oxygen-producing trees on the environment's behalf before it is too late to reverse the climate change.<sup>39</sup> Is it not time to take our health message to another level and start advocating for the greening of Adventism? Can we indeed become the restorers of brokenness and repairers of God's world, leaves for healing of God's justice and God's instruments of compassion before he finally makes the kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven—the most “powerful and revolutionary sentence we can ever say. The prayer seemed to be powerfully answered at the first Easter and will finally be answered fully when heaven and earth are joined in the New Jerusalem,”<sup>40</sup> at His soon coming.

The great Christian writer G. K. Chesterton once wrote: “If a small seed in the black earth can become such beautiful rose, think what the heart of a human being can become on its long journey to the stars.” In our present “eschatological living” we must live as resurrection people between Easter and the final day as indeed a sign of Easter and a foretaste of the final coming of Christ. As Steve Monsma suggested in a recent book, *Healing for a Broken World*, C.S. Lewis in his famous *Chronicles of Narnia* refers at various points to Aslan—the great lion who is a Christ figure—as being “on the move.” “In our world today Jesus Christ is on the move. He is real; he is present. His redeeming, reconciling, healing work is progressing. But he had also not yet come in his full power and glory. That lies in the future. Until that day Christians are called to be Christ's instruments for reconciliation and healing in a broken world.”<sup>41</sup>

At the closing program of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre in 2006, Robina Marie Winbush preached a sermon entitled “For the Healing of the Nations.” And I shall use her concluding questions to ask our community the same questions:

*God is transforming the world: Are you willing to be a leaf on the tree of life, whom God uses for the healing of the nations? Are you willing to resist bowing down to the temporal gods of exploitation and domination and allow your life and your churches to be used for the healing of the nations and transformation of the world? Remember that the power and strength to be a leaf does not belong to you. It is a result of being attached to the tree of life whose roots are watered by the river of life that flows from the throne of God and of the Lamb.*<sup>42</sup>



That God is “on the move” is clearly obvious in many stories that surround us. With my church members as a pastor and with my students as an educator, I have experienced again and again “God-on-the-move.” My mother's story is just one such example that God is healing individuals and through communities also the entire world. We all have our own stories of hurt and healing that we should do well to remember. There is no doubt that the hope that the seer of the Apocalypse presents to the reader in the last chapters of the Bible generates hope that has started penetrating God's world without it being an utopian hope without the final conclusion. Angela still hurts in terrible physical pains of arthritis and nerve damage that scream, “How long, O Lord?” Angela is not fully healed. And neither is our world fully healed. But, the Divine-On-The-Move has been healing the entire world with His grace and love and is willing to heal others even through us, the wounded healers of His beloved community. And we pray [and live eschatologically] that radical prayer of Jesus day by day: “Thy kingdom come and Thy will be done on earth as it is [already] in heaven”. ■

## Notes and References

1. As I spoke today on her 78th birthday, my mum told me that because of that inability to come and comfort her sister and her mum in the moments of her dying, terrible feelings of guilt persist until the present time.
2. Zdravko Plantak, *The Silent Church: Human Rights and Adventist Social Ethics*. (London: Macmillan Press and New York: St. Martins Press, 1998); “Adventist Basis for Human Rights”, *Spectrum*, ( Vol. 27., (1999), pp.

16–29; “A People of Prophecy: Recovering the Biblical Role of the Prophets”, in *The Peacemaking Remnant: Essays and Historical Documents*, Edited by Douglas Morgan, (Silver Spring, Maryland: Adventist Peace Fellowship, 2005), pp. 21–34.; and “The Role of the Biblical Prophets: ADRA in the Midst of the Prophetic Community”, *Adventist Development and Relief Agency International Reflections: A Journal for Study and Reflection on Development Issues from a Christian Perspective*, Vol. 1, Issue 1., pp. 33–48.

3. Political theology not that is politicizing or getting involved into party politics but a theology of the market place or what is also know by the phrase “public theology.”

4. Zdravko Plantak, “There Should Be No Poor”, *Adventist Review*, (2002), Vol. 179, No. 44., pp. 10–11. [1610–1611].

5. See, for example, Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25. Also compare with Jesus’ announcement of “the year of the Lord’s favor”, in his Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4:18–21.

6. A similar point was often raised by Mother Theresa who claimed that she could never have worked in the slums of Calcutta with the poorest of the poor if she did not think that when she was washing the sores of the lepers or holding a dying child that she was actually doing this to Jesus.

7. See further on this in Zdravko Plantak, “A Prophetic Community Today: Imaginative Visionaries and Social Activists for the Third Millennium”, *Exploring the Frontier of Faith: Festschrift in Honour of Dr. Jan Paulsen - Congratulatory Edition*, Edited by Reinder Bruinsma and Borge Schantz, (Lueneburg: Advent-Verlag, 2010).

8. Revelation 21 and 22. I shall focus my thoughts to the idea expressed particularly in Revelation 22:2.

9. See further helpful discussion on this point in Charles Scriven, *The Promise of Peace: Dare to Live the Advent Hope*, (Nampa and Oshawa: Pacific Press, 2009), pp. 20–33 and 72–84. The similar point was raised by Sigve K.Tonstad at the 2009 meetings of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies, in his paper, “For the Healing of the Nations.” Tonstead concluded, “In this text [Rev 22:2] the healing that belongs to the lush land of the future has broken in on the arid land of the present.” (p. 9).

10. Adrio König, *The Eclipse of Christ in Eschatology: Towards a Christ-Centered Approach*, (Grand Rapids: MI: William B. Eerdmans and London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1989), p. 147.

11. *Ibid.*, p. 236.

12. Romans 6:4 and many other New Testament texts on “new life,” “life in the Spirit,” being “in Christ,” etc.

13. Cf. John 7:38–40. Jurgen Moltmann suggests that through his Spirit “God now already sets present and past in the light of his eschatological arrival, an arrival which means the establishment of his eternal kingdom, and his indwelling in the creation renewed for that indwelling.” In *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 23.

14. These two phrases about the Kingdom of Grace and Kingdom of Glory are borrowed from Ellen G. White and are based on the biblical con-

cepts of the “Kingdom of God being at hand” and “Kingdom of God being in you.” See also more on the larger discussion regarding the theological richness of the debate in both the larger Christian as well as Adventist community on the concept of the kingdom of God and its two realities in Zdravko Plantak, *The Silent Church: Human Rights and Adventist Social Ethics*. (London: Macmillan Press and New York: St. Martins Press, 1998), pp. 168–184.

15. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), p. 11.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

17. N. T Wright, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, (New York: HarperOne, 2008), pp. 26–27. Wright, furthermore, suggests that “to work for that intermediate hope, the surprising hope that comes forward from God’s ultimate future into God’s urgent present, is not a distraction from the task of mission and evangelism in the present. It is central, essential, vital, and life-giving part of it.” (p. 192.) See also on this point in Scriven’s *The Promise of Peace*, where he suggests that if Jesus’ “was the root meaning of a faith lived in the light of hope, then radical hope required attention to the needs of today.” (p. 25) In other words, “... the future has present relevance—it colors my life right now.” (p. 76).

18. See, for example, Psalm 52 and Psalm 92:12–13.

19. Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms”, in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary with the New International Version: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, Volume 5, Frank E. Gaebelin, General Editor, (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan, 1991), p. 52.

20. Jams Luther Mays, *Psalms: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, (Luisville: John Knox, 1994), p. 46.

21. See further on this point in Zdravko Plantak, “Wisdom Tradition on Poverty”, *Adventist Development and Relief Agency International Reflections: A Journal for Study and Reflection on Development Issues from a Christian Perspective*, Vol. 1, Issue 1., pp. 48–65.

22. Isaiah 1:30–31.

23. William P. Brown, *Seeing the Psalms: a Theology of Metaphor*, (Luisville and London: John Knox. 2002), p. 74. Brown profoundly explores the significance of the metaphor of “tree” in Psalms and its significance at the beginning of the Psalter and compares it to other biblically significant passages throughout the Jewish scripture. See also last year’s AAR paper by Sylvia Keesmaat, “The Beautiful Creatures: Trees in the Biblical Story”, consequently published in *Theoetherjournal.com An Intersection of Theology and Culture*, at Mars Hill Graduate School, (July 16, 2009) found at <http://theoetherjournal.com/article.php?id=837>, (recovered on November 13, 2009).

24. *Ibid.*, p. 69.

25. Tonstad makes an important connections between Isaiah 11 and Revelation 22, especially in the context of the plural ‘nations’. See Sigve K. Tonstad, “For the Healing of the Nations”, Unpublished presentation,

ASRS, New Orleans, (November 20, 2009), pp. 5–7.

26. Isaiah 58:11–12.

27. Isaiah 61:3–4.

28. See excellent discussion on the justice and righteousness in Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets: An Introduction*, Volume 1. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), pp. 195–221 and Steve Monsma, *Healing for a Broken World: Christian Perspectives on Public Policy*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), pp. 46–61.

29. Similar metaphor abounds in the prophets and could be further explored in famous texts such as Amos 5:24 where “justice rolls on like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream.”

30. Jeremiah 17:8.

31. John 7:38. Verse 39 adds “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive,” further showing how the healing of the nations through the well watered gardens and trees rooted in God could and should give its effect in between Jesus’ first and the second coming. For the sake of the limits of this paper, the elements of both Jesus as our temple from whom the living waters flow, a conversation that is often heard when Ezekiel 43 is discussed theologically by Christian interpreters, and the role of the Holy Spirit in that process as Jesus sends the Spirit to be present with his followers after his resurrection are important themes that need to be further unpacked in a future study on eschatological pneumatology.

32. The theological implications of Ezekiel 47 continue to be debated from the perspective that the vision never came to fruition in a literal sense and is therefore either explained in the context of the first coming of Jesus who became the new “temple” and from whose midst the living waters (John 4) flow freely so that “fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will never wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.” (Ezekiel 47:12). On the other hand, despite some significant differences between the texts in Ezekiel and Revelation, one could interpret that Ezekiel’s prophecy refers to the post-eschaton Jerusalem and suggest that John the Revelator clearly applies this vision to the new earth when there will be no temple and Jesus will be our temple (Rev 21:22).

33. Brown, p. 68.

34. Scriven calls this kind of living “the practice of hope,” “a hope grand and daring enough to motivate adventurous action today.” *The Promise of Peace*, p. 77. See how this was wonderfully understood and then utilized in the early Adventist history as well described in two other presentations from the recent Adventist Society for Religious Studies meetings in New Orleans in November 2009. Douglas Morgan, “Identity Without Insularity: Lewis Sheafe, Matthew Strachan, and the Threeness of African American Adventists,” unpublished presentation, ASRS, New Orleans, (November 20, 2009); and Roy Branson, “Healing of the

Nations: Mission of the Adventist Pioneers,” unpublished presentation, ASRS, New Orleans, (November 19, 2009).

35. Cf. Sigve K. Tonstead, “For the Healing of the Nations,” Unpublished presentation, ASRS, New Orleans, (November 20, 2009). Tonstead’s argument about the ‘nations’ that he connects with Isaiah’s vision in chapter 11 is especially worth noting.

36. Cf. Douglas Morgan, Ed., *The Peacemaking Remnant: Essays and Historical Documents*, (Silver Spring, Maryland: Adventist Peace Fellowship, 2005) and Charles Scriven, *The Promise of Peace: Dare to Live the Advent Hope*, (Nampa and Oshawa: Pacific Press, 2009).

37. Cf. Zdravko Plantak, “Why Should the Poor Concern Us?,” *Adventist Review*, (Nov. 44, 2002), Vol. 179, pp. 26–30. [1658–1662].

38. See further on my reasoning about the need to create universal access to health-care in Zdravko Plantak, “Universal Access to Health Care and Religious Basis of Human Rights,” *Update*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (June 2005): 1–12. See also on a larger issue of Christian involvement with health-care in Hans-Jürgen Becken, “The Church as a Healing Community,” *Mission Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (1984), pp. 6–13. Most recently T. R. Reid, *The Healing of America: Global Quest for Better, Cheaper, and Fairer Health Care*, (The Penguin Press, 2009) and its review, LaVonne Neff, “It’s About Morality,” in *The Christian Century*, (November 3, 2009): 38–39.

39. See one of the best recent contribution on environmental ethics from a Christian perspective in Steven Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care*, (Grand rapids: Baker Academic, 2001).

40. Wright, p. 29.

41. Monsma, p. 42.

42. Found on <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/porto-alegre-2006/4-messages-other-statements-sermons/sermons/robina-marie-winbush-closing-sermon.html> (Retrieved November 13, 2009).

---

**Zdravko Plantak** is the 2009 president of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies and chairman of the religion department at Washington Adventist University, Takoma Park, Maryland. This is his Presidential Address 2009 at the Adventist Society for Religious Studies.

