TOWARD AN ADVENTIST THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL WITNESS: COVENANT-KEEPING IN THE "ALREADY-NOT YET"

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Abstract

This article explores selected implications of covenant-keeping for the church's social witness within the theological framework of the "already-not yet" kingdom of God. Drawing on the work of Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, I maintain that the "already-not yet" theological framework both energizes and provides boundaries for the church as it embodies its witness regarding relevant contemporary social issues. This position will be enriched by selected supporting examples from conversation partners such as Padilla DeBorst (social marginalization and poverty), McCaulley (racial and ethnic discrimination), Volf (peacemaking and reconciliation), Richter (environmental stewardship), Yong (disability), and Swinton (mental health). Further, I will conclude that the social witness of the church should be central to the Adventist theological ethos in particular, rather than positioned at its margins or as a supplementary aspect. These insights aim to encourage the church to more fully embrace its role as a covenantal community in today's social context.

Keywords: Church; Social witness; Social issues; Covenant-keeping; Already-not yet.

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RUMO A UMA TEOLOGIA ADVENTISTA DO TESTEMUNHO SOCIAL: FIDELIDADE À ALIANÇA NO "JÁ-AINDA NÃO"

Resumo

Este artigo explora implicações selecionadas da observância da aliança para o testemunho social da igreja dentro da estrutura teológica do reino de Deus na perspectiva "já-ainda-não". Baseando-me no trabalho de Miroslav Volf e Matthew Croasmun, sustento que a estrutura teológica do "já-ainda-não" tanto energiza quanto fornece limites para a igreja, à medida que incorpora seu testemunho em relação a questões sociais contemporâneas relevantes. Essa posição será enriquecida por exemplos de apoio selecionados de interlocutores como Padilla DeBorst (marginalização social e pobreza), McCaulley (discriminação racial e étnica), Volf (pacificação e reconciliação), Richter (gestão ambiental), Yong (deficiência) e Swinton (saúde mental). Além disso, concluirei que o testemunho social da igreja deve ser central para o ethos teológico adventista em particular, em vez de ser posicionado à margem ou como um aspecto suplementar. Essas percepções visam encorajar a igreja a abraçar mais plenamente seu papel como comunidade pactual no contexto social atual.

Palavras-chave: Igreja; Testemunho social; Questões sociais; Fidelidade à aliança; Já-ainda-não.

HACIA UNA TEOLOGÍA ADVENTISTA DEL TESTIMONIO SOCIAL: FIDELIDAD AL PACTO EN EL "YA-TODAVÍA NO"

Resumen

Este artículo explora algunas implicaciones del cumplimiento del pacto para el testimonio social de la iglesia dentro del marco teológico del reino de Dios "ya-todavía-no". Basándome en la obra de Miroslav Volf y Matthew Croasmun, sostengo que el marco teológico del "ya-todavía-no" dinamiza y delimita la iglesia al encarnar su testimonio respecto a temas sociales contemporáneos relevantes. Esta postura se enriquecerá con ejemplos de apoyo de interlocutores como Padilla DeBorst (marginación social y pobreza), McCaulley (discriminación racial y étnica), Volf (pacificación y reconciliación), Richter (administración ambiental), Yong (discapacidad) y Swinton (salud mental). Además, concluiré que el testimonio social de la iglesia debe ser central para el ethos teológico adventista en particular, en lugar de situarse en sus márgenes o como un aspecto complementario. Estas reflexiones buscan animar a la iglesia a asumir más plenamente su papel como comunidad de pacto en el contexto social actual.

Palabras clave: Iglesia; Testimonio social; Cuestiones sociales; Fidelidad al pacto; Ya-todavía-no.

INTRODUCTION

Scripture reveals a relational, covenantal God who engages in genuine reciprocal relationships with His covenant people.[2] The aim of this mutual relationship is redemption—a wholistic and transformative process that shapes individuals and communities to bear His image and reflect His character of love. Further, Scripture presents covenant-keeping as inseparable from the tangible ways God's people bear witness to this relationship.[3] Therefore, in this article, I want to focus on one key way the church can embody its identity as contemporary covenant people: through a concrete and relevant social witness. While other rich dimensions of covenant theology deserve attention, I aim to highlight selected implications for contemporary Christians who have entered into a covenant with God by accepting Jesus Christ as Savior and who seek to live lives that reflect that commitment—including the relational blessings and responsibilities that come with it. Such are lives shaped by grace and faith, and marked by witnessing in these eschatological times.

While there are many ways to approach this, I will suggest a theological framework that I find particularly helpful along with a series of examples that, in my view, are especially relevant to the church's social witness today.[4]

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[2] In this regard, I find John C. Peckham's work useful. See, for instance, Peckham's Why We Pray, where he writes: "I use the term 'covenantal' in the broader sense of engaging in back-and-forth relationships with creatures in which God makes and keep promises" (Peckham, 2024, loc. 4013). Although this is a basic definition, I believe it is both biblically warranted and adequate for the purposes of this research. In Divine Attributes, he offers a more detailed helpful summary: "The remainder of this book sets forth a constructive model of God's attributes that I call covenantal theism, descriptive of the covenantal God of Scripture envisioned in much traditional Christian worship and prayer—the God who acts in the world, intervenes, speaks, communes, and covenants with his people. Among other things, the modifier 'covenantal' conveys that God enters into real back-and-forth relationship with creatures but does so voluntarily, remaining transcendent even as he condescends to be with us (immanent). In brief, covenantal theism affirms God's aseity and self-sufficiency, qualified immutability and passibility, everlasting eternity, omnipresence, omniscience, omnipotence and sovereign providence, covenantal action, omnibenevolence, and relational triunity" (Peckham, 2024, loc. 4013). He continues: "this God of love is indomitable, all-powerful, and utterly distinct from creatures but voluntarily changes in relationship, willingly suffers with us and for us in love, condescends to spend time with us as genuinely present in creation (while not reduced to or encompassed by it), knows us better than we know ourselves, knows what is best for us and lovingly plans accordingly for our good, sustains and cares for all creation, exercises his infinite power for the best good of all while granting power to others for the sake of the flourishing of love, wills only good for all, meets and defeats evil—at inestimable cost to himself—and eternally enjoys loving fellowship as the Trinity of love, but freely created others to share in the fellowship of love" (Peckham, 2021, p. 37).

[3] A few additional representative examples from the Adventist theological context that support this perspective and provide more details are: Richard Rice (1997, particularly pages 200-211, 214); Ivan T. Blazen (2000, particularly pages 275-278); Skip MacCarty (2007, particularly pages 246-250); Norman R. Gulley (2012, particularly page 59); John C. Peckham (2023, particularly pages 453-495). These works also illustrate that, while understood as a broad theological concept, the notion of a covenant between God and humanity is supported by a close exegesis of Scripture.

[4] This is one of many possible ways to approach the topic. Other frameworks are possible and welcome.

THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Christians who live out covenantal lives place an emphasis on how the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus—within the broader context of the biblical plan of salvation—reveals the ultimate purpose and telos of covenantal life.[5] In *For the Life of the World: Theology that Makes a Difference*, Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun argue that a central feature of Christ's ministry was his embodiment of the kingdom of God and his invitation for all to enter it (2019, p. 149-185). Additionally, Volf and Croasmun particularly highlight the "already but not yet" nature of that kingdom, which they understand as an eschatological tension between what is possible within the kingdom that Christ already inaugurated, and the kingdom that he promised to fully institute in the future (2019, p. 149-185).

Further, Volf and Croasmun usefully argue that discerning the "already-not yet" nature of the kingdom of God is essential for the church's witness and thus for societal flourishing (2019, p. 150).[6] They maintain that the tension of the "already-not yet" kingdom is essential for avoiding the extremes of an over-realized and under-realized eschatology. On the one hand, they explain, "an overrealized eschatology both misconstrues the conditions under which we live and is arrogant about how much of the true life... we have realized in our own lives" (2019, p. 159). In this sense, an over-realized eschatology might suggest that Christians should bring about the fullness of the kingdom here and now, implying that complete societal transformation is possible, sin's reality and its consequences can be fully overcome, and all things can be fully restored. This perspective risks failing to recognize the impossibility of such an achievement, potentially leading to disappointment and loss of hope when sin inevitably persists. On the other hand, as Volf and Croasmun put it, "an underrealized eschatology... [lowers] the bar on how much of the fully consummated vision of flourishing we can hope to achieve this side of the eschaton" (2019, p. 159). Indeed, an under-realized eschatology may focus exclusively on the future restoration, neglecting the implications for how we ought to live and witness today. This perspective can often encourage a passive attitude, leading

[5] It is generally agreed that all biblical covenants point to and find their fulfillment in Jesus Christ's ministry.

[6] Volf and Croasmun are not the originators of the "already-not yet" concept—a framework widely adopted by theologians and biblical scholars in reference to the kingdom of God as portrayed by Jesus in the Gospels and throughout Scripture. However, I find Volf and Croasmun's use of this theological concept particularly compelling, especially in the context of doing theology "for the life of the world."

individuals to assume that their concrete societal witness is unnecessary while waiting for the eventual restoration of all things.

Volf and Croasmun further assert that the church is tasked with the discernment and wisdom "to avoid either an over- or under-realized eschatology" (2019, p. 154).[7] Again, they usefully note that holding these elements in tension is crucial because "awareness of these tensions makes it possible to willingly accept certain limitations to flourishing without giving up on the vision of its fullness" (2019, p. 163). Furthermore, while there are inherent limitations due to the "not yet" aspect of the kingdom that awaits eschatological radical transformation, Volf and Croasmun rightly maintain that the hope of a future transformation should motivate the church's present witness as we live out the "already" of the kingdom.[8]

This theological framework can illuminate what it means to live as a covenant people today, especially in terms of the church's social witness.

SUPPORTING EXAMPLES

Following Volf and Croasmun's usage of the "already-not yet" kingdom as theological framework, I will refer to various examples that meaningfully illustrate the "already-not yet" paradigm as they encourage the concrete and relevant social witness of the church. In other words, these examples call for a covenantal witness that concretely embodies the "already" of the kingdom while also acknowledging limitations that won't be fully resolved until the eschaton ("not yet").[9]

One way the church can witness in that capacity is by addressing pervasive inequality and the marginalization of those who lack access to basic resources needed not only for survival but also for thriving.[10] In this context, Ruth Padilla DeBorst (2016, p. 41-42) reminds us of the questions many might ask:

> Tell me: what does your faith have to offer our society, mired as it is in corruption, injustice, violence, and poverty? Does your faith contribute to the

[7] Again, while these concepts are not unique to Volf and Croasmun, the way they weave them together within a theological vision explicitly directed "for the life of the world" is especially valuable for reflecting on and strengthening the church's social witness.

[8] They envision this as an "advent" structure (See Volf; Croasmun, 2019, p. 153).

[9] Although the examples I provide ahead are not exhaustive, my life journey and experiences (mostly focused on Inter-America and North America) have made me particularly attuned to these elements, and I believe these are generally relevant in various societies around the world today.

[10] Basic resources, in this case, could be conceived as clean water, nutrition, healthcare, basic security, and sanitation services, among others.

> transformation of these realities, or does it simply teach you to wait passively for another world? Does your faith have any bearing on the here and now?

In response Padilla DeBorst points to *the example of Jesus*, who addressed both the spiritual *and* physical needs of those he came in contact with. Following Branson and Padilla, she reminds us that "the historicity of Jesus leaves no room for a dualism in which the soul is separated from the body, or for a message exclusively concerned with salvation beyond death, or for a church that isolates itself from society to become a ghetto" (Branson; Padilla, 1986, p. 89 *apud* DeBorst, 2016, p. 48). Further, "faith does not abstract people from their context but rather is 'rooted in history, and consequently it constantly seeks to become historically relevant' to the particular challenges of that context" (DeBorst, 2016, p. 48). While Padilla DeBorst recognizes that the radical restoration of the circumstances of those who are marginalized and lack basic resources will ultimately occur in the eschaton, she believes that this very conviction should motivate us to live as witnesses to the kingdom's partial realization here and now by concretely addressing the needs of those lacking essential resources and opportunities.[11] For Padilla DeBorst, this represents "the multilayered calling of any community that seeks to follow Jesus and live the already of God's kingdom... in the midst of the beauty and pain of our world today," thus witnessing to "God's integral transformation until the kingdom comes in full" (DeBorst, 2016, p. 42, 64).[12]

Another relevant example for the church's witness today relates to racial and ethnic discrimination. Esau McCaulley illuminates this issue as he advocates for Christians to recognize societal brokenness and offer an alternative vision. In this regard, he argues that the "economic, social, and political oppression" involved in racial and ethnic discrimination "is nothing more than the physical manifestation of the *spiritual sickness* at the heart of the empire" (McCaulley, 2020, p. 61). McCaulley emphasizes that as Christians address these injustices that are ultimately rooted in spiritual sickness, they "are *following in the footsteps of Jesus*" and "the *prophetic tradition*" he followed (McCaulley, 2020, p. 57, 61, emphasis mine). However, McCaulley cautions against both overinterpreting and underinterpreting this prophetic tradition (McCaulley, 2020, p. 61). In other words, while he acknowledges that racial

[11] Along with others, Padilla DeBorst understands this gospel reality as "integral transformation" or "integral mission," an approach that is "whole" or "holistic," viewing the proclamation of the gospel and the call to social transformation as interconnected (DeBorst, 2016, p. 43).

[12] While Scripture offers various examples, a particularly compelling passage that calls for concrete witness in response to the kinds of inequality and marginalization highlighted by Padilla DeBorst is Matthew 25:31–46.

injustice will not be fully healed until the eschaton, he sees the Christian social witness as essential in countering present-day racial and ethnic injustices and advocating for justice.[13] This, he argues, is part of living out the "already-but-not-yet" reality of the kingdom. McCaulley explains:

> Jesus asks us to see the brokenness in society and to articulate an alternative vision for how we might live. This does not mean that we believe that we can establish the kingdom on earth before his second coming. It does mean that we see society for what it is: less than the kingdom. We let the world know that we see the cracks in the façade (McCaulley, 2020, p. 66).[14]

Further, Miroslav Volf reminds us that peacemaking and reconciliation remain central to the Christian social witness (Volf, 2019).[15] Volf notes that in a world marked by divisions—between "people who share the same terrain but differ in ethnicity, race, language, or religion"—the problem of ethnic and cultural conflicts reflects a deeper struggle with identity and otherness (Volf, 2019, p. 4). Thus, Volf argues that "a genuinely Christian reflection on social issues must be rooted in the self-giving love of the divine Trinity as manifested on *the cross of Christ*" (Volf, 2019, p. 15, emphasis mine). While he acknowledges that the redemptive self-giving love of Christ is not always embraced in return, he insists this should not lead to abandoning it.[16] In other words, Christians are called to embody the values of the kingdom now, even if full reconciliation will often remain incomplete. Although Volf concedes that complete reconciliation or "full embrace" in human relationships may not be possible before the eschaton, he emphasizes the importance of cultivating the "*will* to embrace," that is, willingness for reconciliation (Volf, 2019, p. 19-20). Thus, the impossibility of ultimate reconciliation in the here and now does not paralyze our social witness. Rather, the hope of ultimate reconciliation ("not yet") encourages Christians to pursue reconciliation as a partial though concretely present reflection of the kingdom while trusting its future fulfillment.[17]

[13] While he firmly sustains a peaceful approach, he clarifies that "Peacemaking... cannot be separated from truth-telling... Otherwise any peace is false and unbiblical" (McCaulley, 2020, p. 69).

[14] As McCaulley rightly argues, both Jesus and various prophets embody this emphasis throughout Scripture. For instance, see Jesus's ministry in the Gospels, along with the prophetic ministry of Amos and Isiah, among others.

[15] It is worth noting that all the theologians discussed in this article (including McCaulley) would affirm Volf's core approach to peacemaking and reconciliation, which does not negate the need to acknowledge wrongdoing or to pursue justice.

[16] Volf explains: "The ultimate scandal of the cross is the all too frequent failure of self-donation to bear positive fruit... Is the scandal of the cross good enough reason to give up on it? There is no genuinely Christian way around the scandal. In the final analysis, the only available options are either to reject the cross and with it the core of the Christian faith or to take up one's cross, follow the Crucified—and be scandalized ever anew by the challenge" (2019, p. 16-17).

[17] Practices such as peacemaking and reconciliation reflect God's character and His approach to salvation, themes richly illustrated throughout Scripture.

Another relevant way for the covenant people to be faithful witnesses today is through creation care. Sandra Richter argues that many Christians have neglected environmental stewardship due to an imbalanced view of the "already-not yet" framework (Ricther, 2020). By focusing solely on the future kingdom, where all will be made new, they overlook their responsibility to live faithfully as covenant witnesses to God's ideal plan for creation in the present, or the "already" reality of the kingdom (Ricther, 2020). Rather, she suggests that Christians should make intentional efforts to care for and partly restore the environment now, motivated by the hope of future renewal. For Richter, "the stewardship of this planet is not alien or peripheral to the *message of the gospel*" and "Scripture speaks to this topic repeatedly and systematically" (Ricther, 2020, p. 106-107, emphasis mine). She especially emphasizes the various ways in which *Israel's covenant* included and highlighted the sustainable use of agricultural land, humane animal husbandry, care for wild creatures and their habitat, an even the avoidance of environmental terrorism in warfare (See summary in Ricther, 2020, p. 106-108). While the perspective that "everything will be renewed anyway" holds validity, covenant faithfulness also calls Christians to embody kingdom values here and now. Following Douglas Moo, Richter emphasizes that "The 'not yet' of a restored creation demands an 'already' ethical commitment to that creation now among God's people" (Douglas Moo *apud* Ricther, 2020, p. 110). In other words, even though "the church will [not] be able to fix all (or even most) of the environmental woes of our planet," Richter insists that our identity as witnesses to God's character in a fallen world requires us to live as "animated representations of what God's kingdom will be" (Ricther, 2020, p. 111).[18]

Yet another important aspect of the social witness of the church in covenant faithfulness is reimagining the place of persons with disabilities in our communities and churches. Amos Yong emphasizes that "people with disabilities are not only individuals who have physical or mental/intellectual challenges; they are people who confront challenges made worse by the attendant social stigmas and attitudes which subjugate them" (Yong, 2011, p. 12). In that light, Yong believes that "the Bible is redemptive for the experience of disability," drawing attention to themes such as the *Image of God*, Paul's teaching on the *value* of "weaker" members, and "the priesthood of *all* believers," which "welcomes and receives

[18] Richter's claims can be understood within the biblical theme of the fall's effect on creation and the movement towards its recreation. Compelling biblical passages, as Richter herself points to in her work, are the creation narrative in the book of Genesis, as well as the portrayal of final restauration in the book of Revelation.

the *ministries and gifts* of *all* people across the diverse spectrum of abilities" (Yong, 2011, p. 6-7, 13, 108-109, 105, emphasis mine). This means recognizing that people with disabilities are recipients of spiritual gifts meant to benefit the entire church, often embodying and revealing the gospel in ways that humble and surprise us (Yong, 2011, p. 104-105). Thus, Yong challenges us to live out the covenant more faithfully by moving beyond simply providing "friendly" facilities for people with disabilities to embracing them as active agents in ministry, ensuring that "the church's mission is carried out not just *to* people with disabilities but also *with* them" (Yong, 2011, p. 107-108).[19] For Yong, while disabilities will continue to exist in the present reality, we are called to live as "present signs to the world of the salvation that is expected in the coming kingdom" (Yong, 2011, p. 116).[20]

Lastly, a faithful social witness in today's world must consider those experiencing mental health challenges. John Swinton affirms that Scripture offers guidance, particularly through its portrayal of joy and lament. He clarifies that joy, in a biblical sense, "is not the absence of sadness or suffering" but rather an "awareness of the enduring presence of God in all things and at all times" (Swinton, 2020, local. 1667). He reminds us, however, that while joy is present in the "already" of the kingdom, it is "not yet in all its fullness" (Swinton, 2020, local. 1667). Thus, as a faithful covenant witness, the church is called to embrace the notion of joy as confidence in God's presence, without demanding constant feelings of happiness. In addition, Swinton highlights that the lament psalms "articulate the reality of tragedy and loss *alongside* the reality of God's unending love," offering a model for the church to acknowledge the reality of severe mental health challenges—even among the covenant people (Swinton, 2020, local. 1463, emphasis mine). Swinton critiques churches that, by overemphasizing the "not yet" of the kingdom, imply that mental health struggles, such as chronic depression (among others), should not exist. Instead, he sees the church's task as creating spaces for lament and standing alongside those who suffer, *holding on to joy* for them when they are unable to do so themselves.[21] This is done empowered by the hope that one day, in the fully realized kingdom, there will be no more sorrow and no more pain.

[19] He envisions "a church that not only ministers inclusively to people with disabilities, but also receives the gracious hospitality of such people," a community in which "the gifts of each are important and valued precisely because each contributes something essential and unique to the whole" (Yong, 2011, p. 7-8, 15).

[20] Besides the biblical portrayal of the ministries and gifts of the Spirit, as well as the priesthood of all believers pointed to by Yong, a compelling biblical example is the relationship between David and Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9.

[21] Swinton explains in more detail: "When our brother or sister in Jesus struggles to hold on to the great joy of Jesus, other brothers and sisters hold it for him or her, not in a way that is judgmental—'If you can't feel Jesus in the way

All in all, Scripture portrays a future fully realized kingdom in which God will bring about the end of sin in all its forms. Yet, in the meantime, faith and hope in the future kingdom energize us to live out the covenant witness in the present, actively and intentionally doing what we can to alleviate marginalization and discrimination in our communities, fostering reconciliation among individuals and people groups, practicing environmental stewardship, partnering in ministry with people with disabilities, and providing space for lament, standing alongside those experiencing mental health challenges while we hold onto the possibility of joy on their behalf. In living this way, we embody the "already" of the kingdom and practice covenant faithfulness in ways that are relevant to society today.

FINAL REFLECTIONS AND RELEVANCE TO ADVENTISM

Some theological frameworks assume that the kingdom of God can or will be fully realized here and now, while others, when taken to their logical consequences, may inadvertently discourage active engagement with the world.[22]

In contrast, the Adventist biblical understanding of a relational, covenantal God in the context of the cosmic struggle between good and evil should promote a healthy tension between the "already" and "not yet" aspects of the church's societal witness in light of the reality of the kingdom. (And, as Volf and Croasmun would put it, it should thus prevent the extremes of an over-realized and under-realized eschatology.) Along these lines, Adventist theologian John Peckham explains that we should not only "fervently pray for God's will to be done on earth" but also "intentionally and persistently act in practical, loving ways to relieve suffering and foster justice, alongside assurance of God's final victory and eschatological solution and the ongoing intercession of the Son and the Holy Spirit for us in the meantime" (Peckham, 2024, loc. 2726-2728).[23] He explains:

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that I do, then you are spiritually less than I am. You'd better work out what sin you have committed!'—but in a spiritually gentle way that says, 'OK, for now it feels like Jesus has abandoned you. Jesus knows what it feels like to be abandoned. At this moment in time, you don't feel the way I feel, but I desperately want to help you hold on to the possibility that God exists, and the possibility that God loves you, and the possibility that joy might be closer than you think. I know that's not how you feel, but it remains a possibility, and I want to hold that for you. But I want to sit with you in this darkness (as best I can), and I want to say to you that I love you and that God loves you and that we can wait together. The storm will pass. Let me hold joy for you for a little while'" (Swinton, 2020, loc. 1760). A Scriptural reference that illustrates this deep societal need, even present in Jesus's life, is Matthew 26:36-46, which portrays the interaction between Jesus and his disciples in Gethsemane. Another well-known biblical example is God's support for Elijah in 1 Kings 19:1-7.

[22] See, for instance, Olson's perspective on theological currents that emphasize God's transcendence at the expense of His immanence, and those that prioritize His immanence to the detriment of His transcendence. He explains in detail in Roger E. Olson (2013).

[23] While Peckham sustains this in the context of the implications of a cosmic conflict approach to petitionary prayer, his point can also be applied to the concrete societal witness of the church in the various ways previously mentioned.

> This is particularly significant if we remember that, in light of the cosmic conflict, God might face moral restrictions that prevent him from intervening to eliminate evils in some cases, but some such evils are within our power to mitigate or prevent, if we are willing to act (Peckham, 2024, loc. 2986).

Thus, Peckham stresses that "God grants creatures real agency in the world" (Peckham, 2024, loc. 1017). He agrees with Bloesch in emphasizing that "Scripture makes clear that God has chosen to work out his purposes in cooperation with his children," and that "this cooperative relationship establishes that "God makes us covenant partners in the working out of his purposes in the world," though we are, of course, "not equal partners—not even close" (Peckham, 2024, loc. 1017-1019). I, too, agree: even though we are far from being equal partners with God, and our covenant-keeping falls short of His, God graciously grants us legitimate agency and continues to call us into partnership to work out His will in the world. In my view, the covenantal God of Scripture and the relationship He establishes with His creatures within the context of the cosmic conflict have profound implications for the church's witness in the "already" aspect of the kingdom.

Indeed, these convictions generally embraced by Adventists (and beyond) have the potential to deeply energize the church's tangible witness to the partial realization of the kingdom, underscoring that our covenantal witness genuinely matters and—however imperfectly— contributes to revealing God's character of love in the world. As Volf and Croasmun put it, "Even if this goal is something that cannot be fully articulated, life in the here and now can be true life in striving for this goal in Christ, by the Spirit" (Volf; Croasmun, 2019, p. 161).

Once more, I affirm that the "already-not yet" framework can aid us in accepting the human limitations of the present while also empowering our ecclesial communities to bear concrete witness, motivated by the vision of the coming kingdom. And, I am suggesting that addressing social marginalization and discrimination of various kinds, with a view towards reconciliation, as well as attending to environmental stewardship and mental health challenges are crucial areas of ecclesial social witness that deserve more emphasis. It is not

This might be at least partly supported in Peckham's boarder work. For instance, see Peckham's reflections on "imperialist Christianity" (Peckham, 2023, p. 629-639). A more dated yet useful Adventist exemplar broadly aligned with the views presented in this article would be Richard Rice's *Reign of God* (1997). See, for example, Rice's portrayal of "The Reign of God in Human Lives" (1997, p. 289-318), specifically the section titled "Social Responsibilities" (1997, p. 305-307). I am particularly drawing on Peckham's work in this section because, in my view, it represents the most current mainstream expression of Adventist theology to the extent that it relates to the theological themes addressed in this research.

that these practices are entirely absent; rather, I believe these could be more intentionally emphasized and integrated into the core of the Adventist theological ethos with the aim of reflecting God's character of love and bearing witness to it in the world, especially in light of the cosmic conflict.[24]

Much more could be done to further explore these ideas regarding the social witness of the church, and the selected examples are just a few among many possibilities. However, I hope that this reflection contributes to the growing chorus of voices who see the importance of encouraging a more robust and theologically grounded ecclesial social witness—one that embodies the covenant in ways that tangibly reflect the partial realization of the kingdom in the hopes of its future full consummation.

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[24] Adventist ethicists and, more recently, historians, have emphasized several elements discussed in this article regarding the church's social witness. See, for example, the recent publication by Michael W. Campbell, *The Oxford Handbook of Seventh-day Adventism* (2024), in particular, see the essays in "Part I: History of Adventism" and "Part VII: Culture, Ethics, and Politics." That said, my concern is how we might more robustly and systematically integrate these insights into the core of our theological framework. This is not to diminish the value of other disciplines; rather, it is a call for more intentional interdisciplinary engagement that can be holistically incorporated into the theological field and vice-versa—especially, while not exclusively, by drawing on scriptural theological themes as broad and vital as the covenantal relationship between God and humanity within the context of the cosmic conflict, as I have noted in this article.

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