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Living with the End Of Times:
An Analysis of American Seventh-day Adventism

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree Master of Arts

in

Anthropology

by

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2009

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

Living with the End of Times:
An Analysis of American Seventh-day Adventism

by

Marisa Louise Peeters

Master of Arts in Anthropology

University of California, San Diego, 2009

Professor Thomas J. Csordas, Chair

In this paper I examine to what extent membership in the North American division of the Seventh-day Adventist church, a global Protestant denomination with sectarian tendencies, informs everyday life experiences in a way that may be different from mainstream American society. For this purpose I conducted ethnographic fieldwork among a Seventh-day Adventist community in the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. from April to June 2002 and from October to December 2002. After discussing the church's idiosyncratic cosmology and history in a first section of the paper, I examine how the Adventist cosmology is expressed in and gives shape to members' every day

praxis. In a last section I present three case studies of former members as an illustration of the extent to which Adventist cosmology remains ingrained in the former members' habitus. I argue that the Adventist eschatology, and its implications of the end and subsequent beginnings of time, do not entail a rupture with, but rather a reorientation of, everyday life. Moreover, by engaging in habitual actions that commemorate the Adventists' positioning in time and that abstract from a position in space, Adventists can arguably be seen to distance themselves from the space of the society at large, even though this does not necessarily occur at a conscious level.

**Living with the End of Times:
An analysis of American Seventh-day Adventism**

1. Introduction

In this paper I am interested in examining the extent to which membership in a conservative Christian group informs everyday life experiences in a way that may be different from mainstream American society. For this purpose I conducted fieldwork among a Seventh-day Adventist community in the Maryland suburbs of Washington D.C. from April to June 2002 and from October to December 2002. My fieldwork consisted in both participant observation and in-depth interviews. Seventh-day Adventism, which emerged as a pre-millennial prophetic movement in the context of mid-nineteenth century American religious revivalism, offers an ideal example because, in addition to being a conservative Protestant denomination, in some circles it is still seen as a cult. More than understanding the idiosyncratic character of Seventh-day Adventism as a collective movement, I am interested in exploring how the church's cosmology becomes incorporated into the individual members' habitus and guides everyday praxis. By doing so I indicate how a millenarian movement such as Seventh-day Adventism does not necessarily entail a rupture with everyday life, but rather implies a fundamental reorientation of everyday life as expressed in daily praxis.

In order to understand how the church promotes a worldview different from mainstream American society, I will start my discussion with an analysis of the church's

idiosyncratic cosmology and history. Even though the church emerged in an American context, we will see how in many ways it is antagonistic to the ideological underpinnings of America as a nation. A main point of interest is how conceptions of time, and secondarily of space, are idiosyncratic to the Adventist cosmology.

Next I will examine how the Adventist cosmology is expressed in and gives shape to everyday praxis. By focusing on daily praxis I want to examine how, by performing habitual actions, members enact the Adventist eschatology. By doing so, I will show how the Adventist eschatology, and its implications of the end and subsequent beginning of time do not entail a rupture with everyday life, but simply a reorientation and is as such embedded in the members' habitus. My analysis of meaningful habitual actions is presented in terms of root metaphors because in an approach that is concerned with a pragmatic notion of truth--truth as it comes about and is experienced in (inter)subjective praxis--there is "a shift from an emphasis on explanatory models to lived metaphor" (Jackson 1996: 9). The root metaphors I discuss are church attendance, Sabbath observance, practicing a healthy life style and witnessing.

In the last section I present three case studies of former members. By describing the intensity of their struggle I want to illustrate the extent to which Adventist cosmology is thoroughly ingrained in the members' habitus and can therefore not easily and not entirely be left behind.

2. Seventh-day Adventist history and cosmology

Seventh-day Adventism emerged from Millerism, an apocalyptic movement inspired by the ideas of William Miller and situated in the United States of the 1830s and 40s. On the basis of the Book of Daniel, Miller calculated that the Second Coming of Christ and the ensuing end of the world would take place in 1843. Urged to inform others of the imminence of the Parousia, he gathered a large group of followers. When the year 1843 passed without the occurrence of any specific event that could be taken to mean that Christ had returned to earth, two of Miller's followers, Samuel Sheffield Snow and George Storrs, launched a new date for the Second Coming, which, according to their calculations, would take place on October 22, 1844. This very precise date was awaited with great anticipation. In press reports of that time Millerites are depicted in accordance with the commonly held view that millenarians are people who withdraw from everyday life, thereby manifesting a "value-rational response to the belief that the world is about to end and that one must be ready." (Robbins 2001: 527) Irrespective of whether the reports of the Millerites' self-destructive behavior were accurate or not, they underscore that in the public perception Millerites were anxiously awaiting the Second Coming. One can imagine the intensity of the disappointment that ensued when again there was no sign of Christ's tangible presence on earth. In Adventist circles the event (or non-event) of October 22, 1844 is still remembered as "the Great Disappointment." After the 1844 disappointment Millerism disintegrated. The Seventh-day Adventist Church, founded in 1863, formally united a small group of more radical former Millerites, who maintained that Snow and Storr's calculations had been correct. Rather than a literal Second

Coming, they believed that Christ had entered a Heavenly Sanctuary to prepare his (imminent) return to earth.

Ellen G. White, the fledgling church's prophetess, was influential in determining the course of the young Adventist movement. From an organizational point of view, having a charismatic leader implied that the early leadership could put forth decisions with absolute authority. Ellen White's guiding role, however, was not uncontested. A crisis occurred when, in 1851, during the foundational years of the budding movement, the retraction of one the young movement's central doctrines,¹ which had been endorsed by Ellen White's divinely inspired visions, seriously undermined her position as an authoritative prophet as a consequence of which James White, Ellen's husband and one of the most prominent figures in the budding movement, decided not to involve his wife in any of the public decisions for some time. In the following four years Ellen G. White's role was de-emphasized. However, because Ellen's 'silence' seemed to adversely affect the growth of the fledgling movement, she was publicly re-established as the church's prophetess in 1855. By accepting Ellen's visionary authority the church once again became a 'prophetic movement,' which had important consequences for the future of the group, since this justified the view that more than any religious group they were 'God's chosen people,' who had a pivotal role to play in the unfolding of time towards its apocalyptic end and possible new beginning.

During her lifetime, Ellen White herself actively pursued steering the direction of the budding church. Being a prolific writer, she provided a written forum for her visions.

¹ Particularly contentious was Ellen White's support for the Shut Door doctrine, which held that the possibility of non-believers and sinner was considerably reduced, and which was later abandoned by the fledgling group. (Linden 1978: 93)

Among her most influential writings are her *Testimonies of the Church*, which eventually comprised about 5,000 pages in nine volumes, “containing,” as Ellen comments in her *Biographical Sketches*, “instruction to, and pertaining to the welfare of, the Seventh-day Adventist Church” (White 1948: 5). Ellen’s influence reverberates in present-day Adventism. We see traces of her influence in the church’s current emphasis on health. Even though Ellen had not been the first Adventist to develop an interest in health issues, her numerous writings on the subject were influential in promoting health reform in Adventist circles and are still characteristic of current Seventh-day Adventist teachings on health. Her plea was mostly one for temperance in all areas. She strongly advised against the consumption of ‘stimulating’ beverages: “Tea is poisonous to the system, Christians should let it alone. The influence of coffee is in a degree the same as tea, but the effect upon the system is still worse...Never take tea, coffee, beer, wine or any spirituous liquors. Water is the best liquid to cleanse the tissues” (White 1946: 421). Considering that the ingestion of meat was thought to arouse the “animal passions” in human beings, a strong plea in favor of vegetarianism was in line with Ellen’s emphasis on temperance. Ellen was particularly harsh in condemning the eating of pork, and other ‘unclean animals,’ the abstinence of which became an entry-level marker for the future church. Considering that an interest in health reform was on the rise in mid-nineteenth century American society, the Adventist emphasis on health illustrates that despite the unique position in history the Adventists believed they upheld, the church was nevertheless influenced by trends within mainstream societies. Even stronger, a comparative analysis by Ron Numbers of the writings of Ellen White and other health reformers revealed striking similarities, which, according to Numbers, have to be

interpreted as an indication that Ellen White was not only influenced by her contemporaries, but even plagiarized them (Numbers 1992).

Given the central importance of Ellen White to the church's eschatological self-understanding, the church's leadership has carefully responded to accusations of plagiarism² and other criticism of the church's prophetess. The Whites and, after Ellen's death, the Ellen G. White Estate tried to avoid criticism by deleting contradictory passages in Ellen's writings and the Estate has suppressed further publication of some of her more controversial writings. Also, they do not permit unrestrained access to documents pertaining to the church's prophetess. Overall the estate carefully manages the memory of Ellen White. For example, church publications on Ellen's life—including Ellen White's autobiographical *Sketches of My Life*—offer hagiography rather than biography. From a young age there are signs of the girl's special calling, which is soon recognized by her immediate environment. When she confides in an elder that she's been having religious dreams, he tells her: "Ellen, you are only a child. Yours is a most singular experience for one of your tender age. Jesus must be preparing you for some special work" (Linden 1978: 29). The premonitions about the nature of Ellen's destiny are confirmed when she, at the age of seventeen, has a first vision. Accounts of Ellen's public visions testify that her prophetic trance was accompanied by extraordinary physical phenomena. In Schwarz's *Lightbearers to the Remnant*, a standard account of Adventist history commonly used as a textbook in Adventist universities, we read:

During public visions, which might come while she was praying or speaking, Ellen at first lost all physical strength; then she received supernatural strength such that even the strongest persons could not

² Particularly harsh was Walter Rea's *The White Lie* (1982).

control her bodily movements. Throughout a vision--one lasted nearly for four hours--there was no evidence of respiration, yet her heartbeat and facial color continued to be normal (Schwarz 1979: 65).

Other unusual phenomena are reported to have occurred. For example, during one meeting a ball of fire was seen to strike Ellen right above the heart.

The integration of hagiography and biography in accounts of Ellen White's life offered in church publications reveals the dynamics of the past as "mythomotor" (Armstrong 1982: 8-9, quoted in Leman 1998: 153) in the sense that a mythified depiction of the church's prophetess is part of a narrative of history in which the church has a privileged role to play. Chosen to fulfill a visionary destiny, Ellen was given a special place in history, and so was the church of which she was one of the early leaders. Despite some of the criticism Ellen White has been subject to, her visionary status is still very relevant for the contemporary church. One of the White Estate officials, in an interview, makes an interesting distinction between the relevance White has for 'Adventism' as opposed to 'Adventist.'

Adventism or Adventist? Well, for me there could be a difference. For Adventism to me, I see Adventism as a prophetic movement and so believing in Ellen White, I believe, [is very relevant] for Adventism in general. Well, [when] you say...Adventist, there is a whole spectrum you have probably already discovered, in how people respond to her. So for me she is very important to Adventism and any Adventist that really believes in Adventism, she is gonna still be relevant. [He will] adhere [to] the principles that God gave us through her writing. But for every individual Adventist, they may see her differently depending on their own background.

By distinguishing between Adventism as a movement and individual Adventists, the White Estate official can acknowledge that Ellen G. White, due to some of the accusations of plagiarism and other criticisms, may have lost significance for some

church members, without diminishing the importance of the prophetess for the church as a whole. Despite the personal doubts of some of the [North-American] members Ellen White as prophetess has not relinquished importance since by collectively remembering her, the church in a sense recuperates the past to underline the church's eschatological interpretation of the future.

The belief in Ellen G. White supports the church's eschatological self-understanding that is made explicit in the church's beliefs. Ellen G. White comments:

In a special sense Seventh-day Adventists have been set in the world as watchmen and light bearers. To them has been entrusted the last warning for a perishing world. On them is a shining wonderful light from God. They have been given a work of the most solemn import—the proclamation of the first, second, and third angels' messages. There is no other work of so great importance (Schwarz 1979: 11).

Not only are Seventh-day Adventists God's people, they are also assigned a God-given mission which reinforces their special position within the unfolding of history as comes to the fore in the Adventist's interpretation of the three angels' messages from Revelation 14. The Adventist rendering of the three angels' messages is relevant because it not only conveys the central beliefs of the Adventist faith³ but also illustrates how the Seventh-day Adventist church interacts with and is set apart from mainstream American society.

“Fear God, and give glory to him; for the hour of his judgment is come: and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountain of waters” (Revelation 14: 7). The belief in the coming judgment announced by the first angel's message is at the very core of the Adventist faith. Within the Adventist belief system the

³ In this respect it is interesting to note that one of the interviewed church members communicated to me that he feels that the message of the three angels was and is, he stresses, at the core of Adventism. Instead, he says, the church puts forward new pillars: growth, unity and quality of life. The interviewed member, who is a devout Adventist yet at the same time very skeptical of the Adventist organization, is very critical of this. He feels it is an abandoning of the essence of the Adventist faith.

onset of the judgment that determines who will be saved is to be situated on October 22, 1844, on which day Christ began the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary. In this time of “investigative judgment,” which started in 1844 but has not yet been completed, Christ determines which of all the people that have ever lived are “sleeping in Christ” (Seaman 1998: 62), and which of the living people “are abiding in Christ, keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus” (ibidem). Humankind is on probation. The door of salvation is still open, but will be closed at the end of the investigative judgment. After a brief moment in which the fate of sinners and saints is sealed, the Second Coming will occur. At the end of the millennium following Christ’s Second Coming, the earth will be made free of sin. In the Adventist interpretation, Christ, more than God, is attributed a central role in the unfolding of the events that announce the last battle between good and evil in which Christ’s return to earth is a pivotal moment. By identifying with the Second Coming, Seventh-day Adventists inscribe themselves in the battle of good versus evil.

“Babylon is fallen, is fallen that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication” (Revelation 14: 8). The Adventist interpretation of the second angel’s message sheds more light on how the church’s understanding of time informs their perception of space. Chosen by God to participate in the battle of good versus evil, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is “the Remnant” amidst Babylon, which comprises the papacy, Protestantism and spiritualism. Among the opponents of the “remnant” are also the beasts from Revelation 13. Perhaps surprisingly, the United States is also interpreted along the lines of Revelation and is seen to represent the two-horned beast. In *Seeking a Sanctuary*, Bull and Lockhart’s 1989 keen analysis of

American Seventh-day Adventism, the authors suggest that even though the New World seemed to offer the right environment for the movement to grow, the triumphalist nature of the young nation was not compatible with Adventist eschatology. America saw itself as a special nation chosen by God and reserved for a special purpose, yet this conflicted with the Adventist's view of itself as the chosen remnant. Adventists feared the United States would ally itself with the other churches and become an authoritarian state. (Bull & Lockhart 1989: 47-48). The boundaries between the Remnant and its opponents are, however, not rigid, because--given that non-Adventists can be saved until the end of Christ's investigative judgment--the church has the important and urgent duty to proclaim the Second Coming.

“And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, if any worship the beast and his image, and receive *his* mark in his forehead, or in his hand the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God” (Revelation 14: 9-10). The Seventh-day Adventists interpret the last message as a warning that all of the Ten Commandments should be observed (Schwarz 1979: 171). This is especially significant in relation to the fourth commandment (about the Sabbath) which is, in the Adventist view, the commandment most frequently violated since the seventh-day is Saturday rather than Sunday, as is commonly held (in Babylon). Whereas the true Sabbath is considered to be “the seal of God,” and its observance subsequently an unambiguous test of the individual's loyalty to God, Sunday observance is seen as “a mark of the beast.” The expectation is that the United States, the two-horned beast, will side with the Roman and Protestant Churches to enforce Sunday observance. The introduction of Sunday laws will

be a harbinger of Christ having reached the end of his work in the Heavenly Sanctuary, entailing that the period of probation had come to an end.

The belief in the Second Coming, the evangelizing mission of the remnant, and the observance of the Sabbath are at the core of the Adventist cosmology. Equally central is the church's emphasis on health. In this respect it is relevant to note that Adventists are committed to a non-dualistic conception of the human being in the sense that body and soul are not viewed as separate entities or substances. This is argued on biblical grounds since "Adam did not receive a soul as a separate entity; he *became* a living soul (Gen. 2: 7; quoted in *Seventh-day Adventists Believe*: 352). Because body and soul are one, the soul "has no conscious existence apart from the body" (*ibidem*). This holistic view implies that the state of your body influences that of your soul. One interviewed member comments: "We believe [that] our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and that Christ dwells within us." It follows from this that it is important for the Adventist to take good care of his or her body, commemorating it as God's creation and as Christ's dwelling. As was argued previously, when the Adventist interest in health first emerged during Ellen White's lifetime it was influenced by trends in mainstream American society. Yet, by making the health message a central part of Adventist doctrines, American Adventists are set apart from other Americans in so far as the Seventh-day Adventist enjoys an average life span several years longer than that of the average American (Fraser 2003). According to Bull and Lockhart "[t]he irony of the situation is that Adventists, who have traditionally sought happiness in the next world rather than this, have contributed to a science that both they and their fellow Americans now apply to earthly, rather than heavenly, gain" (Bull & Lockhart 1989: 139).

In this overview of Adventist history and cosmology we observe a tension between the church and the larger society in which it is embedded. On the one hand the church's idiosyncratic eschatology places the church at odds with American society at large. The church's self-identification as the Remnant that is entrusted with the unique responsibility to proclaim the Second Coming and given the duty to observe the Sabbath is in rivalry with the view of the American nation as a nation chosen to fulfill a special destiny. On the other hand the Adventist church is in some ways clearly shaped by the larger society in which it took root. The influence of nineteenth century health reformers on Ellen G. White's ideas on health reform offers a clear example.

3. Root metaphors in the Adventist experience

In the next section I will discuss how the Adventist cosmology, more than an abstract belief system, is expressed in and gives shape to the members' everyday life. By focusing on everyday praxis I want to examine how, by performing habitual actions, members--consciously or unconsciously--enact the Adventist eschatology. By doing so, I will show how the Adventist eschatology, and its implications of the end and subsequent beginning of time do not entail a rupture with everyday life, but simply a reorientation and is as such embedded in the members' habitus, which moreover indicates that, since the habitus can be characterized as "embodied history" (Bourdieu 1990: 56),⁴ Adventist

⁴ In the case of the Adventist belief system, it would better to speak in terms of "embodied history and cosmology." As we saw in the overview of the church's history and cosmology both are intertwined. This is for example made clear in the discussion of the church administration's management of the remembering of Ellen G. White, who, as the church's prophetess, takes an important position in the Adventist cosmology.

beliefs do not only shape daily praxis, but are embodied. In this sense we can argue that the member's body is "the realisation of a body of remembrance, a corporeal, practical memory of what might become, which links the future to the past in the present (De Boeck 1995: 134).

My analysis of meaningful habitual actions is presented in terms of root metaphors because in an approach that is concerned with pragmatic notions of truth, truth as it comes about and is experienced in (inter)subjective praxis, there is "a shift from an emphasis on explanatory models to lived metaphor" (Jackson 1996: 9). By adopting the terminology of metaphor, I avoid suggesting that the meaning generated in the practices discussed is unilinear, since "the metaphorical process creates an abundance of possible meanings, a myriad network of associations that result in a poly-isotopic ambiguity that can never be fully mapped into any particular context" (De Boeck 1994: 68). The root metaphors I discuss are church attendance, Sabbath observance, practicing a healthy life style and witnessing.

3.1 Church Attendance

The first root metaphor I will discuss is church attendance. Most Adventists go to church at least once a week, on Sabbath. Church attendance is strongly ingrained in everyday life, to the extent that it becomes a habit that is almost not reflected upon. In this section I will demonstrate how the act of church attendance generates meaning at several levels. For this purpose it is useful to distinguish between the different semantic values of the word 'church.' It can refer to the worldwide Adventist body, or it can

denote a specific congregation, which, in the framework of my study, is Sligo Church in Takoma Park, Maryland. Yet the denotative meaning of the word ‘church’ can also be limited to the actual building in which services are held. In this discussion of the significance of church attendance in the Adventist experience, we will see that the three dimensions are closely interrelated.

“The presence of the Adventist [life-world] is most easily discovered in Adventist churches” (Bull & Lockhart 1989: 153). Adventist churches are characterized by a simple design. Members tend to share a preference for stylistic simplicity.⁵ The minimal (visual) decoration is, however, countered by the central location of a good organ. Music is an essential part of the service. During the service there is a lot of singing. In Sligo Church you can sometimes enjoy a musical performance by a visiting choir after the service has finished. Some people leave, but most people stay to listen. Even though in western cultures the sensory mode of vision is hegemonic (Ingold 2005), in the Adventist church hearing prevails over sight (Bull & Lockhart 1989: 153): during the church service the congregation listens, sings and prays together. Since “music and speech extend through time and not space” (ibidem: 155), Bull and Lockhart put forth the interpretation that the prevalence of sound indicates that Adventists place themselves in time rather than in space. When adopting this perspective, we can start un-layering the meaning generated in the act of church attendance. When Adventists go to church their

⁵ An anecdotal story illustrates this. When doing my fieldwork, I mostly visited Sligo Church, but on a few isolated occasions I would visit the church in Frederick, MD. The first thing that struck me was what a nice church it was. I was a fairly tall building, quite tall and totally white. Ornamentation was kept to a minimum. The style of the building was very simple, but it evoked for me a sense of beauty. When conveying my experience to a church member, she told me that the building had been constructed recently, as the old one had burned down. She also told me that some of the members were not happy with the new building, since they thought it was not simple enough and that too much money had been spent on its construction.

bodily-being-together is transformed from a being-together-in-space into a being-together-in-time, which is particularly significant within light of the church's eschatology. Because for Adventists salvation is situated in time, what is expressed in space is temporary and fleeting and therefore less important. We can conclude that the church building, marked by a simple design and furnished with a centrally located organ and pulpit, embodies the eschatology of Adventism. A parallel conclusion can be drawn about the churchgoers. In the act of attending church and in the act of participating in listening, singing and praying, the churchgoer incorporates the Adventist eschatology.

The prevalence of sound over any other mode of perception is not only meaningful in the context of eschatology. It also implies that Adventist worship becomes most meaningful in a social context since "the spoken word becomes audible only where speaker and listener are in a shared space" (ibidem: 154). The participants in the interviews I conducted strongly emphasized the importance of the social aspect of church attendance. One member compared her church community with a family:

Church time to me is not only a time of worshipping God, which is very, very important in showing him an outward display of our worship together as a congregation. He shows us that you are more than one person. 'Where two are more, I will be there.' So, I think it helps us to establish a family relationship. I know there are people here in this church, even not my family, I don't have many relatives in this church, because they don't live here. I know that I have a family of God here that I love to see every week.

This family metaphor illustrates the cohesiveness of the Adventist community as manifested in the local congregation. By going to church social meaning is generated in the sense that the individual member reinscribes him-or herself in a social body to which he or she can appeal in times of personal crises. "Everyone knows each other's business," one

member comments.⁶ This, however, also entails a certain level of social control. Inherent in the social group are a set of norms, which are boundary markers of membership, because as we will see in the last section, if an individual member stops feeling comfortable with the prevailing norms, attitudes and values, he or she risks being dismembered, being cut out of the congregations' social body.

3.2 Sabbath

In the first section we saw how honoring the Sabbath commandment is the central doctrine of the third angel's message. As such, it is at the core of the Adventist cosmology. We will see how more than anything, the Adventists' observance of the Sabbath illustrates how their idiosyncratic conception of time does not imply a rupture away from everyday life, but becomes an integral part of everyday routine. The weekly practice of keeping the Sabbath reminds individual members that "to be an Adventist is to have an acute awareness in time. [It reminds them that] [i]t is important to know what day of week it is; [that] it is vital to think of history as temporal progression punctuated by dates of prophetic significance" (Bull & Lockhart 1989: 156). By showing how the Sabbath is set apart from other days of the week, we will demonstrate how the Adventist eschatology is ingrained in everyday life and even stronger, how theology becomes 'theodoxa.'

⁶ In this respect I should point out that this is most true for small churches. Sligo Church, where I conducted my fieldwork, has a membership of 2000 people, which means the same level of intimacy cannot be achieved. One Sligo Church official describes his church as "a community of communities."

The special character of the Sabbath is first of all reflected in the fact that on Saturday--or more specifically in the period from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday--Adventists worship God even more intensely than on other days. On Saturday morning the whole congregation worships together in the church service after having attended Sabbath school. The evening before, most families have worship together, more than on other evenings. They pray together, or sing together or read stories. One member comments on her experience as a child: "Dad loves to play the piano and he'll say different songs, hymns, and he'll read from the Bible. When we were younger he used to read stories and then we pray and after that we go to bed." Again we see how worship brings about both social and spiritual meanings: by sharing activities in the enclosed context of the family or church community on the Sabbath, which Adventists uphold to be the Seventh day (the day on which God rested after having created the world in six days), they actively recognize God as the Creator (Zuill 2002: 31). In this sense the Sabbath is the commemoration of God's creation. Since mainstream American society does not share the view that the Sabbath is the Seventh day, we could argue that by observing the Sabbath, the church--as with the joint remembering of Ellen G. White--in a sense underlines the Adventist eschatological interpretation of the future by recuperating the past.

The fact that the Sabbath illustrates an understanding of time that is out of synch with that of mainstream society is reflected in the activities--or absence of activities--Adventists engage in on Sabbath. A convert to Seventh-day Adventism comments on how his Saturday routine was altered when he joined the church: "Well, uh, I no longer did routine tasks on Sabbath that I used to do. I certainly didn't work in the house, in the

yard. I didn't do a lot of these—I guess considered—work activities that I used to do.” Upon becoming Adventist, this member adopted the Adventist custom of setting aside the time from sundown Friday to sundown Saturday for the purpose of rest. Concretely this implies that Adventists avoid secular activities on Sabbath. In the interviews I conducted, various examples were given of activities that were acceptable, such as listening to religious music, visiting friends, doing outreach programs, going for walks, going camping or hiking or playing biblical games. Spending time with family is highly valued and so is being out in nature. Watching T.V. or going to the movies on the other hand are most inappropriate activities. Here we can again see an indication of the Adventist prevalence of sound over other media.

Mostly, it is viewed as very positive to have such a day of rest and relaxation.

One member says:

You know, actually it's a good thing to us. In this busy world we work six days, twenty-four hours a day. You know how it is. If God had not given us the day of rest, we probably would have a heart attack...It's God's way of saying to his people: "I love you, I know you are going to live in a busy world." So, I love the Sabbath.

Here the interviewee translates the importance of the Sabbath to a modern context as a symbol of redemption from the frantic unhealthy lifestyle that she views as typical of contemporary American life. Her interpretation illustrates how the Sabbath generates multiple meanings that are sometimes seemingly contradictory. Whereas the Sabbath as day of rest improves bodily health--it keeps a heart attack away--and thereby improves longevity, the Sabbath--as one member comments in a special issue of the *Adventist Review*--is at the same time a “[‘time between’ that] reminds us every week that ‘this world is not my home, I’m just a-passing through’” (Gallagher 2002: 25). The Sabbath is

not only a commemoration of the beginning of biblical time, and a foreshadowing of future events, but is also likely to extend the “time-in-between” by positively affecting the Adventist’s quality of life.

3.3 Wholesome Holism

The outspoken Adventist focus on health—and more broadly, on quality of life—seems at odds with the eschatological views of the church in which the present is seen as a ‘time-in-between,’ in which the Second Coming is anticipated. But we can also argue that—perhaps more than any other of the Adventist beliefs—the emphasis on health matters illustrates how a millenarian worldview does not necessarily entail a move away from everyday life, but can become fully embedded within it. After discussing to what extent the Adventist interest in health translates into concrete practices, we will evaluate how the emphasis on health fits with the Adventist eschatological views.

Most members abstain from smoking. In doing this they adhere to the church’s non-smoking policy, which the church actively promotes by organizing “group-based quit-smoking programs” (Fraser 2003: 3).⁷ The church also takes a very strong position against alcohol consumption and most members do not consume alcohol. It is also very strongly encourages abstention from pork and other ‘unclean meats.’ The number of Adventists who admit to eating pork is very low. Eating ‘clean meats’ is acceptable but not every Adventist eats as much meat. In a recent Adventist health study, 3% of the participants were characterized as vegan, about 27% were ovo-lacto vegetarians, and

⁷ I consulted an unpublished draft version.

about 20% were reported to eat meat less than once a week, while the remainder ate meat more frequently (ibidem: 4). Church policies that pertain to unclean meats, alcohol and cigarettes are more than ‘mere rules of conduct.’ They become embodied to the extent that they guide sensory experiences. One member characterized cigarette smoke as “this pervading smell, you just can’t get it out of your house.” Another member experienced her accidental encounter with alcohol as “totally disgusting. It made us sick.” On festive occasions most Adventists drink non-alcoholic alternatives. Sparkling grape juice, for example, is referred to by some as ‘Adventist wine.’ Even though some of the more liberal members are tolerant of moderate alcohol consumption, one of the interviewees states: “[Even though] the larger church wouldn’t be so critical, it still is [the case that] if you become an Adventist you are expected to give up smoking and drinking.” In this sense we can argue that abstinence from alcohol and cigarettes, and, even more so, abstinence of pork function as entry-level behaviors. With regard to the abstinence of pork, we read in the May 1992 issue of *Spectrum* magazine: “To practice [entry-level behaviors] has the effect of moving a person across the boundary that marks off the Adventist from the larger population” (Burse 1992: 44). The use of the word ‘boundary’ evokes the notion of space. The implication is that Adventists do not share a joint space with other Americans, but what constitutes the boundary between one space and the other is not a withdrawal of everyday life but a reorientation of daily praxis.

The adherence to health principles was not always a goal in itself. When Ellen White introduced her ideas on health reform, they were seen as “a means to conquer physical appetites that might otherwise be satisfied in a sinful way. Health thus had a merely instrumental value in the quest for salvation” (Bull 1988: 17). The Adventist

focus on health, however, set in motion the medicalization of Adventism, which has now become one of the identifying features of the church (ibidem): the number of Adventist hospitals is growing worldwide and medical personnel (physicians in particular) occupy a position of high prestige within the Adventist community. Physicians are the corporealization of the Adventist ideal: they are highly educated, are experts on health, and their expertise is respected by non-Adventists as well. As the prestige of the Adventist physician can be seen to reflect upon the church among non-Adventists, the high reputation of Adventist doctors and Adventist hospitals may indirectly lead new members to the church. As a result of the medicalization of the church, health has become an end in itself. It has translated into a non-dualistic understanding of the human being that holds that body and soul are one. Because it follows from a holistic view that physical, emotional and spiritual well-being are interrelated, not taking good care of the body might hinder spiritual devotion to God and the church. Health becomes engrained with “an aura of sanctity” (ibidem). It is not so much being ill or unhealthy that is considered sinful, but rather being less healthy than one otherwise could be (Provonsha, quoted in Bull 1988: 19). The observance of health practices by individual Adventists illustrates how abstract beliefs become a part of everyday praxis, yet the opposite is also true since--as the adoption of holism makes clear--over time health practices have influenced theological thinking.

3.4 Witnessing: a root metaphor?

In the 2001 edition of the *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* we read that “[t]he mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is to proclaim to all peoples the everlasting gospel in the context of the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14: 6-12, leading them to accept Jesus as personal Savior and to unite with His church, and nurturing them in preparation for His soon return” (Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook 2001: 8). Judging from this and similar statements it seems obvious that evangelism is very much a part of the group’s consciousness, but the question arises whether it is also a root metaphor in the members’ experience. In this section we will discuss to what extent members are involved in missionary activities and in what ways such activities confer meaning.

There are several ways in which a member can answer the church’s call for participation in missionary activities. A significant number of members choose a profession in which they directly or indirectly evangelize the Adventist beliefs. They become pastors, teachers, doctors and so forth. Many others are involved in volunteer missionary work. But, evangelizing does not always have to take place in a pre-planned manner. For example, one of the interviewees said that it is important to preach in your own neighborhood, to your own neighbors. Sometimes, during the course of an interview, a member would witness to me. At the end of one interview, a church official asked whether he could pray with me for the success of my project on Seventh-day Adventism, for my personal wellbeing and for the happiness of my upcoming marriage.

One of the members informed me that some members might be less inclined in active witnessing, which, however, does not imply that they do not think mission is

important. On her assessment, most Adventists consider evangelism to be one of the pillars of the Adventist church. They might try a more passive witnessing. By incorporating the Adventist values in their lifestyle, they hope to set an example for non-Adventists, which might attract them to the Adventist message. She feels that it was different in the past. The church is changing, and North-American society is changing as well. In the past, she says, Adventists felt that the Second Coming was very near and that it was therefore urgent to inform others so as to save them. But the Second Coming has not occurred and the interviewed member feels that for some Adventists it has therefore become less urgent to witness actively. Bull and Lockhart support this observation in their book *Seeking a Sanctuary*: “In the postwar world, the Second Coming has become more distant and doctrinal modification has become necessary for believers whose expectation of translation is less vital than that of their forebears” (1989: 90).

The fact that the Second Coming has become more distant for some members does not mean that the Adventist eschatology has lost its power. After the events of September 11, 2001 a certain numbers of missionaries went to New York to preach the Seventh-day Adventist message. In the guest editorial of the September 2002 issue of the *Adventist Review* Kermit Netteburg says: “Many people said that [September 11] as the beginning of the end. I think they’re wrong. The September 11 attacks weren’t the beginning of the end, they were the end of the beginning” (Netteburg 2002: 7). With this statement he places the September 2001 terrorist attacks within the Adventist eschatological understanding. Other present-day events are interpreted in the light of Adventist eschatology. An anecdotal story can illustrate this. During my fieldwork I attended Sabbath school classes in Sligo Church. On one occasion the subject of

discussion was the situation in the Middle East, more specifically the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The message was that this conflict would be solved by Christ's return to earth. Members were advised to read the Bible, rather than to watch the news. Here again we see that the Adventist's understanding of time separates them from mainstream society, which involves a reorientation rather than a total withdrawal of everyday life (reading the Bible instead of watching the news).

The Adventist expectation of the relatively imminent end of the world is obviously still present, although it is definitely true that the church is changing. On the front page of a pamphlet issued by the General Conference, we read: "In a world of rapid change, uncertainty and confusing values, Seventh-day Adventists, certain of Christ's victory, are charting a new course for their mission" (2001 pamphlet published by the Seventh-day Adventist Office of Strategic Planning, page 1). The church has for example become less legalistic, which could offer one explanation of why fewer members engage in active witnessing. Yet, one respondent, a former member, observes that "even though not all members evangelize, they all feel involved. They hear other people's stories. They contribute money. Therefore, they are a part of 'the myth of evangelism.'" Although evangelism clearly is a part of the group's consciousness, it does not necessarily convey an example of how the Adventist beliefs become ingrained in everyday life, since it is not as much a part of the everyday praxis of the average church member as the root metaphors discussed in previous sections.

4. Dismemberment

In the discussion of root metaphors it became obvious that Seventh-day Adventist cosmology is more than an abstract set of beliefs but is incorporated in everyday praxis and is as such part of the members' habitus, which implies that even though the Adventist eschatology entails the end of times, the re-beginning of which is only granted to a select few, the adherence to the Adventist faith nevertheless does not entail a move away from everyday activities. The last section, on dismemberment, is devoted to three case studies of people who have abandoned Seventh-day Adventism.⁸ By describing the intensity of their struggle I want to illustrate the extent to which Adventist cosmology is thoroughly ingrained in the members' habitus and can therefore not easily and not entirely be left behind.

4.1 Hannah

Hannah is a highly educated woman in her early sixties. She was raised in the Adventist church and remained a firm follower of the Adventist beliefs until she was in her fifties. Growing up as a member of a small conservative Adventist church her social milieu was situated almost entirely within the church community. Being an Adventist she was secluded from participating in school activities organized on Friday night or Saturday. Dancing was considered wrong and so was going to the movies. As a result, close friendships outside the setting of the church were precluded. Hannah's

⁸ The names used are pseudonyms.

embeddedness within the Adventist church on a social, but also cosmological level, shaped her everyday life to a considerable extent. The extent to which she incorporated the Adventist beliefs is illustrated by the strong anxieties she experienced when going to the movie theater for the first time.

...The Sound of Music came to town, and somehow people's perception was, they thought it was all right. I'm not sure why. But I really didn't feel guilty about it. But I remember when I went it was almost like I was afraid to go into the theater because I always thought there was something bad about the building. But the theater was a really bad place to go to, and that the devil might jump out of the [unintelligible]. I don't know what I felt but it was almost...That had been so drummed into us, that that was a really bad place. But I felt uncomfortable.

We see that her perception at that time was shaped by the belief in the ongoing struggle between God and Satan.

Hannah's Adventist membership continued to be formative as it informed important life choices. For one, she did not want to marry a non-Adventist. A turning point in Hannah's life came at around the age of fifty when she decided to go back to school to obtain a doctoral degree in nursing. Even though this decision was again inspired by her Adventist beliefs—Adventists value both health and education—the critical sense she developed while studying caused her to rethink some aspects of her Adventists beliefs and lifestyle. Subsequently, she increasingly came to perceive the Adventist church as confining:

...I'm a bright person and I can make decisions. But I think [that the Adventist church] is a very controlling thing. A lot [of] religions are. They control your behavior and they don't let you think about what you do. And for years I have all these rules, without really thinking about why. And all of a sudden I couldn't do that anymore. You know...I couldn't rationalize it...so, if I wanted to wear jewelry, so what? Or, if I wanted to go to a movie theatre, so what? There's no one religion, as far as I can tell, with

the truth. You have to decide what's the truth for you. And that's the kind of point that I came to.

Hannah felt that her intellectual freedom was curbed in the church community she and her husband were part of. The social dynamics of her local congregation, which Hannah defines as more conservative than some other Adventist churches, was particularly suffocating to her since there was no opportunity for critical thought about the Adventist beliefs. She does not preclude that if she had been a member of a more liberal congregation she might have remained Adventist.

The move away from Adventism for Hannah (and for her husband who, together with her, also adopted a more critical attitude) was very gradual. The final decision to leave only took place when Hannah's mother, also an Adventist, passed away (and for whose sake Hannah had postponed the difficult decision). But the impact was immediate and substantial since both Hannah and her husband were abruptly cut out of the social tissue they had been a part of for the most part of their adult life despite the fact that both of them were actively involved in the church ("We were movers and shakers."). Now the couple has recovered from this and actually has more friends than before even though most of them are non-Adventists. Hannah has established a new social network and says that she would not want to become a member again, even if she could attend a more liberal church. She disagrees with the fact that women cannot be ordained and she questions the Sabbath (although she still values the importance of a day of rest) and doubts Ellen G. White's prophetic status. But the line between being Adventist and non-Adventist in some ways remains blurry since, even after having distanced herself from Adventism, Hannah continues to embody some of its beliefs. A

good example is provided by her attitude towards the consumption of alcohol. Hannah describes how, even though she does not consider moderate alcohol consumption to be problematic, she nevertheless experiences a visceral reaction when she actually sees someone drink alcohol:

Um, a glass of wine once in a while I don't have a problem with. Uh, you know, that was so drilled into me that I have kind of a basic fear of alcohol, you know, like if I see somebody drink one or two beers or something I get very uncomfortable because [it] was really hammered in, that was a bad thing.

The Adventist belief system that gave shape to Hannah's daily life when she was still Adventist continues to some extent to be present in the life of everyday.

4.2 Paolo

Paolo is a gay professional in his mid-thirties. He is the son of a Brazilian Adventist couple. Together with his family he traveled extensively as a child, although these travels followed Adventist global networks: “[A]ll this traveling was within...a sort of sheltered Adventist environment, sort of Adventist mission compound...never in a place where there weren't many Adventists surrounding us, for one reason or another.” As a result of this extensive traveling Paolo learned to speak Portuguese, Spanish and English at the level of a native speaker. Later in life he mastered two additional languages, French and Hebrew.

Paolo grew up as a devout Adventist and remained so until the age of twenty-four. A gradual change came about at the onset of his twenties when he started to think more critically about his Adventist beliefs. As with his parents before, he traveled a lot

in this period, but he did not travel exclusively within Adventist networks. Through the interaction with others he became aware of how much his life and his person had been shaped by his Adventist views. He came to realize that he was different from both non-Adventists and less conservative Adventists. Unlike his peers, he did not know anything about music and movies. Politics, he says, was an exception because “that’s something that didn’t necessarily go against the church,” although, Paolo points out, “even that, a lot of it used to be shaped by Adventist prophecies and things.” Here we see an indication of how Paolo’s membership into the Adventist church (and moreover into its conservative realization) guided his perceptions and experiences to an extent that he felt fundamentally different from others.

Paolo’s critical thinking was to a great extent triggered by his sexual orientation since he was starting to realize that he was gay, which caused great inner turmoil: “I had never had this, you know, just basically this sexual orientation, being gay. I might never have had things that were so much against my way of thinking, or the way that I thought the composition of myself was.” His newfound sexual identity also posed problems in his immediate social circle since his family absolutely did not welcome these changes. For four years Paolo continued to struggle with his sexuality and refrained from sexual encounters. He comments: “[F]or me to look back now and imagine for four years I thought it so hard that, um...just because I wanted to be married...I was afraid of it. I wanted the idea of pleasing my church, pleasing God, pleasing my family, and, uh, doing the right thing.”

As a result of his personal struggles Paolo developed a critical attitude towards the church that he wanted to further develop by learning as much as possible. He

started a master's program in divinity (which would have allowed him to become an Adventist pastor) but later switched to archeology. It was when he went to Israel within the context of his studies that his life took a drastic turn. Before leaving he had jokingly said to his mother that when going to Mount Tabor, also referred to as the Mount of Transfiguration, a transformation might come about, implying that on this mountain God might bring about a change in his sexual orientation. While climbing Mount Tabor, the transformation that did come about was not one that his family had hoped for since it was a transformation "from being an Adventist, and a Christian, and believing in God, to transitioning and to disbelieving God, and uh, everything else."

Paolo comments:

I was up there, kind of, uh, "God, come on, show me some light, do something." And, uh, so then I remember I came down from there, and everything else, and then I always liked to read a little portion of my Bible, as a devotional thing, and I said: "Okay, I'm going to draw...I have to draw a line here...There are other gay people just like me, very happy. There are other straight people, just like me, in other senses...I don't see the point, you know, of, uh, fighting and shunting something that is, uh, a non-issue. It should be a non-issue..."

Paolo finally comes to terms with his sexuality, but this decision goes hand in hand with his renunciation of the Adventist faith and even his belief in God, which is reflected in a significant alteration of his everyday routine, which is very symbolically expressed by his decision not to pray anymore before dinner:

So, uh, um, I remember I said, okay, today I sat at the table...and I said: "I'm not going to pray before I eat." And I actually very consciously put the spoon in the food, I brought it to my mouth, and I said: "Here it goes." I opened it, and I ate it, and the first spoon...I was 24 years of age, you know. Wow, nothing happened, you know.

He also decides not to read his Bible. These habits were so much ingrained in his daily life that it was very difficult to abandon them. He compares it with a drug addict quitting his addiction:

I said: “Today I’m not going to read the Bible either.”...Yeah, so I had my Bible hidden in the back of my closet... I remember after three days that I’d started not praying before I ate, and not reading the Bible. And then much like people coming out of drugs...I think I had a similar experience because I said: “Oh, my God, three days.” I couldn’t stand it anymore. You know what I did? I went to the closet, and I got my Bible from it, I hid it in my backpack, I ran out of the kibbutz. And it was in a very biblical setting, under a fig tree in the Jezreel Valley...And I got the Bible out and started reading much like, you know, a person’s having another shot of cocaine or something like that.

Paolo’s decision to leave Adventism brought about intense and disruptive changes in his life. For one, he no longer feels restrained from engaging in sexual relations with men. Nevertheless, his decision was very painful not in the least because his family has great difficulties accepting his choice since for them his transformation was one from a devout Adventist to a ‘lost soul.’ (“They feel I’m on my way to being lost.”) Up till the present Paolo is angry at the ‘persecution’ he and other gay Adventists he has been subject to. Yet, the fact of having been to surpass such difficulties gives him nevertheless a great feeling of empowerment. Even though Paolo is no longer an Adventist, his Adventist background is not merely still a part of him, it makes him the person he is today.

4.3 James

James is a male Caucasian in his mid-fifties. He was born into Adventism but he never felt positive about it. Today he only remembers the—for him—negative aspects

of Adventism. He particularly disliked the Sabbath, which he experienced as very limiting, maybe even as paralyzing: “[I]t was a day you couldn’t do anything. [You] wouldn’t go to a restaurant on Saturday. You wouldn’t buy gas for your car unless it was an emergency. You wouldn’t travel.” Moreover, his discomfort with the Sabbath translated into actual physical discomfort. James further elaborates:

You know, my parents had a group of friends, [a] set group of friends. And they would go to each other’s houses for Saturday dinner. And this was kind a common thing. Somebody would come over to our house, or we’d go over to somebody else’s house. And I had no choice in that, and I always hated that, I *hated* that, tremendously. And I never [enjoyed dinner], because I’m very picky at what I eat. And, also, um...I was very shy. So I was uncomfortable in those situations. So, [Sabbath to me] was dress up, something that was uncomfortable, go to something that would give me a headache, barely able to stay awake in the church service, a message that I never paid attention to or cared to listen to. And then, um, and then end up being forced to go to somebody else’s house, and having, uh, dinner, with food I couldn’t stand.

James experienced the Sabbath as a weekly ordeal and up to the present remembers it as a day he usually got a headache.

Despite these negative feelings, James did not rebel against Adventism while growing up. He felt social pressure to comply with the Adventist routine. For example, he continued going to Sabbath classes until the age of twenty. The reluctance with which he participated in Adventist activities does not imply that Adventist doctrines were devoid of meaning for him. Some Adventist doctrines very much guided his everyday perceptions and praxis. In particular, the belief in the Second Coming of Christ and the ensuing end of the world overshadowed his being considerably. At that point Adventists still upheld the belief that only 144,000 would be saved. The fear of not being one of very few caused a lot of stress in his life:

There are six billion people in the world today. I don't know how many billion back then, maybe three billion. But all I knew is, is that that was something that went through my mind all the time. You know, to be good, to be...make it [as] one of the 144,000. And then I started thinking about the multitude of people around the whole world, and then, um, and then occasionally I'd go down to a baseball game, professional baseball game in DC. And the stadium held roughly 48,000 people, I think. And I'd, instead of enjoying the baseball game I'd look around and multiply it by three and think: "Well, that's it?" You know, because basically that was the number. It would work out, three times the people that were in the stadium.

Altogether the putting into practice of the Adventist beliefs was suffocating to James. It was "no movies, no jewelry, dress modest." He felt Adventism was out of sync with the larger American society. "Elvis Presley," for example, "was popular at the time, and Adventists thought he was the most sinful guy because the way he swiveled his hips."

The bottom line is that James felt very much smothered by the Adventist beliefs and social reality. He was gradually able to move away from this, to him, oppressive way of living. At one point he decided to stop worrying about whether he was worthy of being saved or not. He comments: "So, finally when I decided there is no way I can be one of the 144,000, heck with the whole thing, my headaches went away. And I felt pretty good, you know...I don't have to anguish over what's right and what's wrong as far as theology." James's experiences provide a striking example of how the Adventist eschatology, more than an abstract set of beliefs, is a lived reality that guides daily praxis and is moreover embodied. When James stops worrying about his chances of being saved his headaches disappear. James's alienation from the Adventist church is gradual and he does not remember when he finally stops considering himself to be an Adventist. He suspects it was sometime in his twenties. Even though his experience is not one of abrupt rupture, he still feels bitter about these memories of being oppressed.

4.4. Conclusion

Hannah, Paolo and James are all people who were thoroughly embedded in Adventist social circles and had fully incorporated the Adventist cosmology. Despite the fact that each individual's experiences of Adventism is contingent upon their concrete situation and personality different, there are some interesting parallels to discuss. All three cases involve former members who were born into Adventism, who were fully immersed in Adventist social circles and had fully incorporated the Adventist cosmology. All of them relate how difficult it was for them to leave Adventism because it is more than a set of beliefs. It is a lifestyle, a way of being that as they all indicate set them apart from mainstream American society: Hannah did not have any school friends because she did not participate in school activities that took place on the Sabbath, Paolo did not share his peers' awareness of popular culture and James was forced to engage in Sabbath activities that caused him to experience discomfort. Crossing the line from being Adventist to being a former member was for all three the result of a gradual and difficult process and even now their Adventist past is ingrained in their habitus. Hannah still has a visceral response when she sees someone drink a glass of wine and Paolo still smiles once in awhile when he eats dinner without praying first. So, clearly they have not left Adventism entirely behind.

5. Concluding remarks

In *The Road to Clarity*, Eva Keller's study of Seventh-day Adventism in the

Madagascar communities of Maroantsetra and Sahameloka, (2005) Keller disagrees with the assertion that:

a phenomenon such as Seventh-day Adventism must, beneath the surface of global similarity, be essentially and fundamentally different depending on the cultural and social context in which it occurs, and that therefore such a phenomenon has to be explained by reference to that particular cultural context. (Keller 2005: 242)

My objective in this article is similar in the sense that I too want to interrogate the discontinuities between the Seventh-Adventist sub-community and the larger society in which this sub-community is embedded. The difference is perhaps that I examine Seventh-day Adventism as it manifests itself in an American context, which, after all, is the context in which the church first arose. But, as we have seen in this article, Seventh-day Adventism, both in its sets of beliefs and in the experience of church members, is a phenomenon that is sometimes quite at odds with American mainstream society. According to Adventist eschatology the church and its members are God's chosen people with a pivotal role to play in the unfolding of time towards its apocalyptic end and possible new beginning. As Bull and Lockhart point out, this conflicts with the view of America as a chosen nation. These tensions do not, however, result in a withdrawal from society. American Seventh-day Adventists do not prepare for the Second Coming of Christ by choosing to remove themselves from everyday life. Rather, as was argued in this article, the expectation of the end of times results in a reorientation of everyday life. When examining the root metaphors in the daily praxis of church members we see how Adventists place themselves in time rather than space by performing particular habitual actions. The most obvious example is the weekly observance of the Sabbath, which indicates that Adventists have an acute awareness of time. As was said, the Sabbath is

not only a commemoration of the beginning of biblical time, and a foreshadowing of future events, but is also likely to prolong the “time-in-between.” Every Saturday, Adventists gather in the church. Following Bull and Lockhart (1989: 153-155), we can argue that the prevalence of sound over other sensory modalities can be interpreted as an indication that the Adventists’ being-together in the church is a being-together-in-time rather than being-together-in-space. The Seventh-day Adventist eschatology is ingrained in the members’ habitus. The discussion of the experiences of Hannah, Paolo and James illustrate the extent to which the Adventist cosmology is embodied.

By engaging in habitual actions that commemorate the Adventists’ positioning in time and abstract from a position in space Adventists can arguably be seen to distance themselves from the space of the society at large, even though this does not necessarily occur at a conscious level. As was pointed out, root metaphors such as church attendance and the observance of health practices are habitual to the extent that they are not necessarily reflected upon. By enacting these practices, members not only place themselves within a religious belief system, but they also inscribe themselves within an idiosyncratic subculture that sets them apart from the surrounding culture to a considerable extent. This evidently does not imply that there are no continuities between sub-community and society at large. Both at the level of Adventist cosmology and at the experiential level of individual members, boundaries are not rigid. Health reform, as was explained before, provides an example of how Adventist cosmology is to some extent influenced by American society. As for individual members, most members, as is the case with most people everywhere, are part of several worlds. Even though Adventists have a strong sense of belonging and identification with the worldwide church (in which

sense we can argue that they are part of an Adventist “imagined community”) it is an open question to what extent this membership prevails over their sense of national belonging. In the interviews I conducted in Maryland members gave different answers. It seems to be contingent on the individual’s personal situation. One member, who had been a missionary for nearly his entire adult life, said that he was first an Adventist and then an American. Other members said that they valued their being American but that they also felt part of an Adventist community. The members that I interviewed were not consciously aware of any tensions between being both American and Adventist and experience being American and being Adventist as complementary rather than antagonistic. This illustrates that despite the fact that in habitual practices members enact Adventist eschatology and thereby position themselves in time rather than (American) space we have to be cautious not to present an image that portrays a rigid discontinuity.

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