An aerial photograph of a city at sunset, with a white rectangular text box overlaid in the center. The city lights are visible in the background, and the sky is a mix of orange and blue. The text box contains the title and author information in a black, italicized serif font.

*Ecumenism and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in
Europe in the 21st Century*

*Denis Fortin
Andrews University*

Perceived Problems with Ecumenism

1. Syncretism of truth with errors
2. Theological reductionism
3. Either to believe or to serve (right theology or right service)?
4. Loss of missionary vision
5. Rejection of proselytism
6. Desire to create a “super church”
7. Undermine the “positive Protestant principle”

Edinburgh World Missionary Conference (1910)

Official Seventh-day Adventist delegates:

- W. A. Spicer, secretary of the General Conference
- L. R. Conradi, president of the European Division
- W. J. Fitzgerald, president of the British Union

W. A. Spicer (Review and Herald, July 21, 1910, 9)

“This great gathering is of the deepest interest to us, as a sign that the day of the Lord is at hand. Here is focused a mighty movement that comes in the providence of God to prepare the way for the closing work of the gospel. ... But the sure word of prophecy also foretold the world-wide spreading abroad of the light of that Word in the days just before the coming of the Lord. And the great missionary movement of the nineteenth century came as the complement and the successor of the Reformation movement.”

“The Reformation gave the blessed Word again to the world. In the modern missionary movement we see the Lord breaking down all barriers, opening all lands, and putting that Word into the tongues of all tribes and peoples.”

Relationships with Other Christian Churches and Religious Organizations

“To avoid creating misunderstanding or friction in our relationships with other Christian churches and religious organizations, the following guidelines have been set forth:

We recognize those agencies that lift up Christ before men as a part of the divine plan for evangelization of the world, and we hold in high esteem Christian men and women in other communions who are engaged in winning souls to Christ.”

Some reflections :

1. The biblical foundation of unity
2. Models of church unity
3. The European Christian and Adventist context

Biblical Foundation of Unity:

“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as you, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent me”
(John 17:20, 21 NKJV)

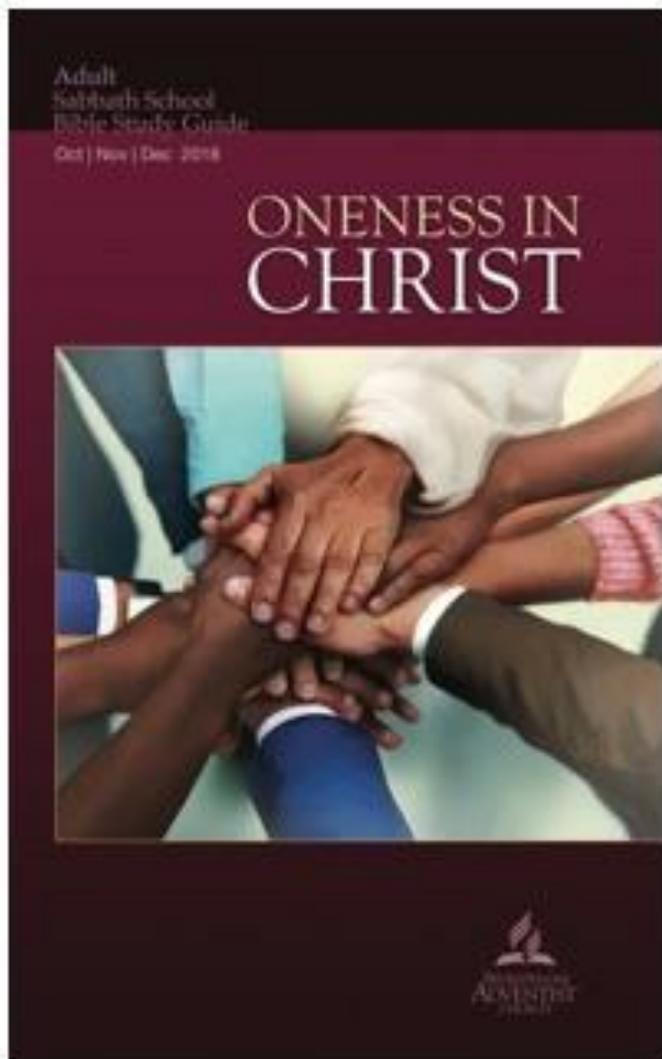
- “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ” (Ephesians 1:3 NKJV).
- Christ “is our peace, who has made both [ethnic groups, Jews and Gentiles] one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation” (Ephesians 2:14 NKJV).

- In Christ, “you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19 NKJV)
- “There is one body and one **Spirit**, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one **Lord**, one faith, one baptism; one God and **Father** of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Ephesians 4:4-6 NKJV)

Everett Ferguson, “These seven items are part of the ‘givens’ of Christianity. Unity is already provided by God in the most important things. Sharing these fundamental things gives a broad and strong basis for unity. In view of what unites, the things that divide seem less formidable. ... In a sense, to be divided is to say God has not done enough to produce unity; it is to minimize the most important aspects of the Christian faith.”

“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise” (Galatians 3:26-29 ESV)

“For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free, and we were all made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13 NASB)



ADVENTISM OF FOR 21ST C EUROPE

Rediscovering Adventist Identity and Mission in 21st Century Europe

- Is the prayer of Jesus in John 17 and are these passages of Paul's letters influencing how we identify ourselves in our European communities?
- Do these passages influence how you relate with one another in the European Seventh-day Adventist Church and with other committed Christians in your communities?
- Are these passages shaping your mission in your communities?

Forms and Models of Church Unity

1. Organic union model
2. Model of mutual recognition
3. Cooperative or Federal Model
4. Association Model

Seventh-day Adventist Church Interchurch Dialogues

- World Council of Churches (1865-1971)
- World Lutheran Federation (1994-1998)
- World Alliance of Reformed Churches (2001)
- Salvation Army (2004-2008)
- World Evangelical Alliance (2006-2007)
- Mennonite World Conference (2011-2012)
- Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (2000-2003)

Dialogue between the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists and the Presbyterian Church (USA) (2008-2013):

- Unprecedented official mutual recognition of both entities as sister churches in the proclamation of the gospel.
- ❖ Seventh Day Baptists (1860s and 1870s) – exchanged official delegates at our respective annual General Conference sessions

Christian World Communion

Anglican Communion

Baptist World Alliance

Disciples Ecumenical Consultative Council

Ecumenical Patriarchate (Eastern Orthodox)

[General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists](#)

International Old Catholic Bishops' Conference

Lutheran World Federation

Mennonite World Conference

Moravian Church Worldwide Unity Board

Moscow Patriarchate (Russian Orthodox Church)

Christian World Communion

Pentecostals

Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity (Roman Catholic Church)

Reformed Ecumenical Council

The Salvation Army

Friends World Committee for Consultation

World Alliance of Reformed Churches

World Convention of Churches of Christ

World Evangelical Alliance

World Methodist Council

Representative from the World Council of Churches

Jan Paulsen

“For many years we have said, and published in our policy statement, that other churches that lift up the name of Christ and use the Word of God are instruments in God’s hand to acquaint people with salvation. So we need to behave in a manner that shows courtesy and respect for their sincerity. I think it is also very important that we be understood aright by them. Therefore we have got to be willing to meet. For us to stay in isolation and keep incommunicado is a disservice to ourselves and exposes us to all kinds of caricatures.”

Jan Paulsen

“There was a time we were young and few in number, and others could afford to ignore us. We are now spread in more than 90 percent of the countries of this world and are one of the most rapidly growing Christian churches. Others, including the Roman Catholic Church, are seriously taking note of who we are and are asking, “What is it that makes you such a growing community?” Therefore, since they are saying, “Come talk to us. We would like to know a little more about you,” we must be willing to talk with them and share with them our vision and mission.”

(Adventist Review, July 11, 2002, 17)

Seventh-day Adventist experience in Europe

- Integrated doctrinal synthesis
- Lived experience with wars and social upheavals

Questions for discussion:

What do you think of Jesus' prayer in John 17 and Paul's comments about Christian unity in his letters? Are these statements applicable to Seventh-day Adventist **identity** in relationship to other Christians?

Is there a need for Seventh-day Adventists to be more involved in some interchurch activities or organizations? What do you think about such relationships being part of your **mission** in the 21st century?



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