Adventist Ethics?
Laying the Groundwork for an Evolving Field

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Abstract

Adventist ethics is an evolving field that, thus far, has lacked comprehensive theoretical grounding. Publications in this academic area fall into six major categories that reflect the importance of the Bible, denominational tradition, and cultural contexts; however, meta-ethics of an Adventist kind is yet to be developed. Therefore, this article proposes a paradigm building on the emphases of the extant body of literature, and calls this paradigm *missional ethics*. This approach is consistent with the essential aspects of Adventist theological tradition, is already exemplified in several significant publications, and encompasses themes of moral concern that are prevalent in the denomination’s Fundamental Beliefs.

1. Adventist Ethics?

Two very different books from the area of moral theory will be the point of departure in this paper.\(^1\) Both force the reader to look at Christian ethics in a new manner. The books are entitled *Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World* (Adeney 1995) and *Virtuous Violence* (Fiske and Rai 2014). The main thesis of the latter (a recent work written by two psychologists) is that most violence does *not* happen because of some pathological impetus or lack of morality in an agent but precisely *because* of moral convictions that *necessitate*, in certain instances, the use of violent means for those to whom certain virtues

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\(^1\) A previous version of this paper was presented on April 5, 2019 in the context of the procedures leading towards the appointment as professor of Systematic Theology and Adventist Studies at Theologische Hochschule Friedensau. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to Rudi Maier’s book *Church and Society* (see footnotes 25 and 52) and suggesting a few improvements to be made.
are important. The title of the former book (authored by a Christian theologian and missionary) is almost self-explanatory: on a globe inhabited by peoples of radically different cultures, one should expect that moral ideas and ideals vary so much that our ethical reflection must take account of this state of affairs. What connects the two is the conviction that in the realm of “virtue” (and this may also be applied to competing models of ethics that focus on “values” or “the good”) much of what seems to be common sense, even among those of us who – broadly speaking – subscribe to a democratic orientation, should not be taken for granted.

This point is hardly surprising for any scholar who does not subscribe to a particular philosophical school or single orientation of ethics such as the common deontological, teleological, and virtue branches, which are commonly referred to in introductory classifications. After all, the very definition of ethics is not easily agreed upon by its representatives in academia, neither among philosophers nor in the Christian discourse – whether it is called moral theology or theological ethics (as Protestants often prefer). In lieu of an extended discussion on whether some notion of “duty,” “love,” “life,” “actions,” “behaviour,” “character,” “conduct,” “consequences,” or “being in the world” is more helpful as a focus, I would like to offer a formulation with which I have worked so far, “the study of appropriate decisions,” and point out why it fits in well with the main topic, i.e. “Adventist Ethics.” Paralleling the wisdom ethos in the Old Testament, “appropriate” implies a potential range of options, indicating that at least in some instances there is more than a simple “right” and “wrong” – there may be “more or less tolerable” or “well-fitting and less well-fitting” and degrees of constructive or healing acts. Moreover, the focus on decisions implies that at least in those areas where humans can decide matters because of their free will (and, one might want to add, actual

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2 Fiske and Rai (Virtuous Violence, 298) refer to evidence that in the realm of psychology, there is a strong bias towards what has been called WEIRD individuals (i.e., those with a western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic background) – a group to which the overwhelming majority of persons in the world does not belong. See also Henrich, Heine, and Norenzayan 2010.

3 Cf. Markus Mühling’s comprehensive presentation on ethics as reflection on actions which include (1) a person with a will, affects, and reason, (2) other persons, (3) natural happenings, (4) empirical and religious certitudes, (5) rules, (6) means, (7) expectations, (8) goals, and (9) results. See Mühling 2012, 19.

4 I would like to thank Kerstin Maiwald for this observation.
personal freedom in their particular social context), they do have a responsibility for their decisions and resulting actions. This emphasis resonates well with the Arminian background of Adventist theology, and therefore leads us to the question in the title of the paper.

Should there really be a thing called Adventist Ethics? There are at least four possible answers – (1) yes, (2) no, (3) yes and no, and (4) neither yes nor no. Position 2 (no) might imply that Adventist ethics is simply to be proper Christian ethics or the best of it. This thinking overlooks the fact that there is no “pure” Christian ethic – reflection on the Christian life, on actions or decisions is always coloured by tradition and culture. Position 3 (yes and no) would presumably mean rejecting the sectarian impulse to offer ethical reflection only for a particular group of people, an in-group code, as it were, and instead focus on, say, “biblical ethics.” Proponents of this stance then run into the well-known hermeneutical conundrums, which is why I suggest not to identify Adventist Ethics with the parenesis, norms, and ideals of biblical writers. In spite of the inherited Adventist desire to restore first-century Christianity, attempts at actually doing so will simply not work out in a world that has experienced twenty centuries of Christian history. Position 4 (neither yes nor no) would imply that a specifically Adventist ethic is needed only in some cases – those where the prophet has spoken or the denomination’s tradition is particularly strong (e.g. abstinence from smoking, pork, and alcohol, from political involvement, and from “worldly” amusements). This perspective would support a casuistic understanding of ethics and, therefore, narrow it to a small set of rules and the reasoning behind them. This is a far cry from the kingdom ethics that we see expounded in the New Testament scriptures.

I propose position 1 (yes) – for several reasons. One is that there are parallel discourses in other Christian traditions: Mennonite ethics (cf. Toews 1963;[\footnote{Cf. denominational Fundamental Beliefs no. 22 (Christian Behavior), which addresses matters of “amusement and entertainment” as well as health, diet, unclean foods, and abstinence from alcohol and tobacco, but (like no. 21, “Stewardship”) does not include aspects of social ethics.}]}
Burkholder 2018), Lutheran ethics,\textsuperscript{6} Baptist, Methodist, and Reformed ethics,\textsuperscript{7} etc.\textsuperscript{8} The second is that Adventist ethics actually exists as a discourse,\textsuperscript{9} and I suggest, therefore (this being the third reason), that it is both meaningful and important to discuss this discourse. This discussion is necessary for another reason; actually several “layers” of ethics can be, and should be, distinguished – and each of them needs appropriate reflection:

(1) *An outer layer: lifestyle traditions.* In the denominational heritage regarding the believer’s conduct, there is a definite set of what are regarded as typical marks of an Adventist believer’s life in this world. Examples include health habits, a set of conservative Evangelical lifestyle elements (e.g. in the area of sexuality, jewelry, and dress), and the rejection of violence and military involvement.

(2) *An inner layer: cultural diversity.* Much less recognized so far is the variety of ethical reflection globally. Regional Adventisms differ much more in matters of everyday morality and emphasis on particular values than in actual doctrinal formulation.

(3) *An upper layer: academic discussion.* A growing stream of publications (but few symposia and conferences so far)\textsuperscript{10} indicate that Adventist ethics is

\textsuperscript{6} Cf. the *Journal of Lutheran Ethics*, an academic journal published in the context of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and Bayer 2007. Interestingly, the original German edition of Bayer’s book does not include “Lutheran Ethics” but is subtitled “Zur theologischen Ethik.”


\textsuperscript{8} For a rather critical viz. self-critical piece on free church ethics, see Lütz 2004. Lütz refers to empirical “free church ethics” as a system of commandments, biblicism, prohibitions, and moralism.

\textsuperscript{9} More on the elements of discourse will be presented in the second part of this paper; for the moment, it is interesting to note that the term “Adventist ethics” has not been used frequently, but it appears in a few instances. See, e.g., Walters 1981; Andreasen 1986; Badenas, and Höschele 2010.

\textsuperscript{10} Among the few significant symposia are the annual Bioethics Conferences of the Adventist Bioethics Consortium, held since 2016, and a 2014 conference at the Adventist University of Africa, Nairobi, titled “The Global Ethics Crisis: Implications for the Adventist Church in Africa.”
on the verge of becoming a field of inquiry in its own right, thus graduating from being a mere conversation.

(4) **A deeper layer: theological foundations.** Analogous to Adventism’s unique mix in expressing the Christian faith, its search for appropriate ethics has been molded by several major influences: Puritan strictness, Methodist Holiness theology, common sense philosophy, a unique brand of biblicism (emphasizing the continuity between the Testaments), and the moral government of God concept (with its concomitant social activism).¹¹

Like every prolonged conversation and field of inquiry, the Adventist Ethics discourse raises a number of questions— not all of which can be dealt with here at length. The aim of this paper will be twofold: (1) identifying and categorizing approaches to Adventist Ethics that exist so far, and (2) suggesting the major parameters for, and proposing an adequate approach to, doing Adventist Ethics. This is, of course, a vast project; therefore, no claim of presenting a fully comprehensive theory is made. Moreover, the paper will touch on questions of applied ethics only in passing; its focus is constructive fundamental ethics.

### 2. Extant Approaches

#### 2.1 Phases

Before turning to an overview and analysis of extant approaches to Adventist Ethics, a brief historical overview of the development of Adventist ethical reflection will help provide a setting for identifying types of ethics prevalent in the denomination’s sphere. Similar to the history of doctrine (cf. Pöhler 1995; Knight 2000), ethical reflection in Adventism went through several stages, but there is also a marked difference with the dogmatic realm: there has been much less controversy for several generations, and hence the overall process has been smoother – so much so that distinguishing clear-cut periods is almost

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¹¹ On the “moral government of God” concept and its importance for Adventist thinking, see Miller 2016.

¹² E.g. who are the major contributors (I would argue that there are several players but no major individual so far); why its state of affairs is the way it is (this interpretation is partly contained in the dissertations by Pearson and Plantak, but an overall evaluation would necessitate a large study of its own); and what role Adventist ethics plays in the overall realm of Adventist theology (again, this presumably calls for a dissertation).
impossible. I suggest, therefore, the following phases should be regarded not so much as being distinct, but as stages in the growth of a discourse that has broadened rather than turning or changing its direction.

I: The pioneer phase. Until the death of the denomination’s pioneer generation (Ellen White died in 1915), church leaders reacted to moral issues mainly on the basis of a shared ethos of radical discipleship and (largely) a plain reading of biblical texts, with respect to the charismatic authority of the movement’s prophet, and on the basis of experience in the world around (e.g. in the Civil War).

II: The orthodox phase. The absence of a prophetic voice in their midst, dramatic international expansion, and the significant numerical growth of membership in the early 20th century moved the denomination into a phase in which institutional logic and adherence to models developed in the pioneer phase characterized not only their organizational operations, but also their attitude to moral issues. Thus orthopraxy in everyday life, formerly largely agreed upon but not codified, became sanctioned by such publications as the church’s first Church Manual (1930) and a growing number of Ellen White compilations, which served the purpose of presenting to church members standards to be followed in a wide variety of life situations – with a concomitant leaning towards casuistic morals.

III: The contemporary phase. A discernible ethics discourse on the academic and intercultural levels developed from about 1980 onward.13 The first (unpublished) dissertations on Adventist ethics were written in the 1970s (Davis 1970; Larson 1973); the 1980 Fundamental Beliefs contained significantly stronger elements of ethical relevance than the 1931 version;14 comprehensive published academic studies on Adventist ethics began to appear (Dudley and

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13 The nine-page bibliography in the first edition of Schwartz 1979, the major denominational history textbook, contained no single reference to a publication on ethics as such. The closest (and only) items with ethical implications were Kellogg, The Living Temple (1903), Wilcox, Seventh-day Adventists in Time of War (1936), and Robinson, The Story of Our Health Message (1943).

14 The 1980 version more than doubled section on stewardship (from 44 to 103 words) and considerably expanded the section on “Christian Behaviour” (from 113 to 199 words). The 1931 text mainly formulates rules and prohibitions, while the 1980 version presents a reasoned articulation of a theology of responsibility and virtue. Moreover, it adds a separate and lengthy paragraph on “Marriage and the Family” (no. 22; 218 words).
Hernandez 1982), a bioethics centre was established at Loma Linda University in 1986, being the first important institutional anchoring of ethical reflection in the Adventist context; and a growing stream of statements to the public on ethical questions was published by the General Conference.

Which approaches have characterized Adventist Ethics thus far? At least six types of contributions to the denominational discourse on ethics can be discerned when analysing the method or type of reasoning that is utilized.

2.2 Bible-Centred Approaches

(1) The biblicist-traditionalist approach. Similar to other Evangelical systems of, or treatises on, ethics, arguments in this kind of contribution are couched in biblical phraseology and derived particularly from New Testament texts. Different from those systems, the moral traditions peculiar to Adventism are a second force behind such expositions. Quotations from E.G. White may be used as evidence or serve as Halakha. Since both her original writings and books made from her manuscripts were a major reference for moral reasoning in the generations after her death, this seems natural, for formulations and concepts taken from them are already present in the collective Adventist psyche in many instances.

This biblicist-traditionalist approach easily lends itself to a deontological perspective: “it is written,” and therefore an Adventist Christian is to fulfil his

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15 Until the 1970s, Adventists published popular books on ethics, and there were a few unpublished dissertations by Adventists, but not on Adventist topics.

16 For examples, see footnotes 20 to 22.

17 In local churches, one sometimes hears members arguing that questions ought to be settled with the help of “the Bible, Ellen White, and the Church Manual.” I heard this idea at least once almost every year in classes when I taught theology in Tanzania between 1997 and 2003.

or her duty and follow the letter, even if this is done eclectically. Both popular writers and well-known Adventist theologians have used this approach until recent years, even though professional ethicists tend to abstain from such a narrow system of arguing their cases. Nevertheless, biblicist reasoning resonates with an important part of the Adventist tradition, and due to the fact that the role of Ellen White’s writings has not always been clear vis-à-vis Scripture, law-oriented patterns of moral thought that build on the prophet’s voluminous corpus of texts are attractive to those who emphasize their reliability and wish to preserve the inherited Adventist ethical code.

(2) The biblical-theological approach, which is used mainly by theologians, shares a strong foundation in the biblical material with the orientation in the first, but desists from the inherited Adventist propensity towards “proof texting” (and, thus, emphasizing some parts of Scripture at the expense of others), and to some extent from the temptation to adjust biblical interpretation to pre-defined outcomes. There are numerous examples from different areas of ethics, written by Old and New Testament scholars and by systematic theologians both in popular and academic formats: on the area of sexuality (Davidson 2007 [844 pp!]), health (Moskala 1998), relationships (Kubo 1993), and the Ten Commandments as foundation for Christian ethics (see Londis 1978

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19 Walters 1981, 2 argues that Adventist ethics is traditionally teleological because believers “keenly anticipate a soon-coming, perfect world” and translate this belief into the maxim “act so as to promote the Second Coming.” This may have been true for individuals and for some phases and aspects of Adventist moral reasoning, notably for those who adhere to the perfectionist ideas of a “last generation theology,” a minority view (which gained support by a few church leaders). Cf. Douglass 1976.

20 One example is Rodriguez 1999. At the time of publishing, Rodriguez, an Old Testament scholar, was Associate Director of the denomination’s Biblical Research Institute; later he was the Director. Other examples are Samuele Bacchiocchi’s books: Bacchiocchi 1898; 1995; 2000. Bacchiocchi, a church historian, self-published these books, which were quite popular among certain parts of the church membership at the time.

21 Further well-known publications of this kind are Springett 1988 and Koranteng-Pipim 2001.

22 An exception is du Preez 1993, the published version of a D.Min. dissertation, in which the author rejects any notion that biblical writers allow for polygamy to be practiced among the people of God. In other publications, du Preez follows a pure duty ethics approach; see, e.g., his article with the puzzling title “A Holocaust of Deception: Lying to Save Life and Biblical Morality,” (du Preez 1998), where he insists that lying is prohibited for Christians even in extreme cases. Cf. also his popular-style book: du Preez 2006.
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and Mainka 2004). Actually the major introductory textbook for Adventist theology, *The Reign of God* (Rice 1985), which also belongs to this category, covers almost all major areas of ethics – love, law, resources, family, social responsibilities, and political responsibilities.\(^{23}\) *The Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Dederen 2000) uses a similar approach and devotes several chapters to themes of ethics,\(^{24}\) but lacks references to the political and economic realms and to subjects such as war and the military.\(^{25}\)

The contributions to this sub-discourse characterize Adventist ethics as squarely belonging to conservative Protestantism, and although empirical findings would have to verify this claim, it is probably safe to say that this type of reasoning has become the Adventist mainstream, at least in the Western world. Building upon biblical premises and honouring traditional denominational perspectives but evaluating them critically in the light of Old and New Testament research, this approach parallels the common Adventist perception of theology being identical to “topical Bible study.”\(^{26}\) Because of this framework, this type of ethics will commonly be limited to issues on which sufficient clarity seems to be found in the biblical writings, and the deontological orientation coupled with the biblicist-traditionalist approach is checked here with a biblically founded virtue ethics orientation. The major limitation may be that intercultural aspects often seem of little importance, and that much of these works have been written from a Western or North American perspective; thus the awareness of contextual embeddedness, which is so vital in many areas of ethics, is at times hardly visible.

\(^{23}\) Rice 1985, chapter 12, pp. 259–287 (“Members of the Christian Church: Their Way of Life”). The entire book is largely based on biblical texts and adds to literature from the Adventist tradition as well as other backgrounds in the footnotes and in the bibliographical suggestions (pp. 285–287). The chapter shortly covers questions of salvation and Christian life, love, law, resources, family, social responsibilities, and political responsibilities.

\(^{24}\) Especially relevant are the chapters on “Sin” (pp. 233–270), “The Law of God” (pp. 457–492), “Stewardship” (pp. 651–674), “Christian Lifestyle and Behavior” (pp. 675–723), “Marriage and Family” (pp. 724–750), and “Health and Healing” (pp. 751–783).

\(^{25}\) A wide array of issues in the realm of health, development, human rights, public life, and family life is addressed, however, in Maier 2015. The book has 31 chapters and almost 800 pages.

\(^{26}\) See Richard Rice’s review article (Rice 2001) on the *Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Theology* (Dederen 2000).
2.3 **Tradition-Focused Approaches**

(3) The historical approach has (understandably) developed much later than the first two types of Adventist argumentation. The earliest major works of this kind were written in the 1970s as unpublished dissertations and theses (see Davis 1970 and Larson 1973). Several key themes and most of those with a significant SDA heritage have been covered in comprehensive published studies:

- Health (cf. Reid 1976; Reid 1982)
- Sexuality (cf. Pearson 1990)
- Human rights (cf. Plantak 1998)
- Politics (cf. Morgan 2001)
- Gender (cf. Vance 1999)

A number of other issues and peculiar aspects of larger themes have been addressed in shorter works (cf. Dick 1976; Anderson 1982; Höschele 2015), and a voluminous monograph interpretation of Adventism, *Seeking a Sanctuary* (Bull and Lockhart 2007), written by two sympathetic non-Adventist scholars devotes several chapters to questions of ethics while integrating them into their overall analysis that the denomination essentially represents a variety of the American dream.

This is, of course, the domain of historically oriented scholars. Their contributions aim at understanding the discourses of the past and at critically reviewing the underlying causes and logic of development in Adventist positions and practices relevant for ethical reflection. Different from a biblical-theological approach, their scholarship is limited by the caveat imposed on historiography and ethics by Hume’s law (i.e., the ought-is problem): in retrospect, we may be able to grasp – at least approximately – how things have been and why, but such insights do not necessarily have a decisive impact on how people ought to decide or act today. On the other hand, all serious ethicists will want to reflect on their subject matter on the basis of a sufficient set of data, which includes the historical perspective. This is why the history of Adventist ethics is a necessary ingredient in the theological-ethical task, as is a grasp of the history of doctrine in constructive theology.

(4) The systematic-theological approach to ethics is (somewhat surprisingly) a relatively recent phenomenon in Adventist scholarship as well. Although

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27 What is missing so far is a historical analysis of Adventist ethical method and of Adventists and the economy; in the latter realm, the topic of labour unions has played a significant role in SDA thinking. Cf. Rittenhouse 1977, and Kistler 1984.

deriving ethical reflection and positions from main tenets of Adventist doctrine had been part of the denominational heritage since the time of Ellen White, systematic attempts at connecting core teachings of Adventism with social ethics were made only from the 1980s onward.\textsuperscript{29} Such efforts did not become mainstream and appeared only occasionally – in a few unpublished theses (see e.g. Mirilov 1994; Jackson 2007)\textsuperscript{30} and some articles and book sections.\textsuperscript{31} Only one full-length book publication (of 1995) has been devoted to the reflection on the relevance of doctrine to ethics so far (Teel 1995). In it, ten leading SDA ethicists of the period relate most of the typically Adventist teachings to themes in personal and social ethics,\textsuperscript{32} thereby pointing out that the denomination’s traditional dogmatic and personal ethics orientation naturally connects with the social sphere.

While such creative efforts are promising and bear the potential of enlarging the theological discourse in the denomination in a meaningful way,\textsuperscript{33} they also point to the limits of what seems plausible in a global movement that hinges on very specific theological traditions and secondary norms (i.e., elements found in Ellen White’s writings). So far, Mrs. White’s impact as an ethicist has hardly been a topic of reflection in its own right, in spite of the fact

\textsuperscript{29} A first short book addressing this connection from an Adventist perspective and written in popular style is Brunt 1987 (90 pp.). The book cover includes the subtitle, “How Do People Waiting for the Second Coming Respond to Poverty, Lawsuits, Hunger, Political Oppression, Sexuality, and Sin?”

\textsuperscript{30} Mirilov 1994 has a focus on the Second Advent and remnant teachings; and Jackson 2007 has a theoretical focus and an application to the race issue.


\textsuperscript{32} Charles Teel (remnant); Jack Provonsha (creation); Michael Pearson (covenant); David Larson (sanctuary); Miroslav Kis (Sabbath); James Walters (law); Charles Scriven (salvation); Ginger Hanks-Harwood (wholeness); Roy Branson (second advent); Gerald Winslow (millennium). The one major theme of traditional Adventist theology that is not addressed in this volume is the gift of prophecy; other subjects that could have been included are the New Earth, judgement, and the “great controversy” theme.

\textsuperscript{33} For an analogous approach in the realm of doctrine presented to a popular audience, see Bruinsma 1998.
that through her writings earlier Adventist moral thought – like early Adventist theology – has been codified. Her thinking appears in the major historical studies on SDA ethics,\(^{34}\) but even the most important publications on Ellen White do not address her development, or influences on her, as a moral thinker.\(^ {35}\) Such a broad and yet thorough study would be needed, however, precisely because the bearing of her writings on Adventist systematic theology (including ethics)\(^ {36}\) today is far from clarified, which points to a need for reflecting method in Adventist theological ethics. A case in point is the massive *Systematic Theology* by Norman Gulley, the first ever multi-volume work of Adventist dogmatics, published between 2003 and 2016. Although the entire set is essentially an exposition of traditional Adventist positions, it does not interact with Ellen White’s thought\(^ {37}\) and does not address ethics anywhere – actually it is four volumes of dogmatics and some fundamental theology.

2.4 **Context-Sensitive Approaches**

(5) The fifth approach is what I would call *local ethics*. The fact that ethics always has to do with the actual lives of people suggests that cultural factors and the meaning of particular actions in a contextual setting play an important role when it comes to reflections on moral choice. A growing number of empirical studies, notably the American and European “Valuegenesis” studies on Adventist youth, their lifestyle, and views (see Dudley 1992; Case 1996; Gelbrich and Hö schele 2013), contribute to such a

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\(^{35}\) Aamodt, Land, and Numbers 2014 contains chapters on “Testimonies,” “Theology,” “Society,” “War, Slavery, and Race,” and “Gender,” but does not deal with Ellen White as an ethicist of her own kind. Of course, her role was that of a prophet-counsellor; however, her importance for the types of ethical reasoning that Adventists adopted is yet to be evaluated. Burt 2015 likewise does not have a chapter on Mrs. White and ethics (there is one, however, on “Ellen White and Vegetarianism,” 199–212, by Theodore Levterov).

\(^{36}\) For the latest voice on interpreting Ellen White’s writings, see Knight 2019.

\(^{37}\) Gulley does not quote Ellen White anywhere and only deals with her ministry on seven pages in the context of remnant ecclesiology; see Gulley 2016, 478–484. Here his main emphasis is to demonstrate that she was a true prophet.
contextual perspective on ethics in the Adventist tradition.\textsuperscript{38} Other examples include studies on homosexuality (see Drumm 1998; Nyarenchi Matwetwe 2005; Fergusan, Guy, and Larson 2008), church-state interactions (see Rosado 1985, focusing on the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Dixon-Fyle 1978), and race relations (see Magethi and Nkosi 1991; Makapela 1996), being areas where cultural contexts and regional discourses naturally affect the positions that scholars take. Moreover, although there is little academic study of this phenomenon so far, popular Adventist moral reflection\textsuperscript{39} clearly belongs to the “local ethics” category and is of significance because the de facto morality and ways of reasoning among believers at the grassroots cannot be dismissed as irrelevant in thinking about what can be reasonably expected of moral agents.

At first glance, an approach that aims at better understanding the cultural environment and social setting in which ethical positions will be translated into action may seem valuable in balancing the traditional Adventist emphasis on universally valid law (viz. biblical instructions in general). Yet regarding ethics as a contextual endeavour will also help reminding those who reflect on moral issues that Adventist ethics has mostly been a contextual undertaking anyway. The Millerite movement and the groups resulting from its sudden end in 1844 were both the product of cultural forces and created a culture that came with a rather clear set of dos and don’ts. All theology is contextual – and so is all ethical reflection. This may be easier to accept regarding other Christian movements, distant generations, and discourses on some Pacific islands, but contextuality (with its concomitant danger, narrow-minded parochiality) is of course also a trait of our own reasoning. Obviously cultural values do not equal ultimate norms, but they need to be studied in order to be understood and to be taken seriously – hence the significance of proper empirical methodology\textsuperscript{40} – and then, in a second step, Christians and

\textsuperscript{38} See also the older empirical studies: Crider and Kistler 1979; Dudley and Hernandez 1982.

\textsuperscript{39} For attempts in this realm, see Doss 2006; and two long chapters of Höschele 2007: chapter 7 (“Adventism and Culture in Traditional and Modern Tanzanian Society”), pp. 259–263, with a focus on circumcision, marriage issues, and Adventist lifestyle questions, and chapter 8 (“Tanzanian Adventists and Public Matters”), pp. 363–430, which highlights the issues of Adventism and colonialism, government relations and political involvement, and the question of military service.

\textsuperscript{40} For reflections and a model on this nexus, see Höschele 2009.
churches can decide whether to support such values or to oppose them (cf. Höschele 2007a). In this sense the growing number of official denominational statements on issues in the realm of ethics\textsuperscript{41} are helpful in that they present typical, but non-binding Adventist positions on many topics.

(6) A sixth approach may be termed missionary ethics. It closely relates to the fifth but differs from it in that it relates ethical reflection to the perceived tension that arises from the communication of the gospel (or the denominational understanding of the same) and indigenous cultural practices, values, and views. The most striking example of such reflections in the Adventist context is polygamy: several major studies have explored this practice in light of the church’s mission (see Kisaka 1979; Kuranga 1991 [on polygamy: pp. 222–235]; Annor-Boahen 2010; the historical overview in Höschele 2015). Other significant issues have been the questions of circumcision (see Papu and Verster 2006),\textsuperscript{42} jewellery (cf. Samir 2019), and the use of certain musical styles and instruments.\textsuperscript{43}

In view of the fact that the denomination has been firmly dedicated to mission since the late 19th century and that its academicians have published in the field of missiology since the 1960s, it may seem surprising that very little scholarly work has been done so far on the impact of missionary practice on ethics and vice versa. Among the hundreds of major scholarly items in the field of Adventist missiology,\textsuperscript{44} fewer than ten focus on matters of morality. Presumably, the reason for this scarcity of ethical reflection in the mission context is that Seventh-day Adventism was brought to “overseas” regions with the heritage of a rather well-defined ethical code. Little discussion seemed to be necessary, therefore – only in those areas where tradition was not very

\textsuperscript{41} For a collection, see Dabrowski 2005. Further statements are available on the denominational website (https://www.adventist.org/en/information/official-statements). A reflection on the role of these statements is offered in Höschele 2006.

\textsuperscript{42} Papu and Verster argue that Christians should not participate in male circumcision rituals because of their cultural and religious connotations.

\textsuperscript{43} While music may also be merely viewed as a matter of aesthetics, some Adventist scholars believe musical practices to belong to the realm of ethics as well. Cf. Bacchiocchi 2000 and Stefani 1993. The balanced approach of Christian 2002 contains a critical reply to Bacchiocchi’s wholesale rejection of what he calls “rock music.”

\textsuperscript{44} I.e. published scholarly articles, monographs, and Ph.D., D.Miss., and D.Min. dissertations. I evaluated more than 300 of such items from my fairly comprehensive collection.
strong (such as the circumcision question) or where the missionary culture associated with inherited Adventist morality seems to be utterly challenging in the propagation of the gospel (as was the case with polygamy in some contexts). Nonetheless, for constructing the groundwork of Adventist ethics in the 21st century, a missionary approach to ethics is of crucial importance because it reflects the ubiquitous encounter of cultures in a worldwide movement and a globalized setting.

3. Missional Ethics

It is not hard to see that the major six Adventist approaches to ethics come in pairs and neatly fit in three main categories: Bible-centred approaches (1 and 2), tradition-focused approaches (3 and 4), and context-sensitive approaches (5 and 6). It also appears that, taken as a whole, these approaches reflect most of the significant ingredients needed in properly constructing Christian reflection on moral matters (and on theology at large).\textsuperscript{45} Admittedly, the Adventist ethics discourse has been rather weak so far in two other realms that belong to the “context” category – the dialogue with philosophical ethics and communication with science (except in medical ethics / bioethics).\textsuperscript{46} It appears, however, that the denomination’s philosophically inclined intellectuals and ethicists are on the way to catching up.\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{45} The similarity with Fritz Guy’s “tripolar thinking” with regard to Adventist theology (Christian gospel – Adventist heritage – Cultural context) is not entirely accidental; see Guy 1999, 225–252. The main difference, at this point, is that the observations above refer to how Adventist ethics has actually been done while Guy argues Adventist theology should be done in this manner.

\textsuperscript{46} There has been, however, a committee at the global denominational level (the General Conference) that has considered a large number of issues (including many which needed input from the sciences) before the denomination issued statements on them: the Public and Official Statements Committee. See Dabrowski 2005. Since 2012, the General Conference’s Biblical Research Institute also has an Ethics Committee.

\textsuperscript{47} The Society of Adventist Philosophers was established in 2010, and it has held annual conferences and symposia since that time. Four of the meetings addressed themes in the realm of ethics (2013: race and gender; 2014: Adventism and moral philosophy; 2016: Adventism and the good life; 2017: free markets), and only some of the papers have been published. It would be too early to call this an Adventist discourse on philosophical ethics, but it is a beginning. See https://adventistphilosophy.org.
One area in which little has been done so far by Adventist scholars in the entire discipline (and not a single comprehensive study has been produced) is the field of meta-ethics, i.e. the reflection on foundations, method, and limitations of the ethical task. A large number of extant works do not present any reflection on theories of ethical reasoning, and the few short items that can be classified as belonging to meta-ethics do not make comprehensive proposals but focus on particular aspects such as the role of the Bible in ethics (cf. Brunt and Winslow 1982; Andreasen 1986), main philosophical positions (cf. Larson 1981), or models of social ethics (cf. Jackson 2007).

3.1 **Principles of Constructing Adventist Ethics**

What, therefore, would be an approach to ethics that builds on the best of the Adventist tradition, rests on solid biblical foundations, and relates meaningfully to the glocal realities in the contemporary world? Future scholars will be able to embark on a full-length discussion of the issues in constructing such an approach; here I merely want to point out that there are several principles one needs to bear in mind in delineating any academic field or discipline and from which insights for doing Adventist ethics can be derived. They are\(^{48}\) (1) a precise object of reasonable proportions; (2) comprehensiveness of scope with regard to this object; (3) continuity with academic tradition and the discipline culture; (4) relevance for the subsystem of society concerned; and (5) interaction, but as little competition as possible, with neighbouring disciplines.

The application of these standard principles to Adventist Ethics will lead to the following contours with several implications for method:

(1) and (2): *Adventist Ethics has a precise object* – the life of the Christian in the world seen from an Adventist perspective, or appropriate decisions in context as a follower of Jesus. The proportions of this task are large but reasonable, as is the discipline of ethics in general. Methodological implications will be that (a) scholars will bear in mind that any study in the field relates to a larger body of issues and theological foundations and (b) no aspect of ethics is excluded.

(3) *Continuity with academic tradition* and the discipline culture implies that (c) Adventist Ethics will be in constant conversation with ethics as it is done

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\(^{48}\) These criteria are derived from the insights found in Krishnan 2009, 9, 12–47.
in other Christian communities and in the non-Christian and philosophical context.

(4) Relevance implies (d) a focus on the themes of the community that is involved (here: Adventists in their various environments); methodologically, this also implies that (e) the biblical and dogmatic aspects of moral reasoning need to be duly considered, and (f) studies of the variety of contexts and their impact on Adventist thinking is of importance.

(5) Competition with neighbouring disciplines will presumably not be a problem (as long as scholars of dogmatics and social scientists remain true to their theological viz. interpretative task rather than jumping to normative concepts regarding the Christian life). (g) Learning from a fruitful interaction with these disciplines, however, will be a necessity in order to refrain from generalizations and one-sided evaluations.

To summarize, Adventist ethics is to be conceived as a field viz. discipline that
(a) is well-embedded in the overall body of Adventist theology,
(b) aims at comprehensively treating all issues and aspects of the field,
(c) benefits from and actively engages with the general ethics discourse,
(d) focuses on themes that are relevant for Adventist communities in their contexts,
(e) builds on sound biblical and dogmatic foundations,
(f) is informed by cultural and philosophical environments in which Adventists operate,
(g) and learns from the social sciences and other pertinent academic disciplines.

Translated into an overall shape of the field, this means that a combination of the Bible-centred, tradition-focused, and context-sensitive approaches will best reflect the aspects that need to be considered and the method of evaluating data in attempting to arrive at well-founded and wise insights. Similarly to dogmatics, where the biblical message is reflected upon by deliberating models in the history of doctrine and the communicability of statements or imagery in particular contexts, Adventist Ethics will thus build on the norma normans (Scripture) while relating its message to the variety of cultural and denominational norms.
3.2 Missio Dei and Adventist Ethics

Before expounding what this means for the use of biblical materials, dogmatic tradition, and contextual factors, I want to suggest a term for the kind of ethics paradigm that has just been delineated: *missional ethics*. Ethicists have begun to use this term only recently; yet its appropriateness for a well-crafted Adventist ethic is evident. “Missional ethics” is derived from the *missio Dei* concept, the insight that God himself is the true missionary. *Missio Dei*, therefore, focuses on his coming into, and purpose for, this world – and connects well with the Adventist emphases on salvation history, the proclamation of the gospel, and a serious Christian lifestyle. It further builds on major themes in the denomination’s theology such as the focus on God’s kingdom, which is not yet but already present in Christ, and God the creator, whose *shalom* is the intention for all humankind.

Missional ethics essentially means that the theoretical separation between the Christian life and a Christian’s proclamation is removed. How a follower of Christ ought to act is not solely derived from either holy texts or cherished traditions or the conventions of communes but is always to be weighed with the question in mind of how God’s goals, his kingdom values, and the purposes of his creation, can be realized, restored, or reflected in particular settings. If it is true that mission is the mother of theology, is it far-fetched to

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49 Draycott and Rowe 2012 seems to be the first book to use the term in its title. The expression was earlier utilized by Wright 2006, 358–387. A recent author also includes it in its title: Salter 2019. The latter is a revised dissertation with a focus on exegesis of text that the author views as crucial for missional ethics (“An Exegetical Definition of Missional Ethics,” University of Aberdeen, 2017).

50 Needless to say, this means that ethics, like theology in general, is quite unlike the exact sciences. Its normative character implies that some negatives are universal (e.g., “thou shalt not murder”), but it is important to realize that many positive norms (e.g., “be fruitful and multiply”) cannot be universalized as command: context is crucial, and even in specific configurations, God’s saints will come to different conclusions due to biographical backgrounds and different cognitive capacities.

51 Martin Kähler’s well-known statement that “the oldest mission became the mother of theology” written in 1908, has often been shortened to this formula. For the context of his thought, see Kähler 1971, 190.
postulate that God’s mission is also the space for, defining distinctive, and crucial principle for properly doing Christian ethics.\footnote{52}{This is also the concern behind the massive volume \textit{Church and Society} (Maier 2015).}

The missional ethics concept implies that ethics has to learn from historical mission encounters, but it is much more than an enhanced version of missionary ethics\footnote{53}{While the term “missional” has been criticized for being fuzzy, it builds on the thought of eminent missiologists such as David Bosch and Lesslie Newbigin, who emphasized that mission is more than merely propagating a certain set of ideas.} (which is often conceptualized as translation or indigenization, thus regularly implying cultural one-way communications\footnote{54}{Cf. the “translation models” and “adaptation models” mentioned by Schreiter 1985, 6–12.}). The point of departure in this concept of reflection on moral matters is that each Christian finds himself in a mission situation as a participant in the \textit{missio Dei}, and that her actions may often speak louder than her words. In this kind of reflection, all the other approaches (Bible-centred, tradition-focused, and context-sensitive) will have their proper place and space, but missional ethics will emphasize the importance of opening up to the future and transform their direction (does this conform to the wording of certain biblical texts? – can this fit in with confessional tradition? – will people accept this?). The question will now be, “does this correspond to God’s kingdom?” or, “what would Jesus do” – in this particular configuration of external demands, inherited values and potential manifestations of the Good?

Before discussing what this missional paradigm of ethics will do to the use of the Bible and dogmatic emphases in the Adventist tradition, and how it will impact Adventisms in their real life context, I would like to cite a few examples of where such an approach has worked out well in SDA ethics. While the term “missional” has not been used by Adventists so far, these examples illustrate what this paradigm can mean if applied to various areas of moral thought.

(1) \textit{Steve Daily’s “Adventism for a New Generation,”} 1993. While this (popular style) book was actually published one generation ago, its ethics chapters\footnote{55}{Daily 1993, especially 206–216 (chapter 20 on Adventist family life), 252–261 (chapter 24 on money), 262–271 (chapter 25 on medicine, health, and healing), 283–293 (chapter 27 on social ethics), 294–311 (chapter 28 on various controversial issues such as homosexuality, divorce, nuclear war, politics, lawsuits, animal rights, etc.), and 317–323 (chapter 30 on altruistic service).}
largely remain valid approaches to a North American situation in which Adventists were slow at the time to interact with public discourses on cultural change. Daily, then a long-time chaplain at La Sierra University, advocated a reasonable, non-legalistic, Christ-centred, and value-focused approach to Adventist Ethics.

(2) The denominational statement on birth control, 1999. Titled “Birth Control: A Seventh-day Adventist Statement of Consensus,” this three-page document was voted by the denomination’s Annual Council. It lists seven “biblically based principles,” insists on responsible, informed personal choice, and notes that there is diversity of opinions on this matter in the church. At the same time, it draws clear boundaries (by rejecting abortion for birth control) and insists that sexual intercourse properly belongs to the marriage context.

(3) A 2003 monograph focusing on biomedicine (Wong 2003). In this introductory textbook, John B. Wong, a physician, trained lawyer, and scholar of ethics, discussed a large number of contemporary issues, providing case studies and biblical reflections, referring to court decisions, and adding scholars’ responses to questions and case studies he provided.

3.3 A Missional Paradigm of Adventist Ethics

How, then, will Adventist Ethics done according to a missional paradigm deal with the Christian’s primary sources? It may seem obvious, but because of a bibliclist bent in inherited Adventist theological arguing patterns, it is important to emphasize that the reasoned use of material found in the Bible will serve as providing a foundation and principles for further deliberation. It is impossible to include here a well-rounded account of different uses of the Scriptures in Christian ethics, but it is clear that a casuistic use of instructions in the New

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56 For the full text, see Dabrowski 2005, 6–9.

57 These are: (1) Responsible stewardship, (2) procreative purpose (of sexuality being one purpose), (3) unifying purpose (of sexuality being another major purpose), (4) freedom to choose (number of children and having children at all), (5) appropriate methods of birth control (abortion as birth control is rejected here; other methods are discussed and accepted), (6) misuse of birth control (extra-marital sexual relations), (7) a redemptive approach.

58 For different perspectives on this vast field, see Green 2011, e.g. s.v. “Narrative Ethics,” “New Testament Ethics,” “Parables, Use in Ethics,” “Public Theology and Ethics,” articles on specific biblical books, and articles on philosophical schools in the same volume.
Testament parenesis is as inappropriate as eclectic (or even wholesale) applications of Old Testament precepts to the Christian’s conduct. Of course, the biblical writings stipulate minimum requirements for those belonging to God’s people, such as obedience to the Decalogue. Beyond such timeless instructions, however, much of the biblical material that addresses moral issues is directed towards particular people in specific situations and social environments. There is, therefore, no shortcut from the Scriptures to ethics that would bypass sound exegesis and thorough reflection on the meaning of narratives and instructions in the light of God’s mission in today’s diverse environments.

At the same time, some of the major motifs that the normative writings of Christendom present imply that their substance of ethical argument is well-balanced and philosophically broad. Figures of thought and imagery such as (1) faithfulness and (2) obedience (passim), (3) spotlessness (e.g. in the Apocalypse), and (4) principledness indicate – when taken as a whole – that corresponding notions and perspectives of (1) devotion or relational ethics, (2) service or deontological ethics, (3) righteousness or virtue ethics, and (4) rationality or utilitarian ethics all resonate with Christian conceptions of the Good and the Right.\textsuperscript{59} There is, therefore, no lack of connectors with those moral theories that philosophers have produced over the millennia. With regard to a missional perspective, this implies that a Christian ethic that is derived from a biblical orientation can be related with many of the major philosophical and cultural patterns of moral reasoning, thus helping the Christian embody the gospel in a variety of environments.

In the Seventh-day Adventist context, the importance of a reasoned (i.e. historically analytical and contextually attentive) use of sources extends to its major secondary authority as well: the writings of Ellen G. White. As a prophetic voice, the importance attributed to her writings regarding moral matters has at times been elevated in the popular mind almost beyond the New Testament.

\textsuperscript{59} The differentiation between the Right and the Good is crucial, especially in the conversation between theology and philosophy, but cannot be discussed here. For a classic on this issue, see Ross 1930. – Other terms and imagery also relate to further philosophical theories, such as “steward” and responsibility ethics.
Testament as far as practical matters are concerned, e.g. with reference to vegetarian or vegan nutrition.⁶⁰ Although scholars have discussed the hermeneutics of her writings for more than a generation now (see Knight 1997 and 1998), their critical and constructive use in Adventist Ethics is still emerging. It goes without saying that such a reasoned use of material from tradition is a necessity with regard to other sources of authority as well. Since Adventists perceive themselves as a non-credal movement, authorities such as the Fundamental Beliefs⁶¹ and other texts voted by the denomination’s leading body (e.g. the Church Manual, the General Conference Working Policy, and official statements [cf. Dabrowski 2005]) may be secondary (or tertiary) norms or guidelines, but must be interpreted and applied in a historically and contextually appropriate manner and with a view of God’s mission in the world, i.e. an orientation that is as much future-oriented as it connects with the past.

Adventist Ethics done according to a missional paradigm will, furthermore, build on dogmatic emphases and traditions that are particularly dear to Seventh-day Adventists. Since one comprehensive attempt at constructing ethical reflection on such a basis⁶² has already been presented in the volume Remnant and Republic (Teel 1995), this paper does not need to repeat the argument presented there at length. The book expounds that doctrines with a more obvious social reference (creation, covenant, Sabbath, law, and wholeness) as well as those more typically associated with the Christian individual and Adventist peculiar teachings (remnant, sanctuary, salvation, second advent, millennium) provide a platform for the entire range of themes in ethics. What this

⁶⁰ The schismatic Reform Adventists actually codified vegetarianism and in practice tend to be vegans; among Adventists, there is a considerable group that relies on Ellen White’s writings for a similar lifestyle. On Reform Adventism, see Ruttmann 2002.

⁶¹ The denomination’s 28 Fundamental Beliefs include a preamble that emphasizes that “Seventh-day Adventists accept the Bible as their only creed” and explains that “revision … may be expected at a General Conference session when the church is led by the Holy Spirit to a fuller understanding of Bible truth or finds better language in which to express the teachings of God’s Holy Word.”

⁶² Another book that works on a similar basis but with a specific focus (bioethics and death issues), thus majoring on creation and eschatology as dogmatic basis, is Reinder Bruinsma’s well-reasoned Matters of Life and Death (Bruinsma 2000). This is one of the very few Adventist monographs addressing (in its twelve chapters) a large number of ethical topics for a popular audience.
Adventist Ethics?

volume does not address, however, is the mission aspect that is so prominent in Adventist doctrine and that would point to missional ethics as well.

It may well be that the academic reflection on Adventist mission, likewise, has rarely connected with ethics because the inherited emphases in the denomination’s missionary endeavours have been an apocalyptic element and the Sabbath doctrine as a distinctive teaching that marks Adventists as being “different from the world.” A missional ethics paradigm, therefore, will be a helpful corrective to a one-sided mission theology that shaped the Adventist movement in its earliest period (“warning the world” and a mission mainly built on Revelation 14; cf. Schantz 1983, 267–275). It can also adjust related concepts that continue to lurk in the denominational psyche, such as the theory that Adventists have to “bring forth” the end of time by accomplishing God’s task of proclamation everywhere (Schantz 1983, 488–489), and the legalistic temptation associated with the so-called “last generation” theology (see footnote 14 and Evans 2010). Missional ethics, by way of contrast, would emphasize God’s initiative in propagating his kingdom, thus properly attributing the Christians’ task as participating in his mission both by thoughtful proclamation and by their very lives. This will presumably even reflect in more appropriate manner the main moral impetus of the book of Revelation, which Adventists cherished from their beginning: remaining faithful until the end.

When one relates the denomination’s doctrinal body as a whole to applied ethics, three major realms stand out: (1) time, (2) the body, and (3) community. It is likely that Adventists can make their most significant contribution to Christian ethics in these realms. Time is an aspect of the emphasis on the Sabbath commandment with its life-structuring rhythm of work and rest. It is also an intrinsic part of Advent-ist theology proper, i.e. the anticipatory shape of the Christian existence. An eschatology that moulds the believer’s plans

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63 None of the section headings in the volume refers to mission, and the content has no more than passing references to missionary matters.

64 Rev. 2:10; 13:10; 14:12; cf. also Hebr. 3:14 and Matt. 10:22.

65 It is more than a coincidence that Bull and Lockhart interpret Adventism’s locus of the holy in time (as opposed to their Mormon cousins, who came to hallow space); see Bull and Lockhart 2007, 252–255.

66 See the appendix for a listing of Fundamental Beliefs that relate to each of these three realms.
and attitudes, a philosophy of (salvation) history that makes the followers of Jesus look far beyond the cares of the present day and of this world: the appropriate use of time is at the core of the Adventist moral consciousness. While these themes may have to be developed further in future studies – and other Christians have done this as well, particularly with regard to “Sabbath ethics” (Segbers 2002) – one must note here that missional ethics enriched by Adventist theology will certainly reason with reference to Qohelet’s realization that “there is a time for everything” (Eccl. 3:1).

The body is a crucial realm of Adventist ethics in several respects. The strong emphasis on God the creator, as well as a literal, material new earth (rather than popular Christian beliefs about “going to heaven”), connect with the rejection of ideas that attribute immortality to a “soul” that is thought of as being non-bodily. Thus human life in the body is key for understanding the Adventist approach to everyday living: the physical is part of the holistic human existence rather than an inferior part of a being. Thus the denomination’s traditional health emphasis and teachings on decency viz. propriety, i.e. a focus on the appropriate conduct of a Christian as a bodily being. As in the realm of time, the Adventist heritage of an ethic that treats the human body with utmost seriousness can certainly enrich Christian missional ethics and the discourse on being missional (which, so far, has not yet touched the question of the body to any great extent).

Community, by way of contrast, is already key in accounts of “being missional” (see, e.g., Guder 2015). Adventists explicitly touch aspects of community in about half of the Fundamental Beliefs; as in most Christian churches, the communitarian character of the Christian existence – and of human life at large – is a crucial part of doctrine. While Adventist holism (which traditionally focuses on body, thinking, and the psyche) may still benefit from an even more holistic view that gives more emphasis to the social sphere, the prominence given to mission and social service in Adventism and the historic nexus to social reform movements (Smith 1974) indicate that Adventist Ethics is well-embedded in the denomination’s theology in this respect and that it naturally links with a missional ethics approach.

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67 See the appendix.
Finally, doing Adventist Ethics in a missional manner means incorporating a consciousness of, and a reflected discourse about, the *glocal character of Christianity* in a more systematic way. Globalization theories are diverse and contested; therefore, it suffices to state here that the Seventh-day Adventist Church, as one of the few Christian churches with a traditionally very strong worldwide coherence, combines in itself global spread and outlook on the one side and regional and cultural contextualities on the other. With the robust American legacy that is inbuilt in its administration, subculture, and some of its discourses, the denomination continues to meet the challenges of cultural friction and diverging interests even in the realm of theology. Quite naturally, such setups – and the mixtures, overlays, syntheses, and new creations that result from the encounter of the local and the global – can lead to viewpoints in the moral realm that were foreign to previous generations.⁶⁸

It is here that a missional approach may be most helpful in steering the Adventist Ethics discourse to an adequate level. As in global Christianity as a whole, “strange virtues” are virtues nonetheless: if Adventists aim at proclaiming the “everlasting gospel … to every nation, tribe, language and people” (Rev. 14:6), they will have to appreciate the variety of cultural logic with regard to moral reasoning among them. This does not mean that the culture-affirming option must be the only and major one; Adventist history has numerous examples of reasonable and successful counter-cultural and culture transforming instances, which implied conflict on moral matters.⁶⁹

### 3.4 Application: An Example

This section, and the paper, ends with an example of applying missional Adventist Ethics – to the question of violence.⁷⁰ Every human being encounters, or is affected by, some form of violence sooner or later. The degree to which violent actions are deemed acceptable in different cultural settings varies a lot, and as

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⁶⁸ The global Adventist debate on gender equality, notably with regard to the ordination question, and differing views on LGBTQ issues, illustrate this point.

⁶⁹ Cf. the various interactional patterns between Christianity and culture presented in Höschele 2007b.

⁷⁰ Some other such helpful examples would be issues of monetary resources, work, the question of power in human relationships, and the twin subjects of belonging to and duties to a nation. These will be addressed in later versions of this study.
has been hinted at in the introduction to this paper, many aspects of this disconcerting reality may be interpreted as virtuous violence – actions done not in spite of, but because of moral codes (cf. Adeney 1995; Fiske and Rai 2014). Yet what is considered an adequate use of force in some settings may be viewed as completely intolerable elsewhere.

Seventh-day Adventists share the Anabaptist heritage of non-violence. They have also developed an end-time scenario that includes the persecution of God’s saints by those who oppose the gospel. These two conceptions result in a general commitment to non-violent conflict resolution, which emphasizes that it is preferable to suffer rather than inflicting suffering on others. However, being children of modernity, Adventists have also been inclined to appeal to authorities regarding religious liberty and human rights. The SDA tradition actually combines elements of an apocalyptic-driven critique of the powers that be with a cooperative attitude where improvements in welfare seems attainable. In a missional ethics approach, the delicate balance between these elements of the Adventist heritage will also have to be weighed against the tangible situation that a Christian faces.

Other spheres where believers approach instances of violence in very divergent ways are the discipline of children, religious insults, and involvement in armed forces or the police. In the latter case, the Adventist ideal of non-combatancy and refraining from work where killing can happen have remained stable; however, in practice one finds a large variety of such careers that have found acceptance among the church membership. As in the case of punishing children and verbally attacking people of other religious convictions, individuals will point to biblical instances that seem to justify such actions. What such perspectives indicate is that a missional ethic will have to start reflection from where people are, since the same actions can have widely different meanings to them. At the same time, the transformational impulse of kingdom values will often lead to challenging the status quo, even if this means that we as Christians have to suffer. Or, as the first epistle of Peter, which portrays a missional ethic contextualized in the first century and contains a total of 16 references to “suffering,” puts it, “Live such exemplary lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.” (1 Peter 2:12).

A missional ethics approach to thinking about morality will deal with instances of real world violence in the way Adventists have essentially done it in
the past: with a kingdom-oriented but non-legalistic, restorative, patience-of-the-saints orientation. By thus fulfilling their calling, by participating in God’s mission, they will act according to the prayer that the Lord taught his disciples and that epitomizes the best in Adventist attitudes and faith: “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.”
Appendix:
The 28 Fundamental Beliefs and their Relevance for Adventist Ethics

Basis of Ethics

Meta-Ethics (Fundamental Theology)
0. Preamble
1. The Holy Scriptures
7. The Nature of Humanity
11. Growing in Christ
18. The Gift of Prophecy
19. The Law of God

Theologia (Doctrine of God)
2. The Trinity
3. The Father
4. The Son
5. The Holy Spirit

Oikonomia (Salvation)
8. The Great Controversy
9. The Life, Death, and Resurrection of Christ
10. The Experience of Salvation
11. Growing in Christ
24. Christ’s Ministry in the Heavenly Sanctuary
25. The Second Coming of Christ

Themes of Ethics

Body
6. Creation
7. The Nature of Humanity
21. Stewardship
22. Christian Behaviour
23. Marriage and the Family
26. Death and Resurrection
28. The New Earth

Time
20. The Sabbath
21. Stewardship
22. Christian Behaviour
25. The Second Coming of Christ
27. The Millennium and the End of Sin
28. The New Earth

Community
6. Creation
7. The Nature of Humanity
11. Growing in Christ
12. The Church
13. The Remnant and Its Mission
14. Unity in the Body of Christ
15. Baptism
16. The Lord’s Supper
17. Spiritual Gifts and Ministries
18. The Gift of Prophecy
19. The Law of God
20. The Sabbath
21. Stewardship
22. Christian Behaviour
23. Marriage and the Family
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Zusammenfassung

Adventistische Ethik ist ein sich entwickelndes Arbeitsgebiet, für das bislang eine umfassende theoretische Fundierung fehlt. Veröffentlichungen in diesem Feld lassen sich in sechs Hauptbereiche einteilen, die die Bedeutung der Bibel, konfessioneller Tradition und kultureller Kontexte widerspiegeln; eine adventistische geprägte Metaethik muss jedoch noch erarbeitet werden. Dieser Artikel schlägt hierfür ein Paradigma vor, das auf die Schwerpunkte der vorliegenden Literatur aufbaut, und nennt dieses *missionale Ethik*. Dieser Ansatz entspricht wesentlichen Aspekten der adventistischen theologischen Tradition, ist beispielhaft in einigen wichtigen Publikationen bereits angewandt und umfasst Themen von moralischem Belang, die in den Glaubensüberzeugungen der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten vorherrschen.

Résumé

L’éthique adventiste est un domaine en évolution qui, jusqu’à présent, a manqué de fondement théorique complet. Les publications dans ce domaine universitaire se répartissent en six grandes catégories qui reflètent l’importance de la Bible, de la tradition confessionnelle et des contextes culturels; cependant, une méta-éthique de type adventiste reste à développer. Par conséquent, cet article propose un paradigme s’appuyant sur l’accent mis sur le corps existant de la littérature, et appelle ce paradigme *éthique missionnelle*. Cette approche est cohérente avec les aspects essentiels de la tradition théologique adventiste, elle est déjà illustrée dans plusieurs publications importantes et englobe des thèmes de préoccupation morale qui prévalent dans les croyances fondamentales de la dénomination.

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