Angela Lõesching was born in 1931 in Eastern Europe to two blind parents—a language-teacher father, blind from birth, and a poet-mother who lost her sight early in life. They raised Angela and her sister Victoria on their own, which meant that Angela had to grow up quickly; her parents could not even teach her to walk. When she was 3 years old, Angela would go to the neighbors to fetch milk, which her mother would then feed her as the mainstay of her diet.

Angela proved to be a stellar student, learning Hungarian, modern German as well as old Gothic, Esperanto, and Serbo-Croatian—languages she can speak, read, and write to this day. Her school planned to send her to Budapest to study at the university as an exceptional child, but World War II broke out, so she was sent instead to Austria with her family as a refugee during the Russian surge in 1944. During the week-long train journey, the Russians and the Germans bombed the train several times, but Angela and her family arrived unharmed at their destination.

Until the end of the war, Angela was “safe” in a refugee camp in the Austrian Alps. However, lack of food and clothing put the entire family in dire straits. In July 1945, the Lõesching family was sent back to what was then Yugoslavia, where they spent 18 months in a camp for German Folksdojcers in Gakovo, a foul place not unlike the concentration camps of the previous war years. Of an initial population of 18,000, only about half survived. At this camp, Angela lost her father and sister under the most painful circumstances.

Just two months shy of age 17, Angela met a wonderful man, whom she eventually married. Her husband shared the good news of God’s love with her and her mother, Stefania. They converted from Catholicism and became committed members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Angela felt that this church’s buoyant faith, filled with hope and shalom, was a balm for her deep wounds.

A year after Angela married and six weeks after she delivered a beautiful little girl, her husband was drafted for a three-year stint in the army and stationed more than 600 miles away on the border between Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria. This was in 1948—the tensest time of the Stalin-Tito conflict, when Yugoslavia challenged Russian control of the Balkans. Angela was now 18 and penniless, with a newborn baby and a blind mother to care for. Ever the resourceful survivor, she found work at the Ekonomija, the Communist agricultural company, where she worked hard to make ends meet, while carrying her baby on her back, until her husband returned from his compulsory military service.

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http://jae.adventist.org
A small group of local Adventist believers helped Angela during that time by providing milk for the baby and wood to burn during the bitterly cold winters. This church community, despite its faults, became to Angela’s family the body of Christ. It was, in a small but tangible way, what Isaiah described: “a well-watered garden, a spring whose waters never fail, ... repairer of broken walls and restorer” of social justice (58:6-12). Indeed, this community became the Sabbath of delight for a broken young woman, as they practiced the Isaiah “fast”— loosing the chains of injustice, untying the cords of the yoke, sharing food with the hungry; providing the poor with shelter; clothing the naked; spending itself on behalf of others; and satisfying the mental, emotional, and material needs of the oppressed.

Angela is my mother!

But why this personal story? I believe that our stories shape us and give us a theological center and meaning. If Angela could be healed of the despair and pain of the horrors of this ugly, sinful world, which are almost unimaginable to my generation, and if she could courageously raise all three of her children (and four grandchildren) in addition to performing humanitarian work in Adventist church communities in Australia, England, and the United States, then God’s restoration and repair of the world are real. And this is exactly what God calls us to do through our faith community.

**Prophetic Living**

I have argued elsewhere that today’s Christian community must take a much more imaginative and visioning “prophetic role” in the present age, and that looking more closely at the biblical prophets will provide us with a much-needed clarification about the way that prophetic role must be fulfilled. We will gain these insights less through apocalyptic and time-line warnings and chart-ticking (in)securities, and more from studying the way biblical prophets accomplished their tasks—through imaginative visioning and social activism in the socio-ethical, political, ecological, and economic arenas, especially as they fought for the people Jesus referred to as the “least of these” within the social, political, and economic strata, who suffered the worst injustices.

Furthermore, in several places I have made a strong call for two major theological tenets—the Sabbath and soon coming of Christ—to become significantly more socio-ethically relevant. I believe that the richness of our theological heritage should give us much greater interest in the “other,” whose human dignity, rights, and aspirations should be supported. Our Sabbath teaching and practice should include not only weekly Sabbaths that equalize us all before God, but also annual sabbaths that specifically focus on social justice and represent a moral embrace of that great jubilee year referred to not only by Leviticus and Deuteronomy but also by Jesus of Nazareth in describing His mission in His inaugural messianic proclamation. The Second Coming encompasses both the hope that we proclaim through evangelism but also—as referenced at the end of Christ’s Olivet discourse—the doing for the least of our sisters and brothers socially and morally exactly what we would do if it was Jesus Himself on the receiving end of our actions.

**Eschatological Living as Prophetic Living**

For several years now, I have wrestled with one further point, which has helped me discover a more helpful and satisfying conclusion. Previously, I had been calling for more imaginative prophetic living, and I continue to believe that this is a special calling for any prophetic community, especially a remnant prophetic community. However, I also now advocate for what I call “eschatological living.” The seer in the Book of Revelation received a vision of how that new world looked. He directed our eyes to the lush garden with water flowing freely to energize the trees that give fruits in frequent cycles and produce leaves that are so therapeutic that they serve for the healing of the nations.

Until recently, I had always thought of this picture in terms of post-Second Coming and therefore had not tried to reconcile it with God’s invitation to the moral community of all believers here and now. And yet, eschatological living urges us to take seriously the vision of New Jerusalem and to apply it to life today. In some way, as South African scholar Adrio König argues in his book, our view must reject on one hand “a completed and [on another] a one-sidedly futuristic eschatology in favor of an eschatology in the process of being realized.” He further suggests that “full eschatological reality requires ... a realized eschatology (‘for us’), an eschatology being realized (‘in us’), and an eschatology yet-to-be-realized (‘with us’).”

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

That is why, having been born into a new life and renewed by the living waters of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-40), we are already living the life that we are hoping for, and thus should be implementing the principles of the kingdom of grace that we soon expect to experience in the new earth and New Jerusalem in the kingdom of glory. Jürgen Moltmann expresses it succinctly: “Time after the [first] coming of Christ must be seen as
‘fulfilled but not yet completed time.’ It is no longer the time of pure expectation, nor is it as yet the eternal present of the time of completion. That is why we live between the ‘now already’ and the ‘not yet.’” 15 As this “future-made-present” creates new conditions for possibilities in history, it becomes the ultimate in the penultimate, and creates a reflection of the possibilities of the “future of time in the midst of time.” 16

N. T. Wright, in his recent book *Surprised by Hope*, elaborates for several hundred pages on this same concept. He speaks about “a sense of continuity as well as discontinuity between the present world (and the present state), and the future, whatever it shall be, with the result that what we do in the present matters enormously. . . . It was people who believed robustly in the resurrection. . . . who stood up against Caesar in the first centuries of Christian era. A piety that sees death as the moment of ‘going home at last,’ the time, when we are ‘called to God’s eternal peace’ has no quarrel with power-mongers who want to carve up the world to suit their own ends. Resurrection, by contrast, has always gone with a strong view of God’s justice and of God as the good creator. Those twin beliefs give rise not to a meek acquiescence to injustice in the world but to a robust determination to oppose it.” 17

I have become fully convinced that the biblical imagery of the leaves that are given for the healing of the nations (Revelation 22:2) must indeed be applied to our eschatological living here and now. The image is clearly linked to previous passages in the prophetic and wisdom literature and to several other metaphors used to call a community of God-fearing people to prophetic living laden with social justice. This type of prophetic living cares about and for the earth that God pronounced good when He created it, and for which He was willing to die in order to restore it from “Paradise Lost” to “Paradise Restored,” in which the lion will lie down with the lamb.

Echoes of the wisdom poetry of Psalm 1 are clearly evident in the vision of the seer: “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever [the righteous] does, prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.” 18 The righteousness that we strive for in this life is similarly described as the final righteousness of the new world order that God establishes when His will is finally enacted on earth as it is already fully realized in heaven. And the tree in Psalm 1 whose “leaves do not wither” seems to bear some connection to the original Edenic tree of life. “As the tree situated in the garden of God served to confer everlasting life to the primal couple, so the psalmist’s tree is the sign and symbol” of blessedness and happiness for the individual. 19

Similarly, in wisdom literature elsewhere, such as Proverbs 11:30 and 15:4, texts explicitly associate the tree of life with righteousness and the healing properties of the speech. On numerous occasions in the Book of Proverbs, righteousness and wickedness are described with powerful imagery, so when we think about the word pair “righteous/wicked,” the terms that are such essential “elements of the psalmic vocabulary,” 20 we cannot neglect the statement in Proverbs 29:7 regarding these two groups: “The righteous care about justice for the poor, but the wicked have no such concern.” 21 This makes it clear that the righteous who are planted like trees with deep roots and nourishing supplies of ever-flowing water are indeed the kind of people that care for the socially and economically disadvantaged. If tree symbolism in Psalms, as William P. Brown suggests, “underscores YHWH’s creative power to bless, recalling the shalom of the primordial garden,” 22 then it is logical to assume that the prophet Isaiah is further developing this ecologically friendly metaphor by adding parallel similes to paint a fuller theological canvass of the community that is watered by God and consequently produces His justice and enacts His righteousness.

In Isaiah 1, the faith community is called to repentance from meaningless worship and useless Sabbath assemblies (vs. 10-15) because they have failed to “seek justice, encourage the oppressed, defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of the widow” (vs. 17, 22, 23), and have become “like an oak with fading leaves, like a garden without water,” so dry that it burns...
and cannot be extinguished (vss. 30, 31). God’s anger is directed against those who have ruined His vineyard (Isaiah 5:7) because “the plunder of the poor is in [their] houses [because they are crushing God’s people] and grinding the faces of the poor” (Isaiah 3:14, 15).

As an eco-friendly, sustainability-encouraging viticulturist and botanist, God plants His vineyard on a fertile hillside, takes care of it, and expects its fruit to reflect the gardener’s loving touch. However, the spiritual vineyard and “the garden of his delight” (Isaiah 5:7) have become corrupted and lack social justice because God’s people are so materially possessed and commercially driven that they add “house to house and join field to field till no space is left,” while they live, alienated and alone, in their “fine mansions” (vss. 7, 8). So a shoot comes from the stump of Jesse and from His root a Branch bears fruit. The Spirit of the Lord is the Branch and will judge the needy with righteousness and give justice to the poor of the Earth (Isaiah 11:1-2, 4, 5). The “righteous branch” wields power to implement justice and, thereby, brings about peace and prosperity for his people” and for the nations. And “a remnant [is called to once more] . . . take root below and bear fruit above” (Isaiah 37:31, 32), an invitation to deep spiritual rootedness that produces an abundance of fruit and ever-green branches in ethical, social, and environmental spheres. Thus, we see again the close linkage of social awareness and ecological justice in a concept of rootedness and fruit bearing.

Isaiah’s most elaborate explanation of these metaphors appears in chapters 58 and 61. Just as the tree in the New Jerusalem expresses God’s magnificence, the community of believers who “will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor . . . will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated” (Isaiah 61:3, 4). This paints a splendid picture of the community of faith serving as the leaves for the healing of the world. The healing of the well-watered garden and the spring whose waters never fail (Isaiah 61:7, 11) are identified in terms of “to spend yourself on behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed” (Isaiah 58:10). just as the sheep in Jesus’ last sermon (Matthew 25:31-46) are commended for what they have done for the needy as if for Christ Himself. Isaiah’s community is, therefore, not dissimilar to Jeremiah’s righteous person who “will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green” (Jeremiah 17:8). This resembles Jesus’ description in John’s Gospel that “whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within him” (7:38); and Ezekiel’s vision “of a great river [that] is depicted issuing from the temple to fructify the land” that the seer of Patmos replicates with modifications in Revelation 22. I believe that this is an unequivocal call for environmental and social justice to function collaboratively.

Conclusion

G. K. Chesterton once wrote: “If small seeds in the black earth can become such beautiful roses, think what the heart of a human being can become on its long journey to the stars.” In our present eschatological living, we must live as resurrection people poised between Easter and the Eschaton, when Easter will become completed in the second coming of Christ. In view of this, we as followers of Christ, motivated by the vision of the seer of Patmos, must not passively wait for our Master to return. Rather, we must become His hands and feet by becoming that well-watered garden envisioned by the poet, prophet, and seer. We must act here and now as righteous, green-leafed trees that work for justice on behalf of the poor. With the help of the Spirit, we can become ever-flowing waters of justice through whom God can accomplish His work of repairing broken communities and restoring justice. In simple terms, our prophetic calling and living must also become our Advent-directed eschatological living. How can we accomplish this task?

At the closing program of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre in 2006, Robina Marie Winbush preached a sermon entitled “For the Healing of the Nations.” Her concluding questions are pertinent to our community as well:

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

C. S. Lewis draws a similar conclusion, noting that “In our world today Jesus Christ [the Lion] is on the move. He is real; he is present. His redeeming, reconciling, healing work is progressing. But he had also not yet come in his full power and glory. That lies in the future. Until that day Christians are called to be Christ’s instruments for reconciliation and healing in a broken world.”

There is no doubt that the hope presented by John the Revelator has begun to penetrate God’s world already here and now. Angela still suffers terrible physical pain from arthritis and nerve damage that make those who love her cry, “How long, O Lord?” She is not fully healed. Neither is our world. And similarly, in our own experiences, we still see the innocent suffer and people subjected to systemic injustice. Unfortunately, many students in our schools and universities from comfortable backgrounds believe that people ought to be self-sufficient and pull themselves up by their bootstraps, which too often translates into contempt for the poor and those who are unlucky because of illness, unemployment, or other personal tragedies. Worldwide, more than three billion people live in abject poverty (one billion subsisting on less than $1 a day, and two billion on $2 a day).

But the Divine-on-the-Move has been healing the entire world with His grace and love and is willing to heal others through us. It is our responsibility as educators and mentors in Adventist schools to help a new generation embrace a radical philosophy that rejects the “I-Me-Mine” culture and incarnates the vision of the biblical prophets, becoming members of the kingdom of grace and working to accomplish God’s universal purposes as they wait for the soon-coming kingdom of glory. And thus, we must pray and live daily that radical prayer of Jesus: “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done in earth, as it is [already] in heaven” (Matthew 6:10, KJV).
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NOTES AND REFERENCES
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3. Political theology is not politicizing or getting involved into party politics, but rather a theology of the marketplace or what is also known as “public theology” or “living theology.”


5. See e.g., Deuteronomy 15 and Leviticus 25. Also, compare with Jesus’ announcement of “the year of the Lord’s favor” in His Nazareth manifesto in Luke 4:18-21.

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


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid., p. 236.


13. Jürgen Moltmann suggests that, through His Spirit “God now already sets present and past in the light of his eschatological arrival, an arrival which means the establishment of his eternal kingdom, and his indwelling in the creation renewed for that indwelling” (The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], p. 23).

14. These two phrases about the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory are borrowed from Ellen G. White’s books The Great Controversy (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1888), pp. 347, 348; and The Acts of the Apostles (Pacific Press, 1911), page 228, and are based on the biblical concepts of the “kingdom of God being at hand” and “kingdom of God being in you.” For more on this topic, as well as the larger discussion regarding the theological richness of the debate in the larger Christian and Adventist communities on the concept of the kingdom of God and its two realities, see Plantak, The Silent Church: Human Rights and Adventist Social Ethics, op. cit., pp. 168-184.


16. Ibid., p. 22.

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


19. Ibid.


23. Brown, ibid., p. 69.

24. Tonstad, “For the Healing of the Nations,” op. cit., pages 5-7, makes important connections between Isaiah 11 and Revelation 22, especially in the context of the plural term nations.


26. Similar metaphors abound in the prophets such as Amos 5:24, which states, “let justice roll on like a river and righteousness like a never-failing stream!”

27. Verse 39 adds: “By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive,” further showing how the healing of the nations through the well-watered gardens and trees rooted in God could and should give its effect between Jesus’ first and second comings. The elements of Jesus as our temple, from whom the living waters flow, and the role of the Holy Spirit in that process after Jesus’ resurrection are important themes that need to be further unpacked in a future study on eschatological pneumatology.


