

# The Sacredness of Saturday in African Traditional Religion: A Bridge for Dialogue

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# Introduction

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- The African continent, with its diverse ethnicities, cultures, and religious practices, is home to a rich spiritual heritage. African Traditional Religions (ATRs) are deeply embedded in the daily lives of many African communities, often manifesting in beliefs, rituals, and sacred observances tied to nature, ancestors, and the divine



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- While African Traditional Religions (ATRs) are **diverse**, some African communities observe certain days as **sacred** or **rest days**, and in a few cases, **Saturday** (the seventh day) is particularly significant. These communities often view **the seventh day as a sacred day** due to **cosmological beliefs, ancestral reverence, or agricultural cycles**.

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- However, it is important to note that the observance of **Saturday as a sacred day** is not uniformly practiced across all African cultures. Hence, there are some African communities where **Saturday** or a similar day is observed as a sacred day.

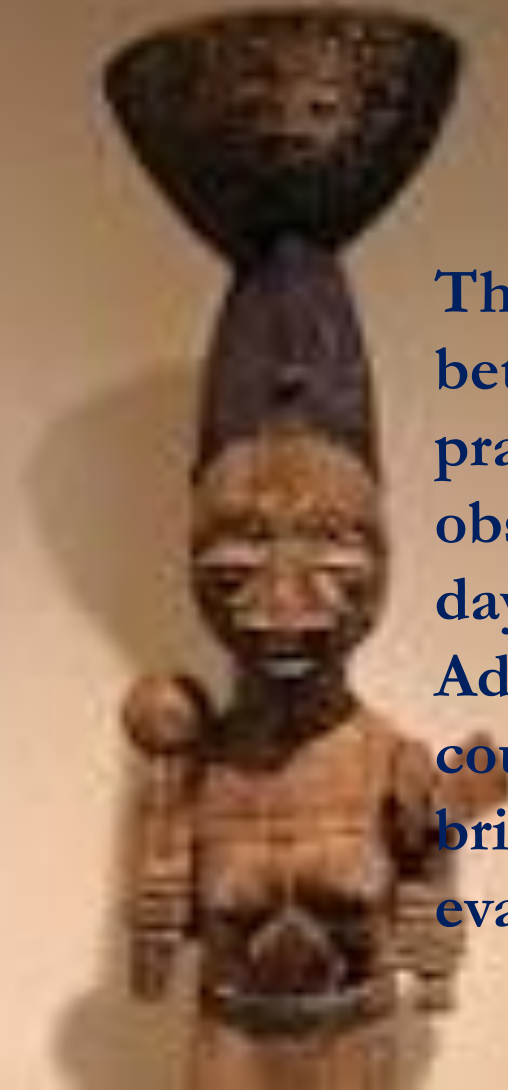
# The Yoruba People (Nigeria and Benin)

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- In Yoruba cosmology, **the seventh day** is considered a day of **rest** and spiritual significance. The Yoruba people have a tradition of observing rest on certain days, and there are links between their sacred calendar and the biblical seventh day.
- For example, the Yoruba may dedicate certain **Saturdays** or specific days to honor deities or ancestors, with community prayers and rituals. The Yoruba people (Nigeria and Benin) worship ***Orisha Osun***, the goddess of love, fertility and rivers on Saturday.

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The connection between their practice of observing a sacred day and the Adventist Sabbath could provide a bridge for evangelism.

# The Akan People (Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire)

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- The Akan people observe particular days as sacred, especially those tied to the lunar and agricultural cycles. While the exact day may vary, some Akan communities consider the seventh day a significant day for ritual activities, communal gatherings, and worship.
- The Akan people (Ghana and ivory coast) worship ancestral spirits and the Supreme Deity known as ***Nyame*** on Saturday.





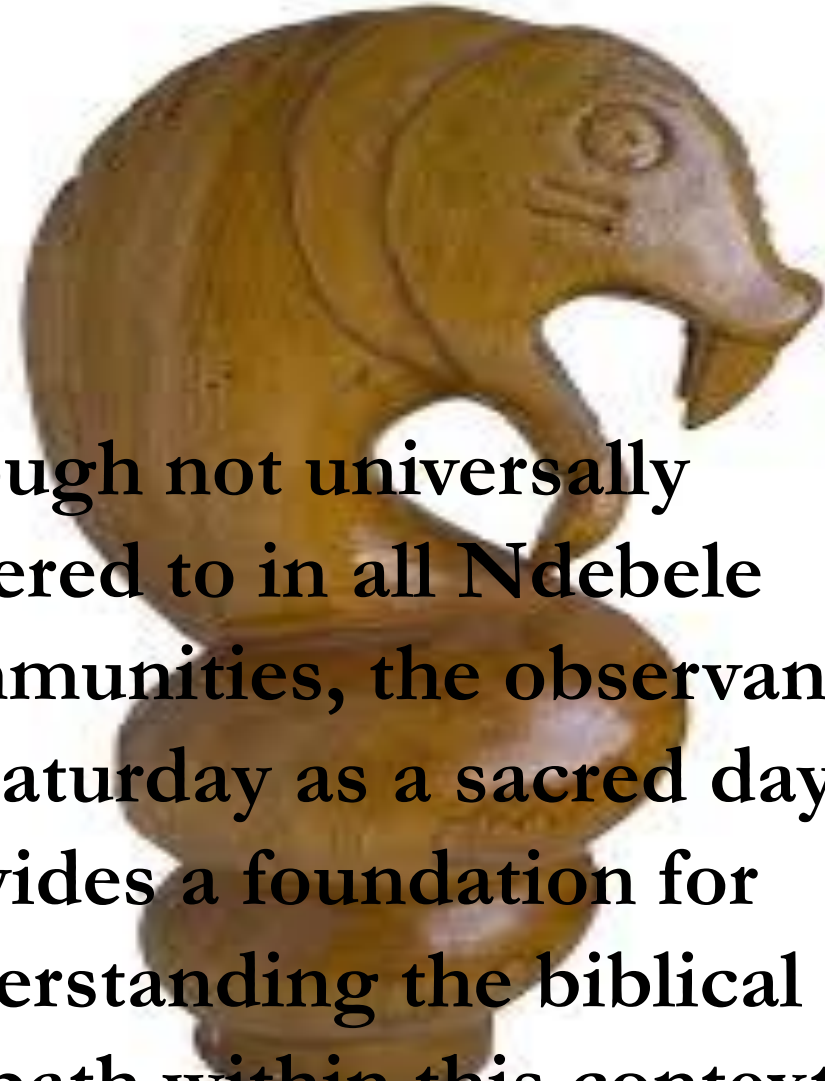
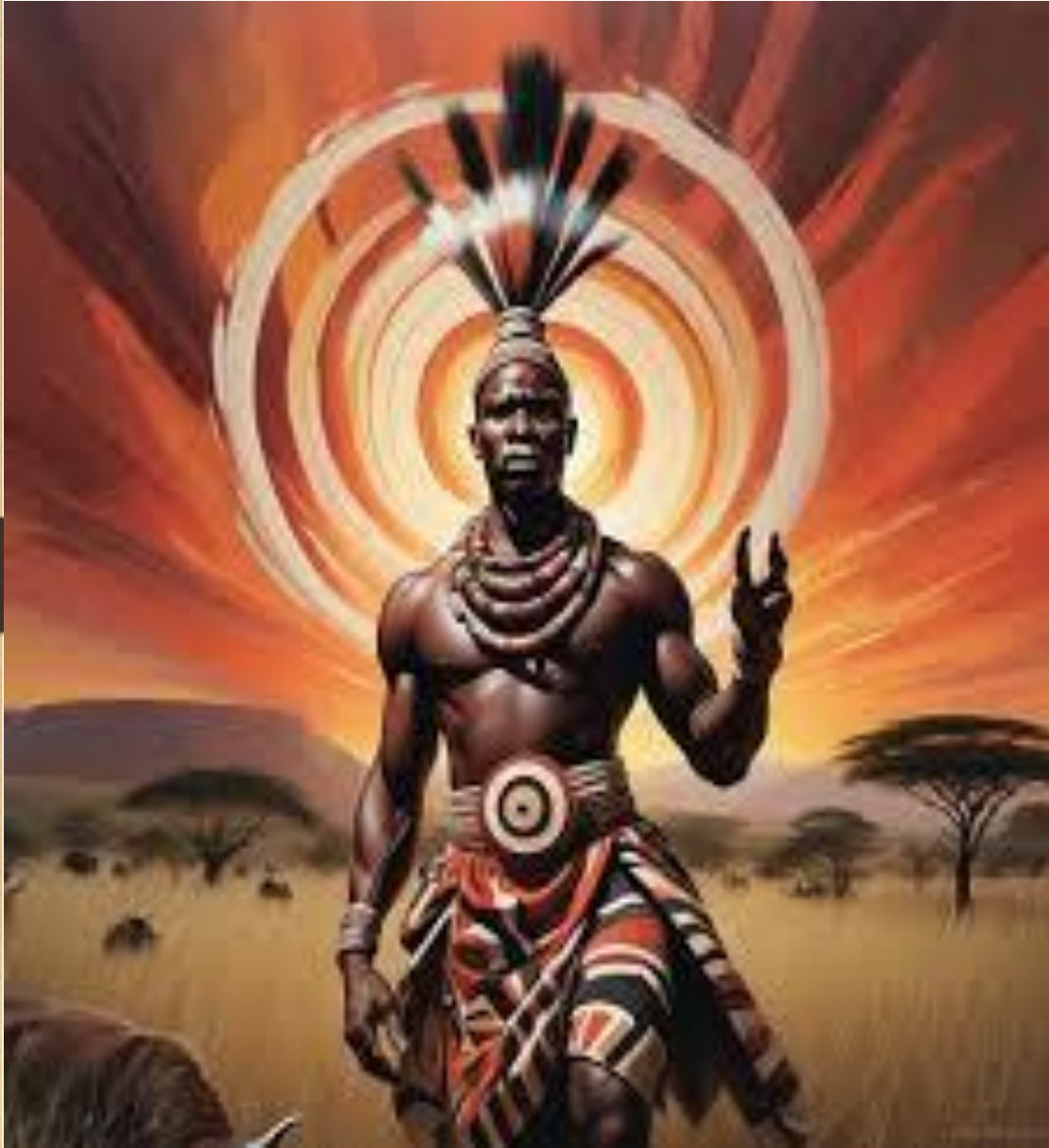
The link between ancestral worship and the observance of the Sabbath can be a point of contact for the Adventist mission, as many Akan see certain days, including Saturdays, as a time for spiritual reflection.



# The Ndebele (Zimbabwe)

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- Among the Ndebele people, certain days, particularly the seventh day, are considered sacred. This day is often associated with rituals of renewal, honoring the spirits, and performing sacred rites. The Supreme deity of the Ndebele people is known as *Unkulunkulu* or *Nkulunkulu* the creator and sustainer of the universe



**Though not universally adhered to in all Ndebele communities, the observance of Saturday as a sacred day provides a foundation for understanding the biblical Sabbath within this context.**



# The Zulu People (South Africa)

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- The Zulu people have a cyclical understanding of time, and some of their spiritual practices include honoring specific days of the week. Although there is no uniform practice of observing Saturday as a Sabbath, the importance of certain days, particularly related to lunar and seasonal cycles, could overlap with the biblical Sabbath in the Adventist tradition.
- The Zulu People of South Africa worship *Unkulunkulu* the creator god and the ancestral spirit.
- In rural areas, some Zulu communities may observe rest on Saturdays, especially in connection to agricultural rhythms, making Saturday a potential time of spiritual reflection.

# The Luba People (Democratic Republic of Congo)

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- The Luba people follow a spiritual calendar that involves dedicating certain days to ancestral worship and spiritual renewal. While Saturday may not universally be recognized as the Sabbath, it holds importance in various local customs related to rest, renewal, and community worship. The Supreme Deity who is the creator of the universe known as ***Kisama Nzambi*** is also considered the ruler of the universe.





In some Luba communities, the seventh day is associated with rituals that align with the rhythms of the earth, which could be seen as analogous to the Adventist practice of the Sabbath.

# The Ewe People (Ghana, Togo, and Benin)

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- Among the Ewe people, the observance of certain days as sacred can be linked to rituals of ancestral worship and spiritual reflection. Saturday is occasionally marked as a time for honoring spiritual forces, reflecting the significance of the seventh day.
- The Ewe people of Togo, Benin and Ghana, worship deities like Togbi the creator god and other ancestral spirits on Saturday.





Like other African communities, the Ewe people often view days of rest as a time for communal gatherings and reflection on the divine, creating a potential parallel with the Adventist Sabbath.

# The Kikuyu People (Kenya)

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- The Kikuyu people observe specific days of rest and ritual significance, particularly in relation to agricultural practices. While Saturday is not universally recognized as a sacred day in all Kikuyu communities, some groups, especially in rural areas, honor certain days of the week for spiritual activities and communal reflection. The deity of Kikuyu people that is worshiped on Saturday is ***Mwene Nyaga*** is the creator of the universe, it is also associated with the mountain.





In some traditions, the seventh day is considered a special day of spiritual importance, particularly for rituals related to the earth and ancestor worship.

# The Shona People (Zimbabwe)

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- The Shona people, like other Bantu-speaking groups, have a strong connection between spirituality and natural cycles. While Saturday is not universally sacred in Shona communities, certain spiritual practices, such as ancestor worship and rituals, take place on specific days, which can sometimes coincide with the seventh day.
- The Shona people of Zimbabwe venerate *Mwari* deity which is the ancestral spirit in charge of Agriculture.





For some Shona communities, the concept of rest and renewal on a particular day aligns with the idea of a sacred observance, similar to the Adventist Sabbath.

# The Basotho People (Lesotho, South Africa)

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- The Basotho people have a traditional understanding of sacred time and often observe certain days for communal rituals, ancestor veneration, and spiritual reflection. While Saturday is not universally regarded as a sacred day, it may occasionally coincide with times of rest or reflection tied to the spiritual calendar. The Supreme deity Lesotho people worship on Saturday is known as ***Moori or Moya*** ( meaning Spirit or breath), the regard it as the creator and sustainer of life.





The connection between sacred time and spiritual renewal among the Basotho offers an opportunity for contextualizing the Adventist Sabbath.

# The Adventist mission statement

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- To make disciples of all people, proclaiming the everlasting gospel in the context of the Three Angels' Messages of Revelation 14, and preparing people for the soon coming of Jesus Christ.



# Mission Emphasis

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- Making Disciples: The church is committed to spreading the message of Jesus Christ and helping people grow in their faith and discipleship.
- Proclaiming the Everlasting Gospel: The focus is on sharing the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ, which is central to the church's mission.
- The Three Angels' Messages: These messages, found in Revelation 14, are a key part of the Adventist mission. They call for worship of the Creator, a warning against false worship
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# The Great Commission

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- Matthew 28:18-20 Jesus' command to go and make disciples of all nations is foundational to soul winning. Seventh-day Adventists believe this commission applies to every believer, not just the clergy. It's the responsibility of all Christians to share the gospel and teach others about God's Word.
- The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a clear and concise mission statement that reflects its core beliefs and global mission:

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# Adventist mission to African traditional religion

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- One of the most interesting points of convergence between ATRs and the Seventh-day Adventist mission is the concept of a sacred day of rest or worship. The Adventist emphasis on the Sabbath, observed on Saturday, finds resonance in the traditional African reverence for specific days of the week as sacred. This paper explores the concept of Saturday as a sacred day in ATRs and how this idea can be used as a bridge to enhance the Adventist mission in Africa.

# The Sacredness of Time in African Traditional Religion

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- In African Traditional Religions, time is not just a linear or mechanical concept, but is considered deeply spiritual. Days, weeks, months, and years are imbued with meaning, and certain days or periods are considered more sacred than others. These sacred days are marked by rituals, rest, and reverence to the divine or ancestors.



## Specific Observances of Sacred Days

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- While there is no single unified calendar across all African societies, certain days in the week are often deemed sacred in different communities, with rituals, festivals, or rest observed on those days.



# The Seventh Day as Sacred

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- In several African societies, the seventh day of the week (Saturday) holds particular significance. For instance, among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, the seventh day is often linked to the concept of sacredness, rest, and ritual observance. This can be tied to cosmological beliefs that see the seventh day as a time to renew spiritual harmony between humans, the divine, and nature.

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# Example

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- The Akan people of Ghana also observe Saturday as the sacred day of the week, dedicated to rituals of rest. These observances have been linked to ancestral worship and are often marked by community gatherings, rituals, and feasts. The notion of a Saturday as a sacred day can provide a common ground for discussing the biblical Sabbath within the context of African Traditional Religion.

# Cultural Rest Days and Rituals

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- Many African cultures, irrespective of the day, observe specific times for rest and reflection. In some communities, there are specific days where work is suspended to allow for communal worship, spiritual reflection, or ancestral veneration. These days of rest are not always tied to the traditional seven-day week but reflect a reverence for specific cycles of time.





# Example

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- In some parts of East Africa, especially in Kenya, the Kikuyu people observe Saturday as a day where work ceases to honor ancestral spirits and perform rituals to ensure the fertility of the land. This day is often observed at regular intervals, though not necessarily on a fixed calendar date, but tied to the rhythm of life and nature.

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# Time and the Divine in ATRs

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- Time in ATRs is often viewed as cyclical, with the rhythms of the moon, the seasons, and agricultural cycles determining when sacred days or rituals are observed. While the seven-day week is not universal, the focus on specific sacred days remains a central theme in many African religions.





# example

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- The Zulu people of Southern Africa follow lunar cycles, and their religious activities often coincide with full moons or the changing of seasons. Certain days are designated for sacred rituals, ancestor worship, or communal festivals. Although the exact day may differ based on local customs, the underlying principle of dedicating certain times to the divine is shared with the concept of the Sabbath.

# The Adventist Mission and Its Encounter with African Traditions

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- The Seventh-day Adventist Church, with its unique emphasis on Saturday as the biblical Sabbath, faces both challenges and opportunities in its mission work in Africa. The challenge lies in how to introduce and contextualize the biblical understanding of the Sabbath in societies where traditional religious observances are already deeply embedded.





# Building on Common Ground

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- One of the key strategies for effective mission work is to identify and build upon common cultural and spiritual ground. The recognition of a sacred day in African Traditional Religions can provide a bridge for introducing the Adventist Sabbath as a day of rest, worship, and spiritual communion with God.
- Hence there is a need to appreciate and try to associate first as a means to learn and gain the interest of the traditional religionist.

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- When we go with motive to show our knowledge as superior, you may not be able to gain access to their heart. Most traditional religionist perceive Christian as nosy and unwise. They see lack of reverence and commitment to worship in Christians.
  - Follows this method:
  - A= Appreciate L= learn new things, C= Contribute I =Impact
  - L= listen



# Spiritual Continuity

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- The shared concept of a sacred day in ATRs can be used to show the continuity between traditional beliefs and the biblical Sabbath. The Adventist mission can emphasize that the Sabbath, though uniquely biblical, aligns with an innate sense of sacred time that exists in many African cultures.



# Examples

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- In regions where Saturday is already considered sacred or a day of rest, Adventist missionaries can explain that the Sabbath, as practiced by the Adventist church, is not a foreign or alien concept but is rooted in the same spiritual yearning for a sacred day of rest and communion with the divine. This creates a point of connection rather than a point of division.



# Rituals of Rest and Worship

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- ATRs often have specific rituals associated with sacred days. These rituals may include fasting, prayer, or offerings. Adventist missionaries can highlight that the Sabbath is not just a day of rest from physical labor but a time for spiritual rejuvenation, prayer, and worship, aligning with the core values of many African communities.



# Example

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- Among the Ewe people of West Africa, ritual offerings and prayers are common on specific sacred days. The Adventist message can focus on the idea of offering praise to God on the Sabbath, emphasizing the opportunity for spiritual renewal and a deeper connection with the Creator.



# Ancestral Reverence and the Biblical Sabbath

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- In some African communities, ancestral worship is central to religious life. Although Adventists do not venerate ancestors in the same way, the concept of honoring spiritual heritage and reverence for the divine can be linked to the idea of observing the Sabbath in memory of God as the Creator.



# Example

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- The Luba people in Central Africa have a rich tradition of ancestral veneration. Missionaries can help the community understand the Sabbath as a way to honor not only God as Creator but also the divine order that underpins their ancestral practices. This creates an avenue for connecting the Adventist view of honoring God with traditional African values of spiritual reverence



# Challenges in Contextualizing the Sabbath

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- Despite the potential for common ground, there are significant challenges to introducing the Sabbath in African Traditional Religious contexts.

# Syncretism

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- African Traditional Religions are often syncretic, meaning that they blend elements of various belief systems. The introduction of the Adventist Sabbath may be absorbed into existing rituals in ways that do not reflect the true biblical understanding.





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- In certain African communities, Adventist teachings may be blended with traditional beliefs about ancestor spirits or animism, leading to a diluted or distorted view of the Sabbath. Missionaries need to provide clear, biblically grounded teachings to avoid this syncretism.



# Resistance to Foreign Religions

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- African communities often view their traditional beliefs and practices as a core part of their identity. The introduction of a foreign religion, even one that resonates with their cultural practices, may still face resistance from those who see it as an imposition.



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- In some areas, especially where Islam or Christianity has been the dominant religion for generations, the introduction of the Adventist Sabbath may be seen as an unnecessary or divisive change, leading to tensions with both indigenous beliefs and other forms of Christianity.



# Generational Tensions

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- Younger generations may be more open to adopting the Adventist Sabbath as they encounter modern Christian teachings, while older generations may resist because of their attachment to ATR practices. The Adventist mission needs to navigate these generational differences with sensitivity.



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- In the Akan communities of Ghana, the younger generation might embrace the Adventist message more readily, especially due to exposure to Christianity in urban areas. However, older members may hold onto the ancestral worship practices tied to specific days of the week, creating intergenerational challenges for missionary efforts.

# The Role of the Church in the African Context

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- The Adventist church can play a significant role in bridging the gap between traditional African spirituality and biblical Christianity by emphasizing shared values and cultural sensitivity.



# Cultural Sensitivity and Respect

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- Understanding the sacredness of time and rest in African cultures is crucial. Adventist missionaries can show respect for local customs and find ways to present the Sabbath that honor African cultural practices of sacred days.

# Sabbath Education

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- Through education, Adventist missionaries can explain that the Sabbath is not merely a day of physical rest but a time for spiritual rejuvenation and connection with God. By framing the Sabbath in terms of communal worship, rest, and divine reverence, missionaries can make the concept more accessible.





# Focusing on Family and Community

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- Adventist teachings can emphasize the communal aspect of the Sabbath, resonating with the African emphasis on family and community. Sabbath observance, as a time for family worship and communal rest, aligns with African social structures and values.



# Steps to step method of presenting the Adventist message

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- Step 1: Build a Relationship
- Be respectful and show genuine interest in their culture and beliefs.
- Take time to listen to their experiences and practices without judgment. This will help build trust and show you value them.



## Step 2

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- Find Common Ground
- Acknowledge shared beliefs, such as the belief in a Creator God, spiritual forces, or moral values.
- Example: “I understand that in your tradition, you believe in a Creator God who made everything. In Christianity, we also believe in God as the Creator, and He wants a relationship with us.”

## Step 3

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- Introduce the Bible's Teachings
- Start with familiar concepts that may resonate with their views, such as God's role in creation or spiritual power.
- Example: Share a scripture like Psalm 24:1 – "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it." This may help them connect with the idea of a powerful Creator.



## Step 4

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- Address Ancestor Worship Gently
- Acknowledge their tradition of honoring ancestors, but explain that Christianity honors ancestors by remembering them without worshiping them.
- Example: “We respect our ancestors too, but we worship God alone, as Jesus taught in Matthew 4:10, 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'”

# Step 5

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- Discuss the Role of the Holy Spirit
- Relate to their understanding of spiritual forces by introducing the Holy Spirit as the divine guide.
- Example: “In Christianity, we believe that God gives us the Holy Spirit to guide us in truth and peace, just as spirits guide you, but the Holy Spirit brings greater comfort and truth.”



## Step 6

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- Present the Promise of Eternal Life
- Emphasize hope in the afterlife, focusing on the Christian promise of resurrection and eternal life.
- Example: “In Christianity, we believe that death is not the end. Jesus promises eternal life to all who believe in Him (John 3:16).”

# Step 7

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- Introduce the Sabbath
- Explain the concept of the Sabbath as a day set aside for rest and worship.
- Example: “God gave us the Sabbath as a special day to rest and worship Him (Exodus 20:8-10). It’s a time to connect with God, similar to how you may observe special days for spiritual reflection.”



## Step 8

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- Answer Questions and Encourage Dialogue
- Be open to their questions and concerns, and provide gentle, thoughtful responses.
- Example: “I understand this might be different from what you know. Feel free to ask any questions, and I’d love to talk more about what I believe and how it might relate to your own beliefs.”

## Step 9

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- Invite Them to Study Further
- Offer to study the Bible together or give them Adventist literature that explains core beliefs.
- Example: “If you’ don’t mind, we can study the Bible together and learn more about God’s promises.”



# Step 10

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- Pray Together
- Pray for them and with them during the conversation, asking for God's guidance in their spiritual journey.
- Example: "Would you like me to pray for you, that God may guide us both in understanding His truth?"

# Conclusion

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- The concept of the sacredness of Saturday in African Traditional Religion offers a unique opportunity for the Adventist mission to engage African communities in a meaningful and culturally relevant way. By recognizing and respecting the spiritual significance of time in African cultures, the Adventist Church can present the Sabbath as a continuation of the African tradition of honoring sacred time. Through dialogue, education, and cultural sensitivity, the Adventist message can resonate deeply within African societies, fostering both spiritual growth and cultural appreciation.



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