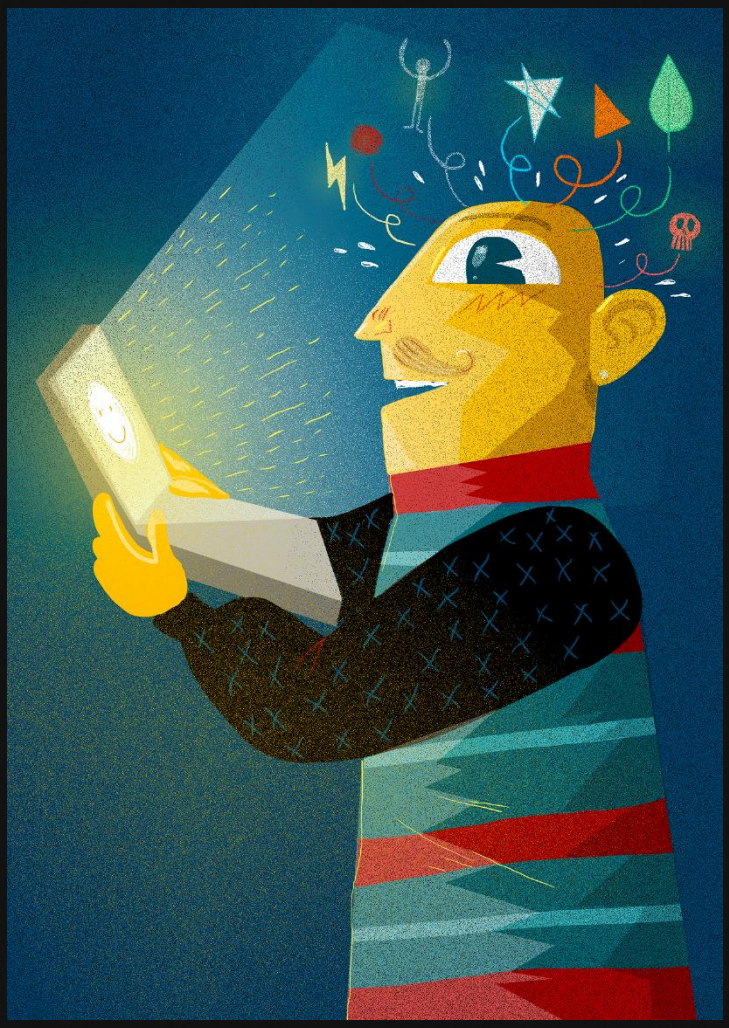
Game Environments



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Special Issue

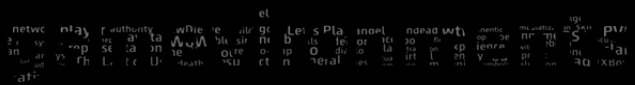
Revisiting Teaching and Games. Mapping out Ecosystems of Learning

edited by

Björn Berg Marklund, Jordan Loewen-Colón and Maria Saridaki

Issue 15 (2021)

articles



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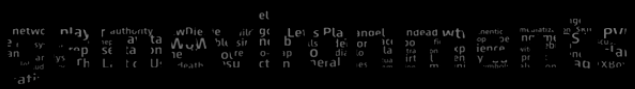

Peer-reviewed Article

Bible Games as Religious Educational Tools in Seventh-Day Adventist Church. A Ludic Inventory

Allan Macedo de Novaes and Erick Euzébio Lima

Abstract
The Seventh-day Adventist Church has developed some analogical and digital games with religious education purposes over the last decades, so this article seeks to answer the following question: how does the Bible study paradigm influence the production of religious games at Seventh-day Adventist Church? The article maps the main Seventh-day Adventist game titles in English from the 1930s to nowadays, building a ludic inventory. Based on elements and procedures of content analysis method, the analysis of elements of the ludic inventory as title, game mechanics, genres, etc., show that the text-based Bible study paradigm of Seventh-day Adventist Church influenced the production of the church's games with fundamental characteristics of Bible study guides incorporated into the game design and production, such as: (1) a question-and-answer style, (2) an emphasis on mastering text-location in the Bible, and (3) a memorization of texts. Besides, the analysis of the ludic inventory also presents that the SDA games were designed under some Seventh-day Adventist religious education principles, involving the discussion about the conceptual binomials competition versus cooperation and fun versus recreation.

Keywords: Religion, Religious Education, Adventism, Games, Bible Games, Religious Games, Christian Games, gamevironments

To cite this article: Novaes, A. M. and Lima, E. E., 2021. Bible Games as Religious Educational Tools in Seventh-Day Adventist Church. A Ludic Inventory. gamevironments 15, 56-101. Available at http://www.gamevironments.uni-bremen.de.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a Christian denomination founded in the United States in 1863 with some peculiar features: a text-centered and print-driven orientation, which results in a Bible study paradigm. A social analysis of Seventh-day

Adventist Church history, doctrines, and culture leads us to distinguish these distinctive traits of the denomination as essential to identify the assumptions by which the movement understands itself, as well as to understand the traditions by which the Seventh-day Adventist movement operates and acts in the surrounding culture – especially in the mass media universe, including the game industry (Manners 2009, Novaes 2016, 2019). Any analysis about Seventh-day Adventism in its social role and in its relationship with the analogic and digital games should consider their text-centered and print-driven characteristics as a point of theoretical and methodological departure (Novaes 2018, Novaes and Lima 2021).

The Adventists are committed to Bible study as a method to accept new believers, defining what it means to be part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in terms of Bible knowledge. The mastery in handling Bible texts, prophecies, and doctrines validate the member's level of engagement. Through the Bible study paradigm, religious education is synonymous with biblical-theological literacy in Adventism. Even after the advent of audiovisual technologies such as television and Internet, text-based Bible lessons continue to be the preferred Adventist evangelistic approach (Santos 2009, Novaes 2019).

The area of study of this article - games and religion, especially games and Christian tradition – finds its roots in Johan Huizinga (1872-1945) and Roger Caillois (1913-1978) who explore the game-religion interface in a non-central way. Echoing these authors, Wagner (2015, 1) reminds us of the similarities between games and religion, such as: the intense engagement of fans, adherence to rules, creation of worlds, and escape from the chaos of the present world – similarities that allow a confluence between the two areas and the deepening of these studies. Campbell et al. (2016, 642), in turn, observe that over the years, even timidly, "the intersection of religion

and gaming has become an important area of inquiry for Religious Studies." Among the possible intersections proposed by Campbell et al. (2016, 644) for the study of games and religion, this article adopts the gaming in religion lens, the one that is "surprisingly, the most neglected of these intersections," seeking to explore and analyze the games present in Seventh-day Adventism.

While the Seventh-day Adventist Church demonstrates a strong concern for the intellectual formation of its members, this bias is also manifested in achievements in formal education, especially since 1872 when the first Adventist school was established (Douglass 2014, 794). Today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has more than 9,000 educational institutions around the world. These efforts are impelled by statements such as that of Ellen G. White (1903, 30), co-founder of the denomination: "The work of education and the work of redemption are one."

Over the years, the educational area has been impacted by social and technological transformations, and "it is no longer possible to think about literacy in isolation from a vast array of social, technological and economic factors," so that the various learning spaces nowadays begin to demonstrate the "dominance of writing being replaced by the dominance of the image; the dominance of the medium of the book to the dominance of the medium of the screen" (Kress 2003,1). The massive adhesion of screens in contemporary society has video games as an important medium to explore their interactive potential. Once video games "create new social and cultural worlds – worlds that help us learn by integrating thinking, social interaction, and technology – all in service of doing things we care about" (Shaffer et al. 2005, 3), these possibilities naturally extend to educational applications, and have the potential to change the landscape of education beyond the traditional academic disciplines and toward "a new model of learning through meaningful activity" (Shaffer et al.

2005, 11). Throughout the history of civilizations, games have played an important role in the field of instruction and training as they serve as learning mechanisms (Routledge 2016), while are part of culture (Becker 2017). Digital games and modern education naturally intersect and find space for dialogue and development of new practices and research. JP Gee states that "good video games offer pleasure from continuous learning and problem solving" (Selfe and Hawisher 2007, 11), noting that games intrinsically have an educational aspect.

In the game universe, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has developed some analogical and digital games – respectively, since the 1930s and the 1980s – and most of them presented mechanics and design elements to fortify the text-based Bible lessons method. Based on this paradigm, Adventist games acted and act as tools of religious education, since "religious education aims to encompass youth culture and traditional forms of belief, and video games seem to serve that purpose" (Radde-Antweiler, Waltemathe and Zeiler 2014, 3-4). One of the characteristics of adventist games is to stimulate their players/believers to acquire skills such as memorizing Bible texts, locating verses in the Old and New Testaments, and knowing characters, places, and narratives from the Christian Scriptures. Whether they are card games, board games, or digital games for PC or smartphones, the Bible study approach is a pattern that is repeated with little variation.

Given this context, this article seeks to answer the following research question: how does the Bible study paradigm influence the production of religious games at Seventh-day Adventist Church? Therefore, this article intends to (1) present the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a text-centered and print-driven movement with a distinctive Bible study method, analyzing its impact on the comprehension and production of religious games; (2) discuss the conflicting relationship between

Adventist discourse and mass media, focusing on game issues; and (3) describe an overview of the main religious games published by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, analyzing the impact of the Bible study method on the comprehension and production of religious games, forming a sort of inventory of recreational games, proposing a periodization based mostly on types and categories of games, game mechanics and design, and religious education approaches.

Seventh-day Adventism: A Text-Centered and a Print-Driven Movement with a Bible Study Paradigm

In Western Christian tradition, Protestant *ethos*, much more than Catholic, has been a culture of the word and its genesis had a close relationship with the invention of printing in 1450 (Burke 2016). Given the importance their leaders and supporters conferred to the Bible, it is not surprising that one of Protestantism's nicknames was religion of the book, which quickly became the main element of the Protestant identity. The concept of *Sola Scriptura* granted to printed publications a sacred status, resulting in an iconoclastic behavior (Eire 1986, Dyrness 2001). Because of their attachment to the book – the Bible, the confession of faith, or the religious publications – Protestantism made the formation of an educated clergy with literacy skills to interpret the religious texts indispensable. Therefore, the word culture also made Protestantism the perfect habitat for the sermon culture since the sensory experience of the Protestant worship is fundamentally hearing (Burke 2009). In Protestantism the sense of sight rarely finds its place in the liturgy, and the divine is represented orally by the language of preaching, hearing, reading, and singing.

However, it is necessary to emphasize that the culture of the word did not prevent the development of a visual culture in Protestantism. According to Morgan (2005, 42),

the myth of Protestant aniconism – the absence of images to portray the religious world – resulted, among other factors, from the iconoclastic episodes of the 16th century and from the theology of reformers such as Calvin and Zwingli, who defended the inability of images to teach Christian truth. These reasons, however, did not stop Protestants from using religious images in their daily lives, whether in religious education in homes, in evangelization through booklets and pamphlets, or in homage to pioneers, martyrs, and reformers. For Morgan (2005, 45), aniconism cannot be associated with Protestantism because the Reformation "inaugurated a new mission for images in a new economy of the sacred." While Catholics promoted a trade in images based on devotion to saints, indulgence, and pilgrimage, Protestants replaced this system with an "ambitious traffic in sacred information," since "it is no longer what you offer [...] assures the divine favor, but what you know is what counts" (Morgan 2005, 49). Therefore, the means of communication – whether textual or visual – acted on the assumption of transmitting information. Since in Protestant theology any act of devotion would be unable to attain divine favor and that God's blessings would be given by grace without meritorious elements, knowledge gained through reading and teaching the Bible replaced confessions, indulgences, and penances as saving elements.

Nevertheless, in Protestant visual culture the role of the text was still central, since in illustrations, diagrams, and other visual resources the functional and integrated presence of the text was predominant. The word established a context for the image, directing and restricting its meanings (Morgan 2005, 53). This dialogue between the image – and many times dependence on the image – and the text in Protestantism also manifested itself in Adventism's relationship with imagery.[i]

Just like the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, Seventh-day Adventism also has its origin related to the centrality of the biblical text and the printed media. Officially established in the United States of America in 1863, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a neo-protestant denomination, which has around 20 million believers globally. Adventism is known to have emerged from Millerism, a religious revival movement in the United States with an eschatological focus and emphasis on interpretations of prophetic texts in the Bible, led by Baptist William Miller (1782-1849) (Bull and Lockhart 2007). In possession only of his Bible and a concordance, Miller developed somewhat unprecedented interpretations of texts from the books of Daniel and Revelation. The most peculiar feature of his message was that he set a period for Christ's return: around 1843 to 1844. With the help of collaborators, the date of 22 October 1844 was set. Setting dates was not something uncommon in American revivals, but Miller's feat was not only to have captivated the imagination of the people, recruiting tens of thousands of people to his movement, but also to have done it through a far-reaching network of printed publications with a high level of acceptance.

The social and religious impact of the Millerite movement, beyond the attractiveness of an apocalyptic message and Miller's charisma, was due to the efficiency of Joshua Himes (1805-1895), both the public relations and publishing manager of the movement. Himes mastered the state-of-the-art communication technology of the time, and at a time when print publishing and distribution in the United States was still in its infancy, he was able to lay the foundation for Millerite literature by maintaining weekly magazines throughout much of America (Knight 2010).

In the weeks leading up to 22 October 1844, urgency gripped the adherents and on the morning of 22 October an estimated one hundred thousand people were

awaiting Jesus' return in their homes or in religious temples, not counting the nearly one million skeptical onlookers (Schwarz and Greenleaf 2009). The hours passed, the day ended, and Christ did not come, generating despair and frustration in the believers and provoking mockery and derision from the detractors. Given this scenario, 22 October 1844 became known in Adventist circles as the day of the Great Disappointment.

Adventism not only maintained the legacy of Miller and company of eschatological preaching and emphasis on Scripture study, but also inherited a print-driven nature, demonstrating a great affinity with this medium (Manners 2009, 63). For this reason, even with the dissolution of most adherents of Millerism after the Great Disappointment, the remnant group that would give rise to the Seventh-day Adventist Church remained united and active through printed publications that sought to give a new meaning to the event (Schwarz and Greenleaf 2009).

The most important moment for the development of Adventism in its relationship with the printed page, however, happened in November 1848, in Dorchester, Massachusetts. On that day, Ellen White received a vision, in which God indicated that the time had come to start a small newspaper and distribute it to the people and, according to the divine command, the responsibility to carry out the project should be assigned to James White (Schwarz and Greenleaf 2009). This newspaper was published in 1849 under the name *Present Truth*, considered the first Seventh-day Adventist periodical, whose focus was the development of the first distinctive Adventist Sabbatarian doctrines, with emphasis on the permanent nature of the Decalogue and the Sabbath. Since the publications were believed to be the direct result of supernatural revelation, it clearly revealed the sacred relationship Adventism had with the text and the printed media. Ellen White's view implied, in a sense, that

the printed publication had received the seal of divine approval, that is, the printed text would be a legitimate and permissible media for missionary purposes.

It is noteworthy that Ellen White was an enthusiast of publications; not only because of the visions and dreams she claimed to have received about it, but also because she was a prolific writer (Manners 2009, 70). During her lifetime, she wrote 26 books, 200 pamphlets, five thousand periodical articles, totaling after her death over seventy thousand pages (Patrick 2014, 91). Over time, Adventist periodicals and Ellen White's writings produced with relative success a doctrinal and theological unity not expected by the predictions of the time, given the dispersal of adherents of the Millerite movement. Wherever it expanded, Adventism established publishing houses. Much of the work of the first overseas Adventist missionary, John Nevins Andrews (1829-1883), was to translate Adventist publications into non-Anglophone European languages. Many of the Adventist missionaries in foreign lands were colporteurs, that is, itinerant sellers of Adventist publications. Taking this background into account, Manners (2009, 63), who calls the Seventh-day Adventist church a print-driven church, goes so far as to state that while all Christian churches in one way or another use the press as a means of communication, in few organizations has the print media played such a fundamental role in the origin, development and consolidation as in Adventism:

> "Print media has played a fundamental role in the growth, development, and consolidation of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. (…) The early Adventist discourse was defined by? the printed page, beginning with the Bible and interpretations of the biblical text, which were often printed to share among themselves and to others outside the group in the hope they would find the 'truth' of Adventism. Until recent times, with the introduction of more visual forms of media, a high level of literacy was needed to be fully involved in and to have full appreciation of Adventism in developed parts of the world. Even with the use of other form of media, the demands for literacy remain high. The Bible

> remains the basic text, members are encouraged to read the writings of Ellen White and Adventists maintain a strong publishing program." (Manners 2009, 63)

Evidence of this centrality of the biblical text before and after conversion is portrayed in Keller's (2005) ethnographic study of an Adventist community in Madagascar, but may be representative, with due proportions, of Adventist cultures in other countries. For her, "the Adventists are not only committed to Bible study; they also define what it means to be an Adventist in terms of the knowledge of the Bible" (Keller 2005, 117). The author aimed to understand what generated a level of long-term commitment in Adventist members in the African country. Her main conclusion was that the main force of Adventism's faithfulness lies in the intellectual life of the believer, who starts to see in the study of the biblical text a road to clarity (Keller 2005). The reading and study of the biblical texts, says Keller (2005, 115), are therefore the main motivation for Adventists to remain engaged in the doctrine and practice of the denomination after conversion. No wonder Seventh-day Adventists have long held the label of "people of the Book" or "people who know the Bible" (Keller 2005, 117, Knight 2000, 59).

The text-centered orientation of Adventism has generated peculiar elements in the evangelistic and proselytizing context of the denomination, the most prominent among them being the role of Bible study as an identity element of the denomination. Bible study, a term popularized by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, indicates a lesson given to a person or a group of non-Adventist people, usually in the form of questions and answers supported by Bible passages. In the great diversity of Bible study guides that circulate in the denomination, the persistence of some characteristics that mark the didactic structure of the materials can be noted (Silva, 2002). Usually structured in thematic lessons, each topic is worked through using: (1)

a question-and-answer style, in which the student is stimulated through questions of low complexity, favoring succinct and objective answers; (2) a emphasis on mastering text-location in the Bible, since each question has one or more references to chapters and verses of the biblical text which the student is led to formulate his/her answer; (3) a memorization of texts and verses.

Bible study, therefore, is a requirement for membership and consists basically of cognitive-intellectual instruction. Doctrinal preparation and minimum scriptural knowledge are required of every interested person before baptism. Even after baptism, the study of the Bible text remains one of the most important elements of the Adventist member's daily life through daily family services and small Bible studies groups.[ii]

Seventh-day Adventist Church and Games. A Relation with Tension and Dialogue

Although many historical and anthropological studies on the presence of games in ancient cultures point to the magical and supernatural character of ludic activities, as presented by Huizinga (2016), among others, early Christianity – and even during the Middle Ages – sought to establish an ascetic lifestyle, largely breaking with popular customs and curbing various pleasures, including games (Horsfield 2015, Bornet 2012, 16). An example of this is Augustine (1950), although recognizing the value of some playful practices in civic education, such as comedies and tragedies, adopts in his work *City of God* a critical stance to the playful performance of Roman religions. Thus, several theologians in the scholastic period outlined an ideological crusade against ludic practices, condemned for their supposed connection with immorality and centrality in the degenerate pagan culture. It must be emphasized, however, that

this critique was based on the theological views of the elite and does not necessarily represent actual practices among popular circles (Bornet 2012, 17).

In pursuing history, Huizinga (2016) points out that the Renaissance was a period of strong artistic appeal in which the European elite strove to separate themselves from the vulgar in order to live life as if it were a game of artistic perfection. However, although several dimensions of society in the period were marked by playfulness, the Protestant Reformation rescued much of the medieval arguments used against pagan playfulness – but now directing them against Catholic playfulness in its scenic and visual expressions. Calvin, for example, banned gambling in Geneva and did not spare even criticism to biblical staging, accusing it of being empty and useless (Bornet 2012, 19). The 17th and 18th centuries are marked by discussions between conservative and liberal Christian thinkers about games and, in this period, some recreational practices that involved gambling were condemned, and others, such as those that required rational effort and were considered of educational value, were valued.

With a strong valorization of reason and devaluation of the body during the Reformation and Counter-Reformation periods, ludic practices and leisure activities that were somehow associated with lust, lasciviousness, narcissism, and hedonism were condemned. Morality, pleasure, and work, in light of the Protestant ethos identified by Max Weber (1958), became central elements for the Christian judgment that was made of leisure. Protestant expressions, such as Puritanism, developed ludic practices that should introduce, besides pleasure, productivity (Daniels 1995, xiv). In America, in the New England region, the Puritans condemned various forms of leisure and sports because they believed in the propensity they developed for the practice of gambling and the vices and morally reprehensible behaviors believed to be derived from it (Daniels 1995, 176). One of these ludic forms was the card game. Therefore,

beyond accusations of time-wasting, lust, among others, the American conservative culture viewed games – especially card games – from the adult universe of addictions and betting, which for a long time was not regulated in several regions of the United States.

In observing this brief historical account about the Christianity-games relationship and moving forward to the present moment, it is necessary to ponder the influence of certain philosophical-theological assumptions of certain Christian traditions, especially those of the conservative matrix, in the field of studies that investigates the relationship between Christianity and games. One of them is a potentially conflicting – sometimes even antagonistic – relationship that Christian communities have developed with the notion of technology (Campbell and Garner 2016, 11). Barbour (1992) elaborates on this complex relationship between Christianity and technology from an adaptation to H. Richard Niebuhr's (1951) classic typology in *Christ and Culture*. For Barbour (1992) there are three types of relationships between Christian communities and technology: the optimistic, which sees technology as a liberating force that provides improvement to the human condition; the pessimistic, which understands technology as a real threat to human autonomy and creativity in the name of efficiency and large-scale productivity; and the ambiguous, which views technology as an instrument of power, so that its development, application, and implications will determine its moral value.

Another perspective that also adds distrust to the games-religion relationship has to do with the notion of leisure. Whether it is considered as a contemplative and restorative time or simply free time and non-working conditions, the Catholic and Protestant traditions present several reservations and criticisms to the concept of leisure and its manifestations in the form of fun and entertainment. In this

undertanding, leisure time spent with and/or through technology is generally considered to be harmful to wellbeing and spirituality (Heintzman 2015, Campbell and Garner 2016). Furthermore, media technology, including digital games, receives much criticism for its apparent ineffectiveness in being used as an evangelistic tool. The logic behind this rejection is that various Christian circles do not understand media and technology primarily as a means for entertainment, education, or information, but rather view it in terms of how effective they are in exercising spiritual persuasion (Schultze 1996, 63). Ultimately, Christian circles, especially conservative ones, tend to think of games as instruments for preaching the gospel and as a tool for moral teachings more than artistic and media works, and evaluate games from this sacred-utilitarian viewpoint (Schut 2008, 208).

Like other Christian movements already mentioned, especially those of the Protestant and Evangelical matrix, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has developed a conflicting and ambiguous relationship with media technology, including digital games (Darius and Ferreira 2017, Ellis 2019, Novaes 2019, Novaes and Lima 2021). Besides the philosophical and theological assumptions that guide the Christianity-games relationship already presented, which Adventism also holds to, two more elements must be highlighted: the problem of recreation versus entertainment/amusement/fun, and the problem of cooperation versus competition.

About the problem of entertainment, there was a complex and tense posture in the religious field in Ellen White's time in relation to playing, in which fun was distinguished from recreation, always with a negative emphasis on the first case and a positive emphasis on the second. Amusements such as games and sports became substitute spaces for other more violent forms of leisure, which in turn made them practices in which the focus was on the virility, and its enhancement, of the

practitioners. Thus, the Adventist discourse positioned itself in rejection of these practices through its main proponent, Ellen White. “There is a distinction between recreation and amusement,” White (2014, 165) said in a book originally published in 1903. For her, the distinction was not only semantic, but also mainly conceptual and practical. While recreation would tend to strengthen and build, providing “refreshment for mind and body” and enabling people “to return with new vigor to the earnest work of life,” amusement practices would exist for the purpose of providing pleasure, absorbing “the energies that are required for useful work and thus proves a hindrance to life's true success” (White 2013, 390). It is in this context that White lists card and board games in her warnings, associating these entertainment practices with addiction, gambling, and indolence, as seen below in a posthumous compilation originally published in 1952.

> “There are amusements, such as dancing, card playing, chess, checkers, etc., which we cannot approve because Heaven condemns them. These amusements open the door for great evil. They are not beneficial in their tendency, but have an exciting influence, producing in some minds a passion for those plays, which lead to gambling and dissipation.” (White 2013, 390)

Regarding the problem of competition, the root of White's opposition to games was in their alleged “inherent combative spirit” and their ability to cause “distraction from the more serious tasks of life” (McArthur 2013, 831). Competition, or the term White most employed, rivalry, was the author's object of concern, for, to her, the two concepts were responsible for increasing selfishness and the desire for supremacy, which would be the source of all evils. The author's statements were made in the context of the second half of the 19th century, when baseball and American football were becoming central elements of college life in the United States, also as a result of the accelerated processes of urbanization and growth of the entertainment industry.

For her, the issue was not whether or not to watch games and sports or even the simple practice of playing, as one of her statements portrayed: “I do not condemn the simple exercise of playing ball; but this, even in its simplicity, may be overdone” (White 2013, 391). Rather, she was concerned about the excesses configured by the institutionalized presence of games and sports during the university phase. For her, competition justified violence, so that she even called American football and boxing, in the pre-regulated form in which they were practiced at the time, schools of brutality, comparing them to games and disputes in Ancient Rome.

White associated, like many in her time, sports competitions with propensity to addiction, especially because of the practice of betting. However, not only competitive sports would have this distorting power, for even other games such as cards, chess, and checkers were criticized by her for potentially contributing to the development of gambling addiction (Gregor 2013, 831). In turn, card games were easily associated with the adult world of card playing and gambling, where there were usually tobacco, alcohol, and other practices present, which were morally condemnable by conservative religious people at the time. For this reason, card games and card playing were criticized in Adventist discourse for many decades.

The aforementioned assumptions and problems had a great impact on the denomination's ludic initiatives. Taking into consideration the emphasis on Bible study as an evangelistic and identity driver, as well as the appreciation of leisure and playfulness when directed to educational and religious functions, the games created by the denomination reflected Adventist thinking on issues such as fun/amusement vs. recreation, and cooperation vs. competition, as seen earlier, but also more tensions like leisure vs. mission, moderation vs. excess, and edification vs. lust. These binomials, in turn, emanate from the dilemmas of Adventist family and youth, as

perceived by the denomination in its socio-ecclesiastical traditions and codes, and, in turn, are projected onto the creation of games by Adventist publishers.

Adventist Games: A Ludic Inventory and its Periodization

In the attempt to build an inventory of Adventist games, it was necessary to overcome some limitations in the process of gathering information and mapping the products. Many games are very old and Adventist publishers have no copies in their collections and often not even cataloged information. Other times there is incomplete information: we identify the title and year of publication of the game, for example, but we do not have satisfactory images or information about authorship, components, or game mechanics.

Therefore, the present work chose to build an inventory from the mention of games in Adventist periodicals, which usually advertised these products in their pages for members to purchase them in Adventist bookstores. In addition, we restricted the search to English language games. There is a record of Portuguese language games in Brazil, for instance, at least since 1970, through Casa Publicadora Brasileira, the Adventist publishing house in the country, and certainly other countries also have their production. However, the survey of Adventist games in Portuguese, Spanish, and other languages will be evaluated in further studies.

Thus, for the purposes of this study, five repositories were considered for the search of Seventh-day Adventist game publications. The most important of the databases – and main focus of the searches – is the *Adventist Digital Library*, which stands as the main document repository of the Seventh-day Adventist church and centralizes Adventist libraries and archives around the world. The term *Bible game* was searched

for and, based on the results obtained, the search was repeated with the names of the games found, in order to obtain more details about them. Most of the occurrences of the searched terms appeared in advertisements of Adventist periodicals. Thus, it was possible to identify with some precision information about the game, such as title, publisher, year of publication, description of features, and target audience.

Once a game was found in advertisements of Adventist periodicals, in a complementary way we searched for more information and data in other bases, namely: (1) *Board Game Geek* (n.d.), today's world leading board game catalog; (2) *WorthPoint* (n.d.), Antiquities website; (3) *Ebay* (1995-2021), e-commerce platform; (4) *Etsy* (n.d.), e-commerce platform; (5) *Adventist Book Center* (n.d.), e-commerce platform.

The results were arranged in three tables, one related to the games from the 1930s to the 1950s, the second from the 1960s to the 1990s, and the third from the 2000s onward. The division of the inventory into three tables was built based on a periodization proposal that took into account the characteristics and patterns of the games, in order to identify significant changes between the three historical periods. Each table presents, in chronological order, the year of publication of the games, as well as other information, such as game title, publisher, type (board, card, or video game), and category or modality (trivia or memory game, for example), as shown in Table 1.

Once the playful inventory was built, based on elements and procedures of content analysis method (Riffe, Lacy and Fico 2005), an attempt was made to analyze the games in the sample to identify the role of the Bible study paradigm. The analysis

consisted of identifying the presence or absence of religious emphases or binomials (amusement/fun x recreation, and cooperation x competition) the games were associated with. Content analysis uses information from the inventory data sheet, especially the title, type and category of the game, in addition to descriptions found in advertisements of the analyzed magazines and bulletins, to identify fundamental characteristics of Bible study guides incorporated into the games, such as: question-and-answer style (Q&A Style), Bible texts location mastery (Location), and Bible texts memorization (memory).

Name	Year	Type	Q&A Style	Location	Memory	Fun or Recreation	Cooperation or Competition
Seventh-day Adventist Authors	1938	Card Game	No	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Truth Game	1938	Card Game	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Characters Game	1941	Card Game	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recreation	Both
Bible Geography Game	1944	Card Game	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Books Game	1945	Card Game	No	Yes	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Seek Game	1946	Card Game	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Worth: A Bible character quiz game	1949	Book	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Groups | John and Judas	1951	Card Game	No	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Journeys 1: Egypt to Canaan	1957	Board Game	Yes	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Four Duzit	1959	Card Game	No	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition

Table 1. Adventist games from 1930-1950.

In the late 1930s we find the first record of a denominational game, called *Seventh-day Adventist Authors* (1938), which brought a reimplementation of the non-religious

game *Authors*, already established at the time and consisting of a deck of cards with images of great authors of world literature (Knecht 1938). In the course of the game, the players should find and group quartets of cards exercising their memory. In the version published by the Review and Herald, one of the main Seventh-day Adventist publishers, 72 cards with names of important authors of Adventist literature are used (Worth Point, n.d.a). The game appears as the first indication in the article entitled Spend Your Time Profitably in the Adventist periodical *Lake Union Herald*, 1938, indicating that the game could qualify the time spent in leisure (Knecht 1938).

In May of the same year, the periodical *Southern Tidings* announced a new game sponsored by the then worldwide youth department of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Missionary Volunteer Department) called *Bible Truth Game* (1938) (Ortner 1938). The game is described as a tool to help young people become interested in Bible study and is recommended for better Sabbath observance practices (Southwestern Union Record 1938). The game contains 101 cards with Bible questions, so that players compete against each other for the most hits while one person uses an answer book to supervise the game (Atlantic Union Gleaner 1938, Worth Point, n.d.b). The ad for the game describes it as "interesting, entertaining and educational," (Atlantic Union Gleaner 1938, 8) and posits it as an opportunity to turn social gatherings into meetings to save people.

In 1941, *The Columbia Union Visitor* announced a new game called *Bible Characters Game* (1941), pointing out in its ad that “character is often determined by the way leisure hours are spent,” a phrase printed on the box of many Review and Herald publisher games (Vooheers 1941). The text of the ad also promised the strengthening of the intellect as well as the enrichment of faith. The game, of the Trivia category,

contained 100 cards, with 25 groups of four cards, each with the name of a character from the Bible and questions relating to it (Columbia Union Visitor 1946).

The *Australasian Record* portrayed the strong gaming movement in the Review and Herald, which even featured columns teaching how to make games at home. The magazine points out four benefits of using them, clearly highlighting their educational nature:

> "(1) The children love games and learn unconsciously while they are playing. (2) Games keep alive knowledge already gained by the children. (3) Bible games, (…) serve to show teachers and leaders the gaps in the Bible knowledge of the children, opening opportunities and awakening interest for further stories and study. (4) The competition involved in the games, (…) encourages alertness in learning." (Australasian Record 1943)

Again, in *Southern Tidings*, we find in 1944 a brief advertisement for the *Bible Geography Game* (1944), described as a simple game that is both recreational and educational (Southern Tidings 1944, Columbia Union Visitor 1946). The game contains a deck of cards, each identified with a biblical location – cities, countries, hills, or rivers – and with questions regarding that location. The following year, 1945, the same magazine consolidated in a sales ad all the games already mentioned and added a new game called *Bible Books Game* (1945), presenting it as an aid for both young and old to "spend many happy, profitable hours during the long winter evenings" (Southern Tidings 1945). In a later ad, entitled "A profitable pastime," the game promised to develop skills in finding the Bible texts (Australasian Record 1965), and the ad highlights, "Learn while you play."

In 1946, the release of *Bible Seek Game* is announced, a game especially for younger players that promised to add biblical knowledge to the players (Northern Union

Outlook 1946). Again, with educational appeal it is said that it "will afford many hours of instructional fun" (North Pacific Union Gleaner 1946). The game consists of cards with questions, whose answers must be spelled out and assembled with pieces of letters of the alphabet (Etsy n.d.a). In 1949, *Pacific Union Recorder* advertises the book *Worth: A Bible Character Quiz Game*, as an intellectual entertainment product. The book is composed of hundreds of questions and can be played with up to four people competing for the most correct answers (Pacific Union Recorder 1951, Ebay 2020). In 1951, we find the advertisement for *Bible Groups* and *John and Judas*, which can be played with the same deck, and are described as a fun and educational option not only for children, but for all ages (Southern Tidings 1951, Worth Point n.d.c).

In 1957 we find the first mention of the release of a Seventh-day Adventist board game, breaking with the pattern of card deck-only games (Atlantic Union Gleaner 1957). Entitled *Bible Journeys: Egypt to Canaan* (1957), the game features a trail that players travel along on a map of the Ancient Orient, so that in order to advance with the pawn, it is necessary to rely on the luck of the dice and get the questions on the cards right (Board Game Geek n. d., Etsy n.d.b). The following year, the *Southwestern Union Record* (1958) advertises this game as "not only a game for keeping active minds and bodies busy, but also giving valuable Bible information at the same time." In the same year, the *Youth's Instructor* magazine (1957) published an advertisement for the game with the slogan "Where family life ends, juvenile delinquency begins," once again placing institutional games as a moral qualification tool for families.

The first published Adventist games were card games (except for two), and the target public were children and teenagers, so the games were advertised as educational and religious solutions to problems faced by Adventist families and youth. We also noticed that the educational aspect linked to Adventist games had to do with the

denomination's biblical-doctrinal literacy culture, in an attempt to reinforce the players' identity and religious formation. These aspects become clear as the fundamental characteristics of the Seventh-day Adventist Bible Studies predominate in the games: question-and-answer style, Bible texts location mastery, and Bible texts memorization, with emphasis on the latter, which is present in all publications of the period. Because they intend to emphasize exercises such as memorization and text location, and because they aim to stimulate social interaction, the games were predominantly classified in the *recreation* category. Although there is a rejection of the competitive spirit in the Adventist discourse, there is a predominance of the mechanics of competition in these games, possibly thanks to the influence of the general games market at the time, which often served as inspiration and reference for the creation of Adventist games.

Between 1960 and 1990 three changes stand out: (1) board games become more frequent, although card games remain an option; (2) there are more explicit suggestions that Adventist games would be suitable playful-spiritual alternatives for the Sabbath observance period, a distinctive religious practice of adherents; and (3) there is the inclusion of digital games later in the period, providing diversity to game types produced by the Seventh-day Adventist church. Table 2 below presents this overview.

Name	Year	Type	Q&A Style	Location	Memory	Fun or Recreation	Cooperation or Competition
I Have a Bible Secret	1963	Card Game	No	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Journeys 2: Life of Christ	1964	Board Game	Yes	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Denominational History	1964	Card Game	No	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible 7 Game	1965	Board Game	No	Yes	No	Recreation	Competition
The Bible Story Game	1965	Card Game	No	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Quote Game	1969	Board Game	No	Yes	No	Recreation	Competition
Bible Fun	1969	Board Game	No	No	No	Recreation	Cooperation
Bible Journeys 3: Life of Paul	1977	Board Game	Yes	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Adventist Heritage 1 WAYMARKS	1979	Card Game	Yes	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Pick and Choose	1982	Video Game	Yes	No	No	N/A	N/A
SAC.MAN	1984	Video Game	Yes	No	No	N/A	N/A
Bible Scramble	1989	Card Game	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recreation	Competition

Table 2. Adventist games from 1960 to 1990.

After *Bible Journeys: Egypt to Canaan*, the second board game was released in 1964, called *Bible Journeys 2: Life of Christ*, an assumed continuation of the previous game (Taggart 1964). The authors made it clear that "the real purpose of the game is to help one to become more familiar with Bible facts" (Taggart 1965). A third board game appeared in 1965 (Etsy n.d.c), entitled *Bible 7 Game*, which had no cards, no questions to the players, as was standard until then. In it, the Bible should be used so that through the appearance of certain types of words in the text, the players could direct the movement of the pawns. Its name *Bible 7 Game* alludes to the seventh day of the week, so as to reinforce the idea that Adventist board or card games are healthy options for the Sabbath day (Michigan Book and Bible House 1966, Review and Herald 1967). However, for games to be appropriate for Adventist Sabbath Day

keeping, one would have to pay attention to “how they are used and how much it improves the Sabbath and the participants' knowledge of God” (Michigan Book and Bible House 1966). In this way, the games arise with a strong appeal and discourse as a leisure alternative for a day when Adventists have restrictions on professional or student activities, which would generate more free time for families.

In 1964, *Youth's Instructor* magazine had a page dedicated to an advertisement of various games. In it, a picture of a family playing on a board and the ad describes, “The happiest families are the ones that have regular periods of recreation. These games are educational, too” (Youth’s Instructor 1964). The following year, the magazine carries the slogan “families that play together stay together” (Youth’s Instructor 1965). In 1969, the same magazine carries a large image of two children playing analog games in front of a fireplace, supervised by a grown woman holding an open book on her lap – probably the Bible (Youth’s Instructor 1969). The main slogan of the ad is “For your family fun and learning library” (Youth’s Instructor 1969, 18) and at the bottom of the image there is a list with 28 games, including their prices, to be ordered by stores and bookstores in the United States.

The 1980s are marked by the beginning of the development of digital Seventh-day Adventist games. Following the same logic as the analog games, the two digital titles released in this decade are from the Trivia category and are intended to guide the user through certain content. The first one, released by the Seventh-day Adventist world headquarters in 1982, called *Pick and Choose*, aimed to take the user to an immersion in military service, confronting him with the ethical dilemmas that a Christian could face in the army, thus preparing him for these situations (Novaes and Lima 2021). The second one appears in 1984, called *SAC.MAN*, developed by

Southern Adventist College, with the objective of leading the user to a fun experience while getting to know the college, envisioning the possibilities of personal development and success (Novaes and Lima 2021).

In this second period, the games maintain the frequency of use of the question-and-answer style, however, most of them do not use the Bible texts location feature and the memorization feature. On the other hand, the binomials present the same trend of recreation and competition as in the previous period.

The 2000s brought with them new releases, the first of which was *Miracles and Pitfalls*ex, standing out for the advancement of the graphic part of the product in relation to previous titles, but still preserving the elements of trivia with questions and answers focused on the biblical text. The *Miracles and Pitfalls* advertisement brought a different tone than the advertisements from previous decades, now without mentioning quality leisure time or moral character building; the reference to the instructional character of the games remained present, however, as the ad showed: “Learn to negotiate mighty miracles and perilous pitfalls while plundering the treasure trove of Scripture and learning God's Word” (Columbia Union Visitor 2000).

Name	Year	Type	Q&A Style	Location	Memory	Fun or Recreation	Cooperation or Competition
Miracles and Pitfalls	2000	Board Game	Yes	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Matchless: A Bible and Nature Game	2001	Card Game	Yes	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Bonanza	2002	Card Game	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Where Jesus Walked	2003	Board Game	No	Yes	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Heroes: The Game	2013	Video Game	Yes	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Days of Daniel	2014	Board Game	No	No	No	Recreation	Competition
PitCairn	2015	Video Game	Yes	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Families Card Game	2018	Card Game	No	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Challenge	2018	Card Game	Yes	Yes	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Bible Journeys 4: Life of Daniel	2019	Board Game	Yes	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition
Heroes of the Bible Game	2019	Board Game	No	No	No	Recreation	Competition
Heroes of the Bible Card Game	2019	Card Game	No	No	No	Recreation	Competition
Happy Town	2019	Board Game	N/A	N/A	N/A	Recreation	Competition
Snakebites & Shipwrecks	2020	Board Game	No	No	No	Recreation	Competition
Pictus Card Game	2021	Card Game	No	No	No	Recreation	Competition
Heroes II	2021	Video Game	Yes	No	Yes	Recreation	Competition

Table 3. Adventist games in the years 2000.

With few exceptions, what we have seen so far is the dominance of the North American publishing house Review and Herald in the Adventist analog game publishing business. However, in 2003, Autumn House, a European Adventist publishing imprint, launched its first title and in the following decade consolidated itself with several releases, taking advantage of the growing wave of the analog game

market (Vatvani 2018). Despite bringing games with more modern operating mechanics, trivia-type games also predominate in the publisher, including reprints of games previously released by Review and Herald.

In 2013 Sam Neves, youth pastor of the Stanborough Park Adventist church in Watford, England, created *Heroes*: *the Game*, a trivia app to test the Bible knowledge (Blyden 2014). The game, originally released for iOS, was part of an evangelistic strategy by the local church to get more people to study the Bible. The game marked in a very important way the Seventh-day Adventist 's entry into the then effervescent mobile platform. In 2015, the Seventh-day Adventist Church through the *Ellen G. White Estate*, the entity that cares for Ellen G. White's literary heritage, launched the digital game *Pitcairn*. The Trivia-style game had versions for Windows, iOS, and Android, with the goal of "encouraging children to read and treasure White's writings" (McChesney 2015), since White Estate research indicated low numbers of contact with Ellen G. White's texts, especially among children.

In 2021, Seventh-day Adventist headquarters announced worldwide, through its communications department, the launch of *Heroes 2*, a re-implementation of the 2013 project coordinated once again by Pastor Sam Neves, and in partnership with the *Hope Channel*, the official English-language TV channel of the Seventh-day Adventist church. The game is described as an "opportunity of learning about God's greatest heroes of all time" (Adventist Review 2021), once again reinforcing the instructional character of the games produced by Seventh-day Adventist. In the survey exposed in this work we notice a homogeneity in relation to the types and categories of games, predominantly card games and the Trivia category. *Heroes 2* has inheritances from both, because the question screens that work as animated cards, present the player with challenges through simple questions; a primordial

characteristic of the trivia style. The game has a main story mode in which the player selects a hero, corresponding to a biblical character like David, Esther, or Samson, and is challenged to answer a series of questions about the biblical account of that personality. Before selecting the challenge, the player has access to a textual contextualization about that character. While playing, your time is recorded, which can be used for competition with friends, user ranking, and obtaining rewards to enhance your game profile. In its menu, the game also offers options for receiving a Bible course via Whatsapp, prayer requests, and direct links to official Seventh-day Adventist television channels and streaming channels with playlists of the game.

The launch of the game is accompanied by a planning of actions and events that extend the user experience with the game, taking them on a transmedia journey. The *Hope Channel*, for example, is planning a game show-style TV program that will enable organized teams from churches and denominational schools around the world to participate. In May 2021 the Seventh-day Adventist general conference organized the first *Heroes 2* world championship (Rodriguez 2021). The four-day event was attended by players from around the world, and among the finalists nine countries were represented.

Heroes 2 is the most current representation of the development and maturation of the Adventist ludic culture, showing that, by using tools such as the *Unreal Engine*, it is aware of what the gaming industry practices. At the same time that it uses current technologies and allows itself to advance through platforms little explored by the Seventh-day Adventist Church so far, such as mobile, the game preserves in itself an identity built over the years, in which the protagonism of the biblical text and its memorization and literacy practices are constantly evidenced, in order to seek to biblically instruct the player through the playful experience.

The games in this period follow the trend of the previous one and the evolution in design is seen through the plurality of mechanics employed, which allow a variety of games that do not depend on the fundamental characteristics of a Bible study guide. The game *Heroes*, for example, still uses the characteristics of question-and-answer style and memorization, but moves away from Bible texts location mastery by adopting a scoring metric that depends on the player's agility, favoring an accelerated dynamic during the game. The binomials maintain the trend of recreation and competition as in the previous period.

Final Considerations

The text-based Bible study paradigm of Seventh-day Adventism is one of the main constituent elements of its religious education orientation, and consequently influenced the production of the church's games since its inception in the 1930s, as surveyed in this study. Whether they are card games, board games, or even digital games, almost all have the same pattern: (1) throughout the history of game development at Seventh-day Adventist Church, at least 50% of published games used the trivia style, based on questions and answers, stimulating the memorization of biblical texts and familiarity with Christian scripture stories; (2) games have gradually decreased emphasis on Bible texts location mastery, moving away from this feature as more sophisticated techniques are implemented; (3) they are games for children and youth audiences, which seek the teaching of Adventist beliefs and values in a playful way through moments of interaction with the family; (4) they are games that seek to align with the Adventist vision of recreation as opposed to fun/amusement, reinforcing the ideal of gaming as moments of health promotion and socialization; and (5) they still minimally exploit the cooperation advocated by the Adventist vision

and tend to align themselves with the gaming market in general - where predominates the competition emphasis.

Although the moralistic discourse of games as playful-utilitarian solutions to young people's problems and as a safeguard for families diminishes considerably from the 2000s on, Adventist games are still produced from a predominantly religious education perspective more than casual entertainment. Evidence of this is that even from the 1980s, with the arrival of video games, and from the 2000s and 2010s, with digital games for computers and smartphones, the characteristics of biblical-doctrinal literacy and reinforcement of players' identity and religious formation remain in Adventist game production, despite the large amount of resources and ludic alternatives since then. It would be expected that more sophisticated features of digital games would increase the range of design and mechanics options in Adventist digital games, but the basis of them remains the same as the first ludic initiatives: trivia games with question-answer and memorization systems. The maintenance of this game design logic is a reflection of how the Adventist religious education perspective still maintains learning and mastering the biblical text as one of its main identity marks.

By associating the evolution of market mechanics and resources with its text-centered orientation and Bible study practice, the Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to preserve its traditions and religious education practices while at the same time trying to connect with a new generation of believers, more accustomed to the speed and interactivity of the digital universe. The latest Adventist game productions indicate that one of the strategies adopted to achieve relevance and efficiency in terms of biblical-doctrinal literacy and evangelism is to invest in a transmedia logic. However, with the immense amount of options and resources that the universe of games

presents today, the Seventh-day Adventist Church will have to face the following question: are trivia-style games still the best option to carry out the objective of biblical-doctrinal literacy so dear to the denomination? A no to the answer will lead the denomination to delve into the hundreds of alternative options that game design and the game industry offers today, validating or rejecting them based on their religious education paradigms. The answer yes will probably lead them to another question: are trivia-style games still as attractive as they were decades ago to today's intended audience? Either way, the denomination will continue revisiting – and possibly give new meaning to – assumptions, codes, and traditions that have guided game production strategies up to this point.

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[i] It should be noted that the Adventist text-centered orientation did not produce the iconoclasm typical of other Protestant religious movements. Millerism, even though focused on the Scriptures and the printed platform, made use of images to spread its message. Morgan's (1999) study presents the development of the Millerite visual culture from the perspective of the mass publication production scenario in 19th century America. And the study by Novaes (2018) points out that the production of charts and other Adventist visual resources can be characterized, through text-centered orientation, of textualized images or image-texts, in which the image exists as a function of the text and is directed by it in the textual-imagetic composition.

[ii] A brief but interesting analysis of the centrality of Bible study and the importance of textual culture in Adventist liturgy can be found in Bull and Lockhart (2007, 221-243).