

“SPIRITUAL GIFTS”: “CHURCH EDIFICATION” WITHIN THE POSTMODERN CONTEXT

TONY OGOUMA, M.A.
Valley View University, Acra, Ghana

Abstract

The Seventh-day Adventist Church based on its 17th Fundamental belief, professes that God bestows upon all members of His church in every age spiritual gifts which each member is to employ in loving ministry of the church and humanity. It can therefore be said that every Seventh-day Adventist has been granted by the power of the Holy Spirit at least a spiritual gift with the aim of edifying the church within a postmodern context. While it is true that spiritual gifts are important in the church, it is also true that they are to be employed in a context which is different from the Pauline settings. Therefore, how should a Seventh-day Adventist use his or her spiritual gift in order to edify the church? Should the edification of the church be shaped by postmodernism? This paper attempts to determine if the use of spiritual gifts by Adventists should be modelled according to the current age – the postmodernism. The paper argues that, in the face of popular pressure to adopt un-biblical fads of our time in order to edify the church, every believer should make a commitment to stand upon the teachings of the Holy Scripture and the Spirit of Prophecy in ministering to the church without any compromises.

1. Introduction

PEOPLE will deny knowledge about spiritual gifts. For, it is clearly articulated in the Pauline writings, that there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit (1 Cor 12:4). “But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will” (1 Cor 12:11; KJV). And among the spiritual gifts we can mention, the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, the gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophesy, the discerning of spirits, the interpretation of tongues (1 Cor 12:8-9) “having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us” (Rom 12:4).

However, much discussion is taking place over how each believer should use his or her spiritual gift, since Paul does not state clearly in which manner the receiver of the gift should use it. For instance, John MacArthur stated that, “nothing has been more abused and misunderstood in evangelical Christianity than

this whole area of spiritual gifts.”¹ No Subject in the last twenty years has sparked more controversy among Christians than has the subject of the gifts of the Spirit. Some churches have split while others have grown tremendously because of the exercise of these gifts.² Whatever gift (or gifts) we have, it is for the common good (not self-edification).³ Thomas Aquinas subordinated the gifts to the practice of the virtues, holding that the gifts enable us to do virtuous deeds perfectly.⁴ “Moreover as the church is losing its hold over society and the culture is becoming more secular, multiple worldviews are surfacing, and aesthetic pluralism is also emerging,⁵ all these could influence the way a Seventh day Adventists believer will use his or her spiritual gift.

A simple answer to the question “Who are Seventh-day Adventists?” can be stated briefly: the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a worldwide body of more than 10 million Christians who observe Saturday as the Sabbath and expect Jesus’ second coming soon. In more detail, one might say that Seventh-day Adventists are a conservative Protestant body of evangelical Christians whose faith is grounded in the Bible and centered on Jesus, with stress on His atoning death on the cross, ministry in the heavenly sanctuary, and soon return to redeem His people. They are known for their Sabbath observance, for their emphasis on maintaining health as part of religious duty, and for their mission activities around the world.⁶

Although Paul does not state clearly in which manner spiritual gifts should be used, however he gives the purpose for which spiritual gifts are given. Hence, knowing and understanding the purpose for which the spiritual gifts are given by the Holy Spirit

¹John MacArthur, *Spiritual Gifts, Includes Index* (Chicago: Moody, 1983).

²Roy E. Gingrich, *The Gifts of the Spirit* (Memphis, TN.: Riverside, 2003), 2.

³Eddie Rasnake, *The Leader’s Guidebook : Using Your Spiritual Gifts, Following God Series* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers, 2004), 25.

⁴Donald G. Bloesch, *The Holy Spirit : Works & Gifts* (Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity, 2000), 60.

⁵Roger Sessions, *Questions About Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1971), 124.

⁶Raoul Dederen, vol. 12, *Handbook of Seventh-Day Adventist Theology*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; Commentary Reference Series (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2001, c2000), 1.

will help one, as a Seventh-day Adventist believer to grasp the manner in which spiritual gifts should be used.

In Ephesians 4:12, Paul states clearly the reasons for which the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts. He unmistakably says that spiritual gifts are given "For (1) the perfecting of the saints, (2) for the work of the ministry, (3) for the edifying of the body of Christ". This paper focuses on the third purpose of spiritual gifts - the edification the body of Christ. If spiritual gifts are given for the purpose of edifying the body of Christ - the church - how could one use his or her spiritual gifts in order to fulfill the edification of the body of Christ? Should the manner of which the church is being edified, be influenced by the culture in which he/she lives such as postmodernism? What is the standard - the true measurement - of "edification of the church" as understood by Paul? Answering these questions will constitute the our work.

2. Understanding Postmodernism

Modernism is now regarded as yesterday's way of thinking. The dominant worldview in secular and academic circles today is called postmodernism.¹

The expression "postmodernism" may mean different thing to different people. However, it was during the period of Rene Descartes, with his famous dictum "I think therefore I am" that the foundation for a new way of looking at humans and God was laid down.²

Reason and the new scientific method developed by Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton, became the measure of all things. Moreover, reason, tradition, and experience became the approach to everything, giving birth to postmodernism. The major particularity of postmodernism is its message of relativism, uncertainty and even pessimism. It has declared that there are no longer any all-encompassing schemes that offer a comprehensive explanation of life. Instead, [it] says, there are only fragmented and contradictory smaller stories of individuals and groups in all their diversity. All

¹John MacArthur, *Why One Way? : Defending an Exclusive Claim in an Inclusive World* (Nashville: W Pub. Group, 2002), 7.

²Reinder Bruinsma, "Modern versus Postmodern Adventism: The ultimate divide", <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/authors/bruinsma-reinder.html> (June 2005)"

is different, [it] proclaims. And all judgment needs to be deferred! There are no absolutes; Truth has been replaced by truths.¹

In addition to what has been said, under the influence of postmodernism - contemporary higher - criticism, the Bible's sole authority is being replaced by other sources: reason, tradition and experience.² Hence, there is a strong departure from Biblical revelation towards empirical experience; there is a shift from what the Bible says to how do I feel it - a new Christian epistemology. Today without any mistake Postmodernism's influence has clearly infected the church already.³

3. Understanding "Edifying" and Spiritual Gifts: Ephesians 4:12

"Edifying" in Ephesians 4:12 comes from the Greek word οἰκοδομη, and it appears 11 times in the New Testament in that form (Rom 15:2; 1 Cor 14:3,5,12,26; 2 Cor 5:1, 10:8, 13:10; Eph 4:12,16,29). It means literally building or edifice (Matt 24:1; Mark 13:1f). But figuratively it means "building" in the sense of edifying, edification, and building up. It is used 7 times in the sense of edifying; 6 times in the sense of building; and 4 times in the sense of edification.

The word "edifying" is used seven times as directly related to the employing of spiritual gifts in the church or the body of Christ. For instance in 1 Corinthians 14:4, Paul exhorts the Corinthians to wisely use their gifts - speaking in tongues and prophesy - "that the church may receive edifying". The result of what Paul means by "edifying the body of Christ" will be that "we all come in (1) the unity of the faith, and of (2) the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13). That is to say that when someone uses his or her spiritual gift, the church should be edify - the church should grow in the unity of faith and the knowledge of God, which will lead each and everyone to the stature of the fullness of Christ.

¹Reinder Bruinsma, "Modern versus Postmodern Adventism: The ultimate divide," <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/authors/b Bruinsma-reinder.html> (June 2005)."

²Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, *Must We Be Silent* (USA, MI: Berean Books, 2001), 29.

³John MacArthur, *Why One Way? : Defending an Exclusive Claim in an Inclusive World* (Nashville, TN: Nelson, 2002), 10.

Moreover for Paul, when spiritual gifts are used with the purpose of "edifying" "we [each church member] henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ. (Eph 4: 14, 15) Each Christian is given a gift, not primarily for his own benefit, and certainly not for his own exaltation or pleasure, but for the blessing and edification of the whole church.¹ Spiritual gifts are given.

In other words, spiritual gifts are to be used by church members in a manner that the church will be built up in both character and numbers...

This refers not so much to the individual as to the church, which is to come to a state of organic unity, completeness, and maturity as contrasted with the childish immaturity suggested in v. 14. For both the individual and the church, likeness to Christ is the goal to be reached (Rom. 8:29). The refusal to grow is a greater sin than immaturity itself, and is the outcome of self-satisfaction and low ideals.²

In one of his article, Samuel Koranteng-Pipim puts it well when he says: "God equips every member with certain spiritual gifts, enabling them to build up or edify other believers so they can perform the soul-saving mission of the church."³

4. Church Edification and Postmodernism

There is no doubt that society influences each and everyone, hence the church, for the church is made up of people who belong to society or culture. However, should society be the measurement of true church edification? We should note that according to Paul there are certain things that will help us know if the church is edified

¹Roy E. Gingrich, *The Gifts of the Spirit* (Memphis, TN.: Riverside, 2003), 6.

²Nichol, Francis D., ed., "Perfect man [Ephesians 4:13]," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1978), 6:1024.

³Samuel Koranteng-Pipim, "Leadership in the Church: Are We Honestly Mistaken?" *Adventist Affirm* 20/1 (Spring 2006): <http://www.adventistsaffirm.org/article/168/previous-issues/volume-20-number-1/leadership-in-the-church-are-we-honestly-mistaken>.

when spiritual gifts are used. In Ephesians 4:13, Paul mentions (1) the church should grow in the unity of the Son of God and (2) the church will grow into the knowledge the God. Then, the church will be built up in both character and numbers; it will come to a state of organic unity, completeness, and maturity. Therefore, any manner that shapes the way of ministering to the church - the use of spiritual gifts - should lead the church and its members to grow in the unity of God and into the knowledge of God, so that all will grow to the stature of the fullness of Christ, and will not be tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine. And God has given to his people the Word as in a manna that will feed each and every one to grow spiritually. For, Scripture is the foundation of the church; the church is the guardian of Scripture. When the church is in strong health - when it grows - the light of scripture shines bright; when the church is sick - when it does not grow - Scripture is corroded by neglect, and the way in which Scripture is being treated is in exact correspondence with the condition of the church, and the manner we used spiritual gifts to edify the church.

One of the occasions where one could edify the church by the use of his or her spiritual gift is when the church meets together, for worship for instance. Unfortunately, the wave of postmodernism has not bypassed the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the way spiritual gifts are used during worship service. Worship styles have significantly changed, with an increasing emphasis on experience, and on contemporary music, drama, and informal small group meetings. Church life, liturgy [order and style of worship] and the use of spiritual gifts during church worship have changed with new forms of worship by dance, theatre, and innovative hymnody.¹ New methods of worship and even evangelism [spiritual gifts are also given for evangelism purpose] are imported from secular world and actively promoted in the church - gospel rock, gospel clowns, gospel cafes, gospel magician etc. But we forget that, using our spiritual gifts in a manner that goes against the principles of the Bible will automatically change the message and the message will be different. Whether I preach, sing, administrate, prophesy or healed . . . I should do it for the glory of God. Moreover, the world has never been the standard for God's people, and God can never be glorified through the Standard of the World (John 1:10; 8:23, 17:16; 1Cor 2:12; Rom 12:2; Jam 4:4; 1John 2:15-16; Eph 2:12). Therefore, a believer should not use his or her spiritual gifts according to the

¹John Wimber and Kevin Springer, *Power of Evangelism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 129

standard of the world - postmodernism. For God tells us that we should "be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God." Rom 12:2.

5. "Edifying the Church" and the Seventh day Adventist

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is a prophetic movement. It is a movement that came "into existence in fulfillment of prophecy to be God's instrument in the worldwide proclamation of the Good News of salvation through faith."¹ Today it seems that culture, pluralism, and scholarship has impressed many "to try to modernize God by humanizing Him."² This "modernization" of God is clearly noticeable by the way many have secularized their manner of ministering to the church and the world via their spiritual gifts (singing, preaching, administering, healing, and others). God has given to each Seventh-day Adventist at least one spiritual gift so that the Word of God will be preached for the growth of the church in character and number. Each church member can contribute to the edification of the church by using his or her spiritual gift in a way that pleases God and not the world.

For "God never changes." He is "the same yesterday, and today, and forever" (Mal 3:6; Heb 13:8). Therefore, faithfulness in the use of gifts that God has given to His church should be in harmony of His principles. Godliness is an imperative. "Before the final visitation of God's judgments upon the earth there will be among the people of the Lord such a revival of primitive godliness as has not been witnessed since apostolic times. The Spirit and power of God will be poured out upon His children. At that time many will separate themselves from those churches in which the love of this world has supplanted love for God and His Word"³ This

¹ *Seventh-day Adventist Philosophy of Music*, 1972; <http://www.iamonline.com/worshipmusic/Guidelines%20Toward%20An%20SDA%20Philosophy%20of%20Music.htm>

² Charles D. Brooks, "From a Talk Given to Seventh-Day Adventist Ministers," *Adventist Affirm* 16/3 (Fall 2002): <http://www.adventistsaffirm.org/article/30/previous-issues/volume-16-number-3/i-want-my-church-back>

³ Ellen. G. White, *He Shall Receive Power* (1995) 341.1.

primitive godliness will affect every facet of the church including church members and the way they will minister (use their gifts) to edify the church of God.

6. Conclusion

The paper has attempted to have a new look on how Seventh day Adventists should edify the church through their spiritual gifts in a postmodern world. Firstly, the paper defined in its introduction, what spiritual gifts are as well as who are understood as Seventh - day Adventist believer. Secondly, the paper attempts to understand what postmodernism and church edification are. Finally, the paper has tried to reconcile how a Seventh – day believer should use his or her spiritual gifts in the midst of a postmodern world.

Though “sensationalism” seems to be the “golden mark” today, the Bible should remain the standard in the church. If God has given to His church spiritual gifts, these must be used in harmony with His principles. Never should postmodernism shape the manner in which spiritual gifts are used for church edification. Godliness is our golden mark as a church, for we have been called to be agents of transformation and change for the glory of God. As Pastor C.D Brooks puts it “I want my Church back.”¹

¹Charles D. Brooks, “From a Talk Given to Seventh-Day Adventist Ministers,” *Adventist Affirm* 16/3 (Fall 2002): <http://www.adventistsaffirm.org/article/30/previous-issues/volume-16-number-3/i-want-my-church-back>