

A NECESSITY FOR A PARADIGM SHIFT IN ADVENTIST THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN WEST AFRICA

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Abstract

The West Central Africa Division of Seventh-day Adventists records substantial membership growth. Its blueprint for theological education however, seems inadequate to meet the immense nurturing and leadership challenges. There is a lacuna between single-emphasis theological educational training for the pastors/leaders and membership nurturing and leadership needs. This paper suggests a paradigm shift towards Adventist Theological Education (ATE), which will provide skills for members' nurture-ship, missional leadership and theological curriculum transformation (TCT). The paper integrates aspects of TCT within members' nurture-ship and missional leadership challenges.

1. Rationale for a Paradigm Shift

Since the organization of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the 1860s, by virtue of remarkable missionary initiative, the World Church has enjoyed stable growth that it is now a world-wide community of faith of more than 20 million memberships.¹ Africa host the highest percentage of membership in world church of Seventh-day Adventists. The West African church membership forms part of Africa's church membership growth.

¹ Herbert S. Bird, *Theology of Seventh-day Adventism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1961), 7.

Through its global mission initiative, the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists (GC) supports financially evangelistic efforts to reach the West African people through various campaign strategies.² The African church regularly receives missionaries from especially the West and other parts of the world to conduct evangelistic meetings. These mission endeavors are resultant of substantial proportion of membership growth within West Africa (WA). The enthusiasm of increase membership also creates enormous leadership and nurturing challenges for the Seventh-day Adventists church in the WA region.

Adventist theological education in WA provides an inadequate blueprint to meet the immense nurturing and leadership challenges. The single-emphasis theological education of pastors/leaders which focuses on pastoral ministry is not sufficient to cater for the challenges mentioned hitherto. The World Church innovative move to establish the Adventist University of Africa (AUA) demonstrated a right direction to unravel the challenges. The first president of AUA, Brempong Owusu-Antwi, in his report during the 2010 General Conference Sessions aptly stated:

The growing membership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the continent of Africa has brought tremendous challenges in leadership needs and nurturing capacity at various levels of the church. These challenges led to the establishment of the Adventist University of Africa (AUA), an institution of higher learning offering postgraduate degrees for all Africa.³

AUA produced its first graduates in 2009 with 166 masters of arts (MA) graduates in both pastoral theology and leadership. The University continues to put out more graduates in church mission and ministry to enhance mission activities and to boost quality leadership. Even though this initiative is a welcome development, trends of ATE in WA still drenches quality of the pastoral ministry without full implementation of the International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) curriculum.

WA church needs a paradigm shift from a single emphasis theological education. WA needs to implement the policy and curriculum of the IBMTE if it would be able to eradicate the numerous challenges the church faces in nurture-ship and leadership. Furthermore, the necessity to

- 2 The purpose of the Global Mission is to “further the Global Mission objectives of carrying the gospel to unreached areas, promoting the importance of mission and raising vital financial support...Adventist Mission supports the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist evangelistic, medical, media and development fields.”[https://www.adventist.org/en/world-church/general-conference /departments/](https://www.adventist.org/en/world-church/general-conference/departments/) (Accessed October 16, 2016).
- 3 Review and Herald General Conference Institutional Report. June 24, 2010.

apply the IBMTE policies arise from the main objective of the World Church to produce well balance ministerial and theologically educated pastors and leaders for the World Church.⁴

This paper confirms the revision of current curriculum for ATE in WA, which is inadequate to prepare pastors and church leaders for possible refutation of theological heresies.⁵ Even though seminaries in WA must continue training students for church leadership, these institutions cannot remain solely on the old path of single-emphasis theological education. The West African church needs to fully prepare for academic transformation of pastors. Pastors in WA need academic preparation for members' nurture-ship. The academic preparation of pastors and missional leaders should enable them tackle leadership challenges, apostasy, and biblical heretical challenges that is confronting the church in these last days of earth's history. This study seeks to address two major areas of concern that necessitates a paradigm shift in the ATE in WA. These include members' nurture-ship and missional leadership challenges in WA.

2. Paradigm Shift in Members' nurture-ship

- 4 The purpose of Adventists ministerial and theological Education is to foster a dynamic theological unity in the world; sharpen the focus on the Seventh-day Adventist message and mission. Support the spiritual and professional development of faculty involved in ministerial programs; promote professional excellence in ministerial training and practice; Nurture a strong partnership between church leaders, educational institutions, and faculty engaged in the training of ministry; energize the spiritual life of Seventh-day Adventist educational institutions through committed faculty. International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education, "Handbook of Seventh-day Adventist Ministerial and Theological Education" in Policies and Procedures (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2001)1
- 5 According to the document presented by the IBMTE, Adventist Theological Education covers the subject areas of (1) Biblical Studies: OT and NT studies, Biblical Languages and Exegesis, Biblical Archaeology and Backgrounds, Daniel and Revelation/Eschatology. (2) Doctrinal and Historical Studies: Doctrine of Scripture and Hermeneutics, Bible Doctrines (SDA Fundamental Beliefs), History of the Christian Church, Seventh-day Adventist History, Ellen G. White Writings/Gift of Prophecy, Science and Religion, Christian Ethics and Social Issues, Apologetics/Comparative Christian Studies. (3) Pastoral and Mission Studies: Leadership and Administration of Local Congregations, Pastoral Ministry (Including addressing the needs of various groups such as youth), Preaching/Homiletics, Evangelistic Leadership – Public, Personal, Church Growth, Church Planting, Worship and Music/Liturgy, Structure and Function of the World Seventh-day Adventist Church, Church Stewardship and Finance, Motivating and Training Laity for Ministry, World Mission (Including study of World Religious and Secularism), Pastoral Care and Counseling, Marriage and Family, Health Ministry, Christian Education/Teaching Ministry, Technology in Ministry. (4) Personal Formation: Spiritual Formation, Life and Career Management, Professional Ethics, Personal Stewardship and Finance. IBMTE, 42-43.

In my opinion, members' nurture-ship focuses on equipping members within a holistic bible study approach. The purpose is for improving members' physical and spiritual walk with God. This task of members' nurture-ship is accomplished by a minister who possesses the appropriate training through ministerial and theological education, guided by the Holy Spirit. For instance, the Bible records, "I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding" (Jer 3:15).⁶

God calls leaders and pastors according to the gift of His grace, through Jesus Christ (Eph 3:7; 4:8). It is worth noting that no one is ordained into the pastoral ministry by means of an academic degree qualification. Notwithstanding, when God calls, it behoves the church to qualify the call with the proper academic qualification for the job. Quality theological education is indispensable for proper interpretation of the scripture.

The totality of the Bible (Old and New Testament) at its core is a storybook with a salvation metanarrative.⁷ Without adequate training in ministerial and theological education, the challenges, which face the church members' nurture-ship in WA, would continue to linger. I strongly agree with Fritz Guy's view that the pastors are the professional servants to whom God has called in order to assist the community of faith in fulfilling its mission.⁸ However, professional servants are to be viewed in the context of service. The call of the pastor does not focus on position or title of an office assumed, but the ministry to the community of faith. The pastor is trained for missions to witness, baptize, and nurture members through teaching and missional leadership.⁹ The IBMTE has observed that:

The primary way by which the Adventist Church fosters a common understanding of its message and promotes its mission is through the ministry of its spiritual leaders – pastors, theologians, Bible/religion teachers, chaplains and administrators. Thus the education and professional training of these individuals becomes of paramount

6 In context, this text addresses the issue of especially civil leaders, as Zerubabel, Nehemiah (Jer 23:4; 2:8). Yet, this text can be unpacked to reveal a larger theological implication to encompass the desire of God for spiritual shepherd over his people. Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown's Commentary on the Whole Bible, "On Jeremiah", Electronic Version.

7 Jiri Moskala, "Mission in the Old Testament," in *Message Mission and unity of the Church*, ed. Angel M. Rodríguez (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2013), 62.

8 Fritz Guy, *Thinking Theologically, Adventist Christianity and the Interpretation of Faith* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1999), 35.

9 *Ibid.*, 35.

importance if the Church is to preserve its message and mission within its international diversity.¹⁰

The result of single-emphasis theological education results in more evangelistic activities for membership growth than members' nurture-ship activities in WA. The church must engage in evangelism (Matt 28:18-19), in addition, there is also a call to "teach converts and members to observe all things" (Matt 28:20). Since large numbers of members are received through evangelism, the assumption may arise that members are ignorant of the distinctive teachings and history of the church. They may lack understanding of the church's view of salvation, the universal great controversy, the work of the remnant as understood by Seventh-day Adventists, and the function of the writings of Ellen G. White. Without a balance theological education as proposed by the IBMTE, the West African church would void itself of mission oriented leaders and theological professors for the classroom. Consequently, church members easily drop out when bewildered with either spiritual or physical encounters as well as with the enormous global theological heresies of false contentious teachings, opposed to the fundamental beliefs of the world church of Seventh-day Adventists.

It is therefore essential for a paradigm shift, which encourages members' nurture-ship witnessing. Pastors and Bible workers need a first-hand insight of scripture. Take for example; biblical and theological studies provide the Bible students with various steps for proper hermeneutics applications to the Words of Scripture.¹¹ Frank M. Hasel proposes that an exegetical consequence of the ancient scripture would produce the right attitude for understanding the mind of God in the study of his Word.¹² A sound exegesis and theology provide an exposition to

¹⁰ IBMTE, i.

¹¹ The biblical audience is the ancient and first people of God who received the sacred Word in its original context, to be understood in their experiential communion and service to God and the rest of the creation. Concerning the phrase "People of God", Gerhard Pfandi opts that it began with Adam and Eve, and after the fall, the people of God are reconstructed through divine initiative, offering humanity a way out of their predicament – a return to God through the seed of the woman (Gen 3:15,16). Pfandi therefore asserts that the people of God are defined by the work of redemption on their behalf and their willingness to be reconciled to him through the seed of the woman. Gerhard Pfandi, "The People of God in the Old Testament," in *Message Mission and unity of the Church*, ed. Angel M. Rodríguez (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2013), 2-4.

¹² According to Frank M. Hasel in his chapter on presuppositions in the interpretation of scripture, God meets us in Scriptures and meets us there for a specific purpose; the approach to the study of Scripture on any other terms than those delineated in God's Word is to come to God with a wrong attitude. Hasel suggests that we need a disposition of mind and of heart that leads to understanding. This is not simply gained through certain exegetical techniques. Frank M. Hasel, "Presuppositions in the Interpretation of Scripture," in *Understanding*

recognize the implication for the modern audience to improve the quality of godly behavior. The emphasis in mission study in the ATE in West Africa may not fully equip the pastor for effective nurture-ship of members to meet spiritual challenges in the last days of earth history.

3. Paradigm Shift in Leadership

Seventh-day Adventist theological schools in West African have produced degree holders in mission and leadership. Ironically, tremendous challenges in leadership and nurture-ship capacity at various levels of the church do not seem to be getting better. In West Africa, conferences and mission fields administrators and the pastors working in these field possess the same qualifications. This often result in the lack of full support for the administrators from those who are not in administrative leadership.

In my opinion, the single-emphasis qualification in WA is prepares more of positional leaders than missional leaders. On one hand, positional leaders as presented by Bienvenido Mergal fits well with the description of a 'title' rather than a 'call to service.' In other words, church administrative leadership appears to be a prestige for the one in charge. The outcome is a leadership model by distance, which means, only those who sympathize, value, and honor the leader in charge get the praise, support, and material benefits for their support.

Pastors and church leaders are usually transferred within their 3rd and 5th year of service new responsibilities in WA. During the time of leadership transfer it becomes a tug of war whereby all means known to the administrators in charge are used to silence those considered as oppositional. Those against the serving leaders use all means known to them to bring about change in leadership.¹³ Ellen G. White states, "Knowledge is power; but intellectual ability, without goodness of heart is a power for evil."¹⁴

The Church in WA needs missional leaders, who are Christ-like in character. Even though Christ is the creator and owner of everything, He allowed His birthplace be a lowly place (Luke 2:7). During His ministry, He humbled Himself to win the favor of his disciples and listeners.

Scripture: An Adventist Approach, Biblical Research Institute Studies vol. 1, ed. George W. Reid (Silver Spring, MD: Biblical Research Institute, 2005), 33-35.

13 Dr. Bienvenido Mergal, is a professor at Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIAS), in the Philippines. The concept of a professional and missional leadership was acknowledged from his chapel seminar lecture for seminary students in September, 2015.

14 Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1991) 198.

Missional leadership is a call to serve the needs of God's people. A missional leader develops character of Christ, value people according to Scripture, develop policies to build a community of faith, and do as Christ would for those who despised Him.¹⁵

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The IBMTE recommendations for ministerial and theological education is a starting point for a paradigm shift in theological education in WA.¹⁶ Theological education in WA needs to embrace a curriculum that emphasizes balance in learning outcomes in Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology as well as in Applied Theological studies. When this happens, qualified personnel for pastoral ministry as well as personnel with teaching skills would be identified for professorial assignment in Seventh-day Adventist seminaries in West Africa. Missional leaders would be identified and nurtured for future administrative needs. Pastors in training would be assigned to the right kind of congregations to attend to the nurture-ship needs of members.¹⁷

15 Mergal, chapel seminar lecture September, 2015.

16 Candidates planning to serve the Church as teachers or professors of religion/theology at the college/university/seminary level should have completed the basic program for an Adventist pastor; have the essential qualities, commitments and skills of an Adventist pastor after a minimum of five years of pastoral experience; have been ordained commissioned to the gospel ministry; have been recommended by the local church or church organization to pursue a career in the teaching ministry; and have completed an appropriate (post) graduate degree. IBMTE, 53.

17 The scripture witnesses to the fact that let us wait on our ministering, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part.... (Rom 12:7; Eph 4:12, 16, KJV), because everyone does not have the same giftedness.