

AASS 4 (2001):57-62

Devotional presented during the

AIAS Theological Forum 2001: The Church: Unity Amidst Change

August 8-11, 2001

THE CHURCH AND HER MISSION

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Introduction

The only reason for the existence of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church is the proclamation of the gospel. The objective of all departments of the church and of all our institutions is the proclamation of the gospel. The gathering of SDA church leaders at its various meetings is to achieve the mission of the church—“To evangelize and not to institutionalize.” Someone has said, “If we don’t evangelize, we fossilize.”

The Role of Ministers in OT Times

What was God’s plan for His church in the OT period? The OT church, the Israelites, were God’s chosen people, a uniquely special and holy nation (Exod 19:5-6). According to the divine plan and purpose, the Israelites were to be both a royal and priestly race (v. 6). In an evil world, they were to be kings, moral and spiritual, in that they were to prevail over the realm of sin (Rev 20:6). As priests, they were to draw near to the Lord in prayer, in praise, and in sacrifice (2 Cor 5:17-18,20). As intermediaries between God and the heathen, they were to serve as instructors, preachers, and prophets, and were to be examples of holy living—heaven’s exponents of true religion.

While it was true that there were priests and Levites that led ancient Israel in spiritual matters, it was also equally true that in the divine blueprint the whole nation was to be a kingdom of priests—missionaries to the world (Isa 43:10; Pss 22:27; 96:3).

The role of the priests and Levites was to teach and lead the people for a global mission. That mission was to proclaim the message of salvation to the whole world. Rightly understood, the sanctuary service was not a doctrine. It was an illustration pointing to Calvary, the hope of humanity—the saving grace of God.

The failure of the OT church was that they kept the gospel for themselves. They did not evangelize, so they fossilized. When they stagnated, they started to become liberal, accommodating the doctrines of Baal and Molech. Their distinctive doctrines were toned down so that they would not appear odd when they mingled with the theologians of big religions. During the time of Ahab, 850 theologians were trained to teach the people of Israel about the theology of Balaam (1 Kgs 18:19). These theologians ate at the table of the queen—honored teachers that corrupted the fundamental beliefs of the church.

Once we tone down our distinctive doctrines and accommodate liberal thinking in conformity with the theology of the world, we are pronouncing extreme unction on the SDA Church. Would to God that every pastor and every leader would be firm not to remove the old landmarks (Prov 22:28).

The Role of Ministers in the NT Church

What is God's plan for his *ecclesia* in the Christian era? In 1 Pet 2:9-10 we find a reiteration of the unchanging plan of God as recorded in Exod 19:5-6. We are (a) a chosen people, (b) a royal priesthood, (c) a holy nation, and (d) a people belonging to God. Please give special notice to what Peter says about the people that compose the NT church. "Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God" (v. 10).¹

The Jewish nation was once "chosen" to represent God on earth. Isa 43:10 says, "Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord, and my servant whom I have chosen." But because of unbelief and hardness of heart they lost their favored position. Peter here declares that God has now assigned the privileges and responsibilities of the Jewish nation to the Christian community, not as a national group, but as a people called out of every nation to constitute one spiritual entity, one great family, throughout the world (Gal 3:28).

The former status of literal Israel has been revoked² and given to this *ecclesia* which in the time past was not a people but now constitutes the chosen people of God, called out of darkness into His marvelous light (1 Pet 2:9-10). In this present *ecclesia*, Paul says in Gal 3:28, "there is neither Jew nor Greek." In other words, there is no racial boundary. His church, now chosen to evangelize the world, is composed of all races. Yet Paul says, "Ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (ibid.).

¹All Scripture passages quoted in this paper are from the KJV unless otherwise noted.

²"The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, rev. ed., ed. Francis D. Nichol (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1976-80), 4:30-31, 35-36.

“That which God purposed to do for the world through Israel, the chosen nation, He will finally accomplish through His church on earth today.”³

Eph 4:7,11-12 tells us that God gave gifts to edify the body of Christ, which is the church. And the gifts given to the church are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. I want to emphasize at this time the role of the pastor. Ellen G. White describes the various functions of the pastor.

1. Planning

The best help that ministers can give to the members of our churches is not sermonizing, but planning work for them. Give each one something to do for others. . . . Let all be taught how to work.⁴

2. Teaching

Let ministers teach church members that in order to grow in spirituality they must carry the burden that the Lord has laid upon them—the burden of leading souls into the truth.⁵

3. Training

In laboring where there are already some in the faith, the minister should at first seek not so much to convert unbelievers, as to train the church members for acceptable cooperation. Let him labor for them individually, endeavoring to arouse them to seek for a deeper experience themselves, and to work for others.⁶

4. Organizing

Time is short and our forces must be organized to do a larger work.⁷

5. Putting the Members to Work

³Ellen G. White, *The Story of Prophets and Kings as Illustrated in the Captivity and Restoration of Israel* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1917, 1943), 713-14.

⁴Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 9:82.

⁵Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Stewardship* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1940), 69-70.

⁶Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers: Instruction for All Who Are “Laborers Together With God”* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1915, 1948), 196.

⁷White, *Testimonies*, 9:27.

Our ministers are not to spend their time laboring for those who have already accepted the truth. . . Just as soon as a church is organized, let the ministers set the members to work.⁸

Unless the total membership of the church unite their efforts with those of the ministers and church officers the work of God on this earth will not be finished.⁹

Let us take a look at the early Christian church. One hundred and twenty members were in the Upper Room organizing and agonizing before the Lord, seeking His power for evangelistic outreach. Peter was their main speaker, but all of them united their efforts with his. The result was three thousand baptisms (Acts 2:41). With all the church members involved in evangelism, Acts 4:4 records the conversion of another five thousand. The church went on to speak “the word of God with boldness” (4:31). “And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women” (5:14).

The early Christian church multiplied rapidly. Now, with a large constituency, there was a temptation toward institutionalism, to develop the hierarchy of the priesthood. The ministers confined their work to the sanctimonious services in the sanctuary of the church. And the believers were satisfied merely going to church listening to the ceremonies, and giving their tithes and offerings. There was no more outreach work.

When the disciples were still alive, they did not succumb to the temptation of institutionalism. Acts 6:1-2 tells us that the apostles called a constituency meeting and made this declaration: “It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables” (v. 2). What does this suggest for us?

The decision of the apostles means that we should not confine ourselves among ourselves. The problem of the local church was given attention. “Seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom” were appointed for the business of the local church (6:3). And the apostles continued mobilizing all believers to move forward in evangelizing the world.

There were hardships. There were persecutions. Acts 8:1 says, “And at the time there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad.” Verse 4 continues, “Therefore they that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word. The strong witnessing of the total membership of the church “turned the world upside down” (17:6).

Read the book of Acts and you will see the penetration program of the early Christian church:

⁸Ibid., 7:20.

⁹White, *Gospel Workers*, 352.

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| 1. Acts 1:1-6:7 | Jerusalem evangelized |
| 2. Acts 6:8-9:31 | Palestine penetrated |
| 3. Acts 9:32-12:24 | Syria penetrated |
| 4. Acts 12:25-16:5 | Asia Minor penetrated |
| 5. Acts 16:6-19:20 | Europe penetrated |
| 6. Acts 19:21-28:31 | Rome penetrated |

In a short period they evangelized the then-known world. But when the church became strong, it became corrupted. The hierarchy of the priesthood was established. The leaders of the church became different sizes of gods. The size of each one corresponded to the magnitude of his authority according to his level in the hierarchy. They were showing themselves as gods in the church (2 Thess 2:4). The priesthood of all believers was forgotten.

Similarly, church members today have become ordinary people. They are no longer members of the royal priesthood. They are no longer missionaries. Hence, they are not involved in the direct personal proclamation of the gospel. Their only part is to give their money for the support of the church. And the leaders confine their activities to making dogmas and policies to govern the constituency. There is no aggressive evangelism.

The next move is to study the different philosophies of the world in order to be on par with the wisdom of men. Following that, there is a temptation to synthesize the different theologies so that the church will not look eccentric by highly acclaimed theologians from other denominations. In that process, liberal theology finds its place inside the church. Some of the distinctive doctrines are thrown overboard. The fundamental beliefs are compromised. When that happens it is time to prepare the obituary of the evangelistic movement.

The Role of the Pastor in the Advent Movement

The leadership must change the direction of the church from institutionalism to an evangelistic movement. Leadership must recognize that every member of the church is a missionary. Each person belongs to the royal priesthood. Each pastor must be a trainer and every local church a training center.

Here is what Ellen G. White says:

The work of God is retarded by criminal unbelief in his power to use the common people to carry forward his work successfully.¹⁰

¹⁰Ellen G. White, "The Great Need of the Holy Spirit," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, 16 July 1895, 450.

The idea that the minister must carry all the burdens and do all the work is a great mistake.¹¹

Church members who just rely on the preaching of the ministers and make no effort to share their faith with others are religious weaklings.¹²

The church of Christ is organized for service. Its watchword is ministry Christian ministers . . . have a broader work than many have recognized. They are not only to minister to the people, but to teach them to minister

Every church should be a training school for Christian workers.¹³

Let us go back to the NT model of church movement. Let every minister be a trainer, organizer and a leader—leading the church in the proclamation of the last warning message.

A pastor who is a trainer will multiply his efficiency a hundredfold if he keeps his flock active in missionary work and educates them to bear responsibilities. The spiritual condition of his congregation will grow and his sheep will multiply. Let the sheep multiply themselves. Here is a simple illustration:

New Zealand has a population of 3,000,000 people. In that country, they have 60,000,000 sheep. But do you know that the shepherd does not reproduce sheep? Sheep reproduce sheep. But here we are, trying to make the shepherd do the reproduction of the sheep.

We must redefine the pastor's role to be that of a trainer, teacher, motivator and organizer. Ellen G. White puts it succinctly:

The Saviour's commission to the disciples included all the believers. It includes all believers until the end of time. It is a fatal mistake to suppose that the work of saving souls depends upon the ordained ministers.¹⁴

If we effect the role of the pastor as a trainer and the total membership of the church will become involved in evangelism, our global mission effort will turn the world upside down.

¹¹White, *Testimonies*, 6:435.

¹²Ibid., 434-35.

¹³Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1905, 1942), 148-49.

¹⁴Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages: The Conflict of the Ages Illustrated in the Life of Christ* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1898, 1940), 822.