

2 ONE MINISTRIES/ MISSION

This article is adapted from the author's keynote address at the Atlantic Union Conference Pastor/Teacher Convention held in Providence, Rhode Island, in August 2009. The oral style has been retained.

I have suffered from an identity crisis for nearly my entire career. The problem undoubtedly stems from the fact that I lack a clear professional orientation. I was trained at the Master's level to be a pastor, but after two and a half years went into elementary and secondary teaching and eventually school administration for most of my decade in the field. And my professional record in academia is just as messed up. I was educated at the doctoral level as a philosopher of education, but after a decade teaching in that field at Andrews University, I moved over to the Seminary, where I masqueraded as a church historian for more than two decades. It is little wonder that I am more than a bit confused as to what I truly am.

I suppose my psychological and professional problems would not be quite so acute if the two

realms of my professional life had a little more contact with each other. One of the most remarkable things about the Adventist subculture is that the only two professional groups that are employed in the local church full time in most congregations have little understanding, sympathy, or even contact with each other's ministries, trials, challenges, and contributions. That fact is more than remarkable; it is tragic!

With that historic distance in mind, I would like to congratulate the Atlantic Union pastoral and educational leadership for the understanding that has brought all of us, both pastoral clergy and educational clergy, under one roof for a shared professional convention. To my knowledge, this may be a first at the union conference level in the history of the denomination.

Of course, with a little thought we could have seen the logic of the combination sooner. Martin Luther, the great 16th-century Reformer, did. "If," he claimed, "I had to give up preaching and my other duties, there is no office I would rather have than that of school-teacher. For I know that next to the [pastoral] ministry it is the most useful, greatest, and best; and I am not sure which of the two is to be preferred. For it is hard to make old dogs docile and old rogues pious, yet that is what the ministry works at, and must work at, in great part, in vain; but young trees . . . are more easily bent and trained. Therefore let it be considered one of the highest virtues on earth faithfully to train the chil-

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dren of others, which duty but very few parents attend to themselves.”¹

The apostle Paul had the same vision. That is evident in his discussion of spiritual gifts. In writing to the Ephesians, Paul used a Greek construction that indicates that the office of pastor and teacher was held by the same person when he noted that “some should be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers” (Ephesians 4:11, RSV). F. F. Bruce, in commenting on this passage, notes that “the two terms ‘pastors (shepherds) and teachers’ denote one and the same class of men.”² On the other hand, the other gifts are listed separately.

The significance of this point is that, in order to remain functional, these two gifts should not be divided. Pastors must not only care for the souls of their flock, but must also be persons who teach (by precept and example) both individuals and the corporate body of the church. Teachers, likewise, are not merely expounders of truth but also persons who have an abiding care for the individuals under their tutelage. Christian teachers function in a pastoral role to their students, and Christian pastors function in a teaching role to their parishioners.

The major difference between the roles of pastors and teachers today has to do with the current division of labor. In 21st-century society, the Christian teacher is usually seen as someone who pastors in a “school” context, while the pastor is defined as someone who teaches in the “larger religious community.” However, their function is essentially the same, even though by today’s definitions they are in charge of different divisions of the Lord’s vineyard. That is why, with that biblical perspective in mind, I have chosen the title “Two Ministries/One Mission.”


One Mission

And what is that shared mission? Ellen White sets it forth nicely in her classic book *Education*. From its first pages, it frames Adventist education in galactic, Great Controversy terminology. “Our ideas of education,” we read in the volume’s opening paragraph, “take too narrow and too low a range. There is need of a broader scope, a higher aim. True education means more than the pursuit of a certain course of study. It means more than a preparation for the life that now is. It has to do with the whole being, and with the whole period of existence possible to man. It is the harmonious development of the physical, the mental, and the spiritual powers. It prepares the student for the joy of service in this world and for the higher joy of wider service in the world to come.”³

Ellen White gets more specific on the book’s second page. In the passage that undergirds her entire philosophy of education, she points out that in order to comprehend the meaning and goal of education, we must understand four things about people: (1) their original nature, (2) the purpose of God in creating them, (3) the change that took place in the human condition at the Fall, and (4) God’s plan for yet fulfilling His purpose in the education of the human race.⁴

She then goes on to explain those four items. First, humanity was created in the image of God. Second, people were to reveal ever more fully God’s image by continual development on the earth and throughout eternity. Third, disobedience badly damaged, but did not destroy, the image in its mental, physical, and spiritual aspects. And disobedience also brought death.

But it is the fourth item that is the focal point of the mission issue. In spite of the Fall, we read, “the race was

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not left without hope. By infinite love and mercy the plan of salvation had been devised, and a life of probation was granted. To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in his creation might be realized—*this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life.*”⁵

Scripture presents the same picture. Central to a proper understanding of the Bible is the Fall, described in Genesis 3. Neither Scripture nor daily experience makes sense if we explain away as legend the first three chapters of Genesis, which says that God created humanity in His image and likeness—an exalted state (Genesis 1:26, 27). Adam and Eve, however, rejected God and chose their own way. As a result, they became alienated and separated from God (chap. 3:8-10), their fellow beings (vss. 11, 12), their own selves (vs. 13), and the natural world (vss. 17-19). Separating themselves from the source of life, they became subject to death (Genesis 2:17; 3:19). Humanity had become hopeless and lost in the fullest sense of the word.

The lostness of human beings provides the purpose

of every type of Christian ministry. Humanity's greatest need is to become "unlost." Thus, Jesus said that He came "to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10, KJV). The message of the Bible from the Fall to the restoration of Eden in Revelation 21 is the story of how God, through teachers, prophets, patriarchs, preachers, symbolic services, and a host of other means, has been attempting to rescue humans from their lostness. We must see Christian education in this context. "In the highest sense," penned Ellen White, "the work of education and the work of redemption are one" because both build directly upon Jesus Christ. To lead the student into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ "should be the teacher's first effort and his constant aim."⁶ Here is education's highest and primary goal.

Presbyterian Edwin Rian correctly notes that, regardless of their philosophical and religious perspectives, most education philosophers "agree on considering the problem of 'sin and death,' which is the problem of man, according to Pauline and Reformed Protestant theology, as irrelevant to the questions of the aims and process of education." Such a position, he asserts, cannot help producing "mis-education and frustration for the individual and for the community." From the perspective of fallen humanity's predicament, Rian uplifts "*education as conversion*."⁷ Herbert Welch, an early 20th-century president of Ohio Wesleyan University, made the same point when he claimed that "to win its students from sin to righteousness is . . . the highest achievement of the Christian college."⁸

Only Christian education can meet people's deepest need, because only Christian educators understand the core of the human problem. Its redemptive aim is what makes education Christian. The primary goal of Christian education in the school, the home, and the church is to lead young people into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. The accomplishment of this aim heals the principal alienation of Genesis 3—between individuals and God. And this sets the stage for the removal of humanity's other basic alienations. Education is a part of God's great plan of redemption, or at-one-ment. The role of education is to help bring people back to at-oneness with God, their fellow beings, their own selves, and the natural world. The whole message of the Bible points forward to the day when the work of restoration will be complete, and the Edenic condition will be restored in the realm of nature and in the hearts of human beings (Revelation 21, 22; Isaiah 11:6-9; 35).

The students' greatest need, then, is for a spiritual rebirth that places God at the center of their existence. Paul described this renewal as a daily experience, and Jesus taught that the Holy Spirit accomplishes the transformation (1 Corinthians 15:31; John 3:5). The goals of Christian education can never be achieved without the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit.

Ellen White wrote that the "all-important thing" in education "should be the conversion" of the students.⁹

It is upon the foundation of the new birth experience that Christian education can proceed with its other aims and purposes.

Many people miss Ellen White's emphasis on the redemptive role of education. But it elevates the teacher's role beyond the humdrum of teaching spelling or math, and places it in the line of gospel ministry. I would suggest that the primary function of a Christian teacher is to be an agent of salvation in the great controversy between Christ and Satan that is occurring in both the world at large and in the lives of every individual student. The good news is that the denomination has officially recognized the ministerial role of church school teachers.

The function of a Christian teacher is to lead young people into a transforming, saving relationship with Jesus Christ. It is in the context of that relationship that such secondary functions as academic achievement, character development, the formation of a Christian mind, and education for social responsibility and the world of work must of necessity take place. It is crucial to realize that all but one of those secondary goals can take place in a non-Christian school. Thus, when Christian educators aim only to achieve the goals that fall within the realm of all education, they have failed before they begin. As a result, when Christian educators neglect to emphasize the redemptive role of their schools, they make the schools both unimportant and unnecessary.

Thus it is that Adventist clergy in the church and Adventist clergy in the school have the same salvific function. They need to move beyond the dichotomy that tends to divide them and realize that they have a shared ministry, even if they function daily in different spheres.

BUT—(and this is absolutely crucial)—if Adventist teachers and pastors limit themselves only to the evangelical function of leading souls to Christ, they have failed in their responsibilities.

How is that? you may be asking. The answer is that Adventism is not merely another denomination with a few different doctrines and some countercultural dietary practices. From its inception, the church has viewed itself as a movement of prophecy, a church with a special message to proclaim to all the world, a call centered in the apocalypse of John. And rightly so: Revelation 12:17 proclaims that at the end of time, God will have a people who keep



all His commandments, and their commandment keeping will eventually stimulate a reaction from the last-day dragon power. “And the dragon,” we read, “was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God” (KJV). Chapters 13 and 14 pick up that theme—Revelation 13 expands upon the dynamics of the last-day dragon power, while chapter 14 presents the message of the last-day woman or church, climaxing with the second advent of Christ. In that context, the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14:6-12 preach the everlasting gospel to all the world, a judgment-hour emphasis as earth’s history moves toward its close, a call to worship the Creator God in contrast to honoring the beast, and a declaration regarding the fall of oppressive Babylon that has substituted human words for the Word of God.

The third angel concludes its message in verse 12: “Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (KJV). And Adventists have noted that Revelation 14 highlights one of those commandments. At the end of time, everybody will be worshipping somebody: either the

Creator God of the Sabbath who made heaven and earth and sea (Revelation 14:7; Exodus 20:8-11; Genesis 2:1-13) or the beast (Revelation 14:9). Furthermore, Adventists have been quick to note that immediately after the giving of the three angels’ messages, Christ comes in the clouds to harvest the earth (Revelation 14:14-20).

For one reason or another, the command to preach those Christ-given messages has been neglected by other religious bodies. It is in that context that Seventh-day Adventists have viewed themselves as a called-out people with a unique message that must be preached to all the earth before Jesus returns again.

And it is that understanding that has literally driven them to the ends of the earth and the islands of the sea until Seventh-day Adventism has become the most widespread unified Protestant body in the history of Christianity. Adventists have been willing to sacrifice their lives and their money to achieve that end. And in the process, they developed a church organization to spearhead that thrust, and an educational system and a publishing ministry to enlighten and convict its membership and prepare them for either going to all the world themselves or sponsoring others to fulfill the denomination’s unique mission.

We dare not become bashful about that mission. It is the only reason for the existence of Seventh-day Adventism. If that vision is lost, Adventism will become merely another somewhat toothless denomination that seeks to entertain its members and do good in its community. The possibility of losing its apocalyptic vision and Adventism’s place in prophetic history is the greatest threat that the church and its educational system face as they enter the 21st century. That threat is the topic of my recently published *The Apocalyptic Vision and the Neutering of Adventism*.¹⁰

And that threat brings me to my next point. *An Adventist pastoral ministry and an Adventist educational ministry that has lost its hold on the apocalyptic vision has failed—not just partially, but totally*. We are in this together. Both our churches and our schools are drifting from their moorings.

Let me illustrate. A few weeks ago, I had a call from an academy principal who had been inspired by my keynote speech at the 2006 division-wide educational convention on “Seventh-day Adventist Education and the Apocalyptic Vision”¹¹ in Nashville, Tennessee. As a result, he determined to hire teachers who truly understood the uniqueness of Adventism and its mission to the world. Last spring, he went to the local Adventist college and interviewed the graduating education majors. His question to each was the same: What is different between Adventist education and evangelical Christian education? Not one student could tell him. Somehow that college had failed in passing on our unique identity and mission, even in an institution established to train educational professionals.

That brings me to the bottom line—a school that no longer understands its reason for being, that has forgotten its message and mission, will eventually lose its support. And it should. To be absolutely straightforward, a Seventh-day Adventist school that is not both Christian and Adventist is an unneeded institution. All of its functions can be achieved by schools in the evangelical and even the public sector. Pastor Shane Anderson is absolutely right in his recently published *How to Kill Adventist Education* when he points out that “Adventist parents increasingly aren’t willing to pay the price to send their kids” to institutions that have lost their purpose. “After all,” he writes, “why pay thousands of dollars to send your child to a school that is now no longer substantially different from the average Christian school—or the local public school—down the street?”¹²

Now I hear some of you preachers out there saying “Amen!” to that analysis. But don’t get too smug. A lot of you are infected by the same disease. I hear your talk about fancy cars and nice houses, about the role of the pastor in community affairs and social action, about a counseling focus in ministry, and about the ministerial methods and messages of T. D. Jakes, Willow Creek, and so on. Those things may be good, but if that is all you have, you have



missed the point of why you are an Adventist pastor. To put it bluntly, too many of your church members “are ‘in the church,’ attend services, and may even pay tithe, but [they] too often don’t know who [they] are as

Adventists anymore.”¹³ Too many pastors have become good at preaching good white evangelical sermons, good black evangelical sermons, and good Hispanic or Asian evangelical sermons, but they have all too often neglected and avoided the truths and mission that have made us Adventists. In the end, that will lead to self-neutering. After all, why go to the Adventist church when the preaching is just as good (if not better) down the street?

To be blunt: If Adventism has an important message and mission, let’s hear it in both our schools and churches, or let’s get out and do something useful and meaningful with our lives.

The Adventist Church may have two ministries, but we have one message. And it’s high time we started emphasizing it in our preaching and teaching with both enthusiasm and conviction. Preachers and teachers who are passionate about Adventism will have a contagious influence. But, on the other hand, bored preachers and teachers will pass on their boredom to their congregations and students and thereby accelerate the transition to Adventist meaninglessness.

By now, we should be clear on our shared evangelical and Adventist message and mission. But do Adventist teachers and preachers really have the same mission?

The Shared Evangelistic Imperative of Schools and Churches

That question is one increasingly asked by pastors in congregations of all sizes. Some see Adventist education as just one more thing that sucks both energy and cash away from the important business of the local church. From their perspective, those resources need to be freed up for “more important tasks.” I have heard more than once the allegation that Adventist education “is stealing money from evangelism.”

A concerned church member wrote that “the pastor of my church has decided that Christian education is irrelevant and not soul winning and therefore our local SDA school should be closed so as not to waste any more of the money that he could be putting into his evangelism to win souls. He has previously sent out e-mails stating that it is his intention to see the school closed. Last school year the school presented a church service at each of the constituent churches, except ours, because the pastor felt it was irrelevant to the members and a waste of time, and told them they were not welcome.” This pastor even preached against supporting church schools since this had

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no immediate results.¹⁴

While that frame of mind has probably always been around to some extent, demographic shifts in the pastoral workforce have increased its popularity. Let me illustrate.

Back in 1965, about

four-fifths of the 45 individuals graduating as theology majors in my class at Pacific Union College had been educated in Adventist schools up through academy, with some 13 of them being Preachers’ Kids (PKs). But for the past three decades, fewer and fewer PKs are entering ministry, as their own parents have downplayed the unique aspects of the message. Also, an increasing number of adult converts entering the pastoral workforce have never spent a day in an Adventist church school or academy. If public school was good enough for them, so the logic runs, it’s good enough for their church members’ children. That mentality undoubtedly contributes to the ongoing proportional shrinkage of the denomination’s educational system. In 1945, the ratio of students in Adventist schools to church membership was 25 per 100. That figure remained somewhat constant until 1965. But since that time, the ratio has dropped off precipitously, to 15 per 100 in 1985 and 9 per 100 in 2000. At the same time, more non-Adventist students are enrolling in our schools, which makes the actual ratio of Adventist students to members closer to 5 per 100.

Some pastors who see the educational system as anti-evangelistic seem to have logical arguments: Since the school subsidy is often the largest item in the church’s budget, couldn’t the money from the subsidy and from tuition be redirected to “better” purposes? In addition, the results of education are often not immediately apparent.

But we need to ask whether these assumptions are valid. One pastor who has never worked for a school violently disagrees. “In my experience,” he writes, “Adventist education is one of the most effective ways to prepare young people for the second coming of Christ. Furthermore, I believe that our schools—rightly run—are more successful at doing this than any other single evangelistic method, including Revelation seminars, church planting, felt-needs evangelism, or contemporary worship services. Also I believe that Adventist education has been the key to propagating our unique Adventist mission in the world.” He also argues “that our schools are the legs that ultimately keep the Advent movement running.”¹⁵

The big question at this point is this: Which of the two arguments has the force of truth behind it? For the short answer to that question, we only need to turn to world history. It is no accident that both nations and churches have sought to control education. It has been evident to all that whoever shapes educational policy also shapes the future. Thus, it is not too difficult to see

the logic in early Adventism's establishing an educational system that would prepare both future members and future leaders.

Moving beyond the social function of the system, we need to grasp the power of teacher influence. Most pastors do well to see their people one or two hours a week, and communicate mostly in large impersonal gatherings to adults who have already formed their characters and have made most of life's important decisions. In contrast, the average elementary school teacher has face-to-face contact with impressionable students 30 hours per week.

Let me ask you in utmost seriousness: What kind of person do you want to have that kind of influence on your child? Who do you want to define his or her attitudes and values? A nonbeliever, a Christian with a different understanding of the Bible, or a like-minded, dedicated, believing Adventist? Never forget that teachers are powerful links between your children and God and a Christian Adventist way of thinking and lifestyle. Teachers will in one way or another influence your children's understanding of truth and values.

At this point, I need to drop in a personal illustration. As a young pastor in Galveston, Texas, I had a very dedicated professional family who desired with all their hearts to educate their only child in the best way possible. They agreed that the public system was not the answer. But there was no Adventist school. They finally decided that a Catholic school was better than secularism. They were somewhat shocked when their daughter elected to become a nun. That may have been acceptable for a Roman Catholic family, but not for that Adventist couple. They had discovered the power of education as a life-shaping event.

There is no doubt as to the evangelistic potential of Adventist education. But now we need to ask if its demands really do suck the finances and life out of a church. The only longitudinal study on the topic that I am aware of is a five-year study that revealed that churches that were not related to a school experienced on average a loss of both membership and tithe each year of the study, while those supporting a church school experienced increases in both tithe and membership each year.¹⁶ Along that line, it is no accident that historically, bursts in spiritual revival and mission outreach in Adventism have been accompanied by educational expansion.¹⁷ The two go hand in hand.

It should be obvious by now that Adventists in the pastoral ministry and Adventists in the educational ministry have one message and one mission. They both work to reach a lost world for whom salvation in Christ and belief in His glorious appearing are the only real hope.

Both ministries are educational, both are pastoral, and the health of each of them is linked to that of the other. Both are frontline operations in the war against sin and evil. And both prosper most when supported by the other. It is therefore absolutely crucial for educational clergy to

privately and publicly support their pastoral brothers and sisters; and for pastoral clergy to energetically support their educational counterparts. Healthy schools have a good relationship with their sponsoring churches; and one of a school's best supporters, in terms of both students and finances, is a supportive pastor.

Only on resurrection morning will those of us who have been in the ministry of teaching and the ministry of pastoring fully realize the results of our work. May God keep each of us working together until that day. ☞



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This article has been peer reviewed.

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