

THE SAME GIFT: “And...to some, pastors and teachers”

BY NEWTON HOILETTE

Is the pastoral ministry superior to the teaching ministry?

Is the pastoral ministry superior to the teaching ministry? Can teaching really be considered a bona fide religious ministry? What is the proper role and function of teachers and pastors? For decades these questions have caused tension in the Adventist Church, as well as in other denominations.

A number of educators have felt that the church treated pastoral ministry as superior to teaching ministry. However, this does seem to be changing. The teaching ministry has received some recognition (albeit sometimes grudgingly and patronizingly). Actions and pronouncements by church administrators, who are mainly ordained ministers, have acknowledged the importance of Christian teachers in fulfilling the gospel commission. The “Commissioned Teacher”¹ designation is one example of an attempt to align teaching with ministry.

As with most contested issues, a historical overview helps us understand the present dilemma and provides a framework for future action.

Principles found in Ephesians 4:11-13 are instructive in encouraging professional respect and Christian unity. A textual examination of

Ephesians 4:11, in particular, helps us understand the gift of “pastors and teachers.” In my opinion, teaching is not only a legitimate ministry aligned to pastoral ministry, but also a potentially excellent and extraordinary ministry.

Historical Perspectives

Historically, the home held the first responsibility for teaching (Deuteronomy 6:6-9). In the Jewish culture, it was the father’s responsibility to teach his sons the *Shema* by the time they were four years old, and then to instruct them in the *Torah*.² Later, synagogues continued this tradition. Subsequently, formal schools developed. Since the synagogue was a teaching institution with the Scriptures as the essential curriculum, this made teaching virtually synonymous with worship. During this period of Jewish history, religion and education were inextricably welded together.³

The Jewish school system consisted of two levels: elementary schools (*Beth*

Hassepher), meaning the “House of Books,” and secondary schools (*Beth Hamidrash*), meaning the “House of Study,” where the Mishnah or the oral law was central to the curriculum.⁴ In the biblical narrative, teaching both in and by the church was taken for granted. When society changed from agrarian to arts and industry, parents had to be away from home for longer periods. They therefore entrusted the teaching of their children to this system, which evolved to care for their needs.

2 Chronicles 17:7 reports that Jehosaphat, a man who walked in the commandments of God, sent officials of his kingdom—princes, Levites, and priests—to teach in the cities of Judah. Along with the didactic texts, these officials also “had the book of the Law of the Lord with them” (v. 9). Ezra’s experience (Ezra 7:10) shows that he devoted himself to the study and observance of the law of the Lord and to teaching its decrees and laws in Israel.

Jewish history and Old Testament references seem to suggest that a dual function—a special gift—was inherent for one in the ministry. Thus, the New Testament delineation: “and to some, his gift was that they should be apostles; to some, prophets; to some,

evangelists; to some, pastors and teachers.”

(Ephesians 4:11, Jerusalem).

In tracing the history from the Jewish system across Rome, the Medieval period, the Renaissance and Reformation eras down to colonial times and on to 20th-century America, one finds curriculum development in which religious life was expected to interface with societal preparation.⁵ The basics of reading and writing, together with catechisms, selected lessons in ethics and life-style that demanded a teaching ministry, form a common thread.

Yet tensions between teaching and pastoral ministry existed throughout those periods.

The emergence of the Sunday School clearly bolstered the teaching ministry concept. Moved by social concerns and a burden for the youth of Gloucester, England, layman Robert Raikes in 1780 organized an educational system that met each Sunday. Because he saw ministry and education as “inextricably welded together” he believed that “the primary purpose was to give these children the rudiments of education but this did not exclude religion.”⁶ Many forces and organizations vehemently opposed Raikes, but within five years the idea reached the capital of England, and consequently the Sunday School Society of London was formed. This coincided the establishing of the first Sunday School in the United States in 1784. Church education was regaining prime focus. This focus was probably capitalized “in 1914 by the publication of Walter Athearn’s significant book, ‘The Church School.’”⁷

During the early years of these schools, they were generally used as evangelistic tools. Later, educational methods were emphasized. This caused great tension and discontent:

There are some who feel that the evangelistic purpose has suffered because of the educational emphasis. If it has, this has happened not by design, but because of a misunderstanding of the true meaning of Christian education. The prevailing present-day opinion is that evangelism

and education are inseparably bound together, and that in true Christian Education they both exist.”

The above clearly indicates that an attempt was made to address the discontent by pastors/evangelists and teachers. It also serves to underscore the inseparable unity of true Christian education and illustrates the tension on which this article focuses.

Can teaching really be considered a bona fide religious ministry?

Vieth’s crucial comment on the term “Church School” needs to be understood in light of our discussion.

The tendency today to use the term “Church School” rather than “Sunday School” has significance beyond the mere change of name. It symbolizes the prevailing pattern for this agency which exists in ideal if not always in fact that on Sunday morning the Church should make provision for a well-organized program of graded worship and instruction with building and equipment well suited to this purpose, with teachers trained for their specified duties and with lesson materials which are properly adapted for development of Christian living in the light of the maturity of the pupils to be taught.”

Textual Examination

Pastoral ministry is a gift of preaching, teaching, and nurturing. Teaching ministry is a gift of teaching, nurturing, and creating confrontation with the Almighty. Both are primarily involved with—and designed for—edification and redemptive activity.

An exegetical interpretation of the Greek formulations in Ephesians 4:11 proves this fact. In particular reference to the portion of the verse that states “to some, pastors and teachers,” Charles Hodge asserts:

And some pastors and teachers, τοῖς ἡ ποιμένας καὶ διδασκάλους. According to one interpretation we have here two

distinct offices—that of pastor and that of teacher. . . . There is no evidence from Scripture that there was a set of men authorized to teach but not authorized to exhort. The thing is well nigh impossible. The one function includes the other. The man who teaches duty and the grounds of it, does at the same time admonish and exhort. It was, however, on the grounds of this unnatural interpretation that the Westminster Directory made teachers a distinct and permanent class of jure divino officers in the Church. The Puritans in New England endeavored to reduce the theory to practice and appointed doctors as distinct from preachers. But the attempt proved to be a failure. The two functions could not be kept separate. The whole theory rested on a false interpretation of Scripture. The absence of the article before διδασκάλους proves that the apostle intended to designate the same persons as at once pastors and teachers. The former term designates them as ἐπίσκοποι, overseers, the latter as instructors. Every pastor or bishop was required to be apt to teach.¹⁰

Hodge asserts that Augustine and Jerome as well as modern scholars interpret the scripture the same way.¹¹

F. F. Bruce concurs that the two-term “pastors (shepherds) and teachers denote one and the same class of men.”¹² Bruce further asserts that all “honorable status indeed is conferred

What is the proper role and function of teachers and pastors?

on those who exercise their special ministries in the Church as gifts imparted to her by her exalted Lord.”¹³

George Knight suggests that the gifts of pastoring and teaching cannot be divided “if they are to remain functional.”¹⁴ The pastor must not only care for the souls of his or her flock, but also teach both individuals and the corporate church by precept and example. The teacher, likewise, is not merely an expounder of truth, but one who cares for the individuals under his or her tutelage. A Christian teacher is also a pastor or minister of the gospel. The difference between the titles of pastor and teacher in modern society arises from the current division of labor.

David Martyn Lloyd-Jones describes the gifts of apostles, prophets, and evangelists as extraordinary and temporary. However, the gifts of “pastors and teachers” are permanent offices. He says that these offices carry functions of equal validity and importance and are indeed one in purpose.¹⁵

A. T. Robinson refers to this text as

pastors being “shepherds and teachers together.”¹⁶ In viewing the text, one can conclude that if pastors should be able to teach, then these two gifts may sometimes be found in one person. Thus teachers should also be able to preach.

Marvin R. Vincent also agrees that the text indicates that pastors and teachers are included under one class. In this context Vincent says, “No man is fit to be a pastor who cannot also teach, and the teacher needs the knowledge which pastoral experience gives.”¹⁷

Elwell and Buckwalter also concur in their describing the gifts of the Spirit, designating teaching and pastoring as one.¹⁸

Focusing on Ephesians 4:11, 1 Corinthians 12:28, and Romans 12:6-8 Knight insists that “The New Testament clearly specifies teaching as a divine calling.”¹⁹ He holds that the primary function of the teacher is redemptive. Similarly, Ellen White held that education and redemption in their highest sense are one.²⁰

Stating the Case

God in His omniscient wisdom knew best how to accomplish His purpose through ministry. He designed that: (1) apostles were to tread a particular path, proclaiming the gospel in a way that certain people would hear; (2) prophets were to foretell the future

because some would hear the word only in this way; (3) evangelists were to use proclamation, seeking those who respond only in this context; and (4) pastors and teachers were to nurture, guide, and edify.

If we accept the above arrangement, there is no need for conflict, for feelings of inferiority or privilege. Both pastors and teachers are on the same team. Instead of rivalry, there should be professional and spiritual collegiality. There is a need for parity, for mutual respect, regard, support, understanding, and cooperation.

Pastors and Christian teachers hold the same educational aspirations for members and students, whether they be catechists or candidates. They encourage the same expectations, nurture the same values, and inspire the same response to the redemptive activity. They teach identical truths and model the example of the same Saviour. Salvation is preached and taught by teachers and pastors alike. The only difference is in their methodologies and salaries.

An unmistakable togetherness exists in the Ephesian text. The giving of these gifts was for the perfecting of the saints and edifying of the body of Christ; thus, both pastors and teachers function as the task necessitates. They are a team. When the team loses, both lose; when it wins, both win.

Teachers must not sell themselves short. Truly the preaching/pastoral ministry demonstrates excellence in an extraordinary fashion. Likewise, the transformation of character that results from confrontation with a godly teacher is irrefutable proof of ministry at its best.

Pastors must not feel threatened by or inferior to, the teacher; neither can they allow themselves to be caught in the trap of feeling superior. The same Spirit works through both pastor and teacher. Accomplishments of both preacher and teacher are "not of ourselves" but by the "gift of God."

Excellence in Teaching Ministry

Excellence means "to surpass" or to be better than one is or thinks he or she can be. An excellent teacher is relevant, current, and far ahead of the student, challenging the student's thought processes and stimulating creativity.

He or she enables the student to deal with diversity and encourages critical thinking relevant to the subject matter. This teaches the student to delve beyond the mechanics to question the quality and validity of the content.

Excellence in the teaching ministry brings the student into confrontation with the Almighty. Such excellence was exemplified by the ministry of Jesus, the Master Teacher. It couples citizenship for this earth with citizenship for the earth to come.

As the church looks at the problem of faith maturity in its youth, it should consider how pastoral and teaching roles relate to this important concern. Faith maturity seems to relate to bringing people into the "stature of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:13), a task shared by pastors and Christian teachers.

The Master Teacher touched the souls, hearts, and minds of His students. He took care of their earthly needs, spoke to issues of the times, and gave hope for the future. Anxious, hungry listeners by the thousands flocked to Him. The blind man at Bethsaida, the woman at the well, Nicodemus and the rich young ruler, the Syrophenician woman, the little man Zaccheus, all had extraordinary contact with Him, and everybody called Him Master Teacher. Rabbi! Marvin J. Taylor declared, "In that spirit which referred to Jesus most frequently as a teacher, primitive Christianity accorded the ministry of 'teaching' a prominent place."¹¹

Conclusion

A brief historical review has shown that education and the transmission of religious heritage have been jointly achieved through the ministerial functions of pastoring and teaching.

Greek exegesis of the Ephesian commentaries by various scholars indicates oneness in function and importance of the work of pastor and teacher, making it impossible to separate the two as gifts.

Knight suggests that the fullest interpretation of the teacher-pastor gift appeared in the ministry of Christ.

One of the gifts of the Spirit is the work of ministry for the perfecting of saints and the edifying of the body of Christ. Clearly, the Bible teaches that

the gift of pastors and teachers are definitively the same. ⁶⁷

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Partners in Ministry*, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Pamphlet.
2. Marvin J. Taylor, Ed., *Religious Education: A Comprehensive Survey* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 12.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 12-17.
6. Paul H. Vieth, Ed., *The Church and Christian Education* (St. Louis: Bethany Press, 1947), p. 22.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 24.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
10. Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966), pp. 226, 227.
11. Hodge insists that modern commentators generally agree with this position in terms of the Greek article whose use and designation is based on Sharp's Rule. Sharp's Rule states "if two substantives (nouns) are connected by *kai* and the first has an article and the second does not, the second refers to the same person or thing as the first" (James Brooks and Carlton L. Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* [Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, Inc., 1979], p. 76.). Hodge points out that the article does not appear between two "substantives referring to different classes where the two constitute one order" (Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1966], p. 227)—as in Mark 15:1 referring to elders and scribes, since they form one body. Hodge continues:
*But in such an enumeration as that contained in this verse, τοὺς μὲν ἀποστόλους, τοὺς δὲ προφήτας τοὺς δὲ ἐπιγγεμιστάς, τοὺς δὲ ποιμένας, the laws of the language require τοὺς διδασκάλους had the apostle intended to distinguish the διδασκάλους from the ΠΟΙΜΕΝΕΣ. Pastors and teachers, therefore, must be taken as a twofold designation of the same officer, who were at once the guides and instructors of the people (*Ibid.*).*
12. F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Ephesians* (London: Pickering & Ingles, 1961), p. 85.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 84.
14. George R. Knight, *Myths in Adventism* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1985), p. 187.
15. D. M. Lloyd-Jones, *Christian Unity* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1980), p. 193.
16. Archibald T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc.), vol. 4, p. 537.
17. Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), vol. 3, p. 390.
18. Walter A. Elwell, General Ed. and Douglas Buckwalter, Assoc. Ed., *Topical Analysis of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1991), p. 157.
19. Knight, p. 187.
20. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1903), p. 30.
21. Taylor, p. 12.