

not merely an extension of intimacy but an extension of the other traits of full friendship: feeling concern and acting for the good of another. Thus Christian brotherhood is *inclusive* rather than *exclusive*. Christ's love extended beyond the circle of His close friends to those He had not met — those centuries of humans who had already died and others not yet born. None of us would betray a dear full-friend, but until we can extend that same ethic to those we do not know and will not meet, we do not know the meaning of Christian brotherhood.

Christ died to save us from our sins, but that fact alone does not make human life bearable. My own moments of deepest pain have come when I have lost my friends. The manipulation, militancy, and bitterness that divide us from our brothers in Christ also divide us from Him. But happily, we have Christian brothers who can personify, and hence make real, the love that Christ has for us. And even more happily, we have our Brother Christ, who persuades us by His life that Christian love is the foundation which supports the pillars of our faith and life.

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The Church as a Prophetic Minority

by Jack W. Provonsha

One of the barriers Adventists face in their attempt to bring "the truth" to their non-Adventist Christian brothers derives from their use of such terms as "the truth." To many non-Adventists, this and such Adventist expressions as "God's people," "God's church" and "the remnant church" are likely to seem perverse and arrogant.

General Conferences are occasions that heighten a denomination's sense of uniqueness. For example, at the Vienna General Conference, a reporter for *Christianity Today*

noted that at the meetings "terminology tended to be esoteric."

When Adventists spoke of God calling us "to be truly one in Christ Jesus," it meant unity among Adventists. "The remnant church" and "God's people everywhere" referred to God's Adventist people everywhere. "Lands untouched by the Gospel" were those which had not heard the Adventist message. Adventists spoke as though they were tackling world evangelization single-handedly. Many other utterances echoed that of Vice President W. Duncan Eva: "God has committed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church the last task to save the world. We have God's package deal. . . the Gospel from beginning to end."¹

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Now, I have experienced something of the feeling of worth, strength and power that a strong sense of mission can bring to a church's outreach. And I am apprehensive over the loss our movement will suffer if the ability to feel that in some way we are "God's special people" ever fully slips away from us. But I must also confess to an increasing personal uneasiness over the use of such expressions, as through the years I have come to know and love some of the very numerous, God-fearing, committed Christians who do not wear our Adventist label. I remain uneasy over the arrogance phrases such as "the remnant church" and "God's people everywhere" can suggest, and I find myself in increasing agreement with J. B. Phillips, who in his book *Your God Is Too Small*, suggests that one of the ways we make God small is to place Him in a box — our private box, that is. Surely God is nobody's private property — not even the "remnant church's."

There remains in my heart a tension. On the one hand, I feel deeply that I and my church are uniquely important to God, that we are the object of His supreme regard, that God has specially called us to a task that is ours alone, that in some special way we are "His chosen people." On the other hand, I am keenly aware of the obvious fact that God is the universal Father of all men, that He can never become the exclusive possession of any individual or group, that there can thus *never* be an exclusive "people of God" wearing an institutional label like "Seventh-day Adventist."

In attempting to resolve this tension, I have come to this conclusion: We must accept both poles of the tension as necessary parts of a larger unity — hopefully providing the basis for a retrained sense of mission, without which the Adventist Church is done for, and a concurrent universal sense of brotherhood, without which we will slip into the ghetto mentality which resulted in the rejection of Israel, God's ancient "chosen people."

The resolution of this tension depends on making some fundamental definitions,

mainly centering around three uses of the term "church." The first two of these are fairly traditional and will require little comment. The third will occupy us to a greater extent since it is the key to my thesis. Diagram 1 is provided to aid in identifying and relating the three ways of speaking of church.

The larger, outer circle in this diagram represents the arena of God's redemptive activity — the world. It refers to the world of fallen humankind over the whole sweep of human history. Somewhere within that larger whole, God has in all ages had His faithful children. This constitutes the Church Invisible — known to God, though invisible, perhaps, to the rest of us. Its membership is based not on public confessions or statistics or membership rolls, but on a quality of life best characterized by the word "integrity." These are the "honest in heart" who in every age and in every place live according to whatever measure of light they possess from whatever source. They include those heathen to which Ellen White refers as worshipping God "ignorantly." When we finally get to the Kingdom of Glory, we may well be astonished at the labels some of its inhabitants wore.

Ellen White speaks of these members of the invisible church when she writes, "From the beginning, faithful souls have constituted the church on earth. In every age the Lord has had His watchmen, who have borne a faith-

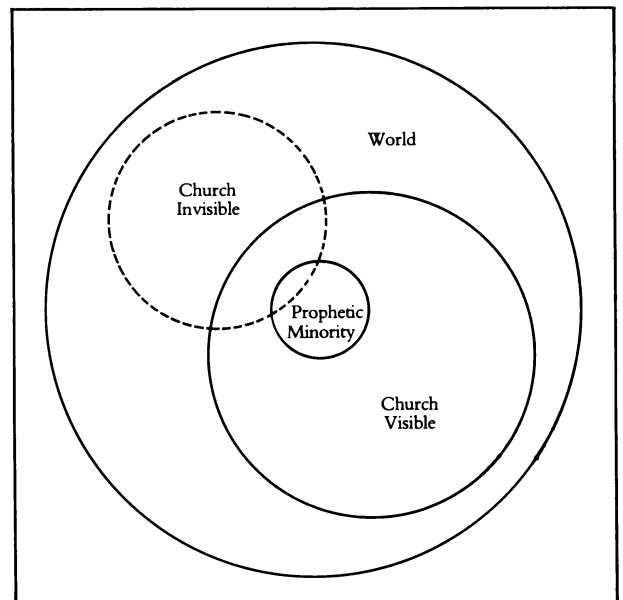


Diagram 1.

ful testimony to the generation in which they live.² It is of this “church” that she says, “Enfeebled and defective as it may appear, the church is the one object upon which God bestows in a special sense His supreme regard. It is the theatre of His grace, in which He delights to reveal His power to transform hearts.”³ This is the olive tree of Romans 11, the true Israel from which branches may be grafted. It cannot be institutionally delimited, even though human institutions may at one time or another bear a greater or lesser correspondence to it.

I have drawn the circle representing the invisible church with a broken line to indicate the indefiniteness of its observable boundaries. I do not even know how large or small to draw that circle. Only God could draw it because to Him only is it truly visible.

By contrast, the Church Visible is a conscious, institutional entity and is easily objectified. Although it may have multiple, often confusing, structures and identifying labels, it always remains identifiable in one way or another. It is composed of all men who have openly claimed to be God’s church whether or not they, in fact, bear any relation to the Church Invisible.

I have purposely drawn its circle in such a way as to overlap that of the Church Invisible. I presume the overlapping would vary considerably from time to time and place to place, depending on the spiritual state of the Church Visible. At different times, one could belong to one or the other or to both; they are simply not necessarily coterminous.

The third definition of church, the Prophetic Minority, is our primary focus. It is drawn as a smaller circle within the larger Church Visible, because it shares in its institutional “visibility.” I have drawn it astride the broken line representing God’s Church Invisible to indicate that again no necessary connection exists between the two. As in the larger Church Visible, some or even many of its members may also be among those reckoned by God as His faithful children. But some or even many may also not be so reckoned.

The Prophetic Minority possesses institu-

tional and other characteristics that identify it with the Church Visible, with which it may share a common feeling of brotherhood. But it is also different in a very real sense, and it is in reference to this difference that a separate label is employed. The term “prophetic” has a specialized meaning in this connection that requires some background explanation. It does not refer to its interest, or competence, in interpreting Bible prophecy or in the possibility that its existence and function may have been divinely predicted. It does not even refer to its possession of the prophetic gift. The term “prophetic” is used in another sense analogous to the ancient role of Israel’s prophets.

In the 1960s, Jack Newfield wrote a book titled *A Prophetic Minority*, in which he describes the radicals of the sixties as being in “ethical revolt against the visible devils of racism, poverty, and war, as well as the less tangible devils of centralized decision-making, manipulative, impersonal bureaucracies, and the hypocrisy that divides America’s ideals from its actions.”⁴ He saw the New Left as expressing its “new ethical-rooted politics in its affirmation of community, honesty, and freedom, and in its indifference to ideology, discipline, economics, and conventional political terms.” Newfield also states:

At its surface, political level, the New Radicalism is an anti-Establishment protest against all the obvious inequities of American life. . . . At its second, more complex level. . . [it] is a moral revulsion against a society that is becoming increasingly corrupt. . . . At its third, subterranean level, the New Radicalism is an existential revolt against remote, impersonal machines that are not responsive to human needs.

This description of the New Left may sound like a “far-out” base from which to draw an analogy for the Adventist movement, except that the analogy is not drawn from the specific content or concerns of Newfield’s radicals or from the vigorous and sometimes violent ways in which they expressed them. The point of comparison is, rather, the role of being a “light set on a hill,” the duty to cry out for reform and change. In

the case of Adventism, the voice is crying in the wilderness, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.”

The analogy is thus far older than the sixties. It goes back to Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah and John the Baptist. It is in their sense “prophetic.” “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Prophetic minority movements share with those ancient figures even in the style of their expression, although the specific content and purpose of their message may differ.

Neither the prophetic role nor the prophetic style has been given sufficient attention in Adventist literature. The prophetic style differs, for example, from that of the scholar.

“A prophetic movement, insofar as it is true to its divine calling, may function as a catalyst bringing about that final polarization which constitutes the climax of the Great Controversy.”

Prophets were more likely to cry out in righteous anger and anguish than to employ the scholars’ measured tones of logic, analysis and synthesis. They often seemed extremists to ordinary folk. Their tools of trade were shock weapons; their language, poetry, invective exhortation and diatribe — even disturbing symbolic exhibitionism (for example, Jeremiah with the ox-yoke around his neck). Prophets stood up to be counted and even, perish the thought, sometimes screamed to be noticed — if that’s what it took to get a hearing. The prophet was concerned with making his point, even if it called for speaking loudly to make it.

The prophetic style gives logic to a number of peculiar characteristics of a prophetic minority. Camel’s hair coats, a vegetarian diet, the avoidance of jewelry, condiments, tea, coffee, alcohol and tobacco all help to provide a sense of identity that brings cohesion and thus a measure of power to the prophetic group. Adventists would do

well to think carefully before they dispense with too many of the marks of their common identity. Mutual strength is to be derived from being able to pick each other out of a crowd, even if the cues are subtle ones like what is worn on the hands or ears or around the neck or on the face. The prophet has to know who he is.

But that is only a minor justification for such things. If these serve only the self-needs of the prophet, they isolate him from his task. Recall that self-serving is the hallmark of a false prophet. Prophetic identity must serve the prophet’s larger role of crying aloud to all people. It is on this basis that such practices as total abstinence from the use of alcohol and tobacco may be defended. Admittedly, on biblical textual grounds alone, total abstinence from alcoholic beverages, especially wine, cannot be defended. On prophetic grounds, however, it can be defended. (Interestingly enough, wine was ruled out for the prophet, John the Baptist.)

I once heard a former president of the American Cancer Society support the surgeon general’s determination “that cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health.” His words could scarcely be heard because of the cloud of cigarette smoke about his own head. I cannot prophetically cry aloud if my voice is muted; I cannot accept responsibility for that vast sea of human misery caused by the world’s alcohol problem if I am a drinker. The fact that one out of 14 persons in the greater Los Angeles basin is a frank alcoholic must rest heavily on our collective conscience, as should other similar human afflictions caused by tobacco and drugs. Traditional Adventist attitudes toward the theatre, dancing, even war, can also, I think, be supported with prophetic logic.

Of course, not everyone who stands up to be counted or even screams to be noticed is a true prophet or a member of the Prophetic Minority. False prophets are also in the land; how to distinguish them is always a serious question. One might not easily distinguish Elijah or John the Baptist from the ascetic “desert fathers” that were numerous in the Syrian and Egyptian deserts during the early

centuries of our era, or from the bearded, sandaled youth of the sixties. In spite of their similar general appearances, however, there were and are crucial differences.

For one, the true prophet's face is always toward his people, even when they do not appreciate his message. The desert father, on the other hand, ran from his people into the wilderness. More important, the true prophet speaks for principle, while the false prophet is actuated primarily by conscious or unconscious self-interest.

Many of the young "prophets" of the sixties, for example, underneath their appearance of concern for peace, love, justice, honesty and equity, were really concerned with promoting their own ends, including their need to count for something. In ghettos, on university campuses, and wherever the young were drawn together were thousands of young people for whom the normal identity crisis of early adulthood had been complicated by rapid change, impersonal bigness and a depersonalizing technology. Their frenzied activism thus may not have been derived so much from selfless concern, compassion and legitimate outrage as from cryptic self-disesteem and the frustration of meaninglessness. Their causes were largely incidental and thus irrelevant. Any cause would have served as well as another provided only that it was convenient and "in."

By contrast, the true prophet is such because of his basic sensitivities. His conscience is easily and deeply disturbed as he beholds error, injustice and hypocrisy. He is angered at oppression and dismayed by error, not for his own sake, but because he deeply feels the evil of injustice. He is thus a people's sensitive conscience and therefore a morally indispensable part of his larger society.

Besides its role as a "light set on a hill," a Prophetic Minority may also play a unique role in bringing about the consummation of all things. Indeed, it may be called to play this role.

The Scriptures repeatedly speak of the last stages of the Great Controversy between Christ and Satan as consummating in a final polarization of mankind and his institutions. Jesus, in His parable of the tares, referred to a time of harvest when it would be appropriate

for the wheat and tares, existing together until that time, to be separated. He also spoke of the final separation of the sheep and goats and of the wise and foolish virgins. The time is coming at the end of all things where the "mixed multitude" of which the Church Visible and even a Prophetic Movement consists will polarize into just two entities, the remnant and Babylon.

The terms "remnant" and "Babylon" are instructive here. In any absolute sense, the term "remnant" is applicable only at the time of the final polarization; it means "that which remains faithful to the end." A preliminary use of the term is justified only by anticipation (and in one other way which we shall consider in a moment). The final remnant may have very minimal institutional character. I cannot imagine a General Conference president of the remnant. The remnant will rather be a general gathering of individuals who in a certain setting will be united by their faith and absolute trust in God.

Babylon, by contrast, will reflect an authoritarian, coercive, human institutional effort to come to grips with impending disaster, much in the way that that ancient tower was man's attempt to be self-sufficient in the face of danger. Since the builders of the tower did not trust God's promise, they were forced to go it alone, to save themselves by their own works. Babylon is such a salvation. Again, it is faith versus works — the oldest battleground of all — locking men in a final climactic struggle.

It is in such a setting that the last prophetic movement comes into its own. Ellen White speaks of a final gathering of "the remnant church from among the nations of the earth,"⁵ of a time when "all who are honest will leave the fallen churches and take their stand with the remnant."⁶ She even refers to a "shaking time" within the Adventist Church.

This gathering of the remnant, I believe, is bigger than any single institution, although an institution — even our visible Seventh-day Adventist Church — may play a significant role in the gathering. Indeed, it may be called primarily for that purpose.

It is possible, by exercising some care, to cool water below its natural freezing point without freezing or crystallizing it. We speak thus of supercooled water. But when this has been achieved, if one takes even a small piece of ice and drops it into the supercooled liquid, crystallization occurs with great rapidity around the introduced fragment, which is called a nidus. A prophetic movement can be the nidus around which the remnant can crystallize in that final setting. To shift the metaphor slightly, a prophetic movement, insofar as it is true to its divine calling, may function as a catalyst bringing about that final polarization which constitutes the climax of the Great Controversy.

This, I think, constitutes the answer to that nagging sense of guilt and frustration which is beginning to hover like a cloud over a denomination that expected singlehandedly

to “finish the work” of evangelizing the world in a generation. In the final moments of earth’s history, there comes into visible being something bigger than any denominational institution, the final remnant; but it comes into being partly because there is a catalytic presence around which the remnant become visible as a testimony to their trust in a trustworthy God.

The Bible describes a sad time when no prophets were in the land. It also warns that where there is no vision, the people perish. The warning is as apropos today as then. It is high time that a prophetic minority called the Seventh-day Adventist Church became conscious of its God-given role — a role that sets it apart, giving it an identity and a voice; a role that also sets its face and heart toward its brethren, toward God’s people everywhere in all the churches.

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 6. Ellen White, *Early Writings* (Christian Home Library), p. 261.
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Becoming the Family of God

by Nancy Vyhmeister

The church needs to become more and more a living, loving community, working toward common goals. The church needs to become a family; not the nuclear family that

predominates in a United States committed to individualism and independence, but what Adventism has already become in some other parts of the world — an extended family.

Seventh-day Adventists have, perhaps, a better chance than others to be such a family. There is, after all, the gift of the Sabbath, and its special twenty-four hours. When Adventists in the United States refer to the Sabbath

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