

# The case for leadership education among Adventist leaders

**L**eadership education is popular everywhere, including in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. From its beginning, the contribution of leaders to Adventism has been uniquely valuable. Early in the life of the church, many Adventist leaders developed themselves without much formal schooling; they led while living under limitations, persecution, and hardship. In fact, we owe a debt of gratitude to them for their courage, example, and guidance. They embodied excellence.

Today, many church entities, departments, and institutions are actively involved in developing qualified people for positions of leadership.<sup>1</sup> Why then is the General Conference entering the Adventist leadership market and seeking worldwide participation in a leadership development effort? How do we know that this new emphasis follows the correct orientation? These questions need our attention.

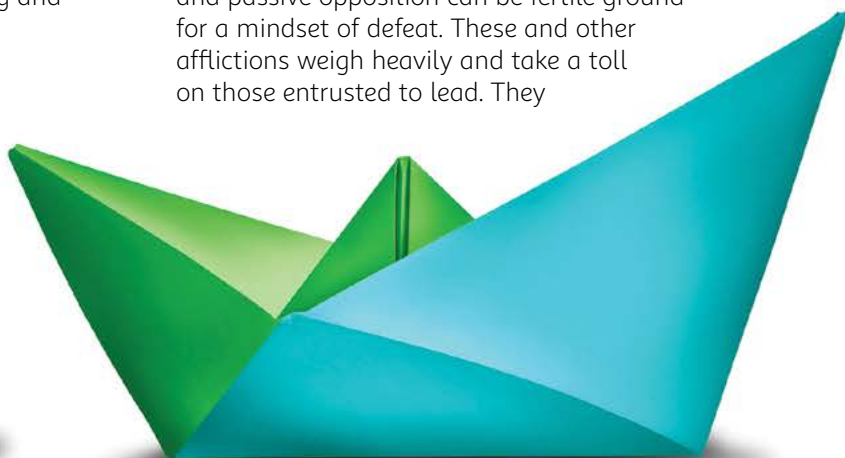
## A spiritual journey

To be a leader in the Adventist denominational structure is a privilege offered to those believers who respond to Christ's calling and

decide to make a service contribution to mission. Seventh-day Adventist leaders stand to benefit much when they understand the denomination and their own personal educational and spiritual journey. Leadership can be described as "a dynamic process in which a man or a woman with God-given capacity influences a specific group of God's people toward His purposes for the group."<sup>2</sup> Why must leaders better understand their commitment to grow in the light of mission?

The biblical record consistently presents the leader as one who is divinely called and empowered for a task.<sup>3</sup> Once they have responded affirmatively, leaders embark on a spiritual journey as they grow in the knowledge of God, His purposes, and His mission. Adventist leaders are involved in a spiritual journey.

A new initiative of the General Conference seeks to reclaim participants from the negative effects of loneliness, discouragement, demotivation, frustration, quiet quitting,<sup>4</sup> burnout, and lack of commitment. Also, issues such as inefficiency, systemic failures, lack of innovation, dissent, and passive opposition can be fertile ground for a mindset of defeat. These and other afflictions weigh heavily and take a toll on those entrusted to lead. They



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need to grow in the application of the best work methods and through reconnecting with Christ as the source of spiritual power. Ellen G. White wrote, “Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort, all have their proper sphere. . . . But they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

### In search of balance

In *Embracing Religions in Moral Theories of Leadership*, Ali Aslan Gümüşay<sup>6</sup> states that the Abrahamic religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—acknowledge three elements that can significantly impact leadership principles and practices: (1) a belief in the existence of and a relationship to

God, (2) the faith in and pursuit of a hereafter purpose, and (3) the belief in and attempted adherence to a sacred scripture.

A true leader is Christ-relationship believer in God’s as outlined in between good pursuit of God’s and adheres revealed in the Word of God (relies on the sacred scriptures), placing himself or herself in the best position to reach his or her fullest potential.

These three elements help bring religion, faith, values, beliefs, and commitment together in ways not found in secular positive, moral, and ethical leadership theories because, as Gümüşay affirms, “for some believers, their religion is holy and conceived as an ‘ultimate concern.’”<sup>7</sup>

In other words, moral theories of leadership (authentic, ethical, servant, and spiritual) are not sufficient in and of themselves to provide the guidance religious leaders desire and need to

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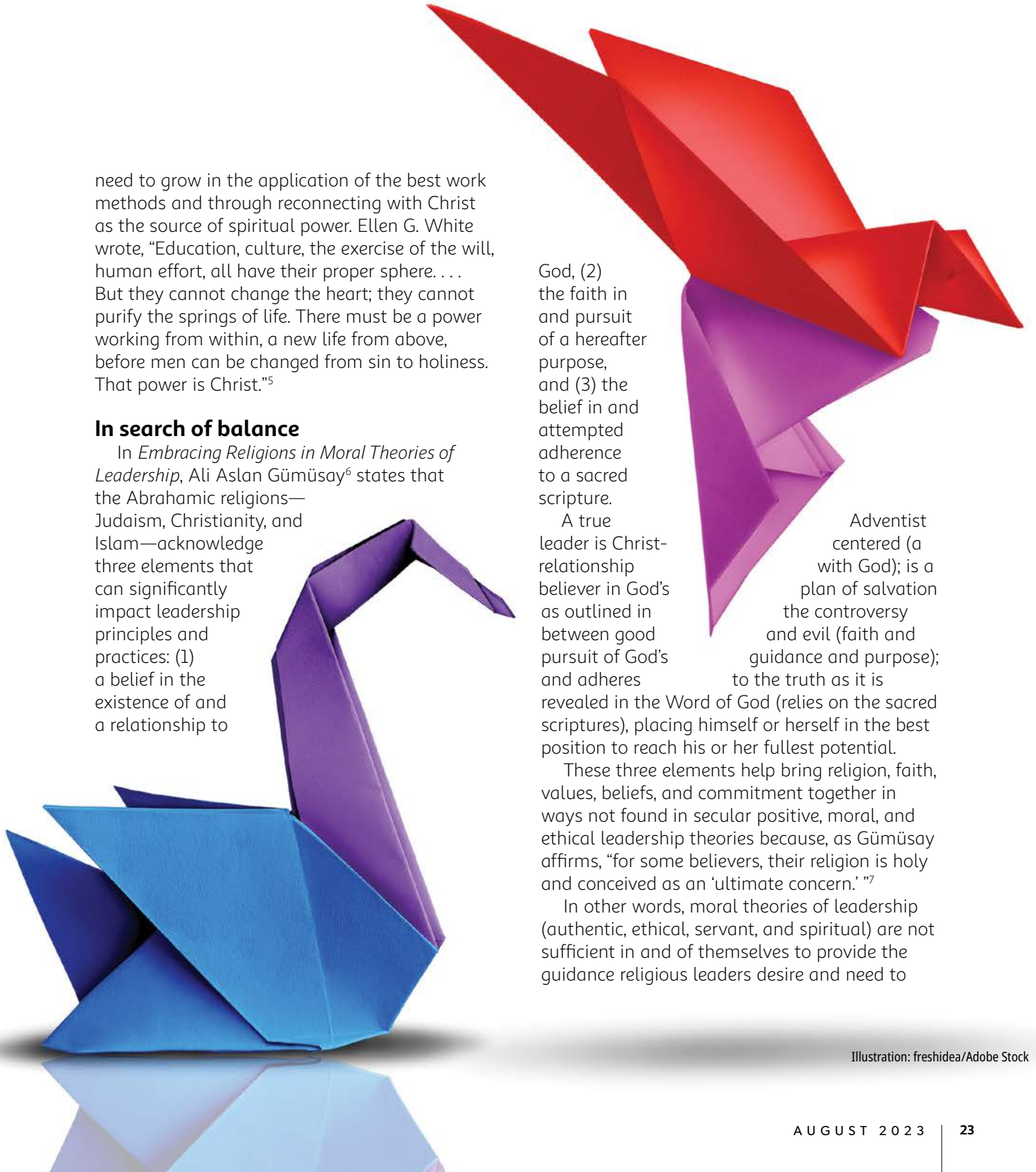


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develop. It means that faith is clearly essential for an Adventist leader to be able to connect the wisdom and knowledge of theories with the commitment to his or her faith.

Indeed, a leader benefits from the wisdom and knowledge that theories provide, but there is a need to balance theoretical knowledge and faith, which helps prevent leaders from becoming religious fanatics or cold, disengaged practitioners. Such a balance between faith and theory is essential for balanced growth in service because neither should exclude the other.<sup>8</sup>

### Personal and institutional growth

Adventist leaders function best when they understand their calling, live and function within a truth framework, and balance their commitment to service with a clear understanding of values such as trust, honesty, integrity, and transparency. Distinctive qualities and virtues such as these will help leaders move mission forward.

The purpose of the leadership development program is to provide leaders the opportunity to reflect, learn from their successes and failures, and bring their work in line with Jesus, His mission, His message, and His calling. The leadership development program seeks to offer them the space to reflect, reconnect, and recommit.

Ellen G. White was on point when she wrote, “When the mind of man is brought into communion with the mind of God, the finite with the Infinite, the effect on body and mind and soul is beyond estimate. In such communion is found the highest education. It is God’s own method of development.”<sup>9</sup>

### A new collaborative arrangement for mission

There is a new collaborative arrangement—the result of a joint effort of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists and Andrews University’s Global Leadership Institute—created to help many continue their journey better equipped with renewed inspiration, clearer vision, and a new sense of urgency.<sup>10</sup>

In 2016, the process began with dreams and conversations of doing something on leadership growth and innovation. It received a new impulse in Cape Town, South Africa, in February 2020 at the Global Leadership Conference and found fertile ground and a clearer focus through pilot programs conducted in Europe and the South Pacific between 2020 and 2022.

In its present form, the program may complement existing leadership development efforts and initiatives of divisions that have them already in place, but it may also serve as a valuable primary source for other territories that offer more modest and limited leadership development options to their personnel. Your prayers are solicited on behalf of this initiative. May the energy and the resources invested be a timely blessing to many in their journey of service.



- 1 A version of this article was first published as Juan R. Prestol-Puesan, “The Case for Growth in Adventist Leaders,” *Adventist News Network*, January 18, 2023.
- 2 J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs, CO: NAV Press, 1988), 44.
- 3 Gen. 12:1–9; Exod. 3:1–15; Josh. 3:7; 4:14; 1 Sam. 3:10; 16:10–13; Isa. 6:8; Jer. 1:1–4; Acts 6:1–4; 1:21–26; 9:1–9.
- 4 In recent media presentations, quiet quitting has been presented as a reaction of employees to the demands of the job environment. “In a nutshell, ‘quiet quitting’ is about rejecting the notion that work has to take over one’s life and that employees should go above and beyond what their job descriptions entail. . . . This can take many forms—including turning down projects based on interest, refusing to answer work messages outside of working hours or simply feeling less invested in the role.” Yessi Bello Perez, “What Is ‘Quiet Quitting?’”, LinkedIn, accessed June 14, 2023, [https://www.linkedin.com/news/story/what-is-quiet-quitting-4887785/?\\_l=en\\_US](https://www.linkedin.com/news/story/what-is-quiet-quitting-4887785/?_l=en_US).
- 5 Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1908), 18.
- 6 Ali Aslan Gümüşay, *Embracing Religions in Moral Theories of Leadership*, *Academy of Management Perspectives* 33, no. 3 (August 2019): 292–306; <https://doi.org/10.5465/amp.2017.0130>. Dr. Gümüşay is a lecturer at Vienna University of Economics and Business, Austria, and the University of Hamburg, Germany.
- 7 Gümüşay, 3.
- 8 In personal advice to one Brother Hull, Ellen G. White wrote: “Your success as a minister depends upon your keeping your own heart. You will receive more strength by spending one hour each day in meditation, and mourning over your failings and heart-corruptions, and pleading for God’s pardoning love, and the assurance of sins forgiven, than you would by spending many hours and days in studying the most able authors, and making yourself acquainted with every objection to our faith, and the most powerful evidences in favor of our faith.” Ellen G. White, “Communications to Elder M. Hull,” *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, January 19, 1864, 62. See also Ellen G. White, *Pastoral Ministry* (Silver Spring, MD: General Conference Ministerial Association, 1995), 26.
- 9 Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1911), 126.
- 10 For more information on this program, visit the Andrews University Global Leadership Institute web page at <https://www.andrews.edu/gli>.

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