Church missiologist brings Adventist perspective to new book on Christian mission

Publication is outgrowth of 2010 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference

21 Nov 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States
Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN

Christ is the mobilizing force for witness and the Bible offers a comprehensive diagnosis and cure to the world's problems, a top Seventh-day Adventist missiologist says in a recently published book on Christian mission.
Ganoune Diop brings the Adventist Church's perspective to "Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age: Christian Mission Among Other Faiths" (Regnum Books). The book, a product of last year's Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, also includes perspectives on mission from Protestant, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Pentecostal church representatives.

The first Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, held in Scotland more than a century ago, is still considered a watershed in the collaborative shaping of mission ideology and methods. Diop, an academic and theologian who currently serves as the church's representative to the United Nations, spoke at last year's conference as co-chair of the Foundation of Mission session.

In his essay, "An Adventist Perspective: Mission to World Religions and Contemporary World Views," Diop calls Christ the "ultimate criterion" for assessing a religion's need for mission.

The idea that Christ motivates Christian witness lies at the core of Scripture, Diop says. The Bible is abundantly clear that "fellowship with God" is restored only through acceptance of God's love and Jesus' incarnation, life and teachings, sacrifice, victory over death and priestly ministry, he says.

"Nowhere but in the Bible do we find this whole chain of truth. What we find is Jesus -- who he actually is, his divinity," Diop says. "The Bible provides a comprehensive diagnosis of human problems and a comprehensive solution. Ultimately that solution is Jesus, who came to cancel all the negatives. He defeated evil and death, and he is coming again to restore peace, justice and righteousness. And that we don't find anywhere else."

The distinctiveness of the Adventist faith stands out as some Christians may be tempted to dilute what sets Christ apart to better fit a culture of tolerance, Diop says.

But today's notion of tolerance is a misnomer, he says.

"There's a naïve assumption that tolerance means endorsement. No. People have the right to life, the right to freedom, the right to expression, the right to their own choices, but that does not make those choices compelling to everyone," Diop says.

"Respecting their rights? We must, unquestionably. We owe every human being respect, dignity, courtesy and decency, but that does not mean accepting, endorsing or embracing their values," he says.

Diop says while mission begins with "common ground," it must go beyond that. Muslims and Christians can find commonalities between the Quran and the Bible, but ultimately the words they use are caught in what Diop calls "webs of meaning," or context. "The Jesus of the Quran is different from the Jesus in the Bible. He didn't die on the cross; he's not God. Muslims and Christians say they are both 'people of the Book,' but strictly speaking Christians are not people of the Book. They are people of a person, Jesus Christ," Diop says.

If religions don't acknowledge that there are often more differences than commonalities, "we really deceive ourselves and others," he says.

"Because ethically you find people who are decent, generous, kind and so forth, but we should not confuse individual ethical choices and lifestyles with the validity or endorsement of a given world religion. These are two different things," Diop says.

"Witnessing to Christ in a Pluralistic Age" is expected to serve as a textbook for students of missiology.
worldwide.

As the church's UN liaison, Diop represents the church's values and concerns to world leaders and other people of influence in New York and Geneva. He previously oversaw the church's five Global Mission Study Centers.

Trans-European Adventists reaffirm existing guidelines for ordained, commissioned ministers

Vote seeks to support women as church leaders within framework of policy

21 Nov 2011, Becici, Montenegro
Miroslav Pujic/ANN staff

The Executive Committee of the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Trans-European Division (TED) last week approved a motion granting administrative unions permission to manage the matter of parity between ordained and commissioned ministers within existing policy and previously voted guidelines.

The move follows a decision by the denomination's worldwide Executive Committee to decline a request from the North American Division to allow commissioned ministers to serve as presidents of local administrative conferences.

At that meeting last month, TED President Bertil Wiklander subsequently withdrew his division's request for a similar variance at the union level. He said he understood that it would have been similarly declined.

This week's vote affirms unions in TED to manage the parity between male and female pastors within the framework of the division's existing guidelines for ordained and commissioned pastors, voted in 2009. Additionally, any decisions made by union officials must be in consultation with TED.

"What works best for the TED at this time is to let all know where we stand and what we want regarding women in leadership, while doing all we can to promote women as pastors and leaders in our church within the working policy," said TED President Bertil Wiklander.

The vote took place at the division's year-end business meetings, held in Montenegro. Division officials passed the motion by 91 percent via secret ballot. There were 45 voting delegates. A secret ballot among the 25 invited union secretaries and treasurers elicited the same result.

Click here to read the full motion.
'Cradle' earns Adventist hospital chaplain national recognition

Baby drop-off a safe alternative for distressed women, Stangl says

22 Nov 2011, Berlin, Germany
APD/ANN staff

A Seventh-day Adventist hospital chaplain in Germany was recently awarded for offering distressed pregnant women a safe alternative to abandoning their babies.

Gabriele Stangl holds a newborn in Waldfriede Adventist Hospital's nursery. The Adventist hospital chaplain's baby drop-off is earning national recognition. [photo courtesy Euro-Africa Division]

Gabriele Stangl, chaplain of Waldfriede Adventist Hospital in Berlin, received Germany's Medal of Merit this month for operating what hospital staff call the "cradle," a padded box behind the hospital clinic accessible by a single unmonitored entrance where women can anonymously leave their unwanted babies.

When a mother leaves her newborn in the cradle, sensors trigger a delayed alarm so she can leave the area undetected before nursing staff are alerted. Stangl says young, desperate mothers have left twenty newborns in the cradle over the past decade.

"Each of these women is terrified for various reasons that her pregnancy might become known," Stangl says.

Later, many of the women find the courage to return to the clinic and register their identities, Stangl says. While only a third of these women ultimately reclaim their babies, almost all end up deciding to at least give their children the opportunity to find out who their mother is, she says.

The women have eight weeks to reclaim their babies. Newborns that remain unclaimed are matched with foster families and given up for adoption.

Stangl says she observed the need for a baby drop-off while working as a hospital chaplain. Patients began sharing their stories with her. One 80-year-old woman on her deathbed finally shared a decades-old secret -- she'd aborted her baby. Stangl watched as a pregnant woman was sent away from the delivery room because she wasn't ready to reveal her identity.

Now, more than one hundred women have given birth anonymously at Waldfriede. Previously, many of these women would have resorted to giving birth in public restrooms or in remote areas without medical care, Stangle says. Much like the women who drop off their babies, many later return to register their identities or reclaim their babies. Waldfriede provides psychological support and counseling for the women who return and face
difficult decisions, Stangl says.

The cradle at Waldfriede is modeled after a similar one located at a non-hospital facility in Hamburg, Germany. "When I heard about [it], I had the idea that a hospital is best suited for such a thing," Stangl says, adding that the clinic and area authorities have been supportive of her ministry.

Stangle has served as chaplain hospital at Waldfriede since 1996. In 2008, the Association of Adventist Woman awarded her the title "Woman of the Year."
In November 2010, the Trans-European Division Executive Committee made four requests to the General Conference regarding Women in Leadership within the TED:

(a) that the study of the theology of ordination is prioritised;
(b) that the General Conference would review and amend its policies so that the wording is gender neutral and all leadership pathways are open to male and female;
(c) that a variance to the model constitutions and bylaws be granted with the insertion of "conference and union presidents should be ordained/commissioned ministers" in its policy language;
(d) that the General Conference grants permission to ordain women to the gospel ministry within the TED.

We recognise that meeting these requests may take some time. Therefore we see each of them as standing requests from the TED while we wait for their implementation.

Concerning our request for a variance in the model constitutions and bylaws by inserting the addition that commissioned ministers may also be elected as conference and union presidents, the General Conference Annual Council voted in October this year to decline a similar request from the North American Division, and by common consent this was taken as a negative answer to our request.

Motion on Women in Leadership

• We maintain our Bible-based conviction that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a fellowship of the “priesthood of all believers” and that the Holy Spirit calls and equips men and women with various gifts, including that of leadership. Ministry in the New Testament is based on spiritual gifts. It is the fellowship of believers that recognises and endorses these gifts and sends out women and men for service.

• We express our sadness and disappointment at the decision of the Annual Council. We prayerfully and sincerely believe it will damage the work of God’s people in many parts of the TED.

• We find it difficult to understand why the election of a commissioned minister by a local constituency could harm other world divisions, since a commissioned minister serving as president only impacts the local organisation.

• We believe that ordination or the “setting aside” of members, regardless of gender, for leadership in the church is made by prayer and the laying on of hands in order to confirm the presence of the spiritual gift of leadership, as the Bible teaches, and not to convey a particular quality of “priestly holiness” or spiritual status.

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• We recognise that changes to the bold print in the model constitutions in the TED Working Policy must be approved by the General Conference. We have maintained this position within the TED when unions or conferences have been tempted to walk an independent path. However we request the General Conference to understand that for many this is an ethical and legal matter that strongly affects their consciences.

• We recognise that the World Church has approved a timetable for studying the theology of ordination with a view to bring a proposal to the General Conference Annual Council in 2014. We regret the extended timeline as it places some unions/conferences/missions/fields in an ethical and legal dilemma.

• We recognise that while waiting for the World Church to establish the Biblical theology of ordination, there are unions/conferences/missions/fields within the TED where the issues of women's ordination and their election to leadership positions are matters of ethical integrity and individual conscience which may challenge the church and undermine our sharing of the Adventist message with the vast majority of the population. After consultation with the TED administration and approval by the appropriate church governance body, such unions/conferences/missions/fields may apply parity between male and female pastors on the grounds of the TED’s existing policies and guidelines for ordained/commissioned minister credentials. [tedNEWS]