Pullman Pastor Hosts Series on Origins

Pullman, Wash., is home to Washington State University with thousands of students and faculty. When Stan Hudson, pastor of the Pullman and Moscow (Idaho) churches, presented seven lectures during April on the topic of origins, there was high interest and excellent attendance. More than 120 people came, most of them guests, to hear “In the Beginning … God or Hydrogen?” The series was held at a local community center.

During his collegiate years, Hudson was a geology major at the University of California. Upon his conversion, he switched his emphasis to theology, but maintained his interest in earth sciences. An In The Beginning Series website HERE continues to connect enquiring minds who attended the series.

Hamilton Receives Award at IRLA World Congress

Gregory W. Hamilton, Northwest Religious Liberty Association president, received a certificate of appreciation at the recent Seventh World Congress for Religious Freedom, held April 24–26 in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. This special recognition was specifically related to his efforts in passing the Oregon Workplace Religious Freedom Act. The conference, organized by the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA), hosted nearly 900 world religious liberty leaders from a number of different faiths and organizations. Go HERE for a summary of Hamilton’s reflections on information shared at the congress. He is pictured here receiving the award from Dwayne Leslie, Adventist world church legislative affairs director and IRLA associate general secretary. For a synopsis of congress resolutions, go HERE.

WWU Presidential Search Continues

The Walla Walla University (WWU) Presidential Search Committee interviewed Linda Wysong-Becker, Union College vice president for student services, and David Thomas, WWU School of Theology dean. An additional interview is planned for Friday, May 4, with Alex Bryan, WWU Church senior pastor. One previously-announced candidate, Dwight Nelson, Pioneer Memorial Church senior pastor, has withdrawn his name from further consideration. The committee is still on track to present a recommendation at the next WWU Board of Trustees meeting on May 14, 2012.

Looking Ahead

May
9–13: SAGE Creation Retreat
17: July Ad/Article Deadline
17–20: NPUC Regional Convocation
18–20: Tillamook (Ore.) Adv. School Alumni Weekend

June
9–16: Alaska Camp Meeting
12–16: Idaho Camp Meeting
13–16: Mont. Camp Meeting
13–16: UCC Camp Meeting
14–23: Wash. Camp Meeting
23: King’s Heralds Concert

July
17–21: Ore. Camp Meeting

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Regional Convocation to be Held May 17–20
The 36th annual North Pacific Union Conference Regional Convocation is coming May 17–20, at Camp Berachah in Auburn, Wash. Carlton Byrd, Breath of Life ministries speaker/director, and other presenters will explore the theme "Let His Mind Be in You!" This annual convocation features training workshops, young adult programs, children's programs and more. Presentations at this year’s event will be recorded for a Breath of Life broadcast. For more information and lodging options, contact Patric Parris at 360-857-7033 or visit online HERE.

The Clear Word eBook Edition
The Clear Word, an easy-to-read paraphrase of the Bible, is now available for your portable reading devices, such as iPad, Kindle, Nook, etc. The eBook edition comes with features such as resizable text, bookmarking, built-in dictionary, searching and much more. Audio editions, read by Lonnie Melashenko, are also available in CD or MP3 formats. Each edition of The Clear Word, print, eBook or audio, is available at AdventistBookCenter.com.

Current Issue
May
Portland Adventist Community Services in Portland, Ore., makes a difference with everyday gifts of dignity in their community. Read how this organization is an example of Salt in Our Community in the May GLEANER.

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Born and raised in Los Angeles, Stan Hudson was captured by Hollywood’s positive images of science. Having been introduced to rockhounding as a youth, he enrolled as a geology major at the University of California at Riverside. After experiencing some disappointments and challenges to his worldview, he became a Christian and enrolled at Loma Linda University as a theology major, completing a bachelors degree there. He went on to earning a master of divinity degree from Andrews Theological Seminary and a doctor of ministry degree from Fuller Theological Seminary. However, he’s never lost his love for earth sciences and issues related to origins. He is co-host of nationally-syndicated LifeTalk Radio’s “Sink the Beagle,” a lighthearted look at the subject of creationism and evolutionism. A resource person for his denomination on origin issues, sometimes involving television, Dr. Hudson lectures widely to groups both secular and religious. He also currently pastors in the university towns of Moscow, ID and Pullman, WA. He is married to Cindy, a registered dietician, and they have two children: Dan (a media production graduate) and Sarah (an English graduate).
Hamilton Reflects on IRLA World Congress

Gregory W. Hamilton, president of the US-based Northwest Religious Liberty Association, received a certificate of appreciation at the recent 7th World Congress for Religious Freedom, held in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic. Following, he offers his reflections upon the gathering at the end of the meetings.

The persecutory impulse is alive and well in many societies throughout the world. This has been made forcefully and eloquently clear during this Congress, despite the many progress reports of many countries represented at this quadrennial event.

Brigham Young University Professor W. Cole Durham, Jr., reminded us that between 70 and 76 percent of the world’s population are experiencing persecution. Religious freedom and human rights is not advancing. While small and major religious freedom and human rights advances are being made in key countries and regions, and often accompanied with democratic reform, these values appear to be regressing at a fairly rapid rate.

Two Ditches: Secularism and Puritanism

As Seventh-day Adventist World Church President, Ted Wilson, eloquently pointed out on Thursday, this so-called persecutory impulse emanates from both those with secular and theocratic world views — those who seek to be “free from religion” and those who seek to “enforce religion” (that is, from a shared sense of ecumenical and community values) in the public square. This struggle is not new to the history of public policy.

It was former Associate Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor who recently stated in a speech at the University of Dublin in Ireland, that “The religious zealot and the theocrat frighten us in part because we understand only too well their basic impulse. No less frightening is the totalitarian atheist who aspires to a society in which the exercise of religion has no place.”

The Persecutory Seeds of Unchecked Discrimination

But what has been only hedged at, is that the seeds of persecution are often sown through subtle acts of discrimination perpetrated both officially and unofficially over a gradual period of time on an unsuspecting and apathetic people at large, and particularly on religious minorities and other subsets of marginalized classes of peoples and ethnic groups, and many times in the name of “reform.” This has been true in most all societies throughout history, and continues to be true today.

Who can forget the gradual progression of discrimination laws enacted by the Wehrmacht and Hitler that systematically led to the Holocaust of over six million Jews prior to the outbreak of WWII? Visiting the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., brings this fact into horrific relief.

It is not my intent to demean particular countries, or those who represented them at this extremely beneficial World Congress on Religious Freedom and Human Rights. Suffice it to say, however, it is important to highlight a persistent and problematic standard that falls consistently short of both the spirit and letter of the international Article 18 standard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in which otherwise peaceful and law abiding religious peoples are singled out for disapproval and discriminatory treatment because they are viewed as a competitive threat by the predominant religion(s) of the land.

Minor and Major Examples by Country ...

Honduras
This can be seen in Honduras, for example. When conversing at length over
lunch on Wednesday with Carlos Portillo and Lizeth Aguilar, recent former Minister and Vice-Ministers of Religious Affairs for the Republic of Honduras (January 27, 2010 ??” April 17, 2012), they shared how both the recent and much needed political and moral reforms taking place in their country ??”which has been brought about through a strong ecumenical coalition of Evangelical Protestants and Catholics??”has marginalized certain religious minorities, including the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Seen as a threatening competitive religion, Seventh-day Adventists have been having difficulty procuring licenses to build more churches as they grow. This is a classic and persistent historic example of how united religious powers can and often marginalize and discriminate against emerging religious bodies whom are seen as a threat, when clearly they could just as easily be seen as a force for good.

Brazil
In Brazil, Attorney Damaris Dias Moura Kuo gave a glowing report of her country's progress, and deservedly so. Brazil has come a long ways toward religious freedom and human rights reforms, where the dominant Catholic Church has recognized the need to accommodate and work with a rapidly growing Protestant and Pentecostal movement, as in every country in Central and South America. But Ms. Kuo repeatedly stated that her country takes great pains to “respect” and “consider” the rights of all religions under Brazil’s Constitution. When I asked her to clarify what she meant in a brief interview she said that their country reserves the right to presume that certain religious faiths may not be healthy for the common good of the country. Her inference, though not stated, was toward terrorists carrying out acts of violence in the name of religion, and that is understandable. But when asked if that unofficial standard included religions that may be viewed as a competitive threat, she hedged, and through the translator, stated that it could, but not necessarily.

Romania and Jordan
These are just a few examples. Other examples were replete throughout the Congress. Liviu Olteanu highlighted the ongoing problems in Romania, and when asked by Andrews University Professor Nicholas Miller how it was that Sharia Law in Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the Arab-Muslim Middle East, squared with the rising religious persecution and killing of Christians, Judge Amjad Shammout, who serves as President of the Arab Bridge Center for Development and Human Rights in Jordan, responded by arguing that Christians have more rights and religious freedom protections in the Middle East than in Western countries, both currently and historically. It was an amazing response, to say the least.

The United States of America
Surprisingly, as Andrews University Professor Nicholas Miller, pointed out on Wednesday, a recent trend toward discrimination is also happening in the United States of America where corporate rights??”both religious and secular??”are increasingly being upheld by the courts in unprecedented ways at the expense of hard fought individual and civil rights. This ensuing competitive struggle is a dangerous development that prepares the way for increased discrimination by corporations and corresponding governmental acquiescence. This shift from individualism toward communitarian (i.e., what is good for the whole community is good for the individual) and corporate rights is a church-state model that dates back to the Holy Roman Empire in which the Church determined what was right for the state, society, and individuals. This may be a premature assessment in terms of where the United States may be trending, but it is a development to watch, particularly after the recent Citizens United and Hosanna-Tabor decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court. The debate over contraception rights in light of the religious freedom discrimination claims being cited by religious authorities??”and largely by the Catholic Church??”over Congress’s health care insurance mandate, is only one developmental example to watch in regard to such corresponding trends, said Miller.

Why We Must Not Become Complacent
In conclusion, it has often been said that as the United States rises and falls in its standards of upholding the equal constitutional guarantee of religious freedom and human rights for all, so goes the rest of the world. This remains a reliable truism where in the United States we have the privilege of championing both at the highest levels and standards throughout the world.

But it seems clear that as other countries are emerging in economic strength and political influence??”such as China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, etc.??”the world community will need to depend on a host of international champions of religious freedom and human rights.

Could it be that the universal values of religious freedom and human rights are fading just as fast as the rate of religious persecution is rising throughout the
world? As stated at the beginning of this article, those numbers are 70-76 percent!
Is it possible, as Dr. Robert Seiple argued during the opening Plenary Session on
Tuesday, that the western world, and all other international champions of religious
freedom and human rights, have relaxed the concept that it is the equal
constitutional guarantee of religious freedom for all that should once again be
championed and not the secular and interfaith influence of ecumenism which
fronts for a return to the lower standard of "religious tolerance"? a standard that
reserves the right to subtly and systematically discriminate against religious
minorities that the religious and political majority disagrees with?

In my thinking, that is the ultimate question that emerged from this vitally
important World Congress.

Gregory W. Hamilton is president of the Northwest Religious Liberty Association
(NRLA), which is a non-partisan government relations and workplace mediation
services program that champions religious freedom and human rights for all
people and institutions of faith in the legislative, civic, judicial, academic, interfaith,
evangelical and corporate arenas in the states of Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon
and Washington.

Back
Resolutions of the 7th World Congress for Religious Freedom

The reading of the Resolutions of the 7th World Congress this afternoon was greeted with a standing ovation from attendees. The document, which adds to the existing body of resolutions and recommendations from the six previous Congresses, acknowledges that “secularism” can both be understood in different ways, and describe an array of social phenomena.

But the Congress Resolutions conclude that: “...what is problematic for religious freedom is secularism as a totalizing ideology: a worldview that only recognizes secular values, thereby excluding religious values. In contrast, regimes characterized by secularity which seek to establish a neutral framework that welcomes and seeks to accommodate religious differences are most conducive to fostering religious freedom.”

Resolutions of the Seventh World Congress

of the

International Religious Liberty Association

on

Secularism & Religious Freedom—Conflict or Partnership

Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, April 24-26, 2012

The International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA) in its Seventh World Congress held in Punta Cana, Dominican Republic, expresses thanks and appreciation for the hospitality shown by its people in welcoming us to their country and commends the recent inclusion of the freedom of religion protections in their constitution. As the president of the Dominican Republic expressed most aptly in his message to the Congress, “this country is a ‘land of freedom’ where people of every different faith—or no faith at all—can live and worship according to the dictates of their conscience.”

This has truly been a historic event. It has been the first World Congress to be held in the Inter-America region and the largest IRLA Congress to date, with almost 900 attendees and guests. It has been the most internationally diverse, with men and women representing almost 65 countries.

The Congress received remarks from government officials from the Republic of Colombia, Curacao, the Bahamas, Mexico and Cuba as well as former Ambassador Robert Seiple, the first US Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom, and Knox Thames, director of Policy and Research for the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom.

Leaders from many different faith groups addressed the Congress, including Dr Neville Callam, General Secretary of the Baptist World Alliance, Dr Larry Miller, Secretary of the Global Christian Forum, and Dr Ted NC Wilson, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Our attendees spanned the spectrum of belief and non-belief—Jews, Muslims, Roman Catholics, Seventh-day Adventist, Orthodox, Mennonite, Baptist, Mormon, Scientologist, and many others.

This Congress has brought together experts and delegates to discuss the relationship of secularism and religious freedom and to share experiences concerning the ways that secular institutions and secularization in society can benefit and also threaten the right to freedom of religion or belief of both individuals and religious communities.

Participants in the Congress, consistent with the stated principles of the IRLA, recognize freedom of religion or belief as a fundamental human right rooted in the dignity of all human beings. The protection of this right is vital for a just society and undergirds all human rights.

Based on the experience of many countries represented at the Congress it was noted that “secularism” can describe an array of social phenomena, some of which are consistent with and supportive of religious freedom, while others threaten,
erode, and potentially undermine it. Over the course of history, the emergence of secular states and secular institutions has often played a vital role in assuring protection of freedom of religion or belief for all. Indeed some ideas identified as secular were the products of religious thinkers and religious thought. However, certain forms of secularism can result in the imposition of inappropriate limitations of this fundamental right.

With these considerations in mind, participants recognized that secularism can be understood in many ways. Congress speakers referred to a variety of conceptions of secularism. One version is “militant secularism,” which is explicitly hostile to religion and seeks to eliminate all signs of religion at least from public space, and in some versions, from private space as well. Another position includes “moderate” conceptions, which call for benign neutrality and flexible accommodation of religion. Still other conceptions of secularism envision affirmative cooperation between the secular state and religion. At the same time, secularism can be a critical defense against religious totalitarianism, providing religious freedom to all belief communities.

The view that emerged during the Congress was that what is problematic for religious freedom is secularism as a totalizing ideology: a worldview that only recognizes secular values, thereby excluding religious values. In contrast, regimes characterized by secularity which seek to establish a neutral framework that welcomes and seeks to accommodate religious differences are most conducive to fostering religious freedom.

This Congress adds to the existing body of resolutions and recommendations from previous Congresses.

Consequently, this seventh IRLA World Congress resolves to:

1. Call the nations of the world to actively promote the principles of freedom of religion or belief, as elaborated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the body of international human rights instruments.
2. Urge governments to establish laws and create the framework for societal activity and freedoms that produce a positive environment for religious freedom according to international standards.
3. Encourage those overseeing constitutional and legislative reform processes to provide protection of religious freedom which does not benefit a particular faith to the detriment to others and those who practice no religion.
4. Have the IRLA continue to identify concrete ways for individuals and its local chapters to productively engage in religious freedom advocacy, ensuring that such advocacy is sensitive to both context and situation.
5. Encourage individuals, including youth, to take the initiative to become advocates for religious freedom, locally and internationally.
6. Maintain religious freedom as a unique and foundational human right and resist the pressure to accept reductionist arguments which maintain that other rights such as freedom of speech, association, and equality, make religious freedom unnecessary.
7. Reaffirm the statement from the sixth congress that “religious freedom is best advanced when religion and state remain separate in their own respective spheres, that states be neutral to any specific religion, and not hostile to religion generally, recognizing the positive contributions religion can and does make in society.”
8. Reaffirm the statement from the sixth congress “that the less obvious forms of discrimination and intolerance that are manifested in some countries under the justification of secularism be identified. Such issues as the banning of religious symbols in the public sphere, the denial of the right to observe specific days of worship, and refusal of conscientious objector status, raise questions about commitment to freedom of religion or belief.”
9. Recognize that IRLA National and Regional Committees are important instruments for involving the IRLA membership in carrying out the Mission of IRLA worldwide and advancing the cause of religious freedom, and that the formation of more IRLA country and regional affiliate organizations and the recruitment of members who are willing to promote the principles of religious freedom is strongly urged as a means to protect, promote, and defend the principles and practice of religious freedom for all people everywhere.
10. Recommend to the IRLA Meeting of Experts that they consider the question of the appropriate role of religious belief in the forming and shaping of public policy and the right of religious people to share their views in public forums.
MAiN SPEAKER
Dr. Carlton P. Byrd
Speaker/Director of the Breath of Life

GUEST SPEAKER
Pastor Lawrence Dorsey

GUEST MUSICIAN
Dr. Wayne Bucknor
Chair of the Oakwood University Music Department

GUEST CONDUCTOR
Andrew Benjamin Young

GUEST YOUTH SPEAKER
Mike Lowe

Workshops
Bible Worker Training parts I & II
Music Workshop
Health Workshop
Special Young Adult & Children’s Programs

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