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Evangelism Symposium Urges simpler Gospel Presentation

05 December 2011, Silver Spring, Maryland, United States [Elizabeth Lechleitner, ANN/teoNEWS] Top administrators, evangelists and Ministerial secretaries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church are reprioritizing the role of God's spirit and simple Bible truths in public evangelism.

Rather than complicating the gospel or endlessly repackaging it, leaders are advocating a simpler approach. They say preaching basic Bible truths is the most compelling way to present the Adventist hope.

This approach requires admitting one's own vulnerability, said Shawn Boonstra, associate director for the Ministerial Association of the church's North American Division. "The world is tired of religious know-it-alls," he said, citing a New Testament story in which the apostle Paul identifies with his audience to make a point.

"It's OK to be a sinner saved by Christ. If your audience doesn't see that you need Jesus, they'll never listen to your message," Boonstra told members of the world church's Evangelism Symposium last week.

The symposium is a broadening of the church's Council on Evangelism and Witness to include more regional evangelists and Ministerial secretaries in the discussion.

About 40 leaders from each of the church's 13 divisions met at Adventist world headquarters November 28 to 30 to share resources, exchange ideas, address challenges to evangelism and pray together.

"Jesus' mission is to seek and save everyone who is lost, so the number one priority of the church should be to win people to Jesus," said Jerry Page, secretary of the world church's Ministerial Association.

In an increasingly secular world, evangelists can no longer assume their audience is either familiar with Christian principles or Biblically literate, said veteran Adventist evangelist Mark Finley.

"I would say my preaching has become more Christ-centered, more biblically basic, and certainly ministering more to the felt needs of people," Finley told ANN during a symposium break.

This message of simplicity seemed to resonate with church leaders and evangelists who attended.

"I think maybe we'll need to accept the idea of just submitting ourselves to the Lord and just preach the simple gospel truth and leave the rest to Him. I think we need to get out of this trap of always thinking we must invent something new or sophisticated, and just use the Bible," said Mikhael Kaminskiy, director of the Office of Assessment for the church's Euro-Asia Division.

Church leaders said a clear, authentic message of truth can even connect with world's growing postmodern population -- a group of 1.8 billion people worldwide, according to Miroslav Pujic, communication director for the church's Trans-European Division.

"We are realizing that Jesus' message is exactly what this generation is looking for -- the real truth, transparency and an alternative to the systems and churches they don't trust in," said Robert Costa, an associate secretary for the world church's Ministerial Association.

Fundamentally, postmodernism is despair and disenchantment with humanity's failed attempts to explain, order and better the world through logic and reason, Boonstra said. "Instead of understanding, logic and reason brought some of history's worst disasters -- two world wars, genocide, religious scandal and economic crisis."
Evangelism Symposium Urges simpler Gospel Presentation | TED Adventist http://www.ted-adventist.org/news/evangelism-symposium-urges-simpler...
The Message of Hope in Slovenian Prison

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He started the programme with a rendition of The Lord’s Prayer then included some well known worship songs and negro spirituals and finished it majestically with “the sinners anthem” - Amazing Grace. Through the messages of songs and his short presentations between them, Wintley truly “brought hope to all of us,” as Mr. Joze Podrzaj, prison director, said in his thank-you speech. Inmates thanked Wintley Phipps with heartfelt applause and a hand-made beehive panel - traditional Slovenian souvenir. “It was truly inspiring visit of a special person who invests his life in encouraging those who need encouragement most,” said Mr. Peterle in his statement to AdventPress.

Phipps arrived to Slovenia together with his wife Linda from Brussels where he sang at the annual Prayer Breakfast for EU Parliament Members. During his short visit he met also with Robert Friskovec, a coordinator for chaplaincy ministry in Slovenian prisons, and Zmago Godina, president of Slovenian Conference of Seventh-day Adventist Church.

[tedNEWS]

Photo [from left] Lozje Peterle, Zmago Godina, and Wintley Phipps

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The Great Hope Project...think differently...think possibilities! "The world is winding up! Jesus is well on His way and, yet, people still don't get it...
Newbold College Deputy Principal Receives Key Community Engagement Award

25 November 2011 Bracknell, United Kingdom [Philip Brown, tedNEWS] Dr John Baildam, Deputy Principal, Newbold College, has been presented with The Paul Clark Award – a special award for 2011 Governor of the Year at nearby Garth Hill College. Charlotte Edwards MBE, English cricketer and current captain of the England women’s team presented Dr Baildam with his award. Charlotte was guest of honour at Garth Hill College’s Celebration of Success last Thursday evening, 24 November.

Dr Baildam’s citation acknowledged his proud community service record of over 17 years as a governor of Garth Hill College, including the last 12 of these years as the Chair of the school’s Governing Body. John’s tenure as chairman has coincided with a period of huge improvement for this local public school and his role in this has been highly significant. The citation also affirmed John for his “resolute commitment to education and his capacity to handle difficult situations with intelligence and sensitivity”. He was also acknowledged for his “boundless enthusiasm and ambition to see the school continue to improve and for managing governors’ meetings with an unwavering attention to detail and endless good humour.”

Dr Baildam’s sustained community engagement has been a feature of his service to Newbold College since commencing as a Lecturer in 1982. Dr Baildam has served in a variety of posts at Newbold since that time, including Director, School of English; Director, Summer School Programmes; Director of Admissions & Records; and since 1997, Director of Academic Affairs.

At its most recent meeting in Montenegro earlier this month, the Newbold College Board of Governors voted to accept that the senior management position of Director of Academic Affairs be now known and referred to as Deputy Principal.

Photo caption
Charlotte Edwards MBE presenting Dr John Baildam with The Paul Clark Award at Garth Hill College [tedNEWS]

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To Avoid Misunderstanding

17 November 2011, St Albans, United Kingdom [tedNEWS] In order to avoid any misunderstanding in connection with the vote on Women in Leadership by the TED Executive Committee, on 16 November 2011, the Trans-European Division (TED) administration has issued the following statement:

"We wish to underline that the TED has not voted any changes in the GC/TED policies or model constitutions. The TED is granting unions permission to manage the matter of parity between male and female pastors on the basis of TED’s Guidelines for Commissioned Pastors as voted in the TED Executive Committee in 2009, based on consultations with the TED and an authorisation by the appropriate union governing body. The TED is not authorising ordination of women within its territory but is waiting for the General Conference to conduct its study of the theology of ordination."

The Trans-European Division Administration

To read full voted document please [click here](http://www.ted-adventist.org/news/to-avoid-misunderstanding).
The Great Hope Project...think differently...think possibilities! "The world is winding up! Jesus is well on His way and, yet, people still don't get it..."
Women in Leadership

Preamble to the Motion on Women in Leadership

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 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]
As a leader in God's church, you will probably be asked on some occasions to deliver a sermon to a different audience and/or congregation. Wanting to do your task well, you will inevitably ask: How do I do this well? What is a good sermon? As a member of a local church and listener to sermons Sabbath after Sabbath, you ask that question too.

Is a good sermon a matter of taste, similarly to a good meal or music? Is it that our personal upbringing, culture, taste, how we are psychologically wired and other things, determine which sermons we consider to be good and which perhaps bad and boring?

Any preacher who ever preached a sermon is aware of the enormous variety of different people's perceptions in his/her audience.

A lot could be said about what is a good sermon, good preaching. For this article, let me just highlight two.

Good news not good advice

In my last church, one of my members came to me and said: "Pastor Duda, I am so disappointed with you. You have been our pastor for two years now and you have not preached against women wearing trousers yet!" Obviously, her idea of a good sermon was that it should tell people what to do (and not to do).

However, from my experience as a pastor and administrator, most people know what to do; they are just not very good at that. My problem is that I already know that I am not what I ought to be; I know I am doing things that I ought not to do and that I am leaving undone things I ought to do. Like most people, I do not live my life crippled by moral indecision, paralyzed for lack of good advice. Our problem is not moral indecision, but moral impotence (Rom 7:21-25).

That's why the remedy cannot be just good advice about what we ought to do, but good news about what God has done – "What the law could never do, because our lower nature robbed it of all potency, God has done: by sending his own Son..." (Rom 8:30). Thus remedy and good preaching is not good advice about what we ought to do, but good news about what God has done. Ultimately preaching is about God, and what he has done, not just about us and about what we ought to do. Surely, our understanding of who God is and what he has done has implications for our lives. Otherwise our imperatives become only pious moralizing, compounding in our hearers their burden of guilt.

If preaching is to be proclamation and not mere moralizing, the ethics of our preaching must be rooted in the theology of our preaching. We cannot make sense of who we are and what we ought to do, unless we first know who God is and what he has done in Jesus Christ. Theology empowers the ethics; it does not just accompany it with an encouraging, heavenly-Father pat on the back.

There is a temptation for leaders (and not only for them!) to use preaching to tell people what to do and not to do and thus straighten them out and "force" them to follow what we consider good and useful. But this can easily border on spiritual abuse. A good sermon will inspire people and help them to do what is right and not just tell them what to do.

Seeing yourself as part of God's story

Preaching is kerygma, the proclamation of what God has done in Jesus Christ. Preaching therefore must be biblical, or it is not preaching at all. The talk may be interesting or edifying, but it is not preaching. The sole source of our knowledge, of what God has done, comes to us through the text of Scripture under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

However, the fact that a sermon is rooted in a particular text or passage is no guarantee that what we are saying is authentically biblical. It is not the frequency of quoting the Bible (or EGW) that makes it biblical. For a sermon to be biblical, it must be rooted not only in a specific Bible text or passage, but also the immediate and wider context of the passage and in the cosmic sweep of God's story as a whole.
I have been teaching Homiletics for over 20 years. In my enquiries with pastors, theology students and members about the sermons which they remembered after a year, 5 or 10 years, or even more after the first time they heard them, I found one common denominator – a memorable sermon was one that somehow “clicked” the Bible material with the current experience of the listener.

The Bible did not come to us as a collection of proof texts, system of fundamental beliefs, a recipe on how to know God’s will, or seven rules for successful leadership. It came to us as a story that has its beginning and its climax. Thus good preaching must recognize not just what God has revealed to us, but how he has revealed it. The gospel that we preach has come to us through the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments telling God’s story. This needs to be connected to our story, which is part of the bigger story.

The stories of the Bible are not merely illustrations of the revelation of God, they are the revelation. Biblical truth is the Event (not just cerebral doctrine) and the Event is what God has done in our creation and recreation (salvation), in what He is doing now and in what he is yet to do before the story ends.

Good preaching is telling and retelling God’s story and our stories from creation to the Second coming (not in one sermon hopefully!). The Bible speaks about this special type of remembering (OT zākar, NT anamnesis), a remembrance which does not merely call to mind the things past, but makes them real, present, potent and demanding here and now.

The gospel is no longer the story of something that God did once for all, far away then and there. It is now also the story of our world, our culture, our society, our individual lives in all the complexity and strange mixture of glory and shame.

That’s why we need to do not only the exegesis of the Bible text, we need to do the exegesis of life. If we have no idea where people are today, the complexities of their lives, the demands of their environment and allurements of culture in which they live, then even the most brilliant exposition of historical details of Ezekiel is not going to connect with them. However theologically sound, however exegetically accurate, however historically informative, however interesting and inspiring it may be, until the saving acts of God which He accomplished once for all then and there have become embedded in our experience, our culture, our history, our individual lives, we have not preached. We might have delivered a religious talk, but not a sermon, and certainly not a good sermon.

A good sermon is not just remembering His story, it is also the remembering of ours. And when our story becomes part of His story, His bigger story, we have a good and a memorable sermon. The two stories are not two anymore, they have become one as we begin to live, however imperfectly “in Christ”. As the apostle Paul put it: “the life that I now live is not my life, but the life which Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20).

We preach the good news that in Christ God’s kingdom has come, a new kind of life has been made possible here and now, a new kind of humanity has been born, a new kind of community has been established. The critical and decisive battle with the power of darkness has been fought and won, not by us, by what we do, but by Christ and what he accomplished on the cross of Calvary 2000 years ago. The war is not yet over, but the outcome is no longer in doubt.

Our personal future may be uncertain, but the outcome is not unknown for those who know the story of God. We know for sure how His story will end. Paradise lost has been regained and will be restored by Him. And we all can be a part of it. That’s what good preaching is all about!

By Pastor Daniel Duda, Education Director, Trans-European Division
How should we treat the newly elected leader?

In the build-up to the average constituency meeting – whether it be at conference, union or higher levels – you will always find at least three groups of people involved: the speculators; the agitators; and the orchestrators.

The speculators are a benign group to which most of us belong. The agitators are usually a smaller and more focused group who have an agenda they want others to share, thereby hoping that they will be able to influence outcomes towards their bias. The orchestrators will always have sinister intentions, backed by strategic plans designed to put their candidates into power.

Session delegates are very much aware of these things, and generally arrive at such constituency meetings with a touch of apprehension in the pit of their stomachs. The dominating question in the minds of most is: ‘Who will it be?’

Once the vote is taken and the new leadership announced, that tension quickly dissipates and many delegates leave immediately, thinking that their work is done.

Does our responsibility cease once we’ve voted?

Do we discharge our obligations and responsibilities to church leadership with a cross on a piece of paper, or by waving a voting card?

Are we only there to determine who will lead us – or do we have responsibility to influence how they lead?

To my thinking, the real question that we should ask ourselves is: ‘How should we respond to these new leaders, whether they are our choice or not?’

Do we adopt an aloof ‘wait-and-see’ attitude, secretly hoping that they will make heavy weather of their new responsibilities? Then, if they do, we can smugly broadcast that we ‘knew it would happen’!

Or do we become more aggressive than that, creating complex issues that will put them to the test – so we can then ‘put them to the sword’!

The ‘saints’ have had practice

This strategy is not new. Regular upstanding churchmen tried it on Jesus 2,000 years ago:

‘After dinner the Pharisees and the lawyers attacked Him with all kinds of questions, hoping He would say something wrong. From then on, they acted more like His enemies than His friends.’ (Luke 11:53, 54, The Easy English Clear Word.)

Ingratiation

Another approach to new leadership is ingratiating. Those who employ this strategy are often masters in the use of subterfuge – compliments that gently caress the carnal nature. Suggestions that ‘Things have never been so well-run before’, or ‘You fellows are a breath of fresh air’, can create dangerous illusions of success for new leaders.

It is human to want to be close to our leaders and count them as our friends. But ingratiating slides easily beyond compliments to tangible favours, and favours build obligation, and obligation may cloud objectivity!

Beware of ‘courtiers’

A ‘courtier’ was one of those people who once swarmed around the rich and the famous, especially royalty. The courtier couldn’t ‘buy’ the regent’s favour with gifts of money or land, but if he supplied choice information he gained a special status, and the protection of the king.

Some leaders have an insatiable thirst for certain types of information. They want to know about the latest alliances, what people think of them and their leadership style, the moral blind spots of their colleagues and counterparts – anything that may give them perceived leverage over those they lead! But the real ‘leverage’ is in the clever courtier’s hand. He may use information selectively, mischievously, partially, or in any way he chooses, to manipulate the gullible leader.

How does God want us to act?
God can’t support aloofness, aggression, ingratiating, obligation or manipulation. So what does he expect from us?

Perhaps these ideas will be helpful:

Join them in ‘Gethsemane’ – Every leader is going to have moments of intense stress, or times when nothing runs to plan, and nobody seems to care. These are often very, very lonely moments – times when our leaders need to know there is someone else in their ‘Gethsemane’ with them – someone who is praying for them!

In Matthew 26 we see how much Christ would have appreciated the praying presence of Peter, James and John. Just listen to the sadness and raw human need in these words: ‘Then Jesus came with the disciples to a place called Gethsemane and said to them, “Sit down here while I go over there and pray.” Then he took with him Peter and the two sons of Zebedee and began to be in terrible pain and agony of mind: “My heart is breaking with a death-like grief,” he told them, “stay here and keep watch with me.”’ (Verses 36-38, New Testament in Modern English, J. B. Phillips)

His vivid anticipation of the next day’s legal charades, public humiliation and inhuman torture, and the burden of humanity’s measureless iniquity, squeezed blood from his pores – but they slept. He was in severe turmoil – but they slept. Three times he urged them to ‘watch’ with him – but they slept!

So, loyal members and colleagues, let’s join our leaders in their daily ‘Gethsemanes’.

Hold up the leaders’ hands – On the way to the Promised Land, Israel was attacked by the Amalekites, and this is what happened: ‘As long as Moses held up his hands, the Israelites were winning, but whenever he lowered his hands, the Amalekites were winning. When Moses’ hands grew tired, . . . Aaron and Hur held his hands up – one on one side, one on the other – so that his hands remained steady till sunset. So Joshua overcame the Amalekite army with the sword.’ (Exodus 17:11-13, NIV.)

Moses was holding up his rod, a symbol of God’s power and grace, but he could not do it alone. He needed the ongoing support of Aaron and Hur, because victory is always a team effort!

So, when our leaders are holding high the symbols of God’s power and grace, let’s support them tirelessly!

Tell truth to power, but do it properly – Bob Stone, a management consultant, makes the following observations: ‘Telling the truth to the boss is the first responsibility of an ethical subordinate. . . . Speaking the truth isn’t just a matter of personal integrity; it’s crucial for organisational success.’

And he is right on target. The one thing that our newly appointed leaders wish for is that we tell them the truth. We need to be open with them about what we think should be stopped, fixed or initiated for God’s work to be successful. But we must make sure that we have the truth before we tell: that our motives are pure, our facts accurate and our perspectives balanced.

‘Telling truth to power’ is never easy. It takes courage – but it also needs to be done in a gracious spirit and with due tact. Time and place are also important. Many a true word has been wasted because it was said at the wrong forum. The rulem of thumb for ‘truth telling’ is simple: the smallest audience will usually deliver the best results! Nathan confronted David about his sin, not Israel.

‘Tell truth to power’ – our leaders are waiting!

So...

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By Julian Hibbert

- Pastor Julian Hibbert is the Editor of MESSENGER, the British Union Conference journal, and this article is an expanded version of an editorial he wrote in the issue of 22 July 2011.