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02 February 2012 St Albans, United Kingdom

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Meeting Point in Cyprus

07 February 2012 St Albans, United Kingdom [Audrey Andersson, tedNEWS] With 72 members and one church numerically, Cyprus is one of the smallest fields in the Trans-European Division (TED), however exciting things are happening.

For the last six months Ehren and Eren have been working as volunteers at the Meeting Point in Limassol, the second largest town in Cyprus. Located on the sea front in a mainly immigrant area, the Meeting Point provides a place for people in the community to meet and get to know each other. The Meeting Point community is growing through exercise classes, English classes, book clubs and kids activities. Open Mic evenings where friends come and share their talents are popular, as are the monthly games evenings. Regular visitors to Meeting Point frequently express appreciation for the ‘safe place’ that is provided by the centre, which enables friendship to flourish among people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds.

After several years of Limassol believers functioning as a company there are now plans to become a church. Creating safe places is a recurring theme for the church in Cyprus. In the capital Lefkosia, there are over 15,000 maids, mainly from the Philippines. They live in with their families and have one day off per week. A new project provides a meeting place for some of these women in Lefkosia. Over twenty women meet on Sundays in a flat for worship, fellowship and a time to relax with friends. Some have asked for Bible Studies and the potential for growth is enormous.

After a recent visit, Bertil Wiklander, TED President, said, “It is encouraging to see how the church is growing and the opportunities there are on the island. We will build on the good work done by others to foster growth among Cypriots and visitors to this beautiful island.” [tedNEWS]

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Order of Merit to Jan Paulsen

03 February 2012 Oslo, Norway  (Tor Tjeransen; tedNEWS) Former Seventh-day Adventist world church President, Dr Jan Paulsen (77), has been appointed Commander of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit. The announcement from the Royal Palace states that: “H. M. The King has appointed Jan Paulsen Commander of the Royal Norwegian Order of Merit for meritorious work for the good of humanity.”

“I am totally surprised and very honored by this recognition coming from H. M. The King of Norway and his councilors,” said Jan Paulsen. “It warms my heart that the accolade came with the recognition ‘Service for the good of humanity’, for that is what the life of Christian service is all about,” Paulsen added.

The Royal Norwegian Order of Merit was founded by King Olav V in 1985 and is conferred on foreign and Norwegian nationals as a reward for their outstanding service in the interest of Norway. The actual date when Paulsen will be presented with the insignia of the order has yet to be decided.

“It is a great honor for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Norway that the global service of Dr. Paulsen has been recognised in this way,” said Pastor Reidar J. Kvinge, leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Norway.

Pastor Paulsen was the world leader of the Seventh-day Adventist Church from 1999 to 2010. He holds a Doctor of Theology degree from the University of Tübingen in Germany. Dr Paulsen began his ministerial service in 1953 in Norway and has served as teacher in Ghana and as teacher and college president in Nigeria. From 1976-1980 he was the Principal of church-run Newbold College in England which houses the main theological faculty of the church in the Trans-European region. For twelve years he served as the President of the Trans-European Division with headquarters in St. Albans, England. Throughout his career Jan Paulsen has shown particular interest in furthering higher education in Africa. His initiative in establishing the humanitarian response of the Adventist Church to the Aids pandemic is also notable.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has 17 million members worldwide and 4.700 members in Norway. Jan Paulsen lives in the Washington D.C. area; he is married to Kari (nee Trykkerud) and has three adult children.

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Order of Merit to Jan Paulsen | TED Adventist

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World Day of Religious Freedom in Croatia

03 February 2012 Zagreb, Croatia [Adventpress Newsletter; tedNEWS] World Day of Religious Freedom in Croatia was marked by an award ceremony on 28th January 2012 at the “Four Points” Hotel in Zagreb which was organised by the Association for religious freedom in the Republic of Croatia. More than two hundred participants, among whom were senior representatives of religious communities and members of the Croatian Government, celebrated human and religious freedom as a fundamental human right, which is an essential component of human dignity.

Dr John Graz, Secretary General, International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA), Raafat Kamal, IRLA Regional Secretary for Europe, Dr Slobodan Lang, President of the Assembly of the Association, and President of the Association Ljiljana Matković-Vlasić, addressed those assembled. Matković-Vlasić with frank words and visible emotion thanked the former Secretary of the Association, Velimir Šubert for his dedicated work and welcomed the new Secretary, Dragutin Matak.

On this occasion many awards were given in recognition of valiant efforts that have been made in promoting religious freedom and tolerance. Among the award recipients was the Croatian president Dr Ivo Josipović, as well as a world-renowned theologian and proponent of world peace and ethics Dr Hans Küng. Awards have been also given to Redžo Hamzić, Dr Aziz Hasanović, Tihomir Kukolja, Dr Don Stanko Lasić, Srdjan Skunca and Josip Takač.

At the end of the ceremony Dragutin Matak, the programme organiser, concluded: "We do not wish to curry favour with anyone by giving these prestigious awards to these brave people, but to encourage more people to keep and nurture human and religious freedom. We have tried to tell everybody: 'When you stand up for the freedom that God gives to every human being, then you are in good company.' " [tedNEWS]

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Operation Global Rain

02 February 2012 St Albans, United Kingdom [tedNEWS] The start of the New Year 2012, January 4th-14th, saw the launch of the global prayer initiative, “Operation Global Rain” in which the Seventh-day Adventist Church family was invited to unite in ten days of prayer for the power of the Holy Spirit to be experienced in their lives.

In the Trans-European Division (TED) many churches have participated and have experienced significant results. Members have been involved in Finland where it is reported that Operation Global Rain has been promoted widely. In the United Kingdom and Ireland churches have become very engrossed in collective prayer and personal prayer. As a result members have reported that they are expecting great things as a result of the ten days of prayer and that they look forward to the rest of the year’s prayer events. The British Union Conference (BUC) internet news bulletin reported that “The South England Conference office family chose to take the whole of Wednesday, 11th January as a day of fasting and special prayer within the office”. Pastors and members from across the BUC rallied to make the start of 2012 prayer focused.

Michael Hamilton, Prayer Coordinator for TED, states that “Many countries may not have had the opportunity to participate for January, but they must be reminded that it is not too late. The initiative is intended to motivate us to the importance of individual and collective prayer and encourage the entire church family to become involved. As often as possible throughout 2012 time must be set aside for the church to pray together for the power of the Holy Spirit in our lives and ministry.” [tedNEWS]

Read more about Operation Global Rain
'Jesus7' Evangelism

18 January 2012 Veszprem, Hungary [tedNEWS] People in the 21st century experiencing the consequences of the multiple crises (economical, financial, ecological, ethical, relational, etc.) are searching for something more trustworthy.

Adventists in Veszprem, a University town in the West part of Hungary, understand how to build up trust and faith in Jesus and by continuous assessment and work they are willing to respond to some of the physical and spiritual needs of the people. By establishing a Health Club they have attracted those who would like to see improvements in their physical life. Adventists from Veszprem also started a Bible University to respond to the needs of spiritual hunger – introducing people to the basics of the Bible story.

There is no doubt that the Adventist Community has become more and more known in the town. Realising that coping with the results of the crises is one of the greatest challenges; in December 2011 they launched a series on "Life with Confidence". During this series an audience of 45 visitors and another 50-60 Adventists was formed. Building up trust in the One who is an Expert in handling crises – Jesus Christ – was most essential during the year end presentations. The year concluded with the baptism of four people – a couple in their thirties, and two ladies in their fifties.

Knowing that many people make New Year resolutions at the beginning of the year, the Adventist community advertised a new type of approach called “Jesus7” which can be interpreted as seven stories of Jesus’ life, or seven days per week. The series was recorded and is being televised over the Internet and soon over the Hope Channel Romania – which covers the Central region of Europe.

The attendance of the series grew constantly and although a 200-seat hall was rented, by the end of the series approximately 250 people were attending, some even sitting on the floor.

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Through a survey sheet they were asked to indicate their commitment and what decisions they have made regarding Jesus Christ. The plan is that this series be multiplied and run in about 50 locations in the country, covering most of the cities and towns in Hungary. The interest through the Internet and TV will be carefully monitored by the Duna Conference. "If the Adventist community is committed to meeting people where they are, responding to their needs, carefully assessing and walking with people on their journey to a close relationship with Jesus, people will gladly follow Him." – concluded Janos Kovacs-Biro. [tedNEWS]

Adventists from Veszprem also started a Bible University to respond to the physical needs of spiritual hunger – introducing people to the basics of the Bible story.
Reintroduced Law Again Jeopardising Status of Some Churches in Hungary

09 January 2012 Silver Spring, Maryland, United States  [Elizabeth Lechleitner/ANN; tedNEWS] The saga of securing official church status in Hungary continues, despite what religious liberty advocates called encouraging news late last year when the Constitutional Court struck down the country's controversial Law of Churches.

Prior to that ruling, more than 300 minority faiths among them the Seventh-day Adventist Church were set to lose official legal status in Hungary on January 1, after which they would undergo a reapplication process.

With the New Year, those churches are facing a similar situation.

Hungary’s Parliament claims the law is necessary to weed out businesses or individuals posing as churches just to gain the accompanying rights and privileges. Furthermore, the majority government maintains that the law doesn’t infringe on religious liberty. It doesn’t “forbid” worship according to any faith tradition, Hungary’s minister of state for government communication, Zoltan Kovacs, wrote in a recent Wall Street Journal opinion piece.

Kovacs said the law merely outlines how churches can gain official recognition “if they show themselves to be popular enough.” One condition requires a church to prove a decades-long history in the country and count more than 1,000 members.

The Hungarian government is “making efforts to explain to the international community that this is not a human rights issue,” said Ganoune Diop, the Adventist world church’s representative to the United Nations.

“Some experts have even predicted a further recession on Hungary’s horizon, he added.

“Now we not only have an objective standard of what constitutes a church, but we also need a two-thirds vote of Parliament just to become an official religion, and we think that’s problematic,” Leslie said.

Currently, 82 of the some 300 minority religions de-registered under the latest law have reapplied for official status, among them the Seventh-day Adventist Church, denomination officials in Hungary said.

Religious liberty analysts said provisions of the new law indicate that those churches that have already applied for status will not experience a gap in official recognition. They’ll maintain previous recognition while a decision regarding their ultimate status is pending in Parliament.
Members of Parliament have indicated that they'll arrive at a decision by the end of February, analysts said. Church leaders in Hungary report that “communication with the government” suggests that the Seventh-day Adventist Church will regain official church status.

“One positive improvement in the new law is that it does not prohibit denominations to use the term ‘church,’ even if they are not accepted by Parliament,” said Ócsai Tamás, president of the church’s Hungarian Union Conference. Churches to which Parliament does not grant official recognition will receive a "religious association" status, he said.

“Hopefully some churches in Hungary -- including the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which has been operating in the country for more than a century -- will have a positive answer [next month],” said John Graz, director of Public Affairs and Religious Liberty for the Adventist world church.

“We encourage all believers to pray for religious freedom in Hungary, so our church and others can continue to operate for the good of the nation as in the past,” Graz said.

Top Seventh-day Adventist leadership in Hungary and the church’s Trans-European Division will continue to closely monitor the situation, along with the denomination’s global religious liberty community. [teNEWS]

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Reintroduced Law Again Jeopardising Status of Some Churches in Hung... http://www.ted-adventist.org/news/reintroduced-law-again-jeopardising-s...
The New Year’s Eve gala concert is the most important artistic and musical event in Albania. Television and radio stations broadcast this event all over the country. Ambassadors, politicians, artists, and important personalities always take part in the great event.

Irida Dragoti-Mazza, an Adventist professional Mezzo-soprano, was unexpectedly asked by the director of the national opera theatre to sing the song ‘Lord’s prayer’ under his directions of the orchestra. Sacred music is not very common in secular theatres, especially in post-communist counties like Albania.

Irida’s performance was greatly appreciated by all the participants, above all, by several foreign ambassadors. The director commented to some TV channels: ‘Irida has prayed in a wonderful way for our beloved country.’

‘I thank God for the wonderful opportunity to witness in secular theatres,’ Irida said. ‘I love God and I’m always happy to sing for Him and my greatest joy is to sing sacred songs. I am proud to be an Adventist and want to thank the church also for giving me the opportunity to sing at Adventists events.’

Irida Dragoti-Mazza is a professional opera singer. She has studied in Albania and Italy, graduating with top grades. She has done master-level studies with some of the most important opera singers in the world, such as Renato Scotto, Daniel Dessi, Raina Kabaivanska. She has also worked with very important directors like Zubin Mehta, Claudio Abbado and famous artists like Andrea Bocelli and Ennio Morricone.

Irida is married to Andreas Mazza and they have a two-year old daughter, Christine.

Photos: Courtesy of Tirana theatre and Irida Dragoti-Mazza

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How to Read the Bible

“How to Read the Bible for all It’s Worth!”
Featuring: Laurence Turner, Aulikki Nahkola, Cedric Vine and Jean-Claude Verrecchia

Newbold College All-day Bible Conference
Sunday, 24 March 2012 9:45 am to 5:30 pm
Building Beneath the Surface - The Leader's Inner Life

Brooklyn Bridge is a famous landmark spanning the East River in New York City. At the time it opened (1883), it was the longest suspension bridge in the world — 50% longer than any previously built. For several years the towers were the tallest structures in the Western Hemisphere.

When the bridge opened there were many skeptics who claimed that such a large structure could not long remain suspended by cables. It could not bear the strain of traffic or wind and weather. Before long it would collapse into the river. Yet for well over a century it has served as a major transportation artery connecting the boroughs of Brooklyn and Manhattan.

During the early stages of constructing the New York tower progress was not apparent. Local citizens complained about the passage of time and the absence of any visible development. In response, the Chief Engineer wrote: “To such of the general public as might imagine that no work had been done on the New York tower, because they see no evidence of it above the water, I should simply remark that the amount of the masonry and concrete laid on that foundation during the past winter, under water, is equal in quantity to the entire masonry of the Brooklyn tower visible today above the water line.”

The Chief Engineer’s statement illustrates a vital truth about leadership: it is the work that is done inside the heart and mind, where people cannot see, that determines whether a leader will stand the tests of time and circumstance. It is the inner life, where only God sees, that informs, stabilizes, sustains or weakens and corrodes the visible aspects of leadership. This inner work is accomplished by worship, devotion, prayer and reflection about ethics, morals, and values.

Today one hears a lot about leadership strategy, leadership vision, the marketing and communication of leadership ideas. The risk is that a person may spend all his/her time on these leadership concepts and forget that character-building is the first priority for leadership.

Jesus spoke in graphic terms about the contrasts between the outer and the inner life. (See Matthew 23:13-28) The outside of cup and platter may be so clean as to glister in the sun but the inside is full of corruption and excess. Religious leaders might be as attractive as newly-painted tombstones in a well-manicured cemetery but the inviting exterior only hides inner decay. This is the tragedy of leaders failing to recognize the importance of the inner life.

On another occasion Jesus spoke about the influence of one’s life. “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’” —John 7:37,38 NKJV

What Jesus is saying is that if you want your life to be influential the first thing is to make sure it is connected to the right source. Perhaps the leadership principle that is most important for spiritual leaders is that “when you guard your secret life with God, your public life will take care of itself.” Jesus assures us that if we are connected to Him, the visible effect of our lives, however small, will be a blessing to the world.

Far too often news headlines these days describe the moral downfall of persons who have hitherto carried enormous responsibility and enjoyed public trust. And then to everyone's amazement the corroded inner life of such a leader is exposed—perhaps an act of financial fraud, failure to tell the truth in a moment of crisis, unfaithfulness to a spouse, or the cancerous effects of a private habit such as pornography. Leaders of religious organisations are not immune to public failure. The environment of power and the accolades of colleagues can easily blind a person to the risks that accompany position and prestige. It requires the inner life to anchor the public life.

How then do we attend to the inner life, the character-building work that is so essential to survival in public leadership? It happens primarily in what we do with our quiet time—those moments of the day that are reserved for feeding and focusing the mind. Those periods in private when we wrestle with huge questions: what kind of person do I want to be? for what purpose am I living? to whom do I turn for mentoring? what are the values by which I live?

It is a myth that a crisis develops character. It does not. Crisis only reveals character. The urgent lesson for leaders is that in changing times, in moments of crisis, strength comes from one’s spiritual disciplines. These habits are not...
developed on the spur of the moment. They yield their fruit only when carefully cultivated with consistency and honesty.

And there is a marvelous assurance that the inner life of dependence upon God will have its beneficial effect in one’s public life. Jesus affirmed that in His statement about a person, who believes in Him, becoming a river of living water.

Ellen G White cautioned and encouraged leaders that, “It is not the capabilities you now possess or ever will have that will give you success. It is that which the Lord can do for you. He longs to give you understanding in temporal as well as in spiritual matters. He can sharpen the intellect. He can give tact and skill. Put your talents into the work, ask God for wisdom, and it will be given you."¹

Building beneath the surface is the most important work that any leader can do.

¹ Ellen G White, Christ's Object Lessons, p. 146

By Lowell C Cooper, General Vice President, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Leadership Development Journal - January 2012
A World of Possibilities

It is canny how ideas converge to capture our attention. Among Heathrow's advertising graffiti last week was the strap: HSBC - the Bank that sees a world of possibilities.

During a training event this month, school governors were introduced to the idea of 'possibility thinking' - what happens when a student believes that they are an A-grade student? What happens when teachers perceive their students worthy of the A-grade? It would appear that the students cease to operate from a basis of fear, or in a spirit of competition, they become adventurous and creative, they begin to live into their possibilities. They live into the person they want to be. Teachers find new respect and passion for those they teach and find common purpose with their students.

Coincidently one of the themes in our Trans-European Division meetings was 'thinking possibilities'. We were challenged to think of 82,000 members all inspired to speak of God's grace, people in twenty nations speaking to needs and conflicts of their communities, we spoke at length of the coming Christ who will overcome in the face of the saga of controversy during the last six thousand years of human history. We spoke with passion about recognising possibilities, gifts for service and leadership, in every person both male and female.

Ben and Roz Zander, in their inspiring 'The Art of Possibility' write as follows:
"The action in the universe of possibility may be described as generative, or giving, in all senses of the word - producing new life, creating new ideas, consciously endowing with meaning, contributing, yielding to the power of contexts. The relationship between people and environments is highlighted, not the people and things themselves. Emotions that are relegated to the special category of spirituality are abundant here: joy, grace, awe, wholeness, passion and compassion."

"You are more likely to be successful overall, if you participate joyfully with projects and goals and do not think your life depends upon them...resources are likely to come to you in greater abundance when you are generous and inclusive and engage people in your passion for life... In the universe of possibility, you set the context and let life unfold."

"The leader of possibility invigorates lines of affiliation and compassion from person to person in the face of a tyranny of fear",... we can exercise this kind of leadership whoever or wherever we are.

Clearly, when we think possibility with respect to our neighbours, we see them not as enemies to be conquered, or heathens to be converted, incorrigible secularists, but people created in the image of God who could grow into disciples of Christ. People like James and John, common fishermen, to whom Jesus simply said: follow me. The same people who years later described the vision of their experience: for we beheld his glory, full of grace and truth.

Thank you for seeing possibility in the people you serve by offering them hope in these times of despair. Improbable, but with possibility!

By Victor Pilmoor - Treasurer, British Union of Conferences of the Seventh-day Adventists

Leadership Development Journal - January 2012
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.

• 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.

• 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/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 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]
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. Our problem is not moral indecision, but moral impotence (Rom 7:21-25).

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.

**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 zakar, 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 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 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!
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 ingratiation. Those who employ this strategy are often masters in the use of sublimecompliments 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 ingratiation 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.