In this Issue

Militant Secularisation Threat to Religion

14 February 2012 London, United Kingdom [BBC News; tedNEWS]

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also in the news

- Meeting Point in Cyprus
- Order of Merit to Jan Paulsen
- World Day of Religious Freedom in Croatia
- Operation Global Rain

features & analysis

- Building Beneath the Surface - The Leader's Inner Life
- A World of Possibilities
- Women in Leadership
- 'Good preaching – What is it?'
- How should we treat the newly elected leader?
Newbold College Joins Two International Associations

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Baroness Warsi, who is Britain’s first female Muslim cabinet minister, went on to write: “You cannot and should not extract these Christian foundations from the evolution of our nations any more than you can or should erase the spires from our landscapes.”

To read the full article please click here. [tedNEWS]
Militant secularisation threat to religion, says Warsi

Britain is under threat from a rising tide of "militant secularisation", a cabinet minister has warned.

Religion is being "sidelined, marginalised and downgraded in the public sphere", Conservative co-chairwoman Baroness Warsi wrote in an article for the Daily Telegraph.

The Muslim peer said Europe needed to become "more confident and more comfortable in its Christianity".

She also highlighted the issue in a speech at the Vatican on Tuesday.

She wrote in the Telegraph that "to create a more just society, people need to feel stronger in their religious identities and more confident in their creeds".

"In practice this means individuals not diluting their faiths and nations not denying their religious heritages."

Baroness Warsi, who is Britain's first female Muslim cabinet minister, went on to write: "You cannot and should not extract these Christian foundations from the evolution of our nations any more than you can or should erase the spires from our landscapes."

'Totalitarian regimes'
She wrote that examples of a "militant secularisation" taking hold of society could be seen in a number of things - "when signs of religion cannot be displayed or worn in government buildings; when states won't fund faith schools; and where religion is sidelined, marginalised and downgraded in the public sphere".

She also compared the intolerance of religion with totalitarian regimes, which she said were "denying people the right to a religious identity because they were frightened of the concept of multiple identities".

Her comments come days after the High Court ruled that a Devon town council had acted unlawfully by allowing prayers to be said at meetings.

'Outdated and divisive'
On Baroness Warsi's article and speech, BBC political correspondent Louise Stewart said it was not the first time a senior Conservative had called for a revival of traditional Christian values.

"Last December, Prime Minister David Cameron said the UK was a Christian country and 'should not be afraid to say so'," she said.

The British Humanist Association (BHA) described Baroness Warsi's comments as "outdated, unwarranted and divisive".

"In an increasingly non-religious and, at the same time, diverse society, we need policies that will emphasise what we have in common as citizens rather than what divides us," said BHA chief executive Andrew Copson.

Baroness Warsi's two-day delegation of seven British ministers to the Holy See will include an audience with Pope Benedict XVI, who visited the UK in 2010.

It is understood it is the first time a serving minister of a foreign government has given an address to the staff and students of the Pontifical Ecclesiastical Academy, the British Embassy to the Holy See said.

This visit marks the 30th anniversary of the re-establishment of full diplomatic ties between Britain and the Vatican.

'No logical basis'
Meanwhile, new research suggests Britons who declare themselves Christian display
Almost three quarters of the 1,136 people polled by Ipsos Mori agreed that religion should not influence public policy, and 92% agreed the law should apply to everyone equally, regardless of their personal beliefs.

It also found that 61% of Christians agreed homosexuals should have the same legal rights in all aspects of their lives as heterosexuals.

And a further 62% were in favour of a woman's right to have an abortion within the legal time limit.

The survey was conducted for the Richard Dawkins Foundation for Reason and Science (UK), which describes itself as promoting "scientific education, rationalism and humanism".

Speaking on Baroness Warsi's comments, Mr Dawkins, former professor for the public understanding of science at Oxford University, told the BBC News Channel: "She is obviously a person who really wants to push religion. "She is not Christian herself but nevertheless she sees religion as a good thing - it doesn't matter what religion as long as there's some religion and that's better than no religion."

"There is absolutely no logical basis for that."

Your comments (1943)

Comments

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Editors' Picks  All Comments (1943)

1569. Alex_S
14TH FEBRUARY 2012 - 12:52  +42
I find the majority of comments on this article very encouraging for the future. In all circumstances now, whether it be work or personal life I very rarely meet people who are religious. People do indeed have the right to believe whatever they want but I certainly wouldn't help any form of growth in religious beliefs and the government certainly shouldn't either.

967. Happyface
14TH FEBRUARY 2012 - 10:38  +144
She misses the point of secularism. It isn't that all religion should be stamped out, it's that in a democracy the government should represent everyone, whichever religion or moral code they subscribe to. It is
preferable to have a government that engages in moral discourse while recognising different positions and beliefs than one that attempts to enforce a single religious doctrine on a people.

912. zee4
14TH FEBRUARY 2012 - 10:30
-158
Those who say religion has no place are wrong and divisive themselves. Secularism is a belief forced on us every day. Those who attack religion (ie Christianity) do so extremely aggressively which often makes me question their argument. If there's no moral 'absolute truth' in life there cannot be a truth there is no absolute truth. The Christians I know love God and love others. That is no crime.

871. crossalways
14TH FEBRUARY 2012 - 10:22
+212
It's precisely because of the predominance of secularism in the UK that has allowed the likes of Warsi to hold the office she does.

To throw religion back in the face of secularism is to deny the tolerance that is the point of secularism.

She needs to rethink.

726. erfalaswen
14TH FEBRUARY 2012 - 9:58
+194
I am a member of a minority religion. If I happen to mention my faith or practice at work, I am cordially reminded to leave my personal life at home. I am happy to do so provided that the same rules apply to all religions. As far as public life goes, religion should be marginal. Worship or religious practice is a private act, it should not have any place in work or in government or in law.

Comments 5 of 19
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Adventist Leaders Visit the President of Poland

14 February 2012 Warsaw, Poland [Andrzej Siciński, AAI; tedNEWS] On 24 January 2012 Mr Bronisław Komorowski, President of Poland, invited to the Presidential Palace representatives from Christianity, Judaism, and Islam for a New-Year meeting.

Christian denominations were represented by members of the Roman Catholic Church, member churches of the Polish Ecumenical Council, the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Pentecostal Church. Judaism was represented by members of the Jewish Community, and Islam, by Muslim Religious Union representatives.

In his address, Mr Komorowski described Poland as ‘a very diverse community of people in terms of language and culture, as well as religion. He focused on the idea of the state as an unhomogenised ‘good community’ which ‘is able to embrace, hold, appreciate and bring out everything that is good in diversity’. Such a community is, on the one hand a reminder of the historical Polish Republic (Rzeczypospolita) of many nations, and on the other hand a challenge for the future, because, he concluded ‘we still have the energy to work for a future in which the community is built on respect for diversity.’

The Adventist church was represented by ten delegates including pastor Pawel Lazar, President of the Polish Union Conference (PUC) and pastor Marek Rakowski, Secretary of the PUC. Pastor Rakowski, when asked about his opinion of the meeting, said:

‘Speaking to such a diverse group of representatives from three major religions was not an easy task, but Mr Komorowski put it excellently, particularly when he was talking about the foundation of the values of faith, on which such a community should be based, without placing Christian values above the values of the other religions.

Referring to the wide inter-religious formula of the meeting Rakowski noted: ‘For me the very nature of the meeting was important. While hosting many significant dignitaries of the religious world, it was very neutral and – in the positive meaning of the word - secular. There were no prayers or rituals which could have caused any discomfort to any of the invited guests’ – emphasised Rakowski.

The Adventist delegation presented to Mr Komorowski a gift of the book The Desire of Ages by Ellen G. White and a series of films on the heroes of protestant reformation.

‘We chose that book’, stated Rakowski, ‘because for us Jesus has the highest value, and it is obvious that if we want to reach prominent people with the gospel, we have to share with them what is most precious to us. The reason we decided to include the films about reformation protagonists, is because it was they who fought for religious freedom and rights to practice and present the gospel. We think that our country and its leaders need to look back at the protestant thread of our history and appreciate its role in shaping and nurturing the values that have their source in God and His revealed Word’.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has been present in the Republic of Poland for more than 130 years and today has about 7,000 members. For more information, please click here www.adwent.pl [tedNEWS]
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Newbold College Joins Two International Associations

13 February 2012 Bracknell, United Kingdom [tedNEWS] Newbold College is now an international member of the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC). This is an association of 600+ small and mid-sized private liberal arts colleges and universities in and outside the United States. “I am delighted to welcome Newbold College of Higher Education into Council of Independent Colleges membership. My colleagues and I look forward to working with you” advised Richard Ekman, President, CIC.

It is good that we have been approved for membership in CIC” said Dr Philip Brown, Principal, Newbold College. “As a member of this association we will share common attributes with other members such as our dedication to teaching, purposefulness about moral and civic values, small class sizes, close partnerships between the campus and its surrounding community, and governing structures that are not part of government” Dr Brown added.

Dr Brown suggested that joining CIC was appropriate for Newbold College at this time, particularly given that the Adventist Colleges Abroad (ACA) Board of Directors voted recently (late October 2011) to welcome Newbold College as an affiliate member of Adventist Colleges Abroad, a consortium of Adventist colleges and universities in the North American Division. “Most of our Adventist colleges and universities in the US are members of CIC” Dr Brown confirmed.

In addition, Newbold College is now an international affiliate of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU), an association of intentionally Christian colleges and universities with 116 member campuses in the US and 69 affiliate campuses located in 25 countries outside the United States.

“I am very pleased to inform you that the Board of Directors of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) approved the staff recommendation that Newbold College of Higher Education be admitted as an International Affiliate of the CCCU effective immediately” advised Paul R Corts, President, CCCU.

In welcoming this news, Dr Philip Brown, Principal, Newbold College said: “It is good to be partnering with an association such as CCCU that shares a commitment to advancing the cause of Christ-centred higher education and to helping institutions like Newbold College transform lives by faithfully relating scholarship and service to biblical truth.” A related benefit for Newbold College joining CCCU as an international affiliate includes the opportunity to participate in a range of special programmes such as governance programmes and programmes for Presidents (Principal) governing board members and other senior administrative leaders

“These are exciting times as we seek to reposition Newbold College as the English-speaking Seventh-day Adventist Christian not-for-profit higher education institution of choice in Europe” Dr Brown added. [tedNEWS]

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Newbold College Joins Two International Associations | TED Adventist

http://www.ted-adventist.org/news/newbold-colleg-joins-two-international...
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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**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]

**youSAY**

Ralf Poehler, Theology Professor from Germany, answers what is theology?

**news quickfinder**

- Militant Secularisation Threat to Religion
- Adventist Leaders Visit the President of Poland
- Newbold College Joins Two International Associations
- Meeting Point in Cyprus
- Order of Merit to Jan Paulsen
- World Day of Religious Freedom in Croatia
- Operation Global Rain
- 'Jesus7' Evangelism
- Reintroduced Law Again
- Jeopardising Status of Some Churches in Hungary
- Sacred Music in Secular Opera Theatre
- How to Read the Bible
- Gold Champs for 2012
- God's Revelation in Albania
- Prayer Initiatives Around the Globe

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Happy Home - Experiencing the Joy - This is a collection of 42 short drama clips in a variety of styles dealing with Adventist beliefs in a creative...

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

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As part of the General Conference Revival and Reformation initiative, the world church's Executive Committee at the 2010 Annual Council held in Silver Spring, Maryland, United States, voted to make "Operation Global Rain" OGR's 10 days of prayer an annual global event each January.

What is OGR? Church congregations, small groups, or individuals set aside one hour each day to pray together. Individuals are encouraged to pray by themselves or with a few friends if they are not near a participating church. During the hour of prayer each day, short sentence prayers are encouraged so each person can pray more than once and should be based on the Word of God.

Many churches and individuals joined the initiative across the Trans-European Division (TED). "Operation Global Rain may be a worldwide initiative, but it is only when it takes place in my heart and life that it makes a difference," states Pastor Victor Hulbert, Communication and Media director for the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the UK and Ireland. He is not alone in those sentiments. Thousands of church members across the country, and millions around the world, are joining an initiative that helps focus our minds for the year ahead. Many churches are opening nightly for special times of prayer, but more importantly, individual members are spending time praying for themselves, their families, and specific neighbours or work colleagues who need to know Jesus.

Vili Costescu of Newbold church states, "We had our regular prayer meeting tonight and it was such a blessing. I expect great things to happen during these 10 days!" Pastor Weiers Coetser has been coordinating a prayer initiative across the whole of Ireland with different pastors contributing to a daily prayer blog. A young lady on Facebook shared how she is not only praying but is restricting her diet during the period, 4 - 14 January in order to focus more intentionally on the things of God.

Dr Bertil Wiklander, TED President states, "that only through humbled hearts, true repentance, and praying together we will experience revival and receive the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to be empowered to reach many people for Christ."

For more information and to join others seeking God’s Spirit in their lives during the 10 days of prayer, January 4-14, 2012, go to www.revivalandreformation.org and click on "Operation Global Rain."
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
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 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 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 personal 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. When we speak of what we ought to do (and we must speak about it), these moral imperatives must issue from our knowledge of what God has done. 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 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 culture, 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 ingratiation. Those who employ this strategy are often masters in the use of subtle 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 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 36-39, 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...
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?


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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.

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