

January 2008

Deconstruction of the E. G. White Statement “the greatest want of the world” as it Relates to Leadership

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Recommended Citation

O'Reggio, Trevor, "Deconstruction of the E. G. White Statement “the greatest want of the world” as it Relates to Leadership" (2008).
Faculty Publications. Paper 16.
<http://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/church-history-pubs/16>

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**Deconstruction of the E. G. White Statement
“the greatest want of the world”
as it Relates to Leadership**

‘The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall” (*Ed 57*).

I would paraphrase Ellen White’s words by saying that, the greatest want of the world is the want of leaders who are not for sale and are not susceptible to bribery and corruption; leaders who live transparent lives and are people of integrity; leaders who are not afraid to identify and name evil for what it is; leaders who carry out their duty with a solemn sense of responsibility; leaders who are governed by conviction and principle, rather than by public opinion or political expediency.

The world is suffering from a dearth of leaders described in the previous paragraph. This lack of leadership is evident in almost every sphere of human endeavor. Present leaders seem driven by their selfish agenda, seeking only to advance their own interest or those of their cronies at the expense of the people they are leading. Some political leaders engage in negative attacks on their opponents’ character by misrepresenting their opponents words, blaming them for things they are not responsible for and pandering to the extremists of their political base.

Corrupt CEOs bankrupt their companies, but arrange golden parachutes for themselves, while bringing financial ruin to the share holders of the companies that they manage. Religious leaders exploit the fears of their parishioners or TV audience by promising what they cannot deliver. Financial, family, and emotional prosperity are promised to those who donate a faith offering.

These televangelists grow rich from these “faith offerings” of their audiences, which they use to live in scandalous opulence, as evident by their million dollar homes. They preach of faithfulness to God and family while frequently engaging in infidelity to God and their families.

Sport athletes cheat and lie about their achievements by using banned substances and engage in illegal activities to achieve fame and fortune. They do anything to win, for only winning counts.

It seems that most leaders everywhere are susceptible to bribe and corruption. Where are the leaders who are not for sale, those who cannot be bought or sold? The world is searching for men and women who are not mere opportunists, looking for an economic advancement. The Bible says that the “love of money is the root of all evil.” This love of money has led many of our leaders to sell their souls for a few dollars. Where are the leaders who are immune to bribery and corruption?

Leadership has become a lost art. Those who aspire to leadership and become leaders no longer do so because of their ability to inspire and motivate the mass to embrace some grand enterprise, overcome some great obstacle or deal with a national tragedy. These leaders seem driven by their desire for control, power, fame and fortune.

One of the great ironies of leadership is that the most effective leaders are those who had little desire to lead. A. Tozer says it beautifully:

“A true and safe leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead, but is forced into a position of leadership by the inward pressure of the Holy Spirit and the press of the external situation. Such were Moses and David and the Old Testament prophets. I think there was hardly a great leader from Paul to the present day that was hardly a great leader from Paul to the present day but that was drafted by the Holy Spirit for the task and commissioned by the

Lord of the church to fill a position he had little heart for. I believe it might be accepted as a fairly reliable rule of thumb that a man who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader.

The true leader will have no desire to lord it over God's heritage, but will be humble, gentle, self-sacrificing and altogether as ready to follow as to lead, when the Spirit makes it clear that a wiser and more gifted man than himself has appeared”.

Sydney J. Harris supports this thesis by asserting that, “Most men who covet power are unworthy of it. There is one hurdle the human race has rarely been able to overcome: Most men who covet political power are unworthy to exercise it, while those we could trust are not attracted to the exercise of power.... In almost every known human society, the men who rise to power—with few exceptions—display the same tendencies, no matter which party or philosophy they adhere to... The most aggressive and competitive personalities come to control the political machinery; and those who are least competitive or greedy for power do not determine that society’s conduct, especially in the employment of military might...

The crux of the human condition seems to be that the wrong types of men are almost always in charge, because they are take-charge types; while the gentle, the fraternal, the living-and-let-livers become their subjects and their tools almost by default...

Every group tends to let power pass to a “strong” man, but the strong men in history have more often led us to destruction than to reconciliation—until now we face destruction on a global scale, and the dream of fellowship seems further away than ever”.

Where are the leaders who live transparent lives and are people of integrity? The world is in dire need of leaders whose lives are an open book, with nothing to hide. They do not live double lives, nor engage in double talk, nor practice back door dealings. How many of our leaders today present themselves as upstanding public servants but privately are engaged in some

vile, degrading and despicable habit? They make pious speeches, preach powerful sermons, and embrace the public adulation that their office brings, but in their private relations with their families, friends, employees, and parishioners, they are rude, abusive and even cruel.

There is no congruency between their public discourse and private life. They lack integrity and authenticity. There is need for leaders who are not only transparent, but people who are authentic and possess integrity. They are not fakes, but are real people who are not afraid to acknowledge their weaknesses or deficiencies. In the words of William Law, they see themselves as servants of servants who are called to this daily mission.

“Let everyday be a day of humility; condescend to all the weaknesses and infirmities of your fellow creatures, cover their frailties, love their excellence, encourage their virtues, relieve their wants, rejoice in their prosperities, compassionate their distress, receive their friendship, overlook their unkindness, forgive their malice, be a servant of servants, and condescend to do the lowliest offices of the lowest of mankind”.

Where are the leaders who are not afraid to name the evil for what it is? Where are the leaders who have a clear, unadulterated understanding of what evil is and will identify it and fight against it? The failure to name the evil is sometimes a clever maneuver to close one's eyes to the evil or to minimize its terrible impact upon its victims. So adultery is artfully described as an extra-marital affair, lying is called misrepresentations, stealing is called misuse of funds, and racism is described as a social ill. These are all examples of how society uses words to conceal the real character of the evil being described and our leaders are the masters of these artful manipulations that are intended to hide the real nature of their deeds.

Not only do we need leaders willing to name the evil, but leaders who are willing to admit

personal mistakes and errors without any justifiable excuses. Leaders who are willing to take personal responsibility, not just for their successes but also their failures and will refrain from casting blame on others. We need leaders who will speak truth to power without fear of consequences; leaders who will stand for the marginalized and powerless and are willing to advocate for the poor and the downtrodden.

Leadership is about serving others, true leaders are driven by an awesome sense of their responsibility and they carry out their duty with profound conscientiousness. They do not waver in the discharge of their duty and they remain steadfast at their post. They understand the importance of their work as it is expressed in the words of Henry Nouwen, “Christian leadership is called ministry precisely to express that in the service of others new life can be brought about. It is this service which gives eyes to see the flower breaking through the cracks in the street, ears to hear a word of forgiveness, muted by hatred and hostility and hands to feel new life under the cover of death and destruction.”

Such leaders never engage in abuse or misuse of their employees or their organization’s resources. They don’t see their position as one of ownership, but of stewardship. Some leaders are tempted to think that because they have occupied a position for many years and have built up an organization, they own that organization, but this is a fatal deception. They must disabuse themselves of this notion, for they are always managers and stewards and never owners. They have been entrusted a sacred responsibility and their duty is to carry it out with fidelity and faithfulness.

Where are the leaders who stand for the right though the heavens fall, leaders who are governed by conviction and principle rather than by public opinion or political expediency? Everywhere we see the flim flam, jelly-fished, nampy pampy, spineless leaders who are swayed

by the changing wind of public opinion or the latest polling data. They pander to the extremists of their base when it's convenient and in another setting say something else to others. They simply tell people what they want to hear rather than speak the truth.

Where are the leaders of conviction and principle, with rods of steel in their backs? Leaders who are steadfast and unwavering? Leaders who will lead rather than follow, leaders who will provide vision, inspire confidence, arouse passion, ignite enthusiasm, evoke trust and fire motivation?