

NATIONAL PRAYER BREAKFAST 2016: NATIONAL STUDENT FORUM

Notes for David Kilgour

Room 250, Sir John A. Macdonald Building

Wellington Street, Ottawa

17 MAY 2016

Permit me to start with a few thoughts on leadership. I define a leader as a principled person, who wants to make a positive difference daily to his/her community. Christian leaders, like members of other faiths, do our best to apply the tenets of their faith whenever feasible.

Speaking about leadership in general, Has Fazel has described ten errors leaders make. Here are two:

- “Because I am the boss” is not a successful strategy. Good leaders see themselves at the bottom of an inverted pyramid as servant leaders. Very often, the best ideas come from people at the bottom of an organization’s structure because the front-line workers have a better knowledge of those they serve.
- We all need affirmation, praise, compliments. Good leaders understand the power of the personal touch of kindness. They show respect, recognition and spend time with their team. I realize that you will for a time be on the receiving end of others errors; your patience, enhanced by your faith, should assist you to cope with bad leadership when you encounter it with integrity.
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Angela Merkel

In my view, Chancellor Angela Merkel is the best national leader in the world today. You will be aware that her father was a pastor in then East Germany. One of her Bundestag party members has indicated that she told a party meeting that accepting refugees was part of the Christian foundation of the CDU/CSU.

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln in the view of many of us is still the greatest American president. His religious views are of interest among scholars and the public; here is what Wikipedia--which I realize scholars must not cite--says in part:

Lincoln grew up in a highly religious Baptist family. He never joined any church, and was a [skeptic](#) as a young man and sometimes ridiculed revivalists. He frequently referred to God and had a deep knowledge of the Bible, often quoting it. Lincoln attended Protestant church services with his wife and children... several people who knew him personally..(say he) believed in Christ in the religious sense...

The preface of the book, *Lincoln*, by David Donald of Harvard tells the reader that his work pays close attention to his subject’s “unquenchable ambition, to his brain-numbing labor in his law practice... and to his repeated defeats...how often chance or accident played a determining role in shaping his life and emphasizes his enormous capacity for growth, which enabled one of the least experienced and most poorly prepared men ever elected to high office to become the greatest American President.”

Loving Neighbours

Miriam Adeney of Christianity Today reminds us: “...Christians are to love our neighbours. When our neighbourhood expands to include the globe, then we’re called to love globally”. In building respect and

understanding, no-one needs to sacrifice his or her beliefs; it is an opportunity to enrich all our faiths and cultures. Martin Luther King Jr said it well: “unless we learn to live together as brothers [sisters] we will die together as fools.”

For genuine reconciliation and harmony to grow, conflict and hatred must be gently erased and the threads of violence be removed. Miroslav Volf of Croatia in his book, *Exclusion and Embrace*, says: “there can be no peace among nations without peace among religions. Since religious peace can be established only through religious dialogue... reconciliation between the peoples depends on the success of the inter-religious dialogue.”

Faith in Canada 150

Greg Pennoyer of the Canadian think tank Cardus (www.faithincanada150.ca) recently noted: ...For more than 450 years, faith has shaped the human landscape of Canada:...it has given shape to a country that stands apart in a world deeply scarred by conflict, prejudice, and brutality... when Canada began its process of Confederation, we were almost exclusively a house of Christian faith... There were, of course, vibrant and abundant faiths among the many First Nations people across the landmass as well. Where they were not actively suppressed, they were cast out by those going about the business of founding a nineteenth century nation-state.

‘Christianophobia’

According to the International Society for Human Rights, about 80 per cent of all acts of religious discrimination today are directed at Christians, who were estimated by the Pew Forum in 2011 to number about 2.1 billion worldwide.

On the optimistic side, according to author Paul Marshall, Latin America is now one of the regions where people are most free to practise their faiths. The countries of central Europe have in recent years been largely spared religious persecution. There are many religiously free countries in Africa and among Asia-Pacific nations. Marshall adds, “...South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, South Africa, Botswana, Mali, and Namibia are religiously more free than France and Belgium...”

Open Doors, a Christian organization, publishes an annual listing of countries where people are least free to follow their faith. At the top is North Korea, followed by Iran, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, the Maldives, Yemen, Iraq, Uzbekistan, Laos and Pakistan.

What Ottawa and other governments might do:

1. Democratic governments should make trade/investment/aid to offending governments conditional at least in part on the protection of the freedom of conscience and worship for all citizens.
2. While we continue to grapple with the worldwide persecution of religious minorities, democratic governments must do more to incorporate peace and tolerance into the fabric of their societies and continue to protect their own spiritual minorities so that they can worship, live and work freely, without fear.
3. Countries should steward their political resources for effective lobbying. We need coordinated religious freedom advocacy by our diplomatic missions in countries of concern and MPs on anti-religious freedom laws. Government officials should engage in continuous conversations on behalf of voiceless religious communities and individuals.

There is probably a greater need for committed Christians and members of other spiritual communities today than at most other points in human history. Christians and other faith community members can act

as a brake upon forces that threaten to overcome civilization. Our lives must somehow manage to remind others that there is a Redeemer for our "tormented public and private world."

'Eating Tears'

The New Testament holds up a church which exists primarily for the sake of non-members. Many churches across Canada have enormous outreach in their communities; they are involved in shelters for the homeless, ministries to street people, safe places for abused women and food banks to name only a few. Many are impressed with the work of L'Arche founded by Canada's Jean Vanier.

The late Henri Nouwen of Toronto's L'Arche community wrote often about lonely, abandoned, unloved people. He spoke of a young minister who had nothing to offer an old man facing surgery except his own loving concern. "No man can stay alive when nobody is waiting for him," he wrote. All of us can fulfil this role of eating tears for someone.

Nouwen moved from teaching at Harvard to L'Arche in Toronto. In his book, *In the Name of Jesus; Reflections on Christian Leadership*, Nouwen offers three principles learned from living in community at L'Arche. He felt Christians in leadership need to move from:

- the need to be relevant - to the discipline of contemplative prayer,
- the need to be popular, spectacular, individuals - to the disciplines of confession, forgiveness, community, and
- the need to be powerful in leadership - to the discipline of allowing ourselves to be led and to be guided by theological reflection.

The Christian writer Philip Yancey thinks parish churches should ideally be "God's neighbourhood bar, a hangout like the television show Cheers for people who know all about your lousy boss, your mother with heart trouble ..., and the teenager who won't do what you tell him; a place where you can unwind, spill your life story, and get a sympathetic look, not a self-righteous leer."

No-one can be a Christian alone for long. Parish churches exist primarily to worship God; His reconciling love transcends all differences of nationality, race, age and gender. In the words of Blaise Pascal, "the real strength of Christianity is that it is adapted to all."

In closing, permit me to suggest that one area where Christian lawyers could provide special leadership is in combating all forms of human trafficking. If you want a place to start, read Thomas Schirrmacher's *Human Trafficking: The Return to Slavery*. The final chapter is on what individuals everywhere can do against this scourge.

Thank you.