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# LEADERSHIP TRAINING FOR A PLURALISTIC AGE

by  
*Errol E. Joseph*

**P**luralism is one of the critical issues of concern to theological educators as they seek to prepare leaders for the twenty-first century (Hough 8). This essay is designed to reflect on the nature of this pluralistic age in which we live, and to consider the implications for our task of leadership training. In so doing the paper will focus on leadership training within the context of evangelical Christianity and especially as it relates to the role of theological educational institutions in this endeavour.

## **This Pluralistic Age of Ours**

Timothy Erdel introduces his discussion of the fact of pluralism in a paper presented to the Eleventh Biennial Meeting of the Caribbean Evangelical Theological Association in San Juan, Puerto Rico in 1993 by noting the diversity of humanity.

Ever since Babel the world has been sharply divided. Today there are well over 5,000 living languages . . .

When one adds the barriers of geography and boundaries of politics, the clusterings of clans, Tribes (sic), and ethnic groups, the endless layers of social stratification, including economics and education, the myriad permutations of culture, the arbitrary racial distinctions and the accidental ones of gender, temperament and talent, one is almost surprised to find any larger cohesion at all (Erdel 2).

There is little doubt that pluralism is the mark of our age (Nicholls 9).

Hough defines pluralism, in the context of theological education, as "simply to mean that we are existing in the time when there are emerging some strong challenges to the knowledge paradigms that have governed our

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This paper was presented  
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Montego Bay,  
March 1997.*

research and discourse since the eighteenth century” (Hough 11). He identifies at least four different kinds of pluralism and diversity within theological educational institutions: (a) Diversity of theological orientation, (b) Sociological diversity, including gender, age, and ethnicity, (c) Methodological and epistemological diversity with a new emphasis upon the context-based approach to truth and moral judgments as in liberation, feminist, Asian and black theology, and (d) Religious diversity (Hough 8-11).

Bohen speaks of a pluriform world marked by four significant currents of change. The first current is a growing awareness of our place within a global context. We live in

a world in which relatively separate entities — nations, religious groups, political blocs — are coming into closer contact with one another. We are growing in awareness of living in a global village, on one planet, and our churches are moving warily toward . . . a world church (31-32).

The second current is “a sharpened sense of the variety of religious traditions as we come into closer contact with those of other faiths” (Bohen 31). This is due to the movement of peoples, and conversions among formerly uniform ethnic religious groups, so that lines are beginning to blur (Bohen 32).

The third current is “an increasing moral discomfort with the inequalities and injustices we are beginning to see as never before” (Bohen 31). This is aggravated by the fact that “we are less reluctant to question authority” and “to see through the manipulations used by those in power to remain in power” (Bohen 33).

The fourth current Bohem identifies is “a hesitant, but insistent questioning of what we once held as absolute visions and values” (31). This results from what is seen as a growing awareness of our own biased perceptions of reality (Bohen 34).

Heim identifies some of the influences which form the basis of the foregoing developments when he observes that

the growth of information technology, the increased accessibility to travel, the influx of peoples and cultures into North America [and to the West in general], the rise of independent, postcolonial nations in Africa and Asia [and Latin America and the Caribbean] . . . only reinforce the sense of a shrinking world (10).

It is these developments which have given rise to the concept of the “global village” and, for some, the “global office.”

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It is evident that the Caribbean is not exempt from these developments. Erdel rightly observes, following his description of the diversity of the world in which we live, that "the Caribbean is in many ways a microcosm of such diversity" (Erdel 2). The reality of Caribbean pluralism is further underscored by Mulrain who writes concerning the pluralism within our world in his introduction to a collection of papers presented at an ecumenical conference on Popular Religiosity:

No longer can we . . . speak of just one group, of one race, of one culture, of one religion. On the contrary, there are several within the Caribbean. This fact has been known for centuries given that its history has been one of movement from being a group of Amerindian tribes, to a slave society and eventually to self-governing and independent entities. The mottos from the various countries of the region reflect attempts to come to terms with this plurality of people, races, cultures and religions and the need to create a unity. Mottos say such things as: "together we aspire, together we achieve," "one nation, one people, one destiny," "out of many one people" (1-2)

It was an apparent recognition of this same complexity that led Bishop Desmond Tutu to describe the twin island republic of Trinidad and Tobago as a "rainbow country." It would not be inaccurate, in my view, to label the age in which we live similarly a "rainbow age."

These writers draw our attention to the complexity of the world in which we live, both internationally and in the Caribbean. They focus on major elements of the pluralism of this age including language, geography, politics, ethnicity, social strata, economics, culture, gender, temperament, talent and religion. Diversity of worldview and ethical positions might also be added to this list.

An examination of various discussions of pluralism (e.g. Bohen, Erdel and Thompson) indicates that there are at least two basic approaches to the issue. The first is a descriptive approach. For these persons pluralism is viewed as a reality of the world in which we live. A reality with which the church must come to terms. Hence the words of the World Evangelical Fellowship's Declaration of Manila:

We live in a pluralistic world. There have always been many different cultures, languages, worldviews, moral codes, scientific systems, and religions. What is new is the modern world in which religions must live side by side in non-traditional combinations. And what is new is the extent to which many people are aware of alternatives, both in their immediate context and in the larger world (Declaration of Manila 1).

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Erdel (2) and Hough (11) make similar observations.

The second approach is an ideological one which views pluralism as a vision and a process that society and the church must actively pursue. Such is Westerhoff's definition of pluralism as "a social order founded upon the principle of harmonious interaction, for common ends, among various distinct communities, each of which possesses both identity and openness" (Westerhoff 338). Pluralism is a desirable social goal to be pursued.

It is the former approach that is taken in this paper. Given the reality of the fact that we live in a pluralistic age, how are we to approach our task of leadership training?

One final observation is important before we address the matter of leadership training. That is, Christianity itself is not a monolith. There is a pluralism that exists within the church as well. This pluralism exists in at least two ways. First, there is an inter-church pluralism. Erdel summarizes well that Christian theology is split

between Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian traditions, between East and West, between Rome and Protestants, between Lutherans, Calvinists, Arminians, Anglicans and Anabaptists, between formal established churches and dissenting, free, pietistic ones. The evangelical revivals, the rise of Methodism, and the Holiness, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Third Wave, and Restorationist movements, to say nothing of classical liberalism, neoorthodoxy, fundamentalism, and Vatican II (3).

Even within evangelicalism this diversity is not eliminated. Among those who consider themselves evangelical, there are differences of polity and liturgy; there are differences concerning the role and place of women in the church, and numerous other differences. Heim acknowledges this diversity when discussing the various approaches to globalization within the Christian community (12-18). So, too, do Taylor and Bekker's typology of approaches to intercultural communication (57-80).

Second, there is an intra-church pluralism. This exists because there is diversity within each church group and each local church. Due to the same influences noted earlier, every church community is becoming more and more marked by sociological diversity evidenced in gender, age, class, cultural, ethnic and other categories of diversity. This is decidedly so in the Caribbean church given the peculiarities of the historical and social development of the Caribbean region. Pluralism is thus a reality both within (interchurch and intrachurch pluralism) and beyond the church (extrachurch pluralism). This is the reality with

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which the church in general, and our institutions of leadership training in particular, must come to terms.

## **Implications for Leadership Training**

This state of pluralism has serious implications for leadership training. Consider, therefore, a leadership training paradigm, a leadership training programme and a leadership training curriculum.

### **A Leadership Training Paradigm**

Writing concerning the educational needs of youth ministers, Dave Rahn identifies three essential areas of preparation: Christian maturity, youth ministry understanding and youth ministry competencies (Rahn 1996). In so doing, Rahn points to three axes essential to the training of leaders for any area of responsibility within the church. These are Character Development (Christian maturity); Requisite Knowledge, which includes both theoretical and theological grounding (ministry understanding) and Requisite Skills (ministry competencies).

A study of leadership recruitment and training in the Bible reflects these same axes. In Exodus 18:21, for example, Moses was to select as leaders “capable men [i.e., skills] . . . men who fear God [i.e., knowledge & character], trustworthy men who hate dishonest gain [i.e., character]” (NIV). Paul, in outlining the qualifications of bishops in 1 Timothy 3:1-7 mentions the same three areas. In terms of character, the bishop must be

above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable . . . not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money . . . must have a good reputation with outsiders . . . (1 Timothy 3:1-7 NIV).

That he must “not be a recent convert” (v. 6) implies certain knowledge. In terms of skills he must be “able to teach” (v. 6) and have managerial skills derived from the management of his own family (vv. 4-5).

Gangel conducted an inductive study of leadership throughout the Bible in an effort to arrive at a biblical theology of leadership. At the end of his study he produced the following narrative description of his findings:

Biblical leadership takes place when divinely appointed men and women accept responsibility for obedience to God’s call. They recognize the importance of preparation time, allowing the Holy

Spirit to develop tenderness of heart, and skill of hands [i.e., skill]. They carry out their leadership roles with deep conviction of God's will, clear theological perspective from His Word, and an acute awareness of the contemporary issues which they and their followers face [i.e., knowledge]. Above all, they exercise leadership as servants and stewards, sharing authority with their followers and affirming that leadership is primarily ministry to others, modeling for others and mutual membership with others in Christ's body [i.e., character] (Gangel 1991, 30).

Gangel's description may be considered a comprehensive definition of Biblical leadership. A close examination of this description reveals the same three pivotal axes of character development, requisite knowledge, and requisite skills.

Literature in the field of leadership training and development supports the three-pronged approach that has been proposed. Klopfenstein presents a select bibliography on Christian leading. This bibliography consists of approximately 49 titles primarily authored by and directed toward Christians (33-53). On the basis of Klopfenstein's annotations, this literature on leadership training and development can easily be grouped into one or more of the three categories of requisite leadership character (10 titles), requisite leadership knowledge (12 titles), and requisite leadership skills (14 titles). Thirteen titles relate to two or more of the above categories.

One approach to the consideration of leadership training for this pluralistic age, derived from the above discussion, would be to ask ourselves three key questions: (a) What kind of character will leaders require to lead effectively in this pluralistic age? (b) What knowledge will leaders require to be effective in this pluralistic age? and (c) What kinds of skills will leaders require to be effective in this pluralistic age? The answers to these questions must then be translated into the curriculum of the training institution through a consideration of the implications of each for at least three of the basic elements of the training curriculum: (a) Training Goals, (b) Training Content and (c) Training Methodology. Figure 1 attempts to illustrate this interrelationship of the various elements of leadership training for a pluralistic age.

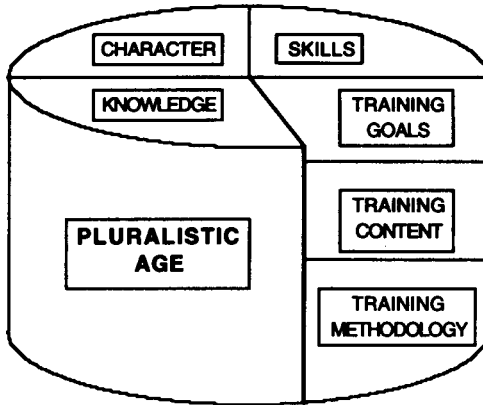


Fig. 1. Proposed Leadership Training Paradigm

## A Leadership Training Programme

Let us examine some suggested elements of a programme of leadership training for a pluralistic age. In doing so, each of the three critical questions mentioned above will be considered in turn.

### Requisite Character

First, what kind of character will leaders require to lead effectively in this pluralistic age? The following are some of the more critical leadership character traits.

The first trait is *global outlook*. By this is meant an awareness and interest in global issues. Heim argues that globalization should become a part of the core curriculum. At the very least this would mean “bringing the study of other cultures and their worldviews, as well as varieties of world Christianity (past and present), into the experience of all students and teachers. The practical intent of such study would be “to learn to articulate Christian faith in sympathetic interaction with a whole system of symbols and concepts which come from another tradition” (Heim 28). Leaders who will function effectively in a pluralistic age must have worldwide sensitivities and be willing to take on all kinds of new issues (Taylor and Bekker 82).

A second critical trait is *conviction*. That is an understanding of and a commitment to one’s own particular uniqueness and one’s own particular beliefs. The Scriptures speak of a core of truth which is called “the faith” (Jude 1:3). This faith finds its unique expression in different



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cultures and traditions. Our leaders must develop intellectual, spiritual and practical apprehension of the Christian faith, so that they can become skilled inhabitants, interpreters and leaders within the Christian world of meaning (Hewitt et al., 108).

MacRae rightly affirms that

there is really no need to abandon, for example, the truth claims made for Jesus Christ in order to be seen to be accommodating of other views. It is surely possible to accept others, without endorsing their views . . . I can find no way of accommodating their value systems as equal to the Christian view, if the cost of such accommodation is the abandonment of the uniqueness of the gospel, and of Christ. Many moral ideas we share with others, but the Incarnation of Truth in Christ is non-negotiable (MacRae 45).

The task of leadership training for a pluralistic age is to encourage both the development of self-identity and the search for commonness. Tarasar observes that “it is in possessing our own particularity that we come to feel at home with ourselves and are best able to enter into communion with others, freely giving and receiving of each other” (Tarasar 202).

*Openness* is a third character trait needed by leaders in this pluralistic age. Openness includes an appreciation and value of diversity and a willingness to accept others who are different from us. The Biblical terminology for that kind of attitude is love (agape). This is the unconditional love of God that reaches out to the whole world (John 3:16). Leaders for this age must accept that God desires diversity in His world (witness the diversity of Creation in Genesis 1) and “therefore affirm freedom of conscience, practice, propagation, and witness in the areas of culture, worldview, scientific investigation, and religion” (Declaration of Manila 1).

Such an acceptance of diversity, pluriformity and difference is a necessary first step toward unity and community in this pluralistic world (Bohen 39). Leaders must thus be able to rise above parochialism and a centripetal understanding of the world and

must move toward a world in which it is possible and permissible to speak honestly about our deep beliefs, doubts and hopes, and listen as others do the same, in the spirit of evangelical simplicity and boldness (Bohen 39-40).

Openness requires a posture of humility on the part of leaders. This humility will involve

subjecting one's faith, one's scholarly work, one's teaching and preaching, one's hermeneutical principles, and one's most precious loyalties to tests that one cannot control—to the judgment and evaluations not only of peers but of people who share little or nothing of one's religious commitments, gender, class, race, culture, or civilizational history (Stackhouse 215).

Such humility is born out of the recognition that no individual or group can claim to be the repository of all truth.

Both the maintenance of one's convictions and openness require *courage*. This is a fourth character trait required of leaders for a pluralistic age. It is in the pluralistic milieu of first century Corinth that Paul writes "Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage" (1 Corinthians 16:13).

Because of the global nature of many of the problems faced in our world, the capacity and willingness to engage in *cooperative effort* is a fifth desirable character trait for leaders. According, to Hewitt et al.,

Formation for ministry that will be global, liberative, reconciling, and kenotically evangelistic would aim to nurture women and men who know how to cooperate and foster community; who can deal with diversities and changes which may challenge their own faith. We also need a training that turns the minister from an inward-looking pattern of service to a congregation to one who would be able to work with others to look outward to see where God is at work, "reconciling the world to himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19 NIV) (Hewitt et al., 109).

## Requisite Knowledge

The second critical question is, What kinds of knowledge will leaders require to lead effectively in this pluralistic age? Two broad areas of knowledge are considered essential for effective leadership in a pluralistic age.

The first is *cultural literacy*, i.e. an awareness and appreciation for other cultures and religions. This would require "bringing the study of other cultures and of varieties of world Christianity (past and present) into the experience of all students and teachers" (Heim 28). Emphasis also needs to be placed on the study of the worldview of different cultures (Heim 28). This might be achieved through courses such as Intercultural Studies & Comparative Religion.

Hewitt et al. see the need for the addition of new subjects to the curriculum such as economics, sociology, politics and the study of non-Christian religious traditions (110). They also see the need to make more normative the exchange of students between different countries and cultures, together with their immersion in deprived areas of their own societies (Hewitt et al., 110). One possible means of facilitating this interaction is the encouragement of more cross-cultural exchanges.

The second area of knowledge is *theological grounding*. Matsuoka advances that "Life in a pluralistic world is not simply a sociological or political fact, but really a theological decision" (Matsuoka 43).

Among the several theological concerns which need to be addressed is a theology of uniqueness, a theology of pluralism, a theology of culture and a theology of salvation. Questions to be considered include: How does God view the uniqueness and pluralism in our world? How are theology and culture related to each other? Is the Christian revelation for all people, or are there others that are equally valid? Is salvation to be found solely in the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ? Is Jesus Christ still unique in a pluralistic world? These latter Christological issues are the central theological questions of our times (Nicholls 11).

Nicholls underscores these issues and expands upon them when he proposes seven theological tasks evangelicals must address in this pluralistic age. Nicholls' tasks include: (a) The issue of Christology, (b) Understanding the uniqueness of salvation in Christ in the context of religious pluralism, (c) A prophetic response to the social issues of violence, poverty, corruption and oppression, (d) Personal and social ethics, Christian community and lifestyle, (e) The theological foundations for Christian environmental stewardship, (f) The unity and diversity of the Church and her agencies in Christ's mission, and (g) The church's response to political power and to religious persecution (Nicholls 13).

An adequate theological foundation in this pluralistic world must also address issues of bibliology and apologetics. Furthermore, it must address the epistemological question regarding the sources of and approach to theology. Should we approach theologizing from above (*theoria*) or from below (*praxis*)? Should we seek to maintain a creative tension between the two as Nicholls recommends (12)?

There are also questions of practical theology. Will we cooperate with those of other faiths where we share common social and other goals? In what ways and on what basis? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such cooperation?

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## Requisite Skills

The third critical question is, What kinds of skills will leaders require to lead effectively in this pluralistic age. Three critical skills are suggested:

Leaders should develop skills in *dialogue*. By dialogue is meant free and open interaction without prejudices or pressures of any sort. This dialogue should be born of a desire to understand and relate to others who are different from us.

Hewitt et al. adapt the suggestions of Konrad Farner for the Marxist-Christian dialogue in outlining five conditions which will make dialogue possible with those who share our world but not our faith:

1. Mutual Respect.

The underlying attitude of dialogue must be the mutual respect that comes with the assumption that each has much to gain from carefully listening to the other and honestly confronting the challenge which the other's questions represent (Hewitt et al., 98).

2. Informed Knowledge. Including literacy in other cultures, faiths, and worldviews and "an awareness of the existence of others, of their struggles, and their values" (Hewitt et al., 99). These are viewed as priorities for theological education.

3. Recognition of the Multi-Dimensionality of the Other's Situation. We must

avoid isolating dimensions of another's experience which for one or another reason is especially interesting or useful for ourselves as Christians. We also must avoid the pitfall of dividing ourselves into neat compartments which rescue us from the challenge which the other places at our feet (Hewitt et al., 101).

4. Practical Consequences. "Dialogue is not merely an intellectual endeavour . . . The consequence of dialogue must be cooperation and solidarity" (Hewitt et al., 101).

5. Recognition of Unanswered Questions.

The starting point for dialogue is that growth and maturity is gained through heeding the unanswered questions which exist on both sides of the dialogue . . . Thus, rather than fearing weak points in our arguments or the scandals of our past, in dialogue we seize on these and their reflection in the eyes of the other in order to take stock of ourselves and our faith (Hewitt et al., 102).

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The communication of the Gospel, especially through proclamation, has always been a central activity of the Christian community (Acts 1:14-40; 8:4-5; 17:23; Rom. 15:19; 2 Tim. 4:17). Skill in *proclamation* thus becomes a priority. MacRae views the central task of proclamation, in terms of contemporary multiculturalism, as being

to communicate the word of God, which is revealed, expressed and understood in the self-revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and which is, in essence, a message of reconciliation, expressed in the love, forgiveness and acceptance of God (47).

Furthermore, he advances that the soteriological principle, which is at the heart of reconciliation, provides a “ready basis for developing an approach for ministry in a multicultural context, and the proclamation shaped by it” (MacRae 48).

Furthermore, proclamation goes beyond verbal preaching of the Gospel to include the

acting out of the gospel in terms, for example, of a life in which God, rather than worldly wealth or power, is worshipped; a life of solidarity with powerless people rather than with rulers; of cooperation rather than competition; of peacemaking rather than aggression (Hewitt et al., 96).

MacRae sees three essentials for effective proclamation in a pluralistic world. These are (a) Proclamation must be shaped by the soteriological principle of reconciliation. (b) Proclamation must not diminish the claims of Christ, but must reflect our deep and real conviction in a spirit and with words that convey the message of reconciliation to those of different religious milieus by adequately representing the love, forgiveness and acceptance of God. (c) Proclamation must speak with relevance to all forms of pluralism including cultural pluralism, social pluralism, moral pluralism, and the pluralism of sub-cultures, such as the youth culture, the drug culture, and the drop-out culture (MacRae 48-50).

The related skills of exegesis, interpretation and application provide the basis for effective proclamation. Nicholls observes that our task is to

exegete correctly the revealed Word of God in its own cultural context and to interpret it through the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, so that it speaks authentically and authoritatively to the issues of our time (Nicholls 11).

Sensitivity to the pluralistic context in which we function would also mean that the form in which the Gospel is proclaimed will change in response to the changing context. Leaders should thus be skilled in the *contextualization* of the message of the Gospel.

Hesselgrave and Rommen offer a comprehensive definition of contextualization as

the attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God's revelation . . . and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts. Contextualization is both verbal and nonverbal and has to do with theologizing; Bible translation, interpretation, and application; incarnational lifestyle; evangelism; Christian instruction; church planting and growth; church organization; worship style—indeed with all those activities involved in carrying out the Great Commission (Hesselgrave and Rommen 200).

Viewed more simply however, contextualization is merely an attempt to communicate the Gospel in a more understandable, culturally relevant form (Hesselgrave and Rommen 2). This is not anything new. It is the precise method and challenge of the early New Testament church which was born into, and ministered in, a pluralistic milieu. This is likely the challenge to which the apostle Paul refers in I Corinthians 9:19-23. Fig. 2 outlines the training programme discussed.

### LEADERSHIP TRAINING PROGRAMME

<b>CHARACTER</b>	<b>KNOWLEDGE</b>	<b>SKILLS</b>
Global Outlook	Cultural Literacy	Dialogue
Conviction	Theological Grounding	Proclamation
Openness		Contextualization
Courage		

**Fig. 2. Proposed Leadership Training Programme**

### A Leadership Training Curriculum

As observed earlier, the three-pronged approach to leadership training must be articulated with the basic elements of the training curriculum. The three elements we shall consider are training goals, training content and training methodology.

Figure 3 illustrates the interconnection of these elements.

### LEADERSHIP TRAINING CURRICULUM

	Training Goals	Training Content	Training Methodology
Required Character			
Required Knowledge			
Required Skills			

Fig. 3. Leadership Training Curriculum

The fact that we live in a pluralistic age means that our training goals must go beyond equipping students with the kinds of knowledge and skills to function as leaders in a particular denomination. They must include the goal of training leaders to function in a very diverse setting. The requisite character, knowledge and skills that we have outlined earlier provide a helpful basis for arriving at training goals for a pluralistic age.

The foregoing discussion of character, knowledge and skills may also provide a basis for the selection of training content. Some specific course offerings were suggested as well. One further note is that this pluralistic age requires that the relevant content not be a peripheral extra. It must be an integral part of the core curriculum.

Training methodology is a third important element of the training curriculum. The methodology of leadership training that will prepare persons for a pluralistic age should, firstly, be one that *communicates and models openness*, along with the other character traits mentioned earlier. To achieve this emphasis will have to be placed on strategies that model engagement and interaction as opposed to declaration.

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The methodology of leadership training for a pluralistic age, secondly, should be one that *emphasizes cooperation* rather than competition. The diversity of our world will sometimes require leaders to work together with others who are very different from them. It is a recognition of these two methodological principles which elicits the observation that our methodology should lay stress on teamwork rather than individual learning, and on learning together by teacher and student, rather than teaching and learning (Hewitt et al., 110).

## **Conclusion**

Since its founding the church has always been concerned about how its message relates to the context in which it exists. It is patently obvious that the church now exists in a pluralistic age. If the church is to be effective now and in the future it must ensure that it prepares leaders who are equipped to function in this pluralistic age. It is hoped that this essay has been able to suggest some beginning steps in that direction.



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