
INTERPRETIVE LEADERSHIP DURING SOCIAL DISLOCATION: JEREMIAH AND SOCIAL IMAGINARY

MARK LAU BRANSON

Abstract: The prophet Jeremiah worked at the intersection of the seventh and sixth centuries BC. Various empires were reshaping the options available to Judah, and as a series of Judah's kings and counselors made decisions, Jeremiah challenged the hermeneutics of their situation and choices. Mark Lau Branson works with the Jeremiah text and context, creating an interplay with contemporary matters of social dislocation, church leadership, and the more specific work on interpretive leadership. He works with the social and communication theories of Jürgen Habermas and recent leadership frameworks of Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky.

Introduction

Practical theology requires work at the interface of current on-the-ground realities and the embedded theoretical constructs with the texts of our faith traditions. Those texts give us access to earlier on-the-ground situations and their own theoretical resources. When a culture or community experiences major societal shifts that bear on their identity and agency, leadership functions need to adapt or the group's identity is at risk. I believe that North American churches and their leaders need to name and interpret our current social dislocation and the accompanying disorienting challenges. It is expected that leaders might instead work to avoid such challenges, pretend to provide expert fixes, or mangle the tradition in efforts to deflect responsibility. I have found that Jeremiah offers an alternative. Jeremiah consulted neither Ronald Heifetz nor Jürgen Habermas. I enjoy my work in practical theology because I can bring them into

Mark Lau Branson is the Homer Goddard Associate Professor of Ministry of the Laity, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California.