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## RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE: LEARNING LEADERSHIP FROM OUR INTERNATIONAL NEIGHBORS

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During the 2010–11 academic year, nearly seventeen percent of students attending a member institution of the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) were not citizens of the United States. The 2010 Standards of Accreditation from the same organization are replete with expectations that faculty, curricula and other institutional resources build an awareness of globalization. Most of these ATS schools have cross-cultural requirements that include experiences, many of them international, to broaden the student's worldview, and theological education faculties are being called to a richer understanding of the world's cultures. That is why the theme for the Spring 2011 meeting of the Academy of Religious Leadership emerged as "Religious Leadership in Global Perspective."

Religious leaders have navigated boundary crossings for centuries, sometimes in peaceful mission, sometimes in conquest. Until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the crossings often mixed religion and politics as dominant cultures stepped into new, often less powerful, regions. The modern mission movements, beginning in late 1800s, broadened theological perspectives and intensified the need for listening to the diverse cultural expressions of faith around the world. These movements included the 1910 Edinburgh Missionary Conference, the International Missions Council and eventually the World Council of Churches.

In the international students we welcome on American campuses today, we witness the beauty of

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God's activity in new accents of faithfulness. From them we learn the depth of love required for *acompaniment* ("walking with the poor" – Mexican student), the taming of *kiasu* ("fear of failure" – Singaporean student) through the gift of faith, the Christian alternative to *candillo* ("authoritarian power" – Ecuadoran student) and the spiritual implications of *Ubuntu* ("connectedness, community" – African student). As we enter into generative relationships with saints from beyond our own regions, our own faith, and social identity expand.

In the following pages you will find four perspectives on learning from our international neighbors. Dr. Carlos Cardoza-Orlandi of Southern Methodist University describes an odyssey of traversing frontiers with his article "What Does it Take to Learn Leadership Across Cultural and Religious Boundaries?: Perspectives, Observations, and Suggestions from a Cross-cultural Location." Since crossing boundaries results in encounters of difference, the author advocates the use of testimonies, "biographical engagement in the complex dynamics of communities seeking sustainability, dignity of life, and the basic needs for a simple but fruitful living." These shared stories help to care for the power differentials experienced between cultures.

Professor Cardoza-Orlandi uses three case studies to illustrate the spanning of margins. The first highlights the contextualization of the Gospel in the Disciples of Christ in Puerto Rico in the first half of the twentieth century. The second captures his experience of the work of CRREDA at the Mexico-Arizona border as they offer life-saving water stations and rehabilitation to migrants. The third case depicts "the return effect" – "an ambiguous yet strong state of being and reflection generated by an encounter with something new and unexpected, yet embodied in and perceived as something known, that challenges who we are, the way we live, and the order of our worldview and existence" – through the eyes of one of his students.

Drs. Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martínez provide insights from international scholars, as well as their own wisdom, in “A Practical Theology of Leadership with International Voices.” Using Freire and selected writers, many of them outside the United States, the authors present a model of practical theology that blends discernment and leadership in a rhythm of praxis, analysis, reflection, story, and reshaping. They illustrate each stage of the model to make the theory more accessible for local congregations.

“The framework of missional ecclesiology creates a nexus that impacts the relationship of a church in context, leaders with participants, and the whole church with the Trinity.” This is particularly relevant for ministry in a land like North America with porous borders. Martinez reminds us that immigrants to the United States are more than “objects of mission...[Their] stories...can help us understand that they are often subjects in mission, particularly to their countries of origin.” Hearing each other’s stories as joint givers and receivers of mission can assist the leader in revising praxis to better serve our ministry contexts.

Dr. Bryan Sims and the Rev. J. Paulo Lopes offer a functional cross-cultural model for leadership development in their article “Spiritual Leadership and Transformational Change Across Cultures: The SLI Leadership Incubator.” Applying Heifetz’s adaptive leadership literature to congregational renewal in the United States and Brazil, they suggest a process for new learning that re-examines existing values and assumptions called the SLI Leadership Incubator. The driving principles for the incubator experience are (1) strengthen spiritual leaders in a covenant community, (2) create space for transformation of individuals and teams in the process, and (3) develop fruit-bearing systems and processes.

Sims and Lopes describe an incubator experience in West Virginia and how the incubator model will be adapted for use in Brazil. The West Virginian incubator focused on issues such as returning to apostolic modes of

ministry that reach beyond the church facility. It also sought to establish a sense of *communitas*, or shared ordeal, that binds individuals to the faith community and orients the community outward to the needs of the world. In contrast, the Brazilian context is seeing rapid congregational growth and will require a shift in assumptions; an incubator implemented in the United States assumes a declining church, but the Brazilian congregation is likely to be vibrant and multiplying outreach. Covenants are more informal in that country, and trust building will require a contextualized approach.

The Rev. Kyle W. Herron's "Embracing the 'Other': Toward an Ethic of Gospel Neighborliness" invites the reader to bridge the fears that separate people from different cultures, ethnicities, traditions and orientations. For too long the Christian faith community has allowed differences to divide. It has failed to speak the Gospel of neighbor to destructive ideologies that "equate Muslims with terrorism, immigrants with illegality and crime and LGBT persons with moral and sexual deviancy." This failure has impacted cultures within and beyond the Church.

Herron bids us to adopt "a Christology that generously embraces our enemies, strangers and sinners." All people are created in God's image and as the other is loved, God is loved; the two acts are interlinked. Christian leaders must implement acts of peace building that welcome and advocate for the others in society as an expression of biblical "neighborliness." By doing so, faith communities around the world will rise to the challenge of Jesus' Good Samaritan parable.

As you hear the experiences of these authors, reconnect with your own story. Join us in the journey of broadening worldviews as we learn from each other. In this era of complexity and instant communication, may the deepening relationships with our international neighbors transform each of us and the people we serve.