
VOLUME INTRODUCTION

LISA WITHROW

The *Journal of Religious Leadership* (JRL) publishes in its fall volume the papers presented at its spring conference, the annual meeting of the Academy of Religious Leadership (ARL). Scholars in religious leadership and practical theology meet alongside professionals serving religious organizations each year to present scholarship focused on a question pertinent to the discipline of leadership studies in current settings and contexts. The 2009 ARL conference entertained the theme, “Leadership and the Margins: Reframing Center-Edge Dichotomies,” with the invitation for participants to think about the impact of human categorizations in terms of particularity and diversity, as well as continuity and change. This intentionally broad question speaks to individuals, communities, and societies in terms of how dichotomous power structures are created and maintained to the detriment of humanity and creation.

Leadership studies encounter these power structures with an analysis of a variety of motives and ethical stances held in their development and maintenance. *Religious* leadership studies engage this conversation by calling for power to be exercised in religiously ethical ways. The content of the works presented here illustrate the many perspectives on power that come together in the academic and professional community for civil discourse, with emphasis on the “other” as a focus for creating new visions of power. Themes of embodiments, attitudes, particularities of stance, relationalities, and learning postures for change permeate this volume of the JRL in the following essays.

Lisa Withrow served as president of the Academy of Religious Leadership (2008-2009) and is professor of Christian Leadership in the Dewire Chair and director of the doctor of ministry program at Methodist Theological School, Delaware, Ohio.

Elizabeth Peterson and Jannie Swart open the conversation with story, testimony, and analysis of ecclesial leadership in post-apartheid South Africa. These colleagues, who lived on opposite sides of racial, class, and gender divides in South Africa during apartheid, together propose that for leaders to have theological integrity in their particular contexts, they must adopt a leadership posture via what the authors define as the “broken ones,” the persons oppressed by apartheid. A phenomenological theology of embodiment with attention to the incarnational suffering and brokenness of God through Christ’s crucifixion provides the theological premise for learning and, indeed, befriending the suffering. This approach to leadership emphasizes a cultural rather than instrumental perspective for leaders. For example, when broken ones are drawn into hegemonic centers of discourse, they create opportunities for transformation by questioning prevailing assumptions and offering alternatives. In other words, according to the authors, a new wisdom emerges in connection with the broken ones; knowledge is created between people rather than through people, thereby developing “structures of belonging.” Peterson and Swart engage in a discussion about phenomenology as a philosophy itself, emphasizing movement away from subject-object to subject-subject relationship where the exercise of leadership takes place mutually, with the possibility of divine revelation occurring in the midst of connection.

The next essay attends to religion’s influence on current United States power structures. D. Michael Lindsay examines American evangelism’s leadership exercising political and social power, which he claims is occurring without a theological framework for managing these leadership roles. Lindsay calls for evangelically-grounded leadership to cultivate a deeper commitment to the common good. In this essay, Lindsay introduces Anthony Appiah’s understanding of *cosmopolitanism*, the intentional interaction or civil engagement with the other while retaining individual, unique identities, as one

component of leadership. Another is community-building by appreciating diversity and particularity of moral resources from different religious traditions, a concept coined as *convivencia*. Lindsay adds discourses on power and public responsibility from Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Reinhold Niebuhr as thinkers who lay the groundwork for cosmopolitan Christianity. Cosmopolitanism, where Christians interact with secular power and authority, retains a commitment to creating cooperative community that lives between individual agency and social structures.

Lindsay concludes that leaders' religious convictions are necessary for pluralistic democracies as resources that have shaped and formed human identity. He compares the evangelical voice to the voices of those advocating for women's suffrage and marching for civil rights. At the same time, people of faith need to seek out perspectives of the other for cosmopolitan and *convivencia* to be realized. The conclusion of Lindsay's essay includes practical suggestions for stewarding public influence and cultural authority with care and generosity.

Another interpretation of the stated theme for the 2009 ARL conference arises in Stephen Sprinkle's work on God of the margins with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) persons who represent embodied theological revelation. Sprinkle uses Genesis 19, the story of Sodom and Gomorrah with particular attention to Lot's wife, as his foundational text for a discussion of a hermeneutical emphasis on the body.

He claims that God may be revealed in and among bodies of strangers, persons, and communities through the lens of queer theology, in contrast to theologies and ideologies of the theological center. First, he rehearses the origins and conflicts of the hermeneutical turn to the body, from the ancient Near East to twenty-first-century theologians; in the theological center, he claims, the body is ultimately inferior to spirit, where flesh finds its meaning. Drawing upon Marcella Althaus-Reid, Sprinkle calls for shocking theology and its superstructures out of myriad ways of keeping the "other" captive. This shock-act is much like Lot's wife turning back toward Sodom

despite all threats and warnings. In a queer reading of the text, Lot's wife turns back to Sodomites as people with an open and respectable spiritual, political, and sexual culture and tradition (as opposed to a patriarchal culture of the God of Lot and Abraham). She defies the patriarchal God and culture of her husband and is therefore embodied as a pillar of salt. Sprinkle's description of queer exegesis challenges center/edge ideologies as neo-colonial. He calls for a marginal God rather than a God at the margins and wonders what this God might look like, especially when God can be embodied in a variety of queer spaces and times.

The next essay discusses the nature of inclusive leadership itself. Transformational leadership and servant leadership provide stances for an inclusive leadership style focusing on human beings versus measurable outcomes, according to Steve Echols. Echols defines inclusive leaders as those who influence the future for the betterment of all by community participation intertwined with individual self-actualization in the midst of a commonly agreed-upon goal or vision. Five critical characteristics apply to inclusive leadership: bringing the maximum number of people to the table, empowering individuals to reach their full potential while pursuing the common good of the group, resisting despotism through a culture that values individual worth, allowing future leaders to emerge, and maintaining integrity of the collective without marginalizing any individual.

Transformational leadership adopts these five characteristics by aligning its own interests with others in a participatory and democratic fashion, while intellectually stimulating followers to become leaders through innovative thinking and creativity. Servant leadership connotes a different starting point: empathizing and listening to the other, to find the purpose and pathway to take mobilizing action for change. According to Echols, each arena of leadership needs the other for inclusive Christian leadership.

Karen Dalton concludes the conversation about reframing center/edge dichotomies with an essay based

on experiential exercises she developed for the ARL conference based on the relationship between power dynamics of center and margin. She inquires about what constitutes effective pedagogy in developing the attitudes and skills needed for ministry and leadership in complex layers of center/margin contexts.

First, Dalton relies on Jung Young Lee for a definition of marginality: being “in-beyond.” “In-beyond” indicates that persons participate in or connect between two or more contexts without being bound by them. Second, Dalton provides an experiential, inductive methodology for experimentation and change in the classroom by engaging the whole person in learning how to live in the disequilibrium of otherness. This laboratory-classroom yields, from Dalton’s experience, new understandings of leadership that are mindful of center/margin issues through practice and reflection. She indicates that finding and claiming one’s authentic voice, while at the same time listening and experiencing the voice of the other, is essential to leadership formation and practice.

These essays form a small body of work that constitutes an important, timely discussion for religious leadership studies for this century. In a globalizing world, at the local market, in the church, and in the academy, complex layers of “otherness” compose the human context. As such, we all are “other” in some way. Intentional study and experience of particularity, diversity, and power are necessary components for a fuller understanding of religious leadership development in today’s world.