

# JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

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## INTRODUCTION

DEBORAH KAPP and LISA WITHROW

*Guest Co-Editors*

The Spring 2012 edition of the *JRL* is the first volume dedicated particularly to women's leadership. This volume offers narratives of women *in* leadership, women's perspectives *on* leadership, and women's responses *to* various leadership roles. Among myriad resources available in secular and sacred leadership studies, few offer women's lenses on the discipline of leadership itself. Those resources that do struggle to identify in a meaningful and significant way specific skills and perspectives that women of color and white women bring to the wider discourse. The particularity of women's voices at the leadership table serves to remind all leaders to attend to social location in the midst of theological and socioeconomic-based teaching and skillful, context-oriented praxis. To that end, the articles and four of the seven book reviews in this volume address the impact of women's leadership in ministry, higher education, the corporate world, and the public arena.

To begin, Ruth Anne Reese observes, "There is no context-free locality from which to reflect on the nature of leadership." Accordingly, she begins her article with examples from her ministry that lead her into the issue of women and leadership. She reflects on leadership as presence and argues that a person's character undergirds the faithful exercise of authority and power. She further examines the importance of support, trust, and interdependence for a leader's right practice.

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Isabel Docampo reminds readers of another essential practice for effective religious leadership: regular, self-reflective, rigorous theological reflection. Docampo understands that religious leadership is essentially a theological task; she calls leaders to engage in constructive theology that is grounded in faith and attentive to the voices of multiple communities and voices while remaining hermeneutically suspicious. Drawing from Latino/Latina theologies, she argues for less absolutism and more hybridity in our theologies and self-understandings.

Sandra Selby adds to Docampo's argument with her article about "Divinely-Centered Leadership." Selby is concerned that religious leaders too seldom engage the everyday life and challenges of the people whom they serve. She argues that church leaders need to engage everyday issues more deliberately and that reflection on meaning making is key to this process. Using her varied background as illustration, she further examines the issue of gender in the workplace as a significant component of meaning making.

Katharine Rhodes Henderson also argues that religious leaders need to be more engaged in the world, especially the public square. Her article identifies the qualities and capacities that public leadership requires in the twenty-first century. Henderson, the president of Auburn Seminary in New York City, anchors her article with personal and institutional history. She concludes with discussions of recent challenges Auburn has engaged and the leadership lessons she has drawn from them.

Diane Zemke focuses her article on an exploration of the presence, practices, and needs of tempered radicals in religious organizations—the faithful members or leaders who are loyal to their organization but whose values or goals are not in complete sync with those of the institution. Zemke attends to the challenges and costs of being a tempered radical. She also explores how churches and other institutions can support the presence of such people in their midst, an important task because it is precisely these tempered radicals who may be able to

ignite or lead organizational change. Zemke, who claims to being a tempered radical herself, uses data from interviews with other women who are tempered radicals to bolster her argument.

Sally Dyck concludes the volume with an article based on personal experience as a pastor and, more recently, a United Methodist bishop. She draws from a variety of resources to reflect on three requirements of religious leadership: courage, imagination, and humility. Her article calls for leaders to engage their work with energy, integrity, and faith.

The seven book reviews in this issue assess a variety of leadership materials, four of which specifically address issues of women in leadership. *God's Troublemakers* and *Women at the Top* profile women who have enjoyed significant professional success and provide insight into how women lead, negotiate challenges to their leadership, and provide models for others. *The Girlfriends' Clergy Companion* and *Dear Church* are autobiographical books that document the varied experiences of some women in religious leadership.

Women leaders featured here, few among many, bring life experience to bear on the study of leadership. Important lessons for women and men from women's hard-earned positions in a world still dominated by men introduce alternative ways of thinking about how and why we lead the way that we do. In particular, women of color remind us of the many lenses required for honest, authentic engagement as the discipline of religious leadership studies and praxis moves into the future.



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**PRESENCE, DISJUNCTION, AND INTENTION:  
A WOMAN'S REFLECTION ON LEADERSHIP**  
RUTH ANNE REESE

**Abstract:** This essay reflects on my own experience of leadership as presence; the disjunction between the perception of leadership roles and the experience and appropriation of leadership roles; and the intentional choice to lead from within a paradigm characterized by virtue and hope. This work also reflects on the context (here referred to as a “tradition”), in which leadership takes place and recognizes that tradition is received and then transformed by one’s participation within it.

*“Tradition is not simply a precondition into which we come, but we produce it ourselves, inasmuch as we understand, participate in the evolution of tradition and hence further determine it ourselves.”<sup>1</sup>*

## **Presence**

This fall (2011), a female student came to my office for a mandatory conversation as part of my institution’s Christian Formation Program. This meeting was our first, and I had never formally met this student. We spent about an hour together talking about Christian formation and what we would do together over the course of her time with us at seminary. At the end of our hour, I said to her, “Do you have any questions for me?” She said, “I don’t see many women who get to the Ph.D. level in biblical studies or theology. Will you tell me your story of how you got to where you are?” And so I did.

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<sup>1</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1975), 261.

A day or two later, a male student came to my office. He had been a member of a large introductory-level course that I had taught the previous semester, and he was now a member of a slightly smaller course I was teaching on the book of Hebrews. He came with two or three questions about the book of Hebrews and about the assignments that were due, but at the end of our time together he asked, "I have one more question, but it isn't related to the book of Hebrews." I gave him permission to ask his question and he asked, "When we don't agree with the biblical text is it okay to say, 'They just got it wrong?'" I thought about that for a moment, and then asked him, "What's making you ask that question?" He replied, "Well, I've been thinking about women in ministry, and I fully support the position that women are called to the ministry, but there are these passages that don't support that position. Can we just say they got it wrong?" In my evangelical institution, such a response is not an option. However, I sat with this student and laid out for him a variety of ways that people have thought about the issue of inspiration, and I spoke with him about how particular views of inspiration lead to particular ways of understanding the authority of Scripture. After I had laid out a variety of options in as unbiased a manner as I could, I told him, "Your question is a very important one because it raises issues around what you believe about the Bible, about God, about the Word-Jesus, and about the work of the Holy Spirit. You'll have to think and read and pray about these things, but I cannot make up your mind for you. You will have to make up your mind for yourself about these things." And, I invited him back for further conversations either this semester or any other time, even if he was not in one of my courses.

These two encounters with students brought me full circle. I remember when I first came to college as a young student of seventeen. At that time, I really did not understand that we addressed our professors as "doctor" because they had done original research in their field and published that research in a dissertation. No one in my



family had a Ph.D. When I first entered college, I never dreamed that I would one day have a Ph.D. Similarly, when I first entered college, I had never met a woman who had been ordained to the ministry. At that time, I don't think I even knew that could happen. The women I knew in my Baptist context who were gifted Bible teachers and communicators were mostly those who had spent their lives working abroad as missionaries. And my view of Scripture, inspiration, and authority did not allow for women to be ordained to the ministry.

When I went to college I had two loves—stories and the Bible. So, I decided to major in both of them: English literature and biblical studies. I discovered almost immediately that at my undergraduate institution these two majors were populated in a very gender distinctive way. While I was at this university, I was one of three females who majored in biblical studies out of some sixty undergraduate majors. I became used to being the only female in many of the upper level courses that I took. I did not think much about this situation, but I also knew that I worked very hard to show that “I was just as good as the guys.” All of my Bible teachers were men. In contrast, my English literature courses often had more females than males, and my courses were equally split between male and female teachers. I did not feel the same need in those classes to “prove myself.” In many ways, the experience I had as a woman in those Bible classes shaped the means that I used to move ahead in the academic system: hard work, determination, and intent to show that I was just as capable as the next guy.

Both of these majors shaped my worldview—my understanding of the tradition I had come from and the tradition I would inhabit. In my upper-level English classes, I first met the worldview-changing experience of hermeneutics. This was my introduction to a variety of literary critics ranging from Aristotle and Longinus to Derrida and Foucault. In upper-level biblical studies classes, I was introduced to the possibility that women might participate in ordained ministry. Still, my understanding of the Bible did not allow for the full

validity of such ministry. At the end of my four years in college, I began to dream about my next step, and I heard about a degree that looked at the Bible as literature. It seemed that this area could be where my loves might meet. But when I talked to my family about going on for more study in this area, at least one person challenged me and asked why I was going to study in that area because “there are not any jobs for women” in that field. Still, I was given the opportunity to go on, first for a master’s and then for the Ph.D. in biblical studies, and my family helped to support me in that endeavor. Far away from the geographical and religious setting in which I had grown up, I encountered, for the first time, ordained women. I lived alongside these women for four years and saw from their lives and from their reading of Scripture (we were all pursuing the Ph.D. together by this time), that these were women who were living out a call of God in their lives. By the time I finished the Ph.D., I could not imagine living in a world where women were not fully supported when they exhibited gifts for ordained ministry and experienced a call to ordained ministry.

Some years later, I was hired as assistant professor of New Testament at Asbury Theological Seminary. One of the attractions of the seminary was that it was a place that explicitly supported the ordination of both women and men. This support was explicit in the foundational documents of the institution. The revised vision statement for the institution states, “Asbury Theological seminary is a *community called* to prepare theologically educated, sanctified, Spirit-filled men and women...”<sup>2</sup> The educational goals of the institution state that the seminary “nurtures men and women called of God for parish ministry and other forms of servant leadership” and that it “prepares women and men for prophetic ministries of redemption and renewal.”<sup>3</sup> In addition, the

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<sup>2</sup> Asbury Theological Seminary, *2011–2012 Catalog*, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Asbury.

seminary explicitly seeks “inclusion of women and minorities on the faculty.”<sup>4</sup> Yet, when one of my female students comes to my office, she can say to me, “I don’t see many women working in biblical studies and theology.” And when I look around at my area—biblical studies—I am well aware that I am currently the only full-time woman working in that field at my institution. And, in this way, simply by being here and doing the work I do and doing it well, I have become a leader—one who demonstrates by the life that I live that women are indeed capable of going on in this particular area of study. My presence is a form of leadership.

## Disjunction

My awareness that presence is a form of leadership is important to me because generally, in my own understanding, I don’t think of myself as a leader. When I think about who I am and what I do, I think about a woman who is generally quiet, reflective, and careful with her words—a person more content with the back row than the front stage. In addition, when I think about the backdrop that forms my view of leadership, I think about presidents and pastors, provosts and deans, and since I am not one of *those* people, I do not think of myself as a leader. Even now, having been appointed as the chair of the New Testament department and having been appointed to chair one of our major faculty committees, I do not think about myself as a leader. Even though “appointed leadership” is part of my traditional script, it is not a script that I appropriate for myself.

I have understood leaders as individuals who led from the front, while I knew myself to enjoy the group where one knew each individual, had an understanding of what made both the individuals and the group tick, and a feel for what might inspire the whole group to rise to the occasion before us. I could not understand myself as a

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<sup>4</sup> Asbury, 17.

leader who was separate from the group even when I was appointed and identified as such. And thus, in my mind, I was not a leader.

The caricature that I had of leadership was one that involved roles, position, and authority rather than personality and character, creativity, an authentic voice, and the capacity to listen. Leaders were those people who stood up and swayed opinions, pressed their ideas and visions forward, gave direction, and had access to budgets. Since I did not do those things or have power over any money other than my own, in my understanding, I was not a leader. But I've come to understand that I am indeed, in my own way, a leader, and that such leadership comes out of the character that has been formed in me and is evidenced in a set of character traits that come to the fore in my own leading. I am becoming a leader who leads out of who I am.

## **Intention**

As a leader, I am located in time, and my presence within time means that I am not static and that the situation around me is not static. And yet, in order to function within time one always works from within a particular, located understanding—a tradition—an understanding of the institution in which one works, an understanding of the self, an understanding of the way the world operates, an understanding of gender. Such a system of understanding is not static like a still photograph; rather, it morphs with the unfolding of time. In this way, understanding itself is not static but changes and is shaped or developed in response to a wide variety of inputs, and this experience shapes one's response to the place one finds oneself and the events happening

therein.<sup>5</sup> This matrix forms the pre-understanding that allows one to operate in the world.

At the same time, this pre-understanding is in constant flux, repeatedly rewritten and redefined, at times by a little tweak or twist or modification to a way of seeing; at other times, the script seems to be so rewritten as to make the former understanding no longer believable. And yet...that former understanding is not dismissed; rather, it is acknowledged as a previous way of being that no longer adequately accounts for the tradition in its current form.

I find myself in the process of moving from one pre-understanding to another. I am aware of leadership as presence; I am aware of the disjunctive thinking I have had about leadership; and I am increasingly aware that I can engage in leadership within my institution in a way that aligns with who I understand myself to be.

*That which has been formed in me:* The matrix of the institution—its commitments to the Wesleyan theological tradition, its attention to corporate worship, its heavy reliance on policies to order institutional life, the informal structures of collegial friendship, its stated support for women, the movement or lack thereof across disciplinary boundaries, its internal and external political struggles, its appointed leadership—forms some of the background that generates my own leadership. There is no context-free locality from which to reflect on the nature of leadership. And it is here that I begin to reflect on the significance of my gender to the manner of leadership that most suits me.

From the very beginning of my time at the seminary, my identity as a woman mattered. Two other women joined the faculty at the same time I did. This event raised the number of female faculty to nine out of about fifty full-time faculty. Only one of the nine women was

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<sup>5</sup> For discussion of the topic of “pre-understanding” and the constructive process of knowing, see Anthony C. Thiselton, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 13–16.

married. None of us had children. In contrast, more than ninety-five percent of my male colleagues were married. The vast majority of those had children. The female faculty welcomed new women to the faculty with joy and with the anticipation of friendship and support across disciplinary boundaries. The eldest among us often told the story of her arrival at the seminary as the first full-time female faculty member and, perhaps more important, of her joy when she was joined first by one more female colleague and then by another.

The female faculty became a network of support in a geographical context where we did not have our own immediate biological family. These women who met together at the beginning and end of each semester for shared meals, celebrations, and storytelling form part of the background for my leadership. These women reminded each other of the ongoing need to raise awareness about the call of women to equal ministry and leadership in the church. These women moved to support our female students in a variety of ways. These women provided a set of relationships in which one could express one's true voice. In other words, these women provided trust, welcome, joy, and sharing. This connection became part of the frame for what I would become and grow into as a leader. Here was a place where each voice was valued, heard, supported, and encouraged. It was not that my voice was not heard in other places—it certainly was, but the voice I spoke with in other contexts was more guarded, controlled, and self-effacing. Those first years at the seminary, I spent a lot of time watching and not very much time speaking.

Early on as a member of several committees and departments in my institution, I observed that there were particular strategies that “won” the day at meetings, and that there were other strategies that produced very little forward movement. At our institution, the person who showed up with a well-constructed written document to distribute to the group almost always succeeded in moving that proposal through the institution with only minor revisions to the document itself. People came to

own their participation in the document by suggesting minor tweaks and revisions to the wording. The wrangling over individual words sometimes seemed interminable. Usually, these changes did not substantially alter the direction of the proposal. On one hand, I observed that this produced material that could help the institution operate; on the other hand, sometimes the larger conversation about vision, dreams, and ideals was cut short by turning our attention to a sheaf of papers. I wondered—sometimes to myself, sometimes to others—whether there could be a better way.

*That which has been formed in me—character:* Be kind. That is: I want to be a person whose character is one of care and consideration for others, and I want to demonstrate this kindness in the manner by which I lead. As a leader, one of the best ways I know to show care for others is by true listening. There are many forms of listening, but what I am referring to here is a listening that is attached to a deep regard for the person who is speaking. I want to listen to others with as much care and respect as I have received from gracious others on more than one occasion in my life. Such listening moves beyond the therapeutic, “I hear what you are saying,” or the summary statement, “What I hear you saying is X.” This listening takes into account the concerns of another in such a way that one is willing to take action on behalf of such a person. Such action may not be the action anticipated by the speaker, but it is action that demonstrates hearing rather than solely speaking a word of affirmation.

In a recent leadership situation, I was the authority appointed to oversee the continued development and revision of a program that had been unanimously voted into existence by our faculty. As it turned out, enthusiasm for the program was not as unanimous as the votes might suggest. Some faculty had voted for the program not because they thought it was a good idea for students, nor because the seminary should focus on it for the next ten years; rather, they voted for it because they thought there was no other option, that failure to support this option

might result in ramifications with external groups that would impinge on the future health of the seminary. In this context, the ability to listen, to really hear the frustration of other faculty members and to address their frustration as a valid concern while still enlisting them as participants in and supporters of the program became a significant task. This task was accomplished with meetings in smaller groups, meetings with large groups over a free lunch, and conversations with key individuals. All of this conversation led to more willingness to work together as a whole faculty even if some still saw the program as flawed in a variety of ways.

As I reflect on this leadership experience, I think about the important book *Women's Ways of Knowing*,<sup>6</sup> which describes “connected knowers”—people who find it easiest to learn and understand through an empathetic relationship with another. Often that other is significantly different from one’s self. The process of learning takes place because: “Connected knowers begin with an attitude of trust; they assume the other person has something good to say.”<sup>7</sup> As a leader, I have generally begun with the attitude that everyone has something to say, and that what they have to say may be a valuable contribution to the work that we will do together. It is challenging to go out of one’s way to try to understand a perspective that is different from one’s own, but it also strengthens the process, as the whole group comes to see the work that they do as belonging to the group rather than to one person’s vision and/or agenda. Similarly, “[c]onnected knowers do not measure other people’s words by some impersonal standard. Their purpose is not to judge but to understand.”<sup>8</sup> From this understanding a

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<sup>6</sup> Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

<sup>7</sup> Belenky, et al., 116.

<sup>8</sup> Belenky, et al.



way forward that includes the whole, or as much of the whole as possible, can be made.

At the same time, it can become clear that further conversation in a given direction will not result in further understanding or empathy. This is particularly true when speech becomes aggressive, demanding, or accusatory. As a leader, it is important for me to be aware of the effectiveness of a soft answer (Prov. 15:1), or a deferral. Not every conversation needs to happen here and now. Sometimes even a pause that admits silence into the room before redirecting the conversation may allow for new direction or a new way of understanding. Not all conversations result in connected knowing; rather, there must be a trust and empathy between the speakers. This development happens over time as a group works respectfully together. On one hand, this trust begins when I as the leader bring together a group and lay the set of problems we need to address before them and then open up a conversation in which multiple possibilities can be explored. On the other hand, the group also places their trust in me—both in the integrity of my character and that I will present the material for review as clearly and carefully as possible.

This approach forms a circle of trust that allows us to hear each other and to move forward in ways that will eventually reach beyond the boundaries of our small group and into the organization itself. Decisions are made in this context that will be brought to the larger institution for consideration. And once again I find myself coming full circle. Now I am the leader who brings a sheaf of papers to the larger meeting for discussion, and there are a few tweaks to the language but mostly affirmation. And I find myself wondering if we have done anything that creates a vision or whether we have just signed a policy that we will work to implement out of duty rather than joy. And in this context, I find myself wondering if we might do it some other way. And I find myself considering the role of care, respect, listening, connecting, and trusting as means of leading in different ways.

*That which has been formed in me—hope:* I find myself more aware of human weakness, fragility, and sinfulness. I see this in my own self and in my very closest relationships. But I am also aware of human resilience and the grace of God that is able to use tragedy and even the manifestations of sin itself for the purposes of God. This grace gives me hope. Without this hope, it would be tempting to think that I must always be in control to make sure that the work gets done right and done well (the old survival strategy coming through). But I am growing in my awareness that even if everything were to come undone—even that can be used by God. This is not an excuse to do poor work but a realization that there is only one ultimate source of good, and that ultimate source of good is neither myself nor my committee nor department nor institution. It is God alone. When I forget that truth, my leadership is no longer hopeful; it becomes anxious, for then my leadership depends on my own performance and abilities. When I remember God's redemptive capacities, then I can dwell in trust and lead from my location within God's hope where Christian character is formed.

## Conclusion

I have come full circle. I am no longer the young college student who knew nothing about Ph.D.s and the place of women in ordained ministry. Now, I am the one who offers to students an example of female leadership. This leadership is demonstrated in a variety of ways: through my presence in a particular field, department, and institution; through my participation in appointed leadership roles; and through my reflection on the ongoing leadership tradition that exists and is being built in my institution. It is my desire to lead in such a way that I reflect the virtues that are formed in me through hope and faith in God.

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# IDENTITY, GOD-TALK, AND SELF-CRITICAL REFLECTION IN RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP: CONTRIBUTIONS FROM A LATINO/A PERSPECTIVE

ISABEL N. DOCAMPO

**Abstract:** Latino/a theology and experience have contributed rich resources about our relationship with God and one another. Examination of these resources across and within diverse racial ethnicities helps us examine the universally accepted claims on God. In this essay, I will offer from my particular Latina perspective ways I believe Latinas/os contribute to a dialogue about effective religious leadership in our current multiracial and multilingual society. My focus is on identity in relation to how we define and know God, and how this in turn shapes our relationships with God and one another in ways that inform our faith practices.

## Identity, God-talk, and Self-Critical Reflection in Religious Leadership

What makes a good leader and good leadership? Most of us know a good leader when we experience one but find it difficult to articulate how to gain that same ability. Leadership is about experience—we learn by doing. However, experience that is not critiqued is unable to teach and correct bad habits. For this reason, seminaries with theological field education programs such as the one where I teach provide several layers of feedback sessions with laity and clergy to help students gain the most from their experience.

Religious leadership, in its assessment of ministry relationships and contexts, must self-reflect about how it embraces the Divine. Hidden from our conversations

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about religious leadership is how our early theological understanding of the Divine's nature and relationship to Creation is shaping and informing our leadership practices. I propose that religious leadership is effective to the degree that it can engage the community in a collective, self-critical theological reflection as a spiritual discipline, from which emerges an ongoing discernment of our theological assumptions of God. These assumptions shape our relationships and our Christian ethics.<sup>1</sup>

Since religious leadership is distilled within the chaos of our lives together, it is important for leaders to understand how identity shapes the faith questions we ask and how we answer them. These questions evoke a re-examination of values, beliefs, and practices. To that end, each challenge before a congregation or community should be guided by these questions: "Who is God? How do I come to this knowledge of God? What is suppressing the reign of God that Jesus taught?" Our identity, context and experience shape our responses. For example, I respond to these questions from the lens of a Latina low-income immigrant, navigating two cultures while experiencing power and powerlessness simultaneously within social realities. Yet I am also shaped by the evolution from that initial label to other identities, never having lost sight of the original lens. I am also Protestant, clergywoman, and middle class, with various levels of power and powerlessness in my current socio-religio-economic relationships. This self-description implies multiple identities and relationships that no doubt inform how I may respond to these questions. The same is true for all of us.

Each group uses its particular identity lens to construct answers to the questions, "Who/where is God?" Awareness of our particular identity lens, however, is insufficient to allow us to understand how we

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<sup>1</sup> Mayra Rivera, "God and Difference," in *Building Bridges, Doing Justice*, ed. Orlando O. Espin (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 41.

come to know God. We must intersect knowledge of power dynamics inherent in these identity relationships and lenses. Awareness of the Caucasian ethnic/racial identity's powerful status as the privileged "universal" or "objective" lens of the God questions is critical. This awareness illuminates how our conceptual notions about God are interrelated historically as a result of the colonization and missionary movements, regardless of whether we claim them.

Religious leadership in a multiracial world, therefore, needs to understand how the historical theology of the evangelical missionary movements and its pervasive dominance shapes and forms the identity of the mainline denominations as well as the faith cultures they evangelized. Even when we do not bring this reality into focus, we are affected by one another. Since identity is defined within the context of relationships with others and God, religious leaders must take note of how "identity is always constructed in relation to others. We cannot understand ourselves without listening to others, especially those we have oppressed or have the potential to oppress."<sup>2</sup> Power relationships within identity formation, including faith identity, inform how we come to understand God and shape the leadership we offer.

Without attention to power in identity formation and in relationships, religious leaders will be unable to reveal what is in need of transformation. Instead, the universal acceptance of the dominant, Eurocentric God-talk as unchangeable, pure, and unaffected by our own multiple identities and hybridity as a human race will make us unable to identify *kyriarchy* (interconnected, interacting, and multiplicative systems of domination and submission), and its practices. My childhood church (1960–1978), *Primera Iglesia*, began with a mission church's identity of "daughter congregation" to a very large, "silk-stocking," southern U.S., Caucasian

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<sup>2</sup> Kwok Pui-lan, *Postcolonial Feminist Theology and Imagination* (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 2005), 60.

congregation, not far from us geographically but very far from us socioeconomically. The church's theological identity was formed by the theology of its founding pastor and his successor, who established the church in his eleven-year tenure. These leaders were both Cuban pastors trained in the mainline Protestant denomination seminary funded by the U.S. church in Havana and mentored in the evangelistic theology that characterized the Protestant missionary movement. They did not critique how their brand of Christianity was infused with Western values and cultures. They accepted the Eurocentric evangelism that suppressed indigenous expressions of faith and made no effort to discover God through the Caribbean and Central American approach to life with humor, ingenuity, dance, and music. These two formative pastors taught the colonized expression of God as unchanging, pure, and androcentric. The church's Latin American indigenous faith expressions were conformed to fit into the U.S. denominational forms if they were allowed at all. More often than not, worship order was a translation of its U.S. church's style and hymnody, as was our polity, doctrine, and Sunday School teaching. *Testimonios, coritos, vigili*as (testimonies, choruses, prayer vigils), were fit into this overall Eurocentric theological framework of God.

This expression of God was the unifying force to a membership, a multiracial Central American diaspora living in the southern United States. Such expression was helpful in that it unified people, but it did not challenge the economic, cultural, and political institutions that pressed our daily lives, nor did it question women's subservience to men. It was not transformative. Instead, this expression of God flattened these institutional forces pressing on our lives and placed them out of reach of the Gospel's interrogation. Even though this expression unified us in the world of the *Americano*, and brought us together as one family, *hermana/o*, it prevented us from seeing ourselves and our experiences as legitimate contributions to the knowledge of God. Yet, in spite of

this limited theological framework, our congregation implicitly and subversively began to offer new God-talk.

How do we Latinos/as come to new understandings of God and practices? De la Torre and Aponte offer “the process of discovering truth,” as the Latinos/as’ definition for epistemology.<sup>3</sup> They go on to say that our process for discovering truth is based in doing theology, *orthopraxis*, rather than developing abstract philosophical principles. For Latinas/os, the “starting point for praxis is found in the location, time, and experience of a particular people,” and, for them, “doing theology as changing the structures of oppression.”<sup>4</sup>

A good example is my childhood congregation’s evolution. As we as a church grappled with our identity in relationship to the social and economic shifts in the 1960s and 1970s (the Vietnam War, the War Against Poverty, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Equal Rights Amendment), we began to see God at work differently. Our collective theological reflection through the piety of *vigilias* and *testimonios* began to voice the pain of our boys in the Vietnam War and to ask for justice for people of color. This voicing led to new practices such as ordaining women, standing in solidarity with our Afro-Latino/a members, and embracing indigenous art and music forms as legitimate centers of worship. Our new faith practices ran counter to our sister Caucasian Baptist churches’ position. We knew that God was not only among us in our travails—in the words of Isasi-Diaz’s women, “*la lucha es la vida*,”<sup>5</sup> documented in her book *Mujerista Theology*—but also that God’s love/freedom was found in our multiple and complex relations with one another. We intuited God in the freedom from restrictions and labels that we experienced, moving us

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<sup>3</sup> Miguel A. De La Torre and Edwin David Aponte, *Introducing Latino/a Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 72.

<sup>4</sup> De La Torre and Aponte, 73.

<sup>5</sup> Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *Mujerista Theology: A Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999).

forward and inward, closer to God and to one another. Our church at this moment in its history was a good example of Aponte and de la Torre's understanding of epistemology and doing theology.

Michelle Gonzalez correctly points out that Latinas also emphasize location, time, and experience.<sup>6</sup> Their starting point is the location, time, and experience of Latina women. Latinas, like Aponte and de la Torre, are also concerned about right practice and transformation. Latinas, both in ministry and in the academy, self-identify differently. On the whole, as Mayra Rivera asserts, "Like Latin American liberation theology, Latino/a theology affirms that God-talk has direct implications for sociopolitical realities and seeks not merely to describe those realities, but also to transform them."<sup>7</sup>

As Gonzalez summarizes, some Latinas identify themselves as feminists, others as *evangélicas* and others as *mujeristas*.<sup>8</sup> In my childhood congregation we were simply *mujeres Cristianas*, having no other words that seemed to fit. This varied self-identification reflects the diversity that exists among all Latinas who, together, create a fuller understanding of God's identity in relationship with humanity. These different identities, however, share a methodology that begins with the daily life, struggle, and faith of women. It is in the day-to-day toil of living and trying to make sense of that life that Latina feminists, *evangélicas*, and *mujeristas* begin their theological thought. They all assert that our day-to-day experience (daily living), by definition includes the private and public realms,<sup>9</sup> as well as all of our institutional relations—social, religious, political and economic. By beginning with the Latina women's experiences, they attempt to

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<sup>6</sup> Michelle A. Gonzalez, "Latina Feminist Theology: Past, Present and Future" in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 25 (1) (2009): 152–153.

<sup>7</sup> Rivera, 30.

<sup>8</sup> Gonzalez.

<sup>9</sup> Gonzales, 153.



liberate the Christian faith from the limitations of the power dynamics that oppress women.

Embedded in the larger story of my Latino/a congregation's theological and ministerial discernment is my congregation's women's story that in some ways reflects Gonzalez' description of the Latinas' work in the academy. The women of our church were (are) a strong force of creative energy for the church and our families. We raised money for missions and our church building and staffed the educational program while we navigated two cultures and languages to provide for our families here and abroad. We advanced ourselves educationally through English classes and/or higher education at great sacrifice economically. God was our daily companion and our source of hope and courage. God was the one who was *abriendo camino* (trailblazing a path), of hope for a future beyond homemaking and poverty, so a hierarchal God that placed husbands (sometimes abusive), brothers, and uncles over us did not make common sense. The God we knew was a God who opened doors of possibilities and who spoke to us directly in our prayers and through worship. We believed what our church taught—that God created us in the Divine's image and called us to surrender our lives to Christian ministry. My mother's generation claimed the power of their Christian faith to serve and to lead in new ways. Supported by a male pastor and leaders who also were discerning new God-talk, my mother's generation became ordained deacons who were unanimously accepted and joyfully received without any hint of resistance. Growing up in the United States and in this church, my generation of young women was encouraged to lead in Christian education, youth ministry, and other roles often given to young males. Two of us were supported to enter seminary for ordination. In so doing, our Latino/a church was out of step from its Caucasian denomination when it moved to embrace a God whose strength was not diluted by the female preacher.

In spite of this collective spiritual discernment that God among us was creating a new understanding of how

men and women relate to each other and how God relates to men and women, our faith and culture held on to some aspects of androcentric religion. For example, the role of the pastor was clearly the male role, even if women were ordained and allowed to preach from the pulpit occasionally. The role of the male as head of the household as God-ordained was also conceptually unchanged, even while it was significantly softened in practice and no longer explicitly preached. Women were expected to continue with all the regular caregiving duties while the men's role in the household remained the same. The word *feminista* was unacceptable in spite of the embrace of women in leadership—we were *mujeres Cristianas empoderadas* (empowered Christian women), within an overall male-led hierarchy, headed by God.

The tenuous theological shift towards a new God-talk collapsed when, several years later, the church called a new male pastor. His agenda was to “set the church straight” by eliminating all women from prominent leadership roles and demanding complete obedience to him, the God-ordained leader. The congregation was unable to differentiate itself from his powerful voice in order to continue to think self-critically about his imposed theological change. While there was resistance, it ultimately succumbed to his patriarchal (and *machista*), God-talk that privileged males. His religious leadership de-valued collective theological discernment. In spite of this disappointment, many women, girls, and men who were part of the congregation at this time experienced a shift in their own God-talk, and some sought other places where women and men could serve equally. Out of this group, some chose congregations that were not as strict in defining gender roles yet retained the God-talk that privileged males along with a God that remained distant, “pure,” and unconcerned with the power dynamics of human relations. Others simply gave up on the church.

God-talk is rooted in the relationship we have with God, and our relationship with God is perceived through the lenses, experiences, and contexts that form our identity. The question, then, is what type of relationship

do we have with a God whose nature/essence cannot relate to our own complex identities? And how does our God-talk influence our religious leadership?

The work of Virgilio Elizondo and other Latino/a theologians on *mestizaje* has allowed Latinos/as to embrace our mixed-race identity (*criollo*, *mestizo*, *mestizaje*, *mulatto*), and offers other racial, ethnic groups the opportunity to do the same. Such work allows us to understand our hybridity as a gift and, thanks to the recent work of Mayra Rivera, weakens the myth of purity. It liberates all of humanity to experience God as intimately connected to our multiple identities and eliminates socially constructed racial and ethnic boundaries from our human relations. It allows us to understand that to be Caucasian is to have mixed ethnicities and linkages to the African continent and exposes the fault lines of the dominant, Western God-talk of purity that keep us distant and apart from the Divine. The Latino/a contribution that embraces this hybridity can help us see how the embodied God—Jesus—is a hybrid between the Divine and the human in all its rich multiple identities. It challenges the belief that the Divine seeks to be separated from our human, complex identities.

God-talk—how we approach and know God—is at the center of my perspective on religious leadership because it is based on our relationship to God and to others. Our rich Christian faith teaches us that God’s power is revealed in the Divine love that embodied the human form to be in relationship with creation. Ironically, the most difficult thing for humanity is to be in relationship, because individually and collectively, we are not at peace with our multiple identities and relationships. Our ability to know ourselves is bound to how well we are in relationship with one another; and our ability to know God is affected by the shape of our relationships with one another. It is impossible to “choose” to know God outside of our identity context or outside of the web of our relationships, even when we are blinded to their influence.

The danger of identifying God as a deity that is unchangeable, sees secular as profane, and is out-of-reach in purity is that this God makes room for humanity to justify dominance over ethnic racial groups in the search for a pure race in emulation of this Divine. This God allows for the justification of dominance over women or “female-gendered” persons and perpetuates the preeminence of the male and of a pure racial identity that does not exist. Why, then, are we quick to negate the presence of God within our multiple, complex identities and relationships and, instead, cling to an approach to God as pure, unchanging, and separate from our human experience? Theologian Kwok Pui-lan describes this lure to bring difference into a new “whole” well:

...the drive to “imagine the whole”—a unified country, an undefiled nation, an intact cultural tradition—is strong and often irresistible. It is a longing for what one has never possessed and a mourning of a loss one cannot easily name. It may also be a quest for certainty that one knows is not there! While I do not wish to undermine anyone’s desire for a meaningful whole, I want to caution against the enormous power of that desire—the lure to shape things into one, unified, seemingly seamless whole. While such a desire may have the positive effect of resisting the fragmented and disjointed experience imposed by colonialism, it may also lead to the danger of reification of the past and the collapse of difference from within.<sup>10</sup>

Latinos/as, in spite of our enormous contribution to the rich flavor of mixed races and identities, are also caught up in the lure for unity that Pui-lan describes and, at times, tend to “privilege unity...and reproduce exclusivist paradigms.”<sup>11</sup> Rivera’s challenge that “God-talk shall thus be faithful to and reflect the interhuman relationality from which it arises, respecting the

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<sup>10</sup> Kwok Pui Lan, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Rivera, 34.

heterogeneity and irreducibility of the divine and the human,”<sup>12</sup> releases us from the seductive grip for unity that has never existed in God nor in Creation. Rivera correctly critiques Elizondo’s “new race” as keeping in place a God who is absolute and beyond the human experience—a pure, distant God. By doing so, Elizondo fails to dislodge “the privilege given to pure origin, oneness...”<sup>13</sup> Her question ricochets in my ministerial experience:

...can we subvert the privilege given to pure origin, absolute (but knowable), differences, oneness, and so forth, while claiming these to be the characteristics that define God? Doesn’t anything that we claim about God immediately become our greatest value and, if so, wouldn’t that reinscribe *mestizaje* as a fallen state rather than as the basic principle of reality?<sup>14</sup>

Privileging unity in God reinforces religious leadership that leads to exclusively separate faith practices under one church, privileges Eurocentric worship style over other optional “styles” that do not reveal God legitimately. This problem relegates our imagination for creating new faith practices to the label of “diversity” and does not change our God-talk; it strips away ethical imperatives for questioning how we construct our lives together in society.

Latinos/as’ theology and practices have the resources for God-talk that match what we intuitively experience when we embrace our *mestizaje* and hybridity, intra- and interpersonally; that experience bears witness that God is not outside of Creation. God is within Creation, including its historical, relational, political, and organic realities, while transforming them. God impels us to move beyond ourselves because God is not limited to one identity. A relational understanding of God’s

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<sup>12</sup> Rivera, 37.

<sup>13</sup> Rivera.

<sup>14</sup> Rivera.

transcendence makes sense given our experiences of life. Mayra Rivera holds out the promise that Latinos/as offer:

...when Latina/o theologies' constructive project embraces images of a world infused by God and always open to that which is beyond (but not outside), itself, they may reclaim the complexity and dynamism subordinated by dominant depictions of the world. Indeed a relational theological anthropology—one that is embodied, relational, and unfinished—calls for a thoroughly incarnate theological vision that does not shy away from its irreducible multiplicity, where the divine embraces the particularity of bodies.<sup>15</sup>

We know intuitively that life is always changing. As human beings individually, and as part of Creation collectively, we are always becoming. Life is a process that is always interrogating our presuppositions and shaking the ground beneath us. The theology of God within humanity and Creation in relationship with each other affirms the root of our own transcendence beyond any imposed identities, socio-economic and political forces, and physical challenges that form our context. Sojourner Truth, Julian of Norwich, Oscar Romero, Sor Juana Inez de la Cruz, and Martin Luther King, Jr., are good examples of religious leaders, lay and clergy, who have guided communities to God-talk and faith practices consistent with this theological understanding.

As religious leaders, it is important that we recognize how our Christian identity is inseparable from the shape we give to the reign of God, our witness. God-talk that inherently links all persons and Creation with the Divine affirms that we are neighbors, and *how* we are neighbors has already set in motion a dynamic process that is moving us collectively in a certain direction. Our religious and ethical leadership question is, "Will we participate with God to discover God's regenerative love in this

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<sup>15</sup> Rivera.

process to transform powers that work against life?" The greatest and second commandments of Matthew 22:37–40 come into sharper focus under this light. Love for/of God is bounded to the love for/of our neighbor and for/of self; this love is transformative and dynamic. God's incarnation in Jesus reveals that the Divine chose an identity as secular, human, earthy, and hybrid, intersecting with patriarchy, imperialism, religious androcentrism, and economic class strata. In this form, God brought transformation. We, then, can become a part of God's transformation precisely because of our multiple identities and relationships.

### **Religious Leadership within Latino/a Congregations in the United States and Abroad**

In spite of these contributions to identity, epistemology, and orthopraxis, many Latino/a congregations within the United States and abroad continue to embrace a theology that negates these contributions; congregations keep in place androcentric and *kyriarchal* understandings of God and of faith practices. I see various power dynamics at work within our identities and relationships. Both U.S. and Latin American churches cannot deny the historical evangelical missionary movements that infused Christian beliefs with U.S. cultural values as well as the influence of U.S.-Latin American political and economic relationships. Latino/a congregations also navigate their mainline denominations' powerful resources and accompanying ambivalence between celebrated diversity and subtle institutional racism. Additionally, Latino/a congregations are bound by how U.S. socio-political-economic realities separate them (and other racial, ethnic groups), into exclusivist identity labels.

These challenges, however, do not have the last word. The hope for transformation, in my ministry experience, thankfully resides in God's love *for* and relationship *with* humanity that beckons us to transcend these power dynamics. An example is my experience with *La*

*Fraternidad de Bautistas de Cuba*, a new Baptist denomination that was formed in the 1990s in Cuba. This group was able to engage in self-critical theological reflection on their ministry context and on how God was working among them during and after the Cold War. They articulated a new understanding of God that embraced their indigenous concepts for life, art, the *criollo*, the *mulatto*, women, and men. They separated themselves from the historical Cuban Baptist denomination that was fused theologically, historically, politically, and culturally with its U.S. “mother” denomination. They desired an indigenous identity and created a fellowship that sought to equalize relations between women and men, *mulatto*, *negro*, socialist, communist, and Christian. In the 1990s, this fellowship recruited women for seminary and ordained them as pastors. New hymns and worship expressions were written that allowed for Cuban faith expressions. This group, influenced by the work of liberation theologians from Brazil and Peru, began community Bible studies that welcomed the people’s interpretation instead of top-down, doctrinal instruction. These grass-roots Bible studies breathed in a fresh understanding of God among the Cubans that included their hybridity, namely, multiple relations within their complex political and social context. I observed how their God-talk bypassed the desire for a false unity and strove instead to make a sacred space for the complexity of race, power, class, and gender that mirrored their own daily life and relationships.

The fellowship’s relationship with a progressive U.S. Baptist group is grounded in mutuality and partnership. Today in 2012, the fellowship faces many challenges to hold on to its theology and vision, in particular when it comes to maintaining equality for its women pastors within a patriarchal society. Nevertheless, it is a good example of religious leadership that explicitly engages its faith community in ongoing self-critical reflection of its theology and ministry practices with outcomes that have created an extraordinary ministry. Visiting and learning from this fellowship changed my own God-talk, allowing



me to embrace my bicultural Cuban-American lenses and perspectives that are forged *on the margin* to be *on the mark*.

My experience with the Cuban Baptist Fellowship contrasts that of my childhood Latino/a church in the United States. The absence of leadership sustaining collective self-critical conversations on the popular piety in my local congregation created a bifurcation between how we do theology (orthopraxis), and how we know God (epistemology). However, in the period during which our religious leadership opened us to discernment, we asked important questions and committed courageous acts of ministry that opened the space for a fresh revelation of God to breathe into our community. While we were unable as a community of faith to enact complete self-critique, we opened a door for many of us to think differently about how God was working among us and what Rivera describes as a “relational theology that is embodied, relational, and unfinished.”<sup>16</sup>

Postcolonial liberation theologians invite Latinos/as into a new form of theological reflection helpful to the Latino/a orthopraxis. For example, Joerg Rieger asks, “What if theology is understood as the *self-critical* reflection on the witness of the church...that creates room for an awareness of the respective blind spots, cover-ups and repressions of each of the modes without giving up the critical task of theology?”<sup>17</sup> Self-critical theological reflection on the Christian witness opens the door to assess our Latino/a orthopraxis and our process for discovering truth as defined for us by Isasi-Diaz, Aquino, Martell-Otero, Gonzalez, De la Torre, and Aponte. This task requires discipline and mindfulness because it challenges us to question continually our comfortable assumptions about God and one another. We often fall short, even with our best intentions. I think of it as a spiritual discipline that we must diligently and

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<sup>16</sup> Rivera, 35.

<sup>17</sup> Joerg Rieger, *God and the Excluded: Visions and Blindspots in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 2001), 167.

patiently practice because our ability to discover God anew in our relationships happens organically. Most often, it is in retrospect or at the edges of extremely painful socioeconomic events that we find new eyes with which to see God as redeeming, guiding, evolving, and present/embodied in us. As I myself reflect on my own Latino/a church experience, I see how our collective discernment allowed me to see God with new eyes even when our collective self-critical theological reflection was painfully short-lived.

Wonderfully hopeful and shamefully painful is how I see God's transformative power at work *beyond the local congregation*. It reminds me that a blind religious leadership does not impede the work of the Divine. Immigrants from El Salvador and Guatemala organizing in Dallas with whom I sometimes work do not relate to a particular Christian church, yet they have revealed to me and other religious leaders a clear historical analysis of the intersection of power, culture, and religion that has wrought havoc with the poor. Their fresh reading of our Christian texts regarding Jesus' ministry readily recognizes the collusion of the state's power and economic system to silence life-giving religion. Fresh from the power of El Salvador's Archbishop Oscar Romero and Roman Catholic base communities in Central America, these immigrants see the weakness of our U.S. churches to enact change in spite of our financial wealth. They easily can tease out the influence of money, politics, and culture in faith communities that strips their power to enact true social change. Their assessment of our Christian congregations capture Jesus' indignation with the hypocritical Pharisees in Matthew 15:7, "You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said: 'This people honors me with their lips but their hearts are far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching human precepts as doctrines.'" These immigrants fiercely claim that God relates with them, guides their work, and seeks mercy/justice for them. They speak loudly against sexism and other forms of oppression. God speaks through these voices found

outside of our traditional Christian communities to challenge us to engage in God's work for justice. As religious leaders they give us their eyesight from which to experience God and reach out to others.

## Contributions to Religious Leadership

The Latino/a approach to theology as orthopraxis and the Latino/a comfort with multiple identities that impact God-talk are contributions to developing effective religious leadership in a multiracial world. The foundation for religious leadership must be rooted in guiding the faith community to tend to a *collective spirituality through self-critical theological reflection on identity, God-talk, faith, and ethical practices*. This self-critical work is a spiritual discipline and, like all disciplines, requires regular practice to bear fruit. In other words, religious leadership requires care for the soul that engages in this self-critical theological reflection. We must enter into this practice of self-critical reflection as a dynamic, spiritual discipline. Since God's Spirit is continually challenging, changing, and maturing us, "...remaining faithful involves a journey of continual conversion,"<sup>18</sup> writes Marjorie Thompson in *Soul Feast: An Invitation to Christian Spirituality*. It seems to me that self-critical theological reflection makes sense as a spiritual discipline because to engage in theological reflection is to trust what the mystics long ago trusted: we are *capax Dei*, "capable of receiving and embodying divine life."<sup>19</sup> Religious leaders must balance solitary and collective reflection carefully. Jesus went to the other side of the lake with his disciples to rest and to pray, and he also had some time alone. He also engaged the Samaritan woman and Syrophenician woman in heated debate that revealed God's *relationship* of grace *with* non-Jews.

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<sup>18</sup> Marjorie J. Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*, (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 2005), 7.

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, 8.

This type of self-critical theological reflection on our identity is countercultural because our churches have accepted the myth of unity. This acceptance occurs in spite of the reality that the United States is home to many faiths, races, and ethnic groups of diverse classes and political power, depending on each other socially, economically, and politically. Religious leaders of mainline denominations have been slow to look critically at their denominational identity to assess how it is informed by the “other,” those to whom they seek so zealously to minister: people who make up the lower economic and poverty classes of all races and ethnicities, and people who live on the streets. They have been slow to reflect self-critically on the imbalance of power and resources that keeps leadership from authentic mutuality despite years of cross-racial dialogue and cultural diversity celebration. They keep in place Eurocentric faith practices under the guise of democratic power sharing. Also, Latinos/as in denominational leadership roles likewise have been slow to self-critique about how our own identity is related to those with vulnerable economic and political power. We too have been slow to move away from androcentric religion, leaving Latina leaders as expendable in the struggle for a place at the table. This problematic lens demonstrates how androcentric God-talk of absolute oneness has not been transformed; what has been achieved is an optional racial/ethnic category that is easily marginalized. This situation begs many questions about how power, politics, and resources block our good intentions to listen attentively to the other—including women—so that we can learn how we still oppress and have the potential to oppress. This “blindspot,” as Rieger would phrase it, keeps us from the spiritual agility we need to recognize God’s transformation at work in groups who resist our denominations’ justification of the *status quo*. Challenging the blindspot also reminds us that as a spiritual discipline, collective self-critical theological reflection on identity takes root over time and after much practice. Hope abounds as long as the practice is faithful.

My own bicultural, bilingual lens and experience have taught me a great deal about how difficult it is to explore, embrace, and live into an identity that is complex, hybrid, and brought into multiple relationships all at once. I am not totally at home in Cuban nor in Latin American cultures when I have visited. Neither am I totally at home in the United States when I find myself in a completely Caucasian environment. I fit, but not quite. I am a hybrid of southern (U.S.), culture, and my Cuban orientation is fused with its relationship to my childhood Latin American cultural context. I have eyes and intuition about faith and social realities that are uniquely hybrid, and my dual language brings me closer to both. This hybrid orientation to life, identity, and faith helped me navigate, with a great deal of aid from mentors, family, and friends, the jarring external negation of who I was when I came face to face with an androcentric denomination at age twenty-nine. Since then, I have dealt with both wonderful affirmations and damning rejections from both Caucasian and Hispanic faith communities (outside of those who ordained me). Since I am a hybrid, people see me through their lens—I am Latino/a, I am Caucasian, I am middle class, I am feminist, I am *mujerista*—I can weave in and out of these identities. Yet, I feel always not truly known, and my value is relative. An example is the shocking experience I had when I encountered the anger of Caucasian feminists in a particular organization. We had a diversity workshop of sorts, and at their request, I risked offering the isolation that I experienced among them as I tried to articulate my hybridity/bicultural identity. I tried to honestly express how I had accented the American in order to feel acceptable, to the detriment of my Cuban and/or Latina identity. This disclosure was not well received, and I quickly learned how fragile my power (non-existent), was in those relationships. Since this occurrence was not my universal experience with Caucasian feminists, I was able to assess the power dynamics that were at play. I quickly realized that for these feminists, my critique touched at the heart of their self-identity as open, welcoming, and

inclusive. I challenged that self-identity in my exploration of my own self-negation in response to the culture's forces to subsume my biculturality as equal. Interestingly enough, I was quickly silenced and avoided. The same has been true on occasions when I have tried to articulate my experience of chauvinism or paternalism with both Caucasian and Latino males.

In my more recent work with interfaith dialogue between Muslim and Christian women, I see similar dynamics at work. Muslim women are being perpetually "saved" from or "labeled" about their own culture, out of a well-meaning intent from non-Muslim feminists. Yet, they are not allowed to articulate who they really are and how they might save themselves, nor how they have multiple identities among them. I have found that my leadership of the dialogue group has been helped by my own hybrid self-identity because I can more easily invite them to name themselves. I identify with them because of my experience with having labels ascribed to me. I can see how my current status/power in this culture shapes our relationship, and therefore our identities. I am sometimes viewed as suspect for embracing Muslim women, and my own identity status/power is made vulnerable. At the same time, I am acutely aware that I also gain status from my relationship with Muslims in certain circles and have the power to disabuse my interfaith relationships. Collective, self-critical theological reflection on these issues with the women in the dialogue group has been very helpful in this process of relationship, identity formation, and most important, transforming fears into friendships.

As a bicultural Christian Latina Protestant clergy, I have had varied experiences in ministry that include congregations, ministry with those involved in domestic violence, ministry with elders, interfaith dialogue, and emergency assistance to families. I have also ministered with Latino/a immigrants and African, Vietnamese, and Cambodian refugees. In these ministries I have had to assess how my identity is shaped by each of these groups. I have also had to step back to ask how my identity has

been shaped by U.S. foreign policy in the Caribbean and in Central and South America. In stepping back, I have come to grips with the knowledge that my middle class comes with a great cost to sisters and brothers within and outside my country. That fact means I must ask how my current identity as a middle-aged, middle-class woman is also shaped by financial centers and my country's public policy. How is it shaped by the ministerial students I teach and the colleagues with whom I work and the expectations of a mainline denominational seminary? Most important, how is it shaped by my relationship with and understanding of the Divine and how the Divine is to be discovered?

### Summary

I have made the case that religious leadership takes place within the context of identity and that we know ourselves only in relationship to one another and to God. I have also pointed out the importance of self-critical theological reflection for discovering our multiple identities in light of our human relationships and our relationships with God. Our ability to know ourselves and one another and to engage in self-critique of our identities shapes and forms our God-talk, how we know God, and consequently, how we then engage in faith practices and ethical decision-making. I have also attempted to show that a Latino/a process of discovering God and of engaging in orthopraxis contributes to how we may begin this work. Latino/a exploration of multiple, hybrid, and complex identities liberates us from seeking an elusive, pure identity for ourselves and for God. I have proposed that religious leadership is best approached as a spiritual discipline of self-critical theological reflection that is done collectively within faith communities.

I hope that the church where I am a member might dialogue with a Latino/a approach to relating with God and doing theology that transforms oppressive structures. This church is a long way from my childhood Latino/a

church in that it reflects the multiplicity of identities of our society in its membership instead of one (Latino/a), identity. In the early 1980s, this 108-year-old, Caucasian-founded mainline denominational congregation opened its doors to Cambodian refugees. It also created an ecumenical parish cooperative to provide social justice services such as a medical clinic and ministries to refugees, and welcome for multiracial and GLBT communities and, more recently, African refugee families.

Our pastoral leaders are three women of varying ages—a Caucasian senior pastor, an African associate pastor, and a Caucasian children and youth minister who has lived in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. We are exploring our complex relationships together, seeking to strive for mutuality as we acknowledge our different resources, power, and needs. We fear being misunderstood and defined by simple labels of white, African, gay, straight, lesbian, Latino/a, African American, wealthy, and poor. As we move forward together will we dare ask these questions of ourselves individually and in community: “Who benefits from a God who is unable to embody/incarnate our multiple identities and who remains reduced to one, simplistic, unchanging form? Are we suppressing God’s love embodied in humanity when we suppress God’s ability to be as complex as we are? Will we be able to move towards “the truth in the African proverb, ‘A person is a person through other persons?’”<sup>20</sup>

A Latino/a approach for doing theology may help us to see God embodied in each of us in our trial-and-error attempts to create a community that transforms institutions (including how we think about God). Also, the Latino/a embrace of mixed identities—*mulatto*, *mestizaje*, *criollo*—within individuals and collectively may make it easier to embrace our identity as a collective

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<sup>20</sup> Desmond Tutu, “Allies of God,” in *Weavings: A Journal of the Christian Spiritual Life* 5 (1) (1990): 40.



global *mestizaje* united by faith in a relational, dynamic God. Finally, a Latino/a approach to religious leadership may help us move towards the dialogical task needed to help us create an authentic worshipping community and give us spiritual courage to self-critique unequal power dynamics in our democratic approaches to change. It also will help us resist the impulse to create unity at the expense of losing God revealed within our multiple identities. Most wonderfully, this dialogical task may help us claim God as heterogeneous and therefore authentically accessible to us as we create heterogeneous worship and leadership practices.



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## RELIGIOUS LEADERS AS FACILITATORS OF MEANING MAKING

SANDRA F. SELBY

**Abstract:** Drawing on four decades of experience as a leader in a Fortune 500 company, social services, and the church, I call on religious leaders to be facilitators of meaning making in a world that is changing at a bewildering rate. A post-modern, post-Christian, diversifying world with accelerating global connections, struggling economies, and increasing stratification has challenged religious and secular institutions alike. In this context, religious leaders can facilitate meaning making by bridging the “Sunday–Monday gap,” connecting the daily experience of those they serve to deeper sources of meaning. Inherent in this challenge is addressing the reality of women’s leadership issues in the workplace and in today’s changing contexts.

### Meaning Making

#### *The “Sunday–Monday Gap”*

A primary challenge faced by religious leaders today is in bridging the “Sunday–Monday gap,” connecting the life of the church to the daily lives of its parishioners. The church is called to participate in God’s transforming work of reconciling love by embodying an alternative vision for the world: one of welcome, wholeness, compassion, and hope. Its leaders, in turn, are called to empower people to imagine how that alternative vision can be lived out within and beyond the four walls of the church. Central to this calling is facilitating the process of meaning making, helping others to make sense of their experience by connecting it to a deeper purpose. Yet, faced with declining membership, the church increasingly

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seems focused on its own internal issues, while people are struggling to find meaning in their lives. The gap from Sunday morning worship to Monday morning reality is widening.

David Miller, author of *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement*, writes:

Many who are Christians complain of a ‘Sunday-Monday gap,’ where their Sunday worship hour bears little to no relevance to the issues they face in their Monday workplace hours. Though notable exceptions exist, sermon topics, liturgical content, prayers, and pastoral care rarely address—much less recognize—the spiritual questions, pastoral needs, ethical challenges, and vocational possibilities faced by those who work in the marketplace and world of business.<sup>1</sup>

The church does, of course, value the commercial marketplace to some extent. Business processes, language, and measurements have permeated religious institutions, with the success of parish clergy increasingly measured by instruments from the world of business. Yet, as Miller suggests, the interface between the church and the marketplace is often a one-way exchange: the church appropriates management tools from business for its own use while offering little insight or support to those who work in business day in and day out. Miller views the inattention of clergy and religious professionals to the workplace as arising from “an insufficient theology,” one that lacks “a contemporary theology of work.” He quotes Miroslav Volf’s *Work in the Spirit*:

Amazingly little theological reflection has taken place in the past about an activity which takes up so much of our time. The number of pages theologians have devoted to transubstantiation—which does or does not take place on Sunday—for

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<sup>1</sup> David Miller, *God at Work: The History and Promise of the Faith at Work Movement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10.

instance, would, I suspect far exceed the number of pages devoted to work that fills our lives Monday through Saturday.<sup>2</sup>

The inattention of the church to the realities of the workplace leads many who work in business to lead compartmentalized lives. In *The Congruent Life*, C. Michael Thompson describes how this compartmentalization can happen:

...model[ing] itself after the institutions of the prevailing commercial culture, [the church] increasingly borrows its structure, its procedures, and even its bottom-line measures of success from business, losing all the while its ability to stand outside the dominant culture as a prophetic and inspiring voice. Working people who enter its doors seeking a more congruent life often simply find themselves in the same spin of activity, conflict, and intrigue that marks their experience of the workaday world—chairing committees, raising money, and attending endless meetings just as they do at work. They're fed the same food they eat of necessity every day on their jobs, with not so much as a side dish of the meaning, hope, and purpose for which they came.<sup>3</sup>

Miller, Volf, and Thompson speak to my own experience. During my twenty-five years in industry, not once did I hear from the pulpit or in adult education classes any reference to the challenges of the workplace where I spent most of my waking hours. The church did little to help me see how Sunday morning related to the reality of the workplace in which I found myself the following day. As a woman, I found this Sunday–Monday gap especially problematic, because I worked in a male-dominated company that embodied what William

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<sup>2</sup> Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), as quoted in Miller, 89.

<sup>3</sup> C. Michael Thompson, *The Congruent Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 27.

Kondrath calls “the power-over/power-with impasse” that functions within many institutions. He writes:

Though some women clearly identify with and function according to the male model of power-over structures, those who identify as female are more likely to attempt to share power, ensure that everyone’s voice is heard, be comfortable with ambiguous situations, and avoid unilateral stands that lead to win/lose conflicts. They are more likely to initiate and sustain processes that involve dialogue rather than debate.<sup>4</sup>

As a woman valuing relational, “power-with” dynamics, I struggled to claim my voice within a male-dominated culture that “[valued] differences in terms of better than or less than.”<sup>5</sup> This struggle became part of the deeper challenge of bridging the Sunday–Monday gap to make meaning of my experience in the workplace.

#### *Experiencing the gap*

They came to my office at the corporate headquarters of a Fortune 500 company in rapid succession, the company’s director of security, followed within the hour by the director of medical services. There was a problem: they had learned of my plans to travel to rural Haiti with a group from my church. The chief of security came armed with a sheaf of papers including a travel advisory from the U.S. State Department. “Haiti is a dangerous place,” he said. “You must not go there.” Next came the company’s medical director, a physician who began by listing the diseases that were then prevalent in Haiti: AIDS, polio, elephantiasis, hepatitis, and any number of tropical viruses. “Haiti is a cesspool,” he said. “You must not go there.”

Why this sudden interest in my travel plans? The previous week, the conversation among a group of

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<sup>4</sup> William Kondrath, *God’s Tapestry: Understanding and Celebrating Differences* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2008), 173.

<sup>5</sup> Kondrath, 172.

company executives traveling on the company plane had turned to August vacation plans. The usual variety of beach and golf trips were mentioned before I said, "I'll be going to Haiti on a mission trip with my church." "Why would you ever want to do such a thing?" "You're crazy!" my colleagues exclaimed. Someone senior to me in the group apparently decided it was not only foolish but dangerous for me to go; hence the visits from the security and medical folks. No one thought I should go on the trip. Except Lee. As chief financial officer of the company, Lee was two levels above me. He was also active in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints at the state and national level. Lee called me to his office and asked, "Why do you want to go to Haiti?" "When the opportunity arose, I felt called to go there," I responded. "Then you must go," Lee said, "I'll support you in this, and when you get back I want to hear all about your trip."

I went to Haiti in August 1989 and returned safely without having contracted any of the diseases listed by our medical director. Shortly after my return I showed Lee my pictures and told him stories from the trip. From that time forward Lee was a mentor to me, someone who modeled how to integrate one's faith with one's work. In a Fortune 500 company Lee was a religious leader, one whose beliefs carried over into his work in a way that formed a community of faith beyond his church. Unfortunately, a few months later I was transferred to another part of the company, leaving me with little contact with Lee during my remaining years there. He remained a mentor, though from a distance.

Four years after my trip to Haiti, I was with about a dozen others gathered for dinner at a private dining room in the Ritz-Carlton in Scottsdale, Arizona. The group consisted of executives and their wives. As usual, I was the only female executive in the group. President Clinton had just launched an initiative to reform health care, and the senior executive among us had asked what we thought about it. Two other women and I argued that the lack of health care for millions of Americans was an issue

of justice, but we were drowned out by a chorus of executives saying, “Do you know what that would do to our taxes?” At that, an inner voice said, “I can’t do this anymore.”

Sometime later I sat in a conference room in Maui with the global leadership team that included fifty men and me. The financial projections for the year were looking grim, and people were worried they wouldn’t get their bonuses. “Well,” the president said, “you all simply have to take costs out of your businesses. If that means getting rid of people, so be it.” But there wasn’t much time to discuss it further that morning; the meeting was being hurried along so that people could make their tee times. So the word went out to the business units to reduce headcount. And the inner voice said, “I can’t do this anymore.”

During this time I became increasingly active in my church and held several positions in lay leadership. While my mentor Lee helped model how to bring one’s faith to work, my church offered little guidance. I was living the life described by Thompson, being “fed the same food” at church: meetings, income statements, and balance sheets, “with not so much as a side dish of the meaning, hope, and purpose for which [I] came.”<sup>6</sup> I was struggling to find meaning in my work, and my inner voice was confirming that struggle.

## Women in Leadership

Part of the struggle, I know, came from being a woman working in the male environment of the industrial corporation that I had joined out of business school in 1981. For the next eighteen years I was “the first woman” in any job I held and one of only a few female executives within the company. Thirty years after I joined that company, the title of an October 2011 *New York Times*

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<sup>6</sup> Thompson.



article by Phyllis Korkki read, “For Women, Parity Is Still a Subtly Steep Climb.”<sup>7</sup> Perhaps there is some solace in knowing that in the last thirty years the “steep climb” that I and my female peers faced in the early 1980s can now be described as “subtly” steep. After ten years of steady increases, the number of Fortune 500 senior executive positions held by women has remained the same as in 2005, at about fourteen percent, despite the fact that “women in the United States now collect nearly 60% of four-year degrees and they make up nearly half the American work force.”<sup>8</sup> In the article Ilene Lang, the head of Catalyst, a not-for-profit group that focuses on women in the workplace, attributes this stagnation to “‘entrenched sexism’ that is no less harmful for being largely unconscious...social norms...are so gendered and so stereotyped that even though we think we’ve gone past them, we really haven’t.”<sup>9</sup>

Lang goes on to describe a phenomenon that characterizes my own experience and that of female friends and associates in corporations, academia, health care, the church, and not-for-profit agencies. Lang, says Korkki, “describes a corporate environment that offers much more latitude to men and where the bar is much higher for women. In her view, men tend to be promoted based on their promise, whereas women need to prove themselves multiple times.”<sup>10</sup> Early in my business career, a man who had been my manager told me that I had been passed over for a promotion for which he admitted I was the most qualified candidate because “for me to put a woman in that job [in 1983] would have been perceived as very risky, and at that time in my career I wasn’t prepared to take that risk.” He gave the job to a less-

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<sup>7</sup> Phyllis Korkki, “For Women, Parity Is Still a Subtly Steep Climb,” *New York Times*, October 9, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Korkki.

<sup>9</sup> Korkki.

<sup>10</sup> Korkki.

qualified male candidate. Thirty years later it seems that women still are perceived as a risky bet.

Korkki contends that we women don't help ourselves because we lack some of the "societal skills" that help men move up the organizational ladder. One of those is self-promotion. Executive coach and leadership expert Peggy Klaus told Korkki that women tend to praise others while understating their own contributions. "Then they get really angry when they get passed over for the bonus and the promotion."<sup>11</sup> The McKinsey Leadership Project published in 2008 by McKinsey & Company concluded that "many [women] think that hard work will eventually be noticed and rewarded. That can indeed happen—but usually doesn't."<sup>12</sup> The dilemma of losing out on promotions because of not wanting to self-promote is a result of what Carol Gilligan, in her research on the development of girls, calls "a loss of voice."<sup>13</sup> In describing this phenomenon Kondrath writes,

When the power is unequal, girls begin to lose their voice and go out of authentic relationship with their values, their ideals, and their history, but they keep trying to maintain the semblance of mutuality in relationships where the other or the culture is bullying them, and of course it doesn't work.<sup>14</sup>

In the two situations from my own work experience that I mentioned earlier, my inner voice that said "I can't do this anymore" was expressing the extent to which I felt alienated in the workplace from my own values and ideals. Because I did not feel empowered to express those values and ideals, I found that the inner voice fell silent.

Recognizing that women face particular challenges in the workplace, McKinsey undertook the Leadership Project "to learn what drives and sustains successful

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<sup>11</sup> Korkki.

<sup>12</sup> Joanna Barsh, Susie Cranston, and Rebecca Craska, "Centered Leadership: How Talented Women Thrive," in *The McKinsey Quarterly* (4) (2008): 46.

<sup>13</sup> Kondrath, 160.

<sup>14</sup> Kondrath.

female leaders”<sup>15</sup> in hopes that the findings would provide valuable information that would help women at McKinsey and elsewhere advance their careers. From their interviews, other research, and a study of academic literature, McKinsey developed a model of “centered leadership [that provides] a well of physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual strength that drives personal achievement and, in turn, inspires others to follow.” While the model applies to men as well, McKinsey believes that the model is especially suited to the experiences and needs of women.<sup>16</sup> In particular, the model addresses what McKinsey found to be distinguishing characteristics of women in the workplace: the dual roles, for many, of “motherhood and management” that can be a significant drain on energy; and, the tendency of women to experience “more emotional ups and downs more often and more intensely than most men do.”<sup>17</sup>

The “centered leadership” model includes five dimensions: meaning, managing energy, positive framing, connecting, and engaging. While the study does not indicate that women in religious organizations were among those interviewed, in my own experience these dimensions apply to the demands of leadership in a range of organizations, including the church. In McKinsey’s model, meaning derives from happiness, using one’s “signature strengths,” and purpose. The linkage between happiness and meaning derives from the work of Martin Seligman and others around positive psychology, which defines “a progression of happiness that leads from pleasure to engagement to meaning.” Meaning, according to Seligman, results in higher job satisfaction and productivity and, says McKinsey, may also include a sense

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<sup>15</sup> Barsh, et. al., 36.

<sup>16</sup> Barsh, et. al.

<sup>17</sup> Barsh, et. al.

of transcendence that contributes to a “deeper sense of meaning.”<sup>18</sup>

These findings echo the results of “A Study of Spirituality in the Workplace,” published in 1999 in *MIT Sloan Management Review*. Scores of people working in a corporate setting were asked, “What gives you the most meaning and purpose in your job?” The answers work against the stereotypes we often hear, as the following factors, in order, were identified as giving people the most meaning and purpose: (1) The ability to realize my full potential as a person; (2) Being associated with a good or ethical organization; (3) Interesting work; (4) Making money; (5) Having good colleagues; serving humankind; (6) Service to future generations; (7) Service to my immediate community.<sup>19</sup> People want to integrate their deep values with their professional life. These findings reveal several linkages to McKinsey’s identification of meaning as a cardinal dimension of centered leadership. The Sloan article reveals something else related to meaning: people feel able to express their intelligence and their creativity in the workplace, but they do not feel able to express their feelings. As a result, they don’t think they can bring their whole selves to work, as the workplace doesn’t readily allow them to do so.<sup>20</sup> The inability to express one’s feelings in the workplace represents what Christina Robb calls the “central relational paradox” by which girls shape themselves to conform to cultural norms: “keeping your true feelings out of relationship to maintain some semblance or remnant of relationship.”<sup>21</sup> In the face of pressure to hold an important part of their inner life separate from their work life, people are encouraged to compartmentalize

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<sup>18</sup> Barsh, et. al., 38.

<sup>19</sup> Ian Mitroff and Elizabeth Denton, “A Study of Spirituality in the Workplace,” in *MIT Sloan Management Review*, 40 (4) (Summer 1999): 85.

<sup>20</sup> Mitroff and Denton, 86.

<sup>21</sup> Christina Robb, *This Changes Everything: The Relational Revolution in Psychology* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 2006), 26, quoted by Kondrath, 160.

their experience, which for women in particular is a recipe for burnout.

McKinsey's research identifies two dimensions of centered leadership that help to address the issues of compartmentalization: managing energy, and positive framing. A study published in *Harvard Business Review* in 2006 states that ninety-two percent of women still manage all household tasks, including child care and preparing meals, a phenomenon that McKinsey refers to as the "second shift." For them, managing energy, including minimizing depletion, restoration, and flow, is essential. The work of minimizing depletion is centered around avoiding burnout. Psychologist Mihály Csíkszentmihályi identified "flow," the phenomenon of not noticing the passage of time due to one's intense engagement, as characteristic of individuals whose work energizes them, yielding higher job satisfaction and productivity.<sup>22</sup>

The frames through which we view the world, whether optimistic or pessimistic, can affect the quality of our decisions, as optimists tend to see the world more realistically than pessimists. Because optimists see the adversity around them realistically, they are able to develop strategies to counter that adversity. Referencing the work of Martin Seligman, the McKinsey study states that the ability to develop the skill of positive framing can be learned. In his book *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, Seligman describes how pessimism can deplete one's energy by promoting a tendency to see reality, especially negative experience, as persistent, pervasive, and personal. But people who by nature are pessimistic can, by being self-aware, process a negative experience by seeing it as having an impact that is temporary, specific, and impersonal.<sup>23</sup> Such positive

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<sup>22</sup> Barsh, et. al., 41.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life* (New York: Pocket Books, 1998), 41-53.

framing is especially important for women, who are twice as likely as men to become depressed.<sup>24</sup>

The fourth characteristic of centered leadership is connecting, which includes having a strong network, practicing reciprocity and inclusiveness, and sponsorship. McKinsey's research reveals that women tend to have narrower and deeper networks and relationships than men, and men's broader (albeit shallower), networks give them more access to important work-related knowledge and opportunities. If leadership "is the ability to figure out where to go and to enlist the people and groups necessary to get there,"<sup>25</sup> the strong networks that men often have can be an asset.

The McKinsey study also discusses "the importance of having individual relationships with senior colleagues willing to go beyond the role of mentor—someone willing to stick out his or her own neck to create opportunity for or help a protégée,"<sup>26</sup> an individual that one female financial services executive calls a "sponsor."<sup>27</sup> Looking back on my own experience in business I can identify two mentors, both male, who were instrumental in serving as advisers, encouragers, and sources of feedback. Both individuals were two levels above me in the organization, and both took an interest in my development without my having to ask them to serve as a mentor. I never had a female mentor because there were no women senior to me during my business career. I would have sought male mentors in any event, as their perspective was so helpful to me in negotiating the male environment and power structure in the industrial company for which I worked.

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<sup>24</sup> Barsh, et. al., 42.

<sup>25</sup> Mark Hunter and Herminia Ibarra, "How Leaders Create and Use Networks," *Harvard Business Review*, 85 (1) (2007): 40-47, as quoted in Barsh, et. al., 44.

<sup>26</sup> Barsh, et. al.

<sup>27</sup> Barsh, et. al.

While my male mentors helped me to understand and negotiate the politics and practices of our company, it was a sponsor, Bob, whose advocacy was directly responsible for my promotion to vice president. I had replaced a vice president when he retired. At the time, my boss, Dave, told me that he would give me Ed's job but with a director's title, and I would need to earn the promotion to vice president. I served in that capacity, with the title of director, for at least a year, with feedback that I was performing well in the position. In time I was, indeed, promoted to vice president. It was only later that I learned what precipitated that promotion.

Like me, Bob reported to Dave, so Bob knew my work. I worked closely with Bob and with Dave's other direct reports, but because I was at the director level, not the vice president level, I was not included in certain meetings and activities, especially the offsite golf outings and other work-related social occasions of the (all male), executive team. So yes, I can relate firsthand to the comments in the McKinsey report about the hard road that women face in being recognized for their contributions. Here's what Bob told me:

I said to Dave, Sandy's doing very good work, in fact better work than Ed did. "Yes she is," Dave replied. "She's doing a great job." "So why," Bob asked, "is she still a director? She should be a vice president, Dave." At this point Dave, looking uncomfortable, said, "But Bob, what's it going to be like to have a woman along on our executive team outings? Will we have to act differently? It just seems uncomfortable." Bob: "Don't be ridiculous, Dave. She's more than earned that promotion. Give it to her." Dave: "You're right, Bob. I'll do that."

Dave did give me the promotion, and from that point on he became a sponsor and advocate. Bob had opened his eyes. In discussing gender-based power Kondrath says, "Many people who identify as male often unconsciously accept and rely on societal rules that favor them, that give them more power and unearned privilege, and see those

who identify as female as less than themselves.”<sup>28</sup> In my situation, it took a male ally to challenge another male on his own reliance on societal rules favoring male dominance. What can complicate sponsorship is the sexual dynamics that Korkki describes in her article. The McKinsey study says:

One surprising thing we learned as a result of talking with female leaders was that they often fail to reciprocate and find expectations that they should do so distasteful. A senior partner at McKinsey noted that men naturally understand that you must “give before you get,” but women don’t. This tendency—which other leaders have described to us as well—combined with the sometimes awkward sexual politics, real or perceived, between senior men and younger women, makes it harder for women to find sponsors.<sup>29</sup>

The final dimension of centered leadership is engaging, consisting of finding one’s voice, ownership, risk taking, and adaptability.<sup>30</sup> As discussed earlier, finding voice does not come easily to women. McKinsey quotes Julie Daum, an executive recruiter specializing in board placements, as saying “even senior women on boards still lose out by not speaking up: they hang back if they think that they have nothing new to say or that their ideas fall short of profound.”<sup>31</sup> And who among us has not had the experience of not being heard when we raise an idea in a meeting with no response from the men in the room, only to have a male colleague congratulated for saying the same thing later in the conversation?

Mid-way through my career, I was given a promotion to a position at the director level on the staff of one of the company’s business segments. My position entitled

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<sup>28</sup> Kondrath, 173.

<sup>29</sup> Barsh, et. al., 45.

<sup>30</sup> Barsh, et. al., 37.

<sup>31</sup> Barsh, et. al., 46.



me to travel with the management team from around the world to the annual management meeting. I was the only woman in a group of forty. On the first day of the meeting, we participated in team-building where we were organized into competitive teams to conduct problem-solving exercises. After three such exercises, the division president called us together. Addressing the group, Dave said, "I've been observing you in these exercises and there's something I need to say. In every exercise, Sandy has come up with a correct solution that has been ignored. The rest of you did not acknowledge what she said, and she turned out to be right. So guys, you need to listen to her, and Sandy, you need to speak up and argue your point." It took me awhile to find my voice with that group, and with each move to a new department, I needed to find my voice again. In the workplace, many women can be invisible and mute among groups of men. We need to claim our voices.

The McKinsey report summarizes the centered leadership model, which it calls "a new approach to leadership [that] can help women become more self-confident and effective business leaders,"<sup>32</sup> as involving "a shared purpose with deep meaning for the people involved, explicit awareness and management of energy, positive framing, strong informal and formal networks, and the collaborative creation of opportunities."<sup>33</sup> While the McKinsey Leadership Study states that such leadership provides a "well" of spiritual strength, its only hint as to the source of that spiritual strength is in a brief reference to how, for some individuals, transcendence provides a bridge to finding deeper meaning and purpose in their work. In my own case, it became clear over time that in order to claim my voice I needed to engage consciously in issues of meaning and purpose in order to bring my whole self to work. While Gilligan, Robb, and others state that the struggle to claim one's voice is

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<sup>32</sup> Barsh, et. al., 35.

<sup>33</sup> Barsh, et. al., 48.

characteristically a female challenge, integration of spirituality and work is acknowledged as an issue for many men, as well. The “Faith at Work” movement is one of the avenues through which the linkage of the workplace to sources of meaning is being addressed.

## Faith at Work

In *God at Work*, David Miller traces the “Faith at Work movement” from its roots in the Social Gospel era to today and cites a “marked increase...in Faith at Work activity” in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. He quotes a 1999 Gallup survey of the religious landscape in the United States: “Two of the underlying desires of the American people at this time are to find deeper meaning in life and to build deeper, more trusting relations with other people in our often impersonal and fragmented society.”<sup>34</sup> Miller adds,

If there is one overriding theme or organizing principle that appears to be a commonly held view by virtually all participants in the movement and that drives interest in Faith at Work, it is a quest for integration. There is a shared view that faith and work are not meant to be separated or isolated from each other. Businesspeople want the ability to bring their whole selves to work—mind, body, and soul—and are no longer satisfied with sacrificing their core identities or being mere cogs in the machine, nor do they want a disconnected spirituality...just as they seek spirituality in their work, they want to bring the issues of their work into their worship. Christian businesspeople and other professionals find common agreement that living a bifurcated life, where faith and work are compartmentalized, is neither true to the Gospel nor a healthy way to work. Integration

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<sup>34</sup> Miller, 73.

acknowledges the distinctive natures of faith and work, as well as other different spheres of life, while also bringing them together in a reconstructive, dialectical, and holistic fashion.<sup>35</sup>

But such integration is not easily accomplished. During my business career the inner voice that said, “I can’t do this anymore” surfaced around issues of equality and justice that I now see were fundamentally theological issues. Because of the central relational paradox for women that Kondrath describes, I struggled with how to communicate those concerns to my workplace colleagues. “Voice” and “vocation” share a common root word.<sup>36</sup> As I sought over time to engage in issues of meaning and purpose related to my work, I began to examine more directly my calling as a religious leader. I had felt called to ordained ministry since high school, but the lack of female clergy role models in my formative years, coupled with economic necessity, led me to get a job in business after college—something that I had never intended to do. In time I came to see that business could be challenging and rewarding, so I received an M.B.A. and pursued a career in business. Periodically the call to ministry would surface again, but it never seemed the right time; in the meantime, I sought to find meaning and purpose in my work in business. To some extent I was successful. I came to see that one can be a “religious” leader in the workplace by honoring the fundamental equality of all people regardless of rank, by showing hospitality to others, by treating others with compassion, and by trying to influence the company to make just and ethical decisions. The calling to ordained ministry kept surfacing, though, and I determined that I would ultimately retire early to pursue that vocation. That time came sooner than I had anticipated, however. My boss, the chairman and CEO, decided to move the company’s headquarters hundreds of miles away, a decision for which there

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<sup>35</sup> Miller, 74.

<sup>36</sup> *vox, vocare* (Latin) [www.etymonline.com](http://www.etymonline.com), accessed 1/17/12.

seemed to be no strategic or financial justification. He wanted me to relocate and “leave all this stuff behind,” including the two hundred people who would lose their jobs. But my inner voice once again had other ideas: “I can’t do this anymore.” This time vocation empowered voice, and I paid attention. I gave notice that I intended to resign, but due to the transition that was occurring in the company I stayed for another six months. During that time I was indeed a religious leader at work, spending much of my time listening to and counseling employees struggling with any number of issues, from whether to relocate with the company and be treated as a “traitor” to their friends who were losing their jobs, to how to handle the anger and grief they were experiencing due to losing their workplace “family.” I left the company in 1999, went to seminary, was ordained, and for four years worked part-time on the clergy staff of a large church and part-time for a parachurch with which I had been associated for more than twenty years. For the past four years I have been engaged full-time in community ministry through the parachurch.

## **A Change of Venue**

Having been a religious leader in business for many years, for the last eight years I have been a religious leader in religious institutions. Earlier in this article, I said that when I was in business, issues of the workplace had never been raised from the pulpit or in adult education class in the church I attended. I suspect that omission is partly because never having worked in business, the clergy didn’t know where to start. Perhaps discussions with parishioners about their workplace experience occurred in one-on-one pastoral care, but it was never a matter of public discussion. I have tried to change that. I taught a class at church on “The Meaning of Work” that led a group of businesspeople who attended that class to start a weekly discussion of faith and the workplace. Recently I preached a sermon in a congregation and on

the radio about compartmentalization and the workplace, and the church's role in that compartmentalization, based on the lectionary text, Matthew 22:15-22. The feedback? Lots of stories, along with gratitude for having named the issue. People want to feel that what they do from Monday to Friday has something to do with what they hear in church on Sunday so they can make sense of their workplace experience; by and large, they told me, the church hasn't helped them address that deep desire.

One year ago, through my parachurch, I started a workplace ministry designed specifically for people who do crisis work. The aim of this ministry is to help individuals find meaning in their work so that they can cope with the trauma and stress of the workplace, an area of interest that is the focus of my doctoral studies. At noon each Wednesday, a group of social workers and others who work with rape victims, battered women, children who witness violence, elder abuse victims, and others who suffer trauma gather for "Spiritual Food," a time of music, guided meditation, reflection, and conversation. The reflection from Spiritual Food is shared as "Food for the Journey" via email to a distribution list of crisis workers whose schedules do not permit them to attend the Wednesday gathering. Many of these individuals have churches of their own but find their workplace experiences of vicarious traumatization and secondary traumatic stress outside the range of Sunday morning discourse and church programming. Our time together helps crisis workers find meaning and healing in story, in art, and in community with others who work day in and day out in situations of trauma and suffering.

While one man attends Spiritual Food periodically and a few men are on the mailing list for Food for the Journey, feedback suggests that this ministry is particularly meaningful for women because it addresses the distinctly female challenges outlined in McKinsey's centered leadership model: meaning, managing energy, positive framing, connecting, and engaging. Women come to Spiritual Food because they appreciate a time of

serenity in the middle of a chaotic work week. They also value the opportunity to connect with others who experience and understand the particular challenges of crisis work, and the toll that such work can take on one's emotional and spiritual well-being. They are relieved to be able to share stories, thoughts, and feelings that are not welcomed in their workplace and at home. For these women, Spiritual Food offers sustenance and hope in the wilderness of daily living.

### Closing the “Sunday–Monday Gap”

The church in a post-Christian age can develop a new understanding of the relationship between church and society by relating the gospel to the social order and becoming, as George Hunsberger writes, “the genuine organizing center integrating the fragmented pieces of modern living.”<sup>37</sup> The church can become that “organizing center” by being intentional about engaging the daily issues that parishioners confront at home and in the workplace around matters of time, money, energy, and meaning.

My workplace ministry illustrates the hunger that those who do crisis work, especially women, have for making connections between their spirituality and the chaotic, frightening, violent world they encounter through their work. The reflections offered at the weekly Spiritual Food gatherings and through Food for the Journey are around themes common to the experience of crisis workers. What I hear in conversations around those reflections is that the women in our group hunger for opportunities to lead more integrated lives so that they can make sense of their workplace challenges, family issues, and the stress of daily living. I hear this hunger as

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<sup>37</sup> George Hunsberger, “The Newbigin Gauntlet: Developing a Domestic Missiology for North America,” in *The Church Between Gospel and Culture*, ed. George Hunsberger and Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 22.

well during individual counseling and in meetings with individuals and groups in the workplace after particularly traumatic events. In a world that encourages compartmentalization, women long for wholeness.

A colleague who serves as chair of stewardship at her church is addressing the Sunday–Monday gap through an expansive approach to stewardship as a year-round, intentional way of living. Each week she raises a question about spirituality and daily life in the worship bulletin. Occasionally the question is discussed during the announcement time in worship. Opportunities for conversation around the question are offered on the church’s Facebook page. It is exciting, she says, to see the conversations between teenagers and seniors on Facebook about the challenges of being a Christian in all aspects of daily life. In addition, the stewardship chair has convened a stewardship and spirituality group that is meeting for a year to discuss the spirituality of stewardship in three areas: prayer, relationships, and resources. They are reading together and having discussion about what a more comprehensive view of stewardship really is. The group includes professors, an attorney, an environmental activist, businesspersons, a social worker, and chaplains.<sup>38</sup>

Churches can also encourage study and dialogue about calling and vocation as it relates to secular employment. Recently I and others at my church took “spiritual gifts” inventories. The report that we received identified our spiritual gifts and how we might put those to use for the church. Rather, why not offer encouragement and counsel about how to put those spiritual gifts to use outside the church?

From strategic planning to “dashboards,” the church has appropriated processes and techniques from business for its own use. Certainly, effective management of financial and other resources in the context of mission is part of the church’s stewardship. But critical thought

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<sup>38</sup> Reference used by permission. For details, contact author.

should be given to the ways in which business processes and measures are being used within the church, lest market share eclipse transformation of persons and communities as the measure of the church's success. The church should also examine whether it is promoting spiritual formation and wholeness when it asks businesspeople to fill the same roles and functions at church as they do in the workplace.

Thirty years ago, shortly after I moved to a new city to work in industry, I visited local churches in my search for a new church home. On one such visit I was approached after the service by a parishioner who asked, "Are you new here?" "Yes, I just moved to town." Having then learned that I was working in finance for a local corporation the greeter asked, "Great! Do you want to be on our Finance Committee?" This, on my first (and last), visit to that church!

Women in leadership in the church face many of the same issues as women in leadership in business. As in business, women have made inroads in the church; in the United States at least two denominations, Disciples of Christ and the Episcopal Church, are led by women. Nevertheless, to quote again the title of Korkki's *New York Times* article, "For Women, Parity is Still a Subtly Steep Climb"—though many clergy women might question the modifier "subtly." In 2008, the United Methodist Church started the Lead Women Pastor Project to study the barriers to women being appointed pastors of churches with more than one thousand members. While twenty-three percent of United Methodist clergy are women, only eighty-five women lead churches with membership of one thousand or more, compared to 1,082 men in those positions.<sup>39</sup>

Meaning, managing energy, positive framing, connecting, and engaging: these five dimensions of

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<sup>39</sup> "Methodist Women Seek to Pastor Large Churches," *The Christian Post*, January 21, 2009, [www.christianpost.com](http://www.christianpost.com), accessed 10/28/11.



centered leadership identified by McKinsey for women in business leadership apply as well to women who are leaders in the church. My own experience in the church and anecdotal evidence from female colleagues suggests that, just as in business, women in religious institutions can struggle to find their voice. Indeed, female clergy face an additional barrier, given that some in their congregations may use Scripture (e.g., 1 Tim. 2:11–14), to question their authority.

It is in the area of meaning making, defined by McKinsey as “finding your strengths and putting them to work in the service of an inspiring purpose,”<sup>40</sup> that female clergy and their male colleagues should be at an advantage in comparison to leaders in business. For where should there be more meaning and purpose than in the church? Therein lies one of the particular challenges for religious leadership today. With declining membership and related financial challenges, the institutional church and its leaders are under tremendous pressure. Anxious judicatories pore over membership and contribution statistics to evaluate clergy effectiveness and congregational health. Congregational mission statements based on the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19–20), are translated into strategic plans for “making disciples” who will add to membership rolls and help keep the doors open. In the face of these pressures, parish clergy may begin to share the sense of compartmentalization experienced by their counterparts in business, their vocation coming to seem like a job divorced from meaning and purpose.

Having McKinsey’s framework for centered leadership at hand would have helped me, as a female business leader, stay in touch with my own relationally-based values in an environment whose power dynamics made it difficult to do so, while also encouraging me to engage questions of meaning and purpose. The church could have facilitated my integrative work of meaning

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<sup>40</sup> Barsh, et. al., 36.

making by teaching me to reflect theologically on my workplace experience. My subsequent theological training has helped me to understand that my relational approach to leadership is characteristically female, but it is also grounded in Christian theology. God as Trinity is relational in God's very Being. Just as the divine life is relational, ours is as well, for all creation exists in relationship through the Creator. Fostering and participating in that fundamental interconnection of all creation through God is integrative, meaning-making work on the journey to wholeness in God. Facilitating that meaning making in community is one of the principal functions of religious leaders. The journey begins with the inner work of being in relationship with the living God, work that is essential in a world that can drive people to live compartmentalized, fragmented lives. The Quaker scholar Thomas Kelly described this challenge seventy years ago:

We Western peoples are apt to think our great problems are external, environmental. We are not skilled in the inner life, where the real roots of our problems lie...The outer distractions of our interests reflect an inner lack of integration of our own lives. We are trying to be several selves at once, without all our selves being organized by a single, mastering Life within us. Each of us tends to be, not a single self, but a whole committee of selves...And each of our selves is in turn a rank individualist, not cooperative but shouting out his vote loudly for himself when the voting time comes. And all too commonly we follow the common American method of getting a quick decision among conflicting claims within us. It is as if we have a chairman of our committee of many selves within us who does not integrate the many into one but who merely counts the votes at each decision, and leaves disgruntled minorities...We are not integrated. We are distraught. We feel honestly the pull of many obligations and try to

fulfill them all...Strained by the very mad pace of our daily outer burdens, we are further strained by an inward uneasiness, because we have hints that there is a way of life vastly richer and deeper than all this hurried existence, a life of unhurried serenity and peace and power...Life is meant to be lived from a Center, a divine Center.<sup>41</sup>

In a world that is changing at a bewildering pace, our households and our institutions are filled with and increasingly paralyzed by anxiety. Women can be further challenged by power dynamics, especially in the workplace, that can silence their voices and leave them feeling isolated and drained. If they are to diminish the Sunday–Monday gap, religious leaders will need to address the realities of women’s issues in the workplace and the workplace ecology itself, thus becoming facilitators of meaning making and drawing those they serve to a “divine center” of wholeness and peace.

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<sup>41</sup> Thomas Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, (San Francisco, HarperCollins, 1941), 91–93.



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**NOT MY FATHER'S SEMINARY:  
LEADERSHIP LESSONS FOR A NEW PRESIDENT**  
KATHARINE RHODES HENDERSON

**Abstract:** Our tumultuous times call us to free ourselves from some traditional notions of religious leadership, theological education, and institutional norms. We need resilient public leaders willing to engage some of the most difficult issues of our day. We need courageous religious leaders and institutions of firm faith and wise mind to forge new relationships, build new partnerships and movements, and master the techniques of twenty-first century media, money management, and entrepreneurship. Using my experiences as president of Auburn Theological Seminary to illustrate, I introduce characteristics and practices needed for effective religious leadership. I argue that women have distinctive leadership potential, which can and should be nurtured.

### **Leading Auburn Theological Seminary**

I am now in my third year as president of Auburn Seminary. Stepping into this role is at once audacious, humbling, creative, all-absorbing and immensely joyful. It is knowing that everything that has come before has prepared me for this moment and that, every day, there is more to be learned to meet the challenges at hand. A recent dream, whose overall message seemed to affirm my leadership at Auburn, presented images of my mother in dreadlocks and war paint and emphasized the name of my maternal great-grandmother, Lela Bloodworth, referred to as a renowned abolitionist of slavery. At this charged juncture in my own career, the dream seemed to be saying, “trust that the courage and fierceness of your

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own matriarchs stand behind you, layer upon layer. We will uphold you. Now is your time. What do you feel is worth fighting for, worth expending your life's blood on?" My answer of course is Auburn, not so much in the sense of institution building, although that is certainly part of it, but more because of the potential impact that Auburn *unleashed* can make in the world.

I say "unleashed" because I believe that our times ask us to free ourselves from some traditional notions of religious leadership and theological education. To respond effectively to the challenges before us, we and our institutions need to move boldly and fluidly within the currents of our times.

Auburn's new tagline, introduced at my inauguration, captures this movement: Trouble the water, Heal the world. It says: flow, turbulent at times, but coursing toward justice and wholeness. It is meant to convey audacity and prayer, charge and invitation. It reaches out to all who hunger to make a difference in the world and says: "Dare to stir things up. If you seek healing, wade in. Act boldly, from the depths of your being, calling upon the roots of your faith, your cherished traditions, and you will be met." The paradox is that it is up to us and it is not up to us alone. God's grace that has brought us this far will carry us forward to do the work we are called to do.

I have found that it is a question of allowing one's whole self to be in play, engaging with realms one is not fully in charge of, attending to what fires the blood, activates the heart, and furthers the life force. Just as our institutions need to be unleashed, so too must we.

Over a decade ago, while serving as Auburn's executive vice president, I had the persistent sense that there was more I could be doing to help heal the world. I took these stirrings seriously and initiated a series of conversations with women whose leadership I found inspiring. The insights I gleaned, which I lay out in my

book, *God's Troublemakers: How Women of Faith are Changing the World*,<sup>1</sup> unleashed me. A central finding was that these women were leading seamless lives. There was no split between public and private, no compartmentalizing. Exhibiting a remarkable integrity, each woman had gone public with who she was, often inventing an organization which could embody her deepest values and address social justice issues she thought were overlooked. This insistence on seamlessness lay at the root of their courage, effectiveness, and resilience.

One of these women is Sister Helen Prejean, a Catholic nun whose activism was awakened by moving to live among poor people in New Orleans. She became galvanized against the death penalty when she began corresponding with a man on death row and praying with the family of the teenagers he had killed. When I asked her how she gathered herself for the work, she said:

My prayer is a whole way of aligning myself with the energy of God. To me, the big image is energy, movement, a stream. So you put your little boat in the stream. And when you're in the stream and God's love is flowing through you, you can be bold. You just say, for example, "the death penalty is wrong, people are suffering, there's great injustice—I will take it on."<sup>2</sup>

The alignment she refers to here is another way of naming seamlessness. It is a fluid thing, an ever-evolving balance informed by prayer, a deliberate opening to what lies beyond our current sense of self and world. Both individuals and institutions can do this dance. We just need to keep listening and moving, allowing ourselves to be stirred and morphed into who we next need to be.

Who we next become is of course deeply informed by who we have been and where we have come from. This is another key finding from my conversations with women

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<sup>1</sup> Katharine Henderson, *God's Troublemakers: How Women of Faith are Changing the World* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Henderson, 112.

leaders. There is no abstract recipe for women's leadership. The forms and emphases it takes arise out of the particulars of each woman's life and the broader context within which she dwells. So too with organizations. With my inauguration as Auburn's president, I have the opportunity to work creatively with the confluence of my own passions and those that Auburn has made manifest for almost two hundred years. Auburn and I, in conversation with the many stakeholders with whom we are linked, are now in transition toward our particular version of seamlessness, giving voice and life to the lessons those inspiring women leaders helped crystallize for me: daring to invent new forms, holding an ethic of relationship and inclusiveness, leading from within, trusting interdependence, and working the links between the personal and systemic spheres. I offer here an account of my relationship to Auburn as a case study, with the hope that it will provide insight to other leaders as they and their institutions evolve together.

### *Justice in the Blood*

The dream of Lela Bloodworth underscores for me that I can't help but do this work because a yearning for justice runs through my blood. It's in my DNA.

I carry with me vivid childhood memories of being in Civil Rights marches with my parents in Louisville, Kentucky in the 1960s. We were moving along in a crowd of mostly black faces. Pressed within that sea of sweaty adult bodies, I felt small and different, a stranger, and self-consciously white, but I also sensed that I was part of something large, something significant. Because our marching was punctuated by prayer and singing hymns, faith became intimately connected to justice, to movement, to doing something with others to make a difference.

My parents were there because of their childhood memories. I still remember the anguish in my father's voice when he told me how, as a youth in rural North Carolina, he saw an African-American man dragged



behind a car in the town square of Wilmington until his body was unrecognizable. Likewise, my mother talked of being awakened as a child by robed Klansmen, on horseback with torches burning, who rode the mile to her home to harass her father for founding the only high school in the region to educate African-Americans.

These memories carried my parents into lifetime commitments as leaders in the community—as bridge-builders and seekers of justice. My father became a beloved professor of Old Testament and Hebrew in a Presbyterian seminary. He made sure I learned my Hebrew alphabet right alongside my ABCs and planted within me deep concerns for Israelis and Palestinians in a conflict that even then was intensifying. When I accompanied him on preaching gigs as a child, it seemed to me that Moses himself would not have been more adored or praised. In our little Presbyterian world, we were royally treated. When I was thirteen, my mother became the first woman elder to be ordained in our church in Louisville. It was a day of anger, tears, and text-citings in our usually orderly congregation. I saw that feminism, though absolutely worth it, came at a cost. It seemed that religious leadership, rightly exercised, mattered a lot.

Right next door lived Ruth and Max Goldberg, who became Aunt Ruth and Uncle Max to me because they treated me as the daughter they never had. They came to church with us on Christmas Eve; I went with them to Friday night Shabbat services. They ate our fried chicken; we ate matzo ball soup and learned to make brisket. Strangers we were by some standards, yet we claimed one another as chosen family—which came with its own kind of risks. On my thirteenth birthday, Aunt Ruth gave me a ruby ring, then over a hundred years old, brought out of Austria during the Holocaust by her courageous parents. She told me its story and asked me to wear it every day. It reminds me that the events of the Holocaust flowed into my bloodline, too.

*Auburn's Roots*

Auburn, too, has justice in its blood, and a conviction about the role of religion in the public square. From its inception, Auburn has deliberately placed itself on frontiers. It was founded in 1818 in Auburn, New York, then a wilderness area right in the path of revivalist energies sweeping the country. Auburn quickly became known as a seminary that engaged the social issues of the day—poverty, slavery, and women and children's rights.

A century later, in the aftermath of the Great Depression, Auburn was nearly forced to shut down—a parable for many during our own uncertain times. Yet those entrusted with its leadership gradually came upon a new vision with a new form. Auburn ceased to be a traditional seminary that trained and graduated ministers, and positioned itself on a new frontier in New York City, where it pioneered continuing theological education.

In the 1990s, Auburn placed itself on yet another frontier, making a commitment to religious pluralism. Auburn's Center for Multi-faith Education was born to support efforts to do so at several levels: through programs at the grassroots, local community level, including and especially with and for women; through efforts to educate seminary faculty across the nation about reshaping their curricula; and a new Face to Face/Faith to Faith program, which helps teenagers from conflict and post conflict regions internationally—South Africa, Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine, and the United States—to become leaders for a new age of interreligious understanding and peace.

*The Confluence of Leader and Institution*

Today, with my leadership, Auburn is morphing again. Though we are still located in New York City, technology and our global interconnectedness have carried us all into new terrain.

Like the journey of Abraham and Sarah, who were told to leave their father's house and go to a land that God would show them, I believe my journey as president of Auburn (as is true of perhaps all seminary presidents

today), is one of transforming the seminary of my father's generation, so that it may address the challenges of a new age—to seek not just faithfulness in training a new generation of leaders but also relevance in an era when existing institutions may not fit current needs and usual forms of leadership may be insufficient. It is a time when religious pluralism is increasing, demographic trends are changing the face of North America, justice issues press in with urgency, and financial constrictions demand a new way. It is an age when seminaries live between the two poles of secularism and fundamentalisms.

### **A Fresh Take on Religious Leadership**

In the years ahead, Auburn's focus will still be on leadership, but we believe it is time to reconfigure the terms. As we see it, progressive religious leaders need to be purveyors of progressive values, bringing ancient stories to life in compelling ways, interpreting the meaning embedded in current realities. They will need to be both thoughtful and bold, winsomely aggressive in carving out sacred space in the public sphere by asking "Where is God in this?" Where is God in conversations about economic justice, Occupy Wall Street, immigration, human trafficking, LGBTQ equality, gender justice, torture, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the environment, and a woman's right to choose, beginning and end of life decisions, and much more?

We want to help leaders feel confident and called to take part in a public conversation in which CEOs are talking with ethicists, theologians are partnering with activists, and secularists mix it up with devout believers. The work is face to face and online, in a milieu that's local, global, and multi-faith. Face to face in every space.

In the last several years, we at Auburn have thought deeply about the skills and qualities such leaders will need to have. Let me introduce them through the stories of leaders who are already embodying them. These leaders range far beyond our usual notions of ministry. Key to unleashing Auburn's power is the task of

broadening the public imagination about what religious leaders do and who they are.

Consider, for instance, Bishop Minerva Carcaño, the first Hispanic woman to be elected to the episcopacy of the United Methodist Church. She has the courage and ability to go up against Lou Dobbs and win the argument. Immigration is her number one issue. Her pulpit is as likely to be CNN as a sanctuary or classroom. We think religious leaders need to be *media savvy* and that it is particularly important to have women's voices and values heard in the media as well as in the church.

Then there is Julio Medina, who pursued crime and did time in prison. He found God there and went to seminary on the inside, in prison. Now he pursues justice as the founder of Exodus Transitional Community, helping formerly incarcerated people lead meaningful lives after serving their time. He has even been honored at the White House. A religious leader needs to *pursue justice*.

I think of Farah, a young Muslim girl from Columbus, Ohio, who came to Face to Face/Faith to Faith, Auburn's international multi-faith youth leadership program, several summers ago. By her own admission, she was so shy she hesitated to speak. Now she is a counselor for the program and an interfaith leader in Columbus who speaks about growing up Muslim in the United States post 9/11. Surely leaders need the capacity to *build bridges* across divides of many kinds.

Leymah Gwobee is a Methodist woman from Liberia and the main character in the documentary film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell*. Her activism began with a "crazy dream" about peace! Backed by women in her church and joined by their Muslim sisters, these women began organizing for peace in Liberia during Charles Taylor's dictatorship. They could not watch one more child be mutilated, and they refused to be raped again. So they used what power they had to take action, including sex strikes, denying their men sex until they laid their weapons down. This group of women epitomizes *courage* in the face of conflict—an essential capacity for a

religious leader today. In October 2011, Leymah was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for her work.

Rabbi Justus Baird directs Auburn's multi-faith programs. He was faced with the decision about whether to accept an invitation to meet with President Mahmoud Amadinijad of Iran. I remember sitting in a staff meeting with him as all of us were discussing our opinions, but what did Justus do? After consulting the people he thought could advise him best, he turned to the Talmud, to his sacred texts, to see what they would tell him about engaging the stranger. Justus was *intellectually rigorous and spiritually grounded*, which is what leaders need to be today.

Then there is Kathy LeMay. Although born to humble circumstances, which included living in her car at times, her family had always given her the message that there was plenty to give. Today, as CEO and founder of her company, Raising Change, she is advising some of the wealthiest people in America about what it means to be generous, to become activist-philanthropists, putting their wealth in service of creating systemic, sustainable social change. Kathy is *wise about money*, as all effective religious leaders need to be.

I first came to know Sharon Brous as a new rabbi just down the street on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. That's before she became famous. Today she is the new face of Jewish leadership in America as the founding rabbi of IKAR, the social justice-based boom congregation, the "it" synagogue in Los Angeles where the young people want to go. Sharon saw a need and, with God's help, created IKAR from scratch, becoming a spiritual entrepreneur. We must add *entrepreneurial* to our list.

Katharine Ragsdale is the newly installed president of Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As new seminary presidents, we share a lot of experiences. But there is one thing she has faced that I didn't have to. When she was seeking ordination as a priest, she came out as a lesbian and was told that there was no place for her in the church. Last fall, she became the first "out" seminary president. When the Church said

to Katharine, “No, you don’t belong in church leadership,” she did not say “no” to the Church. That’s the kind of *resilience* it takes to stay in for the long haul.

If these leadership capacities seem too focused on the individual, perhaps the last is one of the most important: to *live the value of interdependence* by making connections and building communities and movements. A leader is only as good as the networks she is able to build and leverage.

Although we certainly can’t take total credit for their formation, each of these leaders has in some way been touched and shaped by Auburn, and our convictions about leadership have been influenced and inspired by them. Though we think these qualities are vital for all leaders, some are particularly important for women to develop, and some may have special resonance for women.

## Women’s Distinctive Leadership Potential

Operationalizing the value of interdependence is a case in point. While writing *God’s Troublemakers*, I became aware of research on women’s leadership that corroborated my own findings about women’s preference for a management style that deliberately draws upon the diverse strengths and insights of others and involves tending a “web of inclusion”<sup>3</sup> throughout the organization and beyond. Such organizations tend to be more egalitarian and horizontal rather than hierarchical. When interdependence is truly working, there is not less power, but more, and of a different sort. Power becomes a measure of the healthy functioning of the group, the degree to which its varied gifts are utilized, and the evolution of collective insight into complex issues. This willingness to share power and care for connective tissue is precisely the kind of skill needed to build far-flung

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<sup>3</sup> See Sally Helgesen, *The Web of Inclusion* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1995) and Jean Lipman-Blumen, *The Connective Edge: Leading in an Interdependent World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990).

networks and communities capable of igniting widespread social change.

Related to this management style is an ability, even a preference, for leading from within a group, or even from behind or beneath. The idea is that often organic, creative movement is best facilitated from somewhere other than on top or out front—“leading without ego,” as some of the leaders I interviewed put it. This skill can be especially effective for facilitating a conversation among people who bring very diverse viewpoints to the table. It requires deep listening, hospitality to otherness, the capacity to hold open a space where common goals may begin to take root, and the humility to recognize that some key pieces of the mystery may still lie beyond anyone’s reach. While this ability may not fit our traditional definition of top-down leadership, it certainly beckons as just the sort of presence so many of our peacemaking efforts and movement building initiatives may well require.

Similarly, women’s relationship to money is a growing resource for leadership. Women control over half of the personal wealth in the United States today,<sup>4</sup> an underappreciated fact. Also, women are often greater risk takers in terms of their giving. Whereas the philanthropic habits of men often follow traditional lines of giving to alma maters and the arts, women often seed smaller non-profits and justice-related causes, including those that focus on women and girls. This means that strategic philanthropy by women could be the major factor in moving the needle on justice issues in the coming decades. On behalf of this vision, Auburn’s new Generosity and Gender Justice initiative<sup>5</sup> supports

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.pbs.org/ttc/headlines\\_economics\\_philanthropy.html](http://www.pbs.org/ttc/headlines_economics_philanthropy.html). Also see this 2009 article in *Forbes Magazine* by Betsy Brill which discusses women’s wealth and philanthropy: [www.forbes.com/2009/08/18/brill-women-philanthropy-intelligent-investing-wealth.html](http://www.forbes.com/2009/08/18/brill-women-philanthropy-intelligent-investing-wealth.html).

<sup>5</sup> For more on the Generosity and Gender Justice Initiative, see [www.auburnseminary.org/womens-multifaith-education?par=20](http://www.auburnseminary.org/womens-multifaith-education?par=20).

women of every economic level as activist philanthropists, helping them to grapple with the challenges, fears, and potential of making money, having/not having money, and giving it away. This initiative is guided by the principle that generosity is defined as a holy way of being in the world that goes beyond acts of kindness to embody a spiritually charged way of living that is generous, generative, and inclusive. Such generosity lies in every one of us. It can flourish, in ways that have often been overlooked and underused, to change the world.

As we know, just as women have been marginalized in the corporate world, so too are women disproportionately underrepresented in top religious leadership positions in congregations. Currently, I am the only woman president of a Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) seminary. This ongoing obstacle means that the entrepreneurial skills that women have—the fierceness to make a way out of no way, fueled by a passion for life to flourish—are a crucial means for bringing women's values to bear on public issues. Just think what might happen if this entrepreneurial fierceness were fully unleashed!

My research for *God's Troublemakers* revealed that the entry point for each woman's work on broad public issues was most often a single charged personal encounter with brokenness or injustice which had so caught her attention that she could not turn away. Her response in the moment was correspondingly intimate and personal—like buying peanut butter and bread for a room full of hungry children—but the encounter became an unforgettable window on broader social patterns which called her into action. She may not have thought of herself as a policy analyst or a social change agent or spiritual entrepreneur before the encounter, but she became one afterwards. For many women, justice is compellingly understood as right relationship writ large.

Underlying all of Auburn's women's programming is the conviction that women have a distinctive and absolutely necessary role to play in healing the world.



Research has demonstrated that when the women in a society achieve greater equality in such areas as education, business, and civic engagement, the well-being of the entire community is lifted up.<sup>6</sup> There is growing recognition that empowering women is key to realizing justice in a broader framework.

## Going Public

We are now in the midst of transforming Auburn into a laboratory where the key leadership qualities we have identified can be experienced, experimented with, and honed by both men and women. Our growing edge is to do whatever it takes to bring progressive religious values into the public realm. In keeping with the ethic of seamlessness I mentioned at the outset, we feel it is essential that Auburn operate in such a way that it models the values it seeks to teach. This means that Auburn itself will be developing its own public presence as it simultaneously supports individuals in becoming more visible themselves. It means that I and Auburn staff must pivot and expand our capacities and repertoire for leadership. Organizationally and individually, I and we must strive to embody the leadership qualities we espouse.

To fully unleash our power, we must commit ourselves to bridging the gap between theory and practice, between theology and social action. We want to be a think tank that operationalizes itself—a think/act tank—a creative laboratory for informed committed action, a place where education and doing are always in dynamic interplay in service of right relationship and the flourishing of all life.

This commitment means we will remain open to programmatic, organizational, and staffing changes we can make to continuously live this dream forward.

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<sup>6</sup> For a global view, see The World Development Report 2012 focused on Gender Equality and Development on the World Bank's website.

Although we are very much in process, my hope is that Auburn can become an organizational model for how to transform an institution focused on learning and research into one that includes practice, action, and movement building. Here are some glimpses of how that is already happening.

*Tapping the Resources of Auburn Media*

Ten years ago, when we were acutely aware of the absence of progressive religious voices in the public square, we took the first steps toward forming what is now Auburn Media—a full-featured resource center for the interface between the world of religion and the secular media. Since then, we have trained over two thousand religious leaders so that they can speak to a broad range of public issues using the traditional media of radio and television, as well as new media and social networking tools.

We've also developed Auburn Media into a resource for journalists seeking to cover religion more accurately and engagingly. We have discovered that journalists actually want to talk to religious leaders and clergy. They are hungry for moral voices that help make sense out of current realities. To ensure that public debate is informed by diverse perspectives, we connect journalists with responsible religious voices and experts from across the country.

Spurred by Auburn Media, I too am honing media skills, as a blogger on the *Washington Post* "On Faith" blog and as a spokesperson on a range of public issues. Being out there in public in a credible way takes an enormous amount of time. It means being willing to be consciously and openly religious, using religious narrative and sacred text, in ways that progressives often shy away from. It means finding a language of moral valance that translates well across a broad audience. It means being the curators and purveyors of story and narrative, an art at which women often excel. While the public is often numbed by abstract policy discussions or a barrage of statistics,

we find that personal stories that illuminate public issues can move heart and mind and change behavior.

## Time for Movement Building

### *Groundswell*

We will continue to build upon Auburn Media's resources, but it is already serving as a fertile seedbed for further public initiatives. Chief among them is a major new commitment to building movements for change. The signs of our times—the Great Recession, demographic change, regime changes and public uprisings in the United States and across the globe, the emerging energy of the millennial generation—indicate that the time is ripe for an upsurge of collective action. We witnessed the potential for such a movement during the election of President Barack Obama, which brought a swell of hope and united people across racial, religious, cultural, and political spectrums. Since then, however, a rising sense of disillusionment around economic inequalities and political partisanship confirm for many that we need more than a president, more than regime change, to ignite sustainable change. We need a new venue for social action, organized not around a political party, a particular tradition, or a single issue, but around hope that a shared vision for a better world can become reality.

In response, Auburn has launched a multi-faith social justice initiative called “Groundswell.” Our goal is to create an action network that is progressive, pragmatic, and post-partisan, galvanizing people around shared values rather than dogmatic truth claims. Designed as a “progressive plus”<sup>7</sup> movement, Groundswell will rally

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<sup>7</sup> Groundswell includes progressives plus others who share such values as bridge building and border crossing (reaching out to and trying to understand our neighbors and even our enemies), truth telling (listening deeply and giving voice through sacred text and contemporary conversation), hope and humility, tradition and innovation, and celebration in the small steps that carry us forward even in the face of great challenges.

people who are hungry to enact justice in a fallen broken world. By cultivating connections between social justice organizations whose work has often been separate and siloed, and deploying innovative social media tools, Groundswell will generate moral force around social justice issues by bringing together the secular, the seeking, and people of faith in bold collective action.<sup>8</sup>

One of our initial campaigns is calling forth a “groundswell of responsibility” on one of the most troubling and hidden moral issues in America, the sex trafficking of children. Groundswell is currently leading a diverse multi-faith movement to educate and bring awareness to this issue. Our strategy has been to gather a broad multi-faith clergy coalition of signers to a full page ad in the *New York Times* requesting Village Voice Media to shut down its Adult Section, which provides a platform where others can advertise minors to be trafficked for sex. Signers are Christians, Jews, Muslims, Sikhs, Buddhists and humanists, joining together to pursue justice. They represent the end goal of all interfaith work—not merely generating dialogue and cozy feelings about one’s neighbor, but taking collective action to heal and repair the world.

Going public as a seminary is a counterintuitive act. This campaign has demanded not only that that I and other Auburn staff handle media effectively, but that we train our allies and clergy signers to do so as well. It has joined us in partnerships with secular NGOs and advocates across religious and theological differences. This kind of advocacy, education, and engagement means that we must not only be informed about institutional risk, but also comfortable taking the risks that such engagement demands. Most recently, it has meant using our convening power for a meeting between Village

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<sup>8</sup> See John Kania and Mark Kramer, “Collective Impact,” *Stanford Social Innovation Review* (Winter 2011): 36–41. The authors describe collective impact as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving specific social problem.”

Voice Media and Auburn's clergy coalition. As president and host, my role was to create a holding environment for people who would not otherwise meet to have conversations they would not otherwise have about very different perspectives on how to address the trafficking of children.

To work on an issue like child sex trafficking calls forth in me many of the leadership capacities we have identified for religious leaders generally: being spiritually grounded, pursuing justice, being courageous in the face of conflict, practicing the discipline of being media savvy, and nurturing resilience.

### *Prophets/Profits for Peace*

A second movement-building initiative that exemplifies a more public role is Prophets/Profits for Peace. It builds on Auburn's longstanding concern for a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and focuses on multi-faith relationships between and among Christians, Jews, and Muslims. Prophets/Profits for Peace uses financial investment as leverage for strengthening the economy of the West Bank for an eventual Palestinian state. It is based on the premise that investment is a more positive and effective means of bringing about peace than divestment, a strategy for change that some within mainline Protestant denominations invoke as a means to "end the Occupation."

With hope in short supply in the Middle East, Profits/Prophets for Peace (PFP), provides an opportunity for institutional and personal investors to do something right now that can improve the prospects for a two-state solution to the conflict. To be sure, political negotiations are essential, as are people-to-people programs, like Auburn's Face to Face/Faith to Faith program for youth. But we believe that economic leverage is a powerful yet often overlooked dimension of peacemaking. By strengthening the economy of the West Bank through capital investment and supporting enterprises where Israelis and Palestinians are working

together for mutual benefit, we believe we can increase the viability and capacity of a future Palestinian state in a negotiated two-state solution, nurturing “stakeholders for peace” who are quite literally invested in such a future. In the process, we can rally a diverse coalition of investors—Christians, Jews, and Muslims—who may disagree on politics, but are committed to working across ideological, religious, and political lines to set the stage for a sustainable peace. We are convinced that this approach is not only possible, but the most faithful and effective means of promoting a just, prosperous, and lasting peace for all.

As with the Campaign for Responsibility, focused on child sex trafficking, PFP involves galvanizing unusual partners and allies around shared goals and values—in this case, peace in the Middle East. True to our conviction that religious leaders need to be wise about money, PFP takes Auburn and me as a woman president into the realm of finance and investment, learning the art of a financial “deal” that focuses on a double bottom line, that is, potential financial gain plus social good flowing from the formation of relationships among unlikely partners: Jews, Christians, and Muslims all across theological spectrums. It provides a way for finance and legal professionals who are lay leaders from synagogues, churches, and mosques, to use their professional skills for faith-based justice and peace work. It demands that I as president use the convening power of Auburn, set the vision for the project, learn the very public and political issues around this particular conflict, and use religion as a resource for making peace, not waging war. It provides a broad spectrum of people the opportunity to learn the art of peacemaking, to act together instead of fighting each other. It is the highest form of lay and clergy education and requires ongoing learning by all of us.

Ironically, though women make some of the best peacemakers, I am often one of the very few women at the table in this work, which is also true at diplomatic and negotiating tables more broadly. One of my goals is to bring more women to the PFP work even as we provide

an unusual vehicle for men to exercise their leadership as peacemakers.

As a seminary dedicated to healing the world, our strategic goals revolve around where we want to see the needle move around public issues like child sex trafficking, Israeli-Palestinian Peace, LGBTQ equality, or economic justice. Then it's a question of discerning who the right partners and allies are, signaling our interest to them, and engaging them in setting goals and aligned actions. What Auburn brings to the table may change from campaign to campaign. Sometimes we take the lead and sometimes we play a supporting role. We may offer concept and vision, or media training for all players, or fundraising, or the use of new media and technology.

In an interdependent world, we don't have to do it all, but we do want to give it our all. For us, this means continuing to embody those leadership capacities we feel are key to our times: pursuing justice, bridging divides, being spiritually grounded, intellectually rigorous, entrepreneurial, wise about money, resilient, and courageous in the face of conflict. It is, finally, a question of fulfilling our vocation, asking concurrently and continuously, "Where is God in this?" "How can Auburn be bold?" "To what end and purpose?"

## Leadership Lessons

### *Exercising the Bully Pulpit*

All of this emphasis on going public is changing my role as seminary president. I am no longer just the key promoter of the institution *qua* institution but the vessel by which Auburn uses its bully pulpit to promote and advocate for particular values in the public square. I have learned to get up to speed quickly on public issues such as child sex trafficking, but I also remind myself that I do not have to be the expert. What I must be sure to do is contribute what is often missing: a moral perspective. In a world where many issues are framed solely in financial, legal, and practical terms, offering the modern day equivalent of a parable, as Jesus did, allows listeners to

reframe accepted notions, to gain insight in a “still more excellent way.”

### *Metabolizing Conflict Sustainably*

Taking an institution public—being more visible and vocal—means taking risks. It involves taking negative hits on the internet and from those who may have liked you better the old way. As we go up against secular corporate powers and principalities or those who espouse narrow ideologies, I am drawn out of my comfort zone and into realms where courage and media savvy are essential.

There is a gender component to this work as well. One must be fierce to speak truth to power, but it must be done with presence so as not to be discredited as female hysteria. I also realize that many of my male colleagues seem to respond instinctively to public conflict, as if it is blood sport, with an emphasis on the sport. As a female of a certain age, I metabolize conflict differently—it registers in the body and psyche differently. I am most effective when I put the emphasis on the blood, calling up the dream of my fierce reformer matriarchs in dreadlocks and war paint. The way I marshal the necessary presence and resilience is to know with my whole being that much more than a game is at stake.

### *Being a Leadership Laboratory*

My colleagues and I think that Auburn’s training of public religious leaders can only have integrity if we are also learning and living it ourselves. We are working to embody the leadership qualities we feel are essential, individually and as an institution. Rather than setting the tone from the top—the usual corporate model—we have put in motion an iterative, organic process whereby the institution develops new capacities through successive acts of creation, conscious and unconscious, intentional and serendipitous. We are simultaneously doing and watching, refining our practice as we go. By modeling what it means to go public as a religious institution, we



are able to bring tested, up-to-date experience to those we educate.

With this much institutional change, the radar is on all the time. I have created a cabinet for strategic change with senior level staff to monitor our capacity and set benchmarks for success. I use the board very actively as strategic partners. Many board members are involved in Groundswell and Prophets/Profits for Peace as generative thought partners, advocates, and institutional caretakers, watching out for Auburn's institutional interests.

I also consult an executive coach and organizational change expert who knows me and the institution well, including the board and senior staff. She has seen me lead in various settings, internal and external to the institution, and helps me benchmark success, strategize, and monitor progress. I chose this particular companion on the journey because she is a feminist theorist who has helped to build the Jewish social justice movement with an emphasis on women's leadership. Her expertise and experience map onto my own: gender, faith, and social justice. Because she is a woman who has seen gender dynamics play out in many organizations, she is a great listener and guide. She also offers a place of rest—as someone who is for “me,” who helps me discern what my “highest and best use” is in a given situation, and who speaks the truth with kindness, not judgment.

### *Tuning to the Jazz of Interdependence*

Auburn's structure has become flatter and less hierarchical. Instead of a leaders with discreet roles and purviews siloed from one another in discreet centers, we now have pods, as we call them, which coalesce fluidly to work together on initiatives as need arises. Staff members still function as educators who direct programs as educators, but simultaneously they may be operating in fast-moving “campaign” mode. This means that my role as president shifts as well. I am no longer conducting an orchestra with a prescribed set of instrumentalists and a score to follow. It is more like leading a jazz ensemble

and trusting not only the musicians but also the power of the process itself. “A jazz ensemble...is a model of a diverse group coming together sometimes in a ‘chaotic, turbulent environment, making fast, irreversible decisions, highly interdependent on one another to interpret equivocal information, dedicated to innovation’ and the creation of a novel, transformed result.”<sup>9</sup> This leadership mode requires entrepreneurial ability, nimbleness, flexibility, and the ability to play different roles at different times. There is space for individuals to shine as stars but always the requirement that they play well with others. It is about calling forth the talents and providing a holding environment where there is structure and challenge but also nurture.

### *Beyond the Usual Talent Pools*

The seminary as movement builder must reach well beyond usual talent pools to include those from other professional cohorts. We feel we need to be a more complex ecosystem internally in order to interface more effectively with the interconnected complexity all around us. In addition to the traditional skill sets of theologically trained educators and administrators, we have sought out people with media and movement building expertise. Auburn has recently hired Isaac Luria, a millennial, who brings skills for building social change campaigns and who can grow small databases into large ones as he did previously for a political lobby group. Susan Reed, former editor-in-chief of *O, The Oprah Magazine*, brings thirty years of experience in print media and public relations to help an obscure seminary become more visible and enhance visibility for the social change initiatives with which Auburn aligns itself.

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<sup>9</sup>Beth Zemsky and David Mann, “Building Organizations in a Movement Moment,” in *Social Policy* (Spring–Summer 2008): 16.

*Caring for Coalitions*

In our experience, collective impact thinking is less about focusing on Auburn as an isolated player and more about the partners, allies, and players we can bring into our own constellation or with whom we may associate in theirs. It is about discerning where the power and energy is, valuing a diversity of strengths, and sensing how their confluence will allow us to be more effective than any of us could be alone. In this more permeable mode, one's own well-being becomes intermingled with that of the whole. I am as territorial and fierce about my own institution as anybody, yet I find this self-interest becomes tempered by a larger vision of the whole and by caring for the coalition to which one is committed. Having collective impact means actually living the value of interdependence, becoming a potent part of the beloved community to heal and repair the world.

The goals we strive for are not solely about unleashing Auburn's potential but are much more broad: moving the needle toward more inclusive justice and promoting religion as a force for good in the world.

**A Little Bit Swerved**

It is no longer common practice to spend a career in one place. Financial and political vagaries, whether corporate or non-profit, make it a risky business to give one's professional life (and heart!), to an institution that can spit one out to balance a budget or to maintain the status quo. And yet I find myself as president following much the same path as my father did at the seminary in Kentucky to which he gave almost the entire sum of his professional life. I guess that sustained commitment is in my blood too, because Auburn has captivated my imagination for almost twenty years. In several roles and now three years into the presidency, it remains infinitely fascinating, constantly morphing to meet the needs of the times, yet steadied and grounded by almost two hundred years of history and theology—a theology which, even in Auburn's early years, was deemed “a little bit swerved” by

a visiting student from Princeton Seminary. Perhaps I can be most true to the spirit of my father's work and to my own vocation by taking Auburn to a place that honors my "father's seminary" by going beyond it—just as he did in his time. I am able to do this, in part, by invoking the encouragement of the cloud of witnesses—from ancestors appearing in dreams in war paint and dreadlocks, to our collective forebears who faithfully worked for justice, to contemporaries who are my partners, allies and friends. I cannot imagine a more creative and fulfilling role than to join my one "wild and precious life" as Mary Oliver would say, to Auburn's and, with partners within and beyond, to "trouble the waters and heal the world" by God's abundant and ever surprising grace.

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## IT TAKES SO MUCH ENERGY: FEMALE TEMPERED RADICALS IN CHRISTIAN CONGREGATIONS

DIANE ZEMKE

**Abstract:** “Tempered radicals” are those whose personal values differ in some significant way from those of their organization, in this case their congregation. Tempered radicals can be assets to their congregations since they often function as change agents. However, they are also prone to psychological dissonance and burnout, which can thwart their efforts. In this paper I explore how women tempered radicals can continue to work faithfully for change in contexts where they do not fit well. Based on interviews I conducted I offer sustaining practices for women tempered radicals and suggest ways leaders and congregations can support them.<sup>1</sup>

As a practicing Protestant for nearly forty years, I have come to understand that I have often functioned as a tempered radical in the various congregations I have attended. Within a congregation I often have a dual identity: one of being welcomed for the many gifts I bring and one of being viewed warily because I may use those gifts to cultivate alternatives to the cherished status quo. Thus, I am often insider and outsider simultaneously, both welcomed and distrusted. Like others with my experience, I have found it difficult to

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Dr. Steven Zemke for his insightful comments on the manuscript.

walk away from church but often painful to stay.<sup>2</sup> I have chosen to participate in a Christian congregation out of obedience to God and in the belief that good fruit is possible.

As I have reflected on my own experience, I have wondered how other tempered radicals continue to work faithfully for change in congregations where they do not fit. How do they manage the inevitable tension of dual identities, of being both welcomed and seen as a threat? What practices sustain them? And, perhaps just as important, what can congregations do to welcome the tempered radicals in their midst? These questions led me to explore the lives of tempered radicals in Christian congregations. In my research I was privileged to hear the stories of five experienced tempered radicals, both women and men, Protestant and Catholic.<sup>3</sup> This article shares the experiences of the female tempered radicals.

## The Nature of Tempered Radicals

The personal values of tempered radicals differ in some significant way from those of their organization.<sup>4</sup> Typical examples include women within traditionally male professions or minorities within traditionally white institutions. In these examples, tempered radicals attempt to honor their gender and/or ethnic values simultaneously with their organizational or professional values. Tempered radicals often appear as loyal company

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<sup>2</sup> For examples, see Nora Gallagher, *Things Seen and Unseen* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1998), 9; and Letty Russell, "Searching for a Church in the Round," in *Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for Their Own Spiritual Lives*, ed. Miriam Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 253.

<sup>3</sup> This study formed the basis for my Ph.D. dissertation in leadership studies: "Now and Not Yet: The Experience of Tempered Radicals in Christian Congregations" (Ph.D. diss., Gonzaga University, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> The description of the characteristics of tempered radicals is based on Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully, "Tempered Radicals and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change," in *Organization Science* 6 (5) (1995): 585–600.

employees on the outside, yet harbor a decidedly different internal reality, based on their conflicting values. These conflicting values form the foundation for conflicting identities, since value commitments help construct identity. It is the struggle to enact these dual identities that is at the heart of tempered radicals' experience. Tempered radicals are not chameleons, exhibiting one identity here and another there. Rather, they work to honor both identities simultaneously.

The struggle to manage these conflicting identities authentically makes life as a tempered radical difficult. Few people actively choose it but instead find that this life is thrust upon them as they begin to participate in organizations. Psychological dissonance builds as they wrestle with conflicting identities. The typical strategies for resolving dissonance, such as leaving the organization or devaluing their group, do not work for them since they have chosen to remain organizationally committed. Thus, tempered radicals are prone to burnout due to the ongoing tension and misalignment. They may also suffer feelings of self-doubt, guilt, fraudulence, passion, and rage, since they are unable to live up to their ideals of either identity.

In spite of the challenges, tempered radicals can function as successful change agents. They can “behave as committed and productive members and act as vital sources of resistance, alternative ideas, and transformation within their organizations.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, within organizations desiring to change or grow into new areas, tempered radicals can be a valuable resource. Since tempered radicals do not fit well within the dominant culture, they often challenge the status quo, functioning as change agents from within. They work, often quietly and slowly, to create space for themselves and others like them. They live a “now and not yet” life, seeing what could be, but living in what is. They function as outsiders within, having insider language and knowledge with the

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<sup>5</sup> Meyerson and Scully, 586.

outsider's ability to critique. They can also critique both the status quo and radical change since they are part of neither. Alternately, they can advocate for the status quo or radical change when it seems useful to their goal.

Tempered radicals exist in business, medicine, education, and also in denominations and congregations. As with tempered radicals in other contexts, those in congregations are very aware that fitting in with congregational or denominational norms violates who they are. They struggle with managing the officially sanctioned identity of "good Christian" or "good member" that conflicts with their own values on how to live out their faith. Their issues vary with person and context. Some may focus on actually "walking the talk" in social justice issues or living with integrity. Others may long for expanded participation and roles for women and/or laity. Still others may long for truly authentic practices of faith rather than the sometimes shallow busyness of congregational life.

As in other contexts, tempered radicals in denominations and congregations create a useful resource for needed change and transformation. Tempered radicals can create a foundation for change or renewal in groups that welcome their different viewpoints and their struggles to be authentic. They can offer a prophetic witness to complacency and the inwardness of congregational life. Tempered radicals can challenge members to deepen and expand their walks of faith. They provide bridges to other groups who wish to belong, but cannot or will not until something changes. Tempered radicals can make difficult congregational/denominational changes easier since they may embody the direction the group needs to move. Yet, these persons are often isolated, devalued or ineffective, thus thwarting change. Welcoming and supporting tempered radicals is vital if congregations/denominations are to grow and remain healthy.



## Portraits of Female Tempered Radicals

Jean and Monica<sup>6</sup> were participants in my study who graciously shared their experiences of living as tempered radicals. They exemplify many of the challenges female tempered radicals face as well as demonstrating sustaining practices that enable them to persist. I have included portions of their narratives below to more fully illumine the paths female tempered radicals tread. I will open with short descriptions of Monica and Jean and move to exploring their experiences in more depth in the following sections.

### *Jean*

Jean<sup>7</sup> is a Roman Catholic nun in her seventies, having entered religious life before Vatican II. She was transformed by the changes of Vatican II, strongly identifying with the vision for expanded roles for women and laity. She also strongly identifies with her order's charism, to care for women, young children, and the poor. For a decade she served as the pastor (not priest), at St. Catherine's, a congregation in an economically depressed area, a service that she relished. In that role she was completely responsible for the parish, but was not allowed to offer the sacraments. She has also served significant leadership roles in her order since she has strong gifts in facilitating, visioning, organizing, and listening. Today she is the executive director of a small social services agency in St. Catherine's neighborhood.

Jean has numerous strong and long-standing value conflicts with Catholicism. She noted that women are treated poorly: "Women are called to serve in the church...[but] they're not listened to." She experienced open discrimination when she was pastor at St. Catherine's from local priests, although the bishop

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudonyms have been used for the names of the women and their congregations.

<sup>7</sup> Jean was interviewed the afternoon of September 29, 2009 at her home.

supported her in her position. “When you go to the meetings and you’re the only woman, you feel really isolated because you have the priests in little circles talking. And they’re not really interested in what you have to say.” Further, she claimed, “Men laity are listened to more and treated differently than the women.” Jean also felt tension with serving the poor: “Sometimes we have double standards in the church. Sometimes we say we are called to minister to the poor, but then our actions do not fit that calling.” As could be expected, Jean is an ardent advocate for the ordination of women and expanded participation for laity. Yet in spite of these conflicts, Jean strongly resonates with Catholicism and is actively practicing her faith.

### *Monica*

Monica<sup>8</sup> is a Roman Catholic laywoman in her forties, married, with five children. She converted to Catholicism twenty years ago, soon after her marriage. Shortly after her conversion she had a mystical experience with God that transformed her life. While her husband served in the military, Monica served in volunteer and paid positions with military chaplains at various duty stations. Monica is deeply invested in living out her faith in her family and parish. She is a very active leader at St. Teresa’s, a small, rural congregation, serving with the youth, on parish council, and in ecumenical events in her small town. She has also been active in her diocese as it works through the clergy sexual abuse scandal.

Like Jean, Monica has numerous strong value conflicts. Some center on the role of women and laity. She stated, “I would like the bigger church to include married priests and women deacons. I really do. I think that’s hurting us...because it’s keeping out people...” Monica is also caught in the midst of a generational change in her parish with its ensuing conflicts as leadership passes to younger women with different ideas.

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<sup>8</sup> Monica was interviewed the afternoon of November 16, 2009 at her home.

Her extensive ecumenical experience is also a source of conflict. Youth events such as Vacation Bible School in rural towns are ecumenical in order to draw enough participants. Yet Monica has experienced strong anti-Catholic behavior from some Protestant pastors. She finds this behavior discouraging since “we’re all there for one reason, to introduce these kids to a fun, Christ-centered week.” Yet in spite of the value conflicts, Monica claims a strong identification with Catholicism.

### **Transformation, Commitment, and Vision**

Jean and Monica experience the dual identities of faithful Roman Catholics and feminist change agents. They also exemplify characteristics common to many tempered radicals in congregations. These characteristics include a deeply authentic spiritual life, a strong sense of commitment, and vision.

Jean and Monica had transformative experiences with God that continue to percolate through their lives decades later. Monica noted her mystical experience with God had changed her forever. Jean was galvanized by Vatican II. These women also experience their faith relationally, talking about God as one would talk about a close friend. God is a living actor in their lives rather than a dogmatic statement or ethereal concept. This ongoing relational approach supports and reinforces their transformative experiences. It also fosters an intrinsic religious orientation where they work to live congruently with their beliefs.<sup>9</sup> Yet this vibrant faith serves as a source of dissonance as they live with people and institutions that do not share or perhaps even value their experiences or orientation.

When asked why they remain in situations where they experience such dissonance, both women strongly responded that they were committed. Jean stated, “If I

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<sup>9</sup> H. Zondag, “Involved, Loyal, Alienated, and Detached: The Commitment of Pastors,” in *Pastoral Psychology* 49 (4) (2001): 315.

weren't committed I would have said a long time ago... I'm done. I'm not going to try anymore. It's ridiculous." Monica echoed her. "I would just never give in." They have deeply considered their commitment since both recounted stories of others, even some close friends, who have left their congregations or Catholicism altogether. Jean reflected, "I feel so sad about [her leaving]. But I understand how she feels. She said, 'I can't do it...' It's the institution and that hierarchy they can't handle." Monica was frustrated that some seemed to take the easy way out by leaving, yet claimed "I do know people of God who just could not be in the church any more. I know for them it wasn't a cop-out. They're exhausted from the struggle."

Although Jean and Monica appear to draw strength from their committed stance, the nature of their commitment is complicated. Congregations are normative organizations where people belong because they embrace the values.<sup>10</sup> Organizational commitment to any group is based on value congruence, organizational support, and investment.<sup>11</sup> Monica and Jean are organizationally committed to the normative organizations of their religious order (Jean), and parish (Monica). Both of these smaller groups are embedded within Catholicism, another normative organization. Thus, value congruence is a major issue in sustaining their commitment. These women strongly resonate with some Catholic values or they would be unable to remain. However, when one experiences value conflicts within an organizational commitment and in a normative organization, it would seem that the dissonance would be doubly difficult. The very processes supporting the commitment are the processes in conflict.

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<sup>10</sup> Zondag, 320.

<sup>11</sup> C. Vandenberghe, "Organizational Commitments," in *Commitment in Organizations: Accumulated Wisdom and New Directions*, ed. J. Meyer (New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 2009): 111–112.

Further, the strength of Jean's and Monica's commitment suggests that they are both affectively and normatively committed to their contexts. Affective commitment is based on emotional attachment to one's organization whereas normative commitment is based on loyalty and/or obligation.<sup>12</sup> However, these women also experience action commitment since they are deeply focused on change.<sup>13</sup> For example, Monica asserted, "We have a responsibility to fix the manmade problems [in Catholicism]." Although they have a strong emotional attachment and a sense of loyalty, they are also working to change that to which they are attached, which is another source of conflict. Thus, their commitment at all its many levels is a source of conflict. They strongly embrace Catholic values and practices, which enables them to remain within the fold. Yet they ardently pursue substantial change to address the areas where they do not fit.

Jean and Monica are also deeply oriented to ministry arising out of calling and gifting rather than denominational requirements of position, education, and gender. This focus on calling sustains them. Yet they acutely feel the discrepancy between a call to serve God with their gifts and practices that exclude or discourage their participation because of what they are not rather than who they are. Jean felt this orientation most keenly when she was forbidden to participate in the rite of reconciliation. "I would have to sit in the pew because I didn't have the capacity to forgive sins" even though people confessed to her when she served as pastor. Similarly, she could not anoint the sick or dying, even though the people were her parishioners and requested her services.

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<sup>12</sup> C. Vandenberghe, 100.

<sup>13</sup> M. Neubert and C. Wu, "Action Commitments," in *Commitment in Organizations: Accumulated Wisdom and New Directions*, ed. J. Meyer (New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis Group, 2009): 181.

Jean and Monica, like many tempered radicals in other contexts, are visionaries. Yet their visions are not aligned with the congregation/denomination, but instead with their relationship with God. They work to enact their visions within their contexts, hoping to create a new future that makes room for others like them. These visions are at the heart of their now-and-not-yet existence. They are realistic about the pace of change. As Jean reflected on the possibility of women's ordination, she noted, "It won't happen in my lifetime, but I think it will happen." Monica claimed, "We're in a journey and process towards fuller communion with what God intends for us. I think we're working towards that just as we have a faith journey in our lives individually."

Jean and Monica portray female tempered radicals' lives within congregations. Their transformative experiences, intrinsic religious orientations, commitments to change, and nonaligned visions of the future can combine to create a difficult life for them. Yet they are able to persist. Several practices serve them well.

## Sustaining Practices

Tempered radicals' sustaining practices can be highly individualized, because each tempered radical and each context is different. However, these women's practices fall into several distinct categories, including acquiring role models, maintaining strong relationships, and moderating one's change efforts.

Jean and Monica have numerous strong women role models and heroes that align with their values. Role models embody aspects one wishes to emulate, whereas heroes serve as personifications of one's values and ideals.<sup>14</sup> Jean's role models and heroes include Miriam,

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<sup>14</sup> M. Pleiss and J. Felhausen, "Mentors, Role Models, and Heroes in the Lives of Gifted Children," in *Educational Psychology* 30 (3) (1995): 163; D. Porpora, "Personal Heroes, Religion and Transcendental Metanarratives," in *Sociological Forum* 11(2) (1996): 209.

(Ex. 15:20), Lydia (Acts 16), Mother Teresa of Calcutta, and Mary, the mother of Jesus. The foundress of Jean's order is an especially strong hero since "she went through such terrible turmoil with the priests . . . [yet] she was always able to keep her cool, be strong about it. She was tenacious." Jean did note one man: Oscar Romero, because of his work with the poor. Monica had two military wives she reflected on as well as Ruth and Deborah (Judges 4–5). These role models and heroes form a cloud of witnesses that inform and strengthen these women in their walk. Jean, in particular, was adept at selecting role models that portrayed attributes for which she needed support.

Although Jean and Monica draw strength from their role models and heroes, they also depend on living relationships to sustain them. Tempered radicals can be lonely and isolated since they do not fit completely within their organization nor within groups that oppose it; they are people of both worlds.<sup>15</sup> Since it is difficult to feel truly at home in one place, creating a web of relationships that sustain different aspects of one's conflicting identities is important. Jean has found those relationships within her religious order. "I feel very respected by our [religious] community and the gifts I have to offer." Her order gives her a place to share her ideals. "I share it with my friends, with my sister friends mostly. I share it but nothing happens [she laughs]. We talk a lot about the church and what it should be like." Monica also has strong relationships but they are embedded in her parish. "I think it's just a grace you really feel in our parish. . . . Here it's very close-knit." Yet, these relationships are a source of conflict for her as well since her congregational dynamics can be difficult.

Successful tempered radicals embody moderation in their change efforts. Because of the dissonance they experience, they experience more demands on their

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<sup>15</sup> Meyerson and Scully, 598.

emotional energy.<sup>16</sup> The possibility of burnout always looms and the pace of change is often slow. One cannot always be fighting large battles. Further, tempered radicals often live in their organization for the long-term and realize they must manage the effects of their vision on those around them. If they create too much furor too often, they may lose their voice as well as the part of their community that sustains them. Thus, they must pick their battles carefully. Monica was particularly thoughtful on this point. She claimed that in contrast to various military parishes she had attended, in her rural congregation she was working more quietly and carefully because of “the dynamics of the people that I work with and the dynamics of the priest.”

While these practices of reflecting on role models and heroes, seeking supportive relationships, and picking battles are sustaining, women tempered radicals face some special challenges within congregations. Learning to navigate gender is one of them.

## Navigating Gender

Jean and Monica were interviewed as part of a larger study exploring the lives of tempered radicals in congregations generally. Although gender was not an explicit area of inquiry, gender effects were obvious in how these women navigated their identities. Both endured the marginalizing effects of being a female leader in a male hierarchy within Catholicism. Jean, in particular, transgressed norms in her pastoral role. She recalled that she would not be given the agenda for the deanery meetings until after the fact and she knew she was purposefully being excluded. This targeted exclusion ceased when the bishop intervened. Like many women, Jean worked overtime to prove herself. She worked hard at improving St. Catherine’s and at being adept at her role, offering several examples of her success. Yet she

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<sup>16</sup> Meyerson and Scully, 586.



noted, “I think people started to respect what I had to offer. I really do, but it takes a long [time] and takes so much energy out of you.” This extra loss of energy is important since tempered radicals already have higher demands on their emotional energy due to enduring persistent dissonance.

Monica argued that Catholicism is indeed misogynistic, but it does not affect her faith in God. “I think for me it’s always easy to focus, to draw a distinction between God’s work and the work of men on earth. It does not hurt my faith as a Catholic woman to say that the church has certain policies that are very misogynistic and exclusive. It does not hurt because my faith is in God.” Yet, Monica must explicitly and frequently make this distinction, living in resistance to the dominant frame. She must consistently lay aside the devaluing of women’s voice and experience. This stance requires emotional energy she can ill-afford.

Jean and Monica are Roman Catholic, so the difficulties with gender should be expected. However, I would argue that gender effects are present for many Protestant women as well. Many Protestant denominations also have male hierarchies and women’s voices are not allowed in leadership. Women’s areas of service are commonly more limited. Thus, women’s voices overall seem harder to hear. While all tempered radicals tend to be quieter than frank dissidents, being less visible and less heard because one is a woman tempered radical is a double burden when enacting change.

Other studies have noted that female dissidents, of which tempered radicals are a subtype, are treated differently than male dissidents. Dissenting women are more apt to be called marginal members than men. Since they are “marginal,” leaders can ignore their voices. In reality, many female change agents are highly committed, attending regularly and serving on committees.<sup>17</sup> Women

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<sup>17</sup> Russell, 197.

dissidents are also more likely to have their work labeled as obstructive, faithless, or as special-interest politics. In contrast, similar efforts by men will be described as Spirit-led and following God's commands.<sup>18</sup> It appears that within congregations, female tempered radicals are likely to be doubly devalued: first for pushing for change and second for being a woman pushing for change.

For female tempered radicals in congregations, gender is always on the plate, which is not the case for men. If women wish to be active with other change initiatives, they must decide whether and how to add gender issues to the mix. Since the dominant frame is usually male, male tempered radicals rarely feel any pressure to address gender. Their choices are simpler and it is easier to pick battles and moderate emotional energy. If women decline to pursue gender issues in favor of other change as a way to manage emotional energy, other women may take offense, because gender is such an important topic. A woman's choices on pursuing gender issues can also make it more difficult for her to find supportive relationships. For example, feminist women may view Catholicism or conservative Protestantism as openly misogynistic. Women who remain in these contexts can be seen by feminists outside as not honoring their own gender. A feminist Catholic or conservative Protestant may be marginalized inside the congregation and within secular feminist groups as well. Thus, gender provides another challenge for female tempered radicals in their already dissonant existence.

Clearly communicating one's values in a context where women are actively ignored, devalued, or invisible is a challenge at any time. Trying to do so when one is attempting to enact change from below makes a difficult reality even more so. Yet there are steps congregations can take to support tempered radicals.

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<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Bettenhausen, "Feminist Movement" in *Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for Their Own Spiritual Lives*, ed. Miriam Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 206.

## Welcoming Tempered Radicals in Congregations

Tempered radicals are a valuable resource for change yet can lead difficult lives within congregations. They have high demands on their emotional energy but can effectively foster needed change within the group. Female tempered radicals face added burdens due to gender, especially within male-dominated denominations. There are several specific actions that congregations can take to welcome the women tempered radicals among them.

To begin welcoming tempered radicals, leaders need to understand the difference between task conflict and relational conflict. *Task conflict* focuses on what the group should do and how it should do it. Task conflict, unless it becomes very heated, is correlated with improved decision making.<sup>19</sup> It actually benefits a congregation since it causes people to think more deeply about issues, own what they believe, creatively solve problems, and avoid groupthink.<sup>20</sup> *Relational (affective) conflict* attacks the person, not the issue, and uses techniques such as blaming, character assassination, and questioning motives.<sup>21</sup> Relational conflict, even at very mild levels, is correlated with poor outcomes and is to be actively avoided.

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<sup>19</sup> Charlan Nemeth, "Dissent as Driving Cognition, Attitudes and Judgments," in *Social Cognition* 13 (3) (1995): 279; Dean Tjosvold, "Conflict with Interdependence: Its Value for Productivity and Individuality," in *Using Conflict in Organizations*, ed. Carsten De Dreu and Evert Van De Vliet (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 23–37.

<sup>20</sup> Michael West, "Dissent in Teams and Organizations: Lessons for Team Innovation and Empowerment," in *Bridging Social Psychology: Benefits of Transdisciplinary Approaches*, ed. P. Van Lange, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum): 354–358; Irving Janis, *Groupthink: Psychological Studies of Policy Decisions and Fiascos* (2nd ed.), (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1982).

<sup>21</sup> Karen Jehn, "Affective and Cognitive Conflict in Work Groups: Increasing Performance through Value-Based Intragroup Conflict" in *Using Conflict in Organizations*, ed. Carsten De Dreu and Evert Van De Vliet (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997), 87–100.

Tempered radicals will be involved in conflict since they are attempting to change the status quo. Creating a safe and productive space for that conflict protects tempered radicals, especially women, from personal attack. Wise leaders will make a practice of supporting task-based conflict and quickly shutting down relational conflict. One way to enact this practice is to create and maintain standards for respectful dialogue about issues and teach the congregation about benefits of task conflict and the dangers of relational conflict.

Unfortunately, many leaders are uninformed about conflict and want to avoid any conflict at all costs. A point where leaders stumble is in understanding the difference between dissent and obstruction. Most dissent is prosocial, which means that dissidents, including tempered radicals, are focused on improving the situation, at least from their viewpoint.<sup>22</sup> Dissent, when practiced well, generates task conflict. Alternately, obstruction focuses on resisting change, especially static resistance and will often use relational conflict.<sup>23</sup> As I was conducting my study, I found that a number of congregational leaders referred to dissent of any kind as obstruction and viewed any dissent as a threat. Wise leaders will learn to differentiate between prosocial dissent and obstruction. Supporting task-based dissent will create room for tempered radicals and benefit the congregation.

Another way to support tempered radicals is to create a welcoming open door policy for dissent and to actively encourage differing perspectives. Leaders need to welcome tempered radicals to the leadership table, rather than selecting lay leaders solely from the dominant frame. This practice can also create a broader support system for

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<sup>22</sup> Kim Cameron, "Organizational Virtuousness and Performance" in *Positive Organizational Scholarship*, ed. Kim Cameron, Jane Dutton, and Robert Quinn (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2003): 76.

<sup>23</sup> D.J. Markham, *Spiritlinking Leadership: Working Through Resistance to Organizational Change* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

tempered radicals since others who silently agree with their ideas may seek them out as they bring forward initiatives that support others' experiences.

Leaders also need to specifically create a discipline of deeply listening to dissenting and marginalized voices within the congregation. Dissenting views should be assessed as at least partially valid, since the majority of dissent highlights organizational deficits.<sup>24</sup> The leader's job is to understand the impact of those deficits, moving past proposed solutions that may only be partial. Keeping positive and open lines of communication with tempered radicals as their needs are explored helps as does speaking respectfully about their views to others.

Supporting tempered radicals also involves learning to be honest about dissent in the Bible. In the Hebrew scriptures, the prophets functioned as dissidents. The Christian scriptures portray several instances of faithful believers with diverging views. It is easy to understand at least portions of Jesus' ministry as a form of dissent. However, leaders often find it easy to honor biblical examples of dissent directed outward toward social reform, while ignoring or distancing themselves from the many examples directed inward toward religious reform. While social activism may be encouraged, tempered radicals asking their leaders and congregations to honor their charism, biblical injunctions, or statements of faith may be marginalized, sometimes from the pulpit. Thus, leaders should be attentive to how they publically portray dissent, which dissidents they honor, which they ignore, and why they make those choices. Being honest about dissent in the Bible and Christian history has two benefits for tempered radicals. First, it can introduce them to role models in the Bible and history they may find helpful. While tempered radicals often feel alone, they are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, both in Scripture and

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<sup>24</sup> P. Nystrom and W. Starbuck, "To Avoid Organizational Crises, Unlearn," in *Readings in Organizational Decline*, ed. Kim Cameron, Robert Sutton, and D. Whetten (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger): 328.

in Christian history. Second, being honest about dissent can create a more welcoming culture within the congregation for tempered radicals.

Closely related to being honest about dissent in the Bible is being more discerning about how leaders portray the concept of unity. The need for unity is a repetitive theme within Christianity.<sup>25</sup> It is not uncommon, however, for leaders and congregational members to shortchange the hard work of unity and replace it with the easier counterfeit of uniformity. This strategy is particularly common in congregations in decline since they perceive uniformity as safer. In uniformity there is little potential for internal conflict and it feels easier for leaders to manage the congregation.<sup>26</sup> Uniform situations are particularly difficult for tempered radicals, because they already struggle with fit even in a more diverse context. There are fewer places to build relationships and fewer events that support some part of their identities. Further, congregants in a uniform situation will often informally shun those who do not fit well. Shunning negatively affects tempered radicals ability to foster change and enlarge their context. It also hinders them from finding supportive relationships.

Female tempered radicals in congregations can often have a difficult time. Leaders can be inept at managing conflict, actively devalue dissent, misrepresent dissent in the Bible, and emphasize uniformity. Further, leaders, as well as congregational members, can particularly target female tempered radicals to silence their voices, especially regarding gender equity. Given this reality there are some specific practices that can help women. Many of these practices aim at lessening dissonance, which will lessen the potential for burnout.

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<sup>25</sup> See for example Eph. 4:3, 1 Pet. 3:8, Rom. 14:10, and Gal. 5:22.

<sup>26</sup> B. Staw, L. Sandelands, and Jane Dutton, "Threat-rigidity Effects in Organizational Behavior: A Multilevel Analysis," in *Readings in Organizational Decline*, ed. Kim Cameron, Robert Sutton, and D. Whetten (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1998): 328.

## Recommendations for Female Tempered Radicals

As I noted at the beginning of this article, I too am a tempered radical, but unlike my female study participants I am Protestant. Based on my own experience and research as well as the wisdom gleaned from Jean and Monica, I will offer some strategies that may be particularly helpful for female tempered radicals.

Part of persisting as a tempered radical actually is owning that one is living within that reality. Although near the beginning of this article I argued that most tempered radicals find this life thrust upon them rather than chosen, in reality there are other options. One may choose to leave to find a congregation or denomination that is a better fit. This option is especially open within Protestantism, where congregational and denominational switching is common. If one chooses to remain a tempered radical, pushing for change and enduring the dissonance, it does help to recognize that one has made a conscious choice to do so.

Second, since gender is such a large issue for women, it is well worth one's time to thoroughly understand the role it plays in one's own dissent. Women cannot escape gender in their dissent, and clearly understanding one's stance and why one holds it will lessen some of the dissonance. Further, if a woman is not pursuing gender equity, she can develop a specific script explaining why that is not the case since it will be questioned by possible supporters.

Third, I cannot overemphasize the importance of finding supportive relationships. Realistically, the congregation may not be able to provide the types of sustaining relationships female tempered radicals need, because the congregation only supports one part of one's identity at best and is the location of value conflict. Ironically, in a context where one should feel most at home, women in particular can instead feel strongly

alienated.<sup>27</sup> Successful tempered radicals cultivate relationships that explicitly support their different identities and look broadly for them. There are several options for finding supportive relationships while remaining in one's context. In a larger congregation one may find a few other tempered radicals interested in the same issues. Choosing to align along the issue rather than along gender may give women male allies. Male allies can prove important within conservative contexts and women do well to remember that many men would welcome gender equity as well. Meeting with kindred spirits regularly outside of church to honestly discuss challenges can help. Alternately, many denominations have dissident groups on certain issues that one can join. Dissident groups should be treated with caution, however. Dissident groups may become one's true congregation, using resources that are then not available for change in the original context.

Fourth, as I have mentioned earlier, tempered radicals need to choose their battles and strategies wisely. Emotional energy is at a premium and the strain of dealing constantly with gender issues lessens it further. One strategy is to specifically limit the number of issues, or the manifestation of those issues, upon which one will focus. This strategy is why some female tempered radicals do not add addressing gender issues to their slate. A second strategy is to work for a series of small, incremental wins. The energy needed is low but consistent and impacts of failure are lessened, so it becomes easier to recover. Small wins allow one to manage more effectively both identities and to be more agile in which wins one pursues. Small wins also generate less resistance in the larger group and can build on each other. But the pace of change with a small wins strategy is slow, which can prove frustrating.

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<sup>27</sup> Miriam Winter, Adair Lummis, and Allison Stokes, *Defecting in Place: Women Claiming Responsibility for Their Own Spiritual Lives*, ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1994), 32–198; Bettenhausen, 207.



Women, in particular, can benefit from learning to enact dissent effectively. Effective dissidents have a clear vision of what they want to achieve and they work to articulate clearly this vision to others. They learn to be flexible in responding to others' views because inflexibility is viewed as extreme. They also work to create coalitions, knowing that the more people involved in the change process, the less the organizational resistance.<sup>28</sup> Women should be especially vigilant about keeping their dissent as task conflict. Women's dissent is routinely assessed negatively and the double bind is always functioning. Entering into relational conflict will only fuel these negative assessments. Women need to become skilled at moving relational conflict back into task conflict or walking away when unable to do so.

Finally, women can benefit from spiritual direction. Tempered radicals struggle with picking their battles, creatively managing low emotional energy, burning out over time, and managing ongoing dissonance. Spiritual directors who understand tempered radicals can work with women to help constructively navigate their choices, thus improving their effectiveness and persistence.

## Conclusion

Female tempered radicals bring a wealth of perspectives, skills, and passion to their congregations. Their experience of being in the margins, of not fitting in, and remaining committed creates opportunities for congregational growth and change. However, women need the support of leaders and their congregations if they are to be positive forces for change and continue to live faithful lives.

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<sup>28</sup> West, 356.



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## LEADERSHIP: A CALLING OF COURAGE AND IMAGINATION

SALLY DYCK

**Abstract:** In a rapidly changing church and culture, leadership is essential, and women in leadership and ministry offer unique gifts, insights, and tendencies based on their experience as women. This article presents one woman's experience and reflection on the essential components of leadership—courage, imagination, compassion, collaboration, and humility—and challenges both men and women to look at their strengths as well as what unique cautions each gender must consider in order to lead into God's preferred future.

### A Great Cloud of Courageous Women

Rev. Clare Fergusson is the main character of a murder mystery series by Julia Spencer-Fleming. In the first of the series, *In the Bleak Midwinter*, Rev. Fergusson, an Episcopal priest, finds herself helping to solve a murder connected to her new parish in an otherwise sleepy town in New York State.

I enjoyed the novel because, as with any good murder mystery, I did not know what was going to happen next, but also because this woman clergy demonstrates a deep compassion for the people of her community and a willingness to jump feet first—quite literally into a rushing river—to help. Her efforts at helping are sometimes misguided but motivated by a willingness to risk caring for others. She gets tricked into going out into the woods alone to help someone and is nearly killed herself—by a parishioner, although she doesn't know it at

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the time. She risks her own life to save a child's, all while preparing for Advent and Christmas.

The novel is as improbable as a Nancy Drew mystery, but the image of a woman in ministry jumping into a rushing river, surviving in the woods at night with an aggressor in pursuit, reaching out to those who were committing crimes (or accused of them), while caring for those who were the victims of crimes, violence, and hurt, inspired me. We all know that popular images affect real impressions, and that clergy are often depicted as weaker characters in movies, television, and novels, so Rev. Clare is a refreshing image of strength, courage, and compassion.

Reflecting on the inspiration I received from Rev. Clare made me wonder about women who inspire us in leadership today. Few women of my generation were raised to be courageous. It was an era when, frankly, we might have been told we could do whatever we wanted, but it usually meant that doing whatever we wanted was going to give us great privilege, status, and comfort, not require us to jump feet first into anything—especially the rushing rivers of adaptive challenges that we face today.

As a child, I combed the library stacks for biographies on women. I was given very little direction in this regard but ended up reading many old biographies about women that were probably written decades before I was reading them. The women included Clara Barton (who started the Red Cross), Florence Nightingale (who significantly advanced the profession of nursing even with aspersions cast upon her throughout the years), Elizabeth Blackwell (one of the first women physicians), Jane Addams (founder of Hull House, a community center in Chicago), and others whom I never learned about in the classroom. I note that there were no biographies on Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Phoebe Palmer, or Anna Howard Shaw, but then I don't know that there were any biographies written about them in the 1960s, either.

The books I read were about inspirational women with leadership skills that defied perceptions about women in their time as well as mine, who organized and

mobilized people to do a new thing and, as a result, were accepted by them in a new role. Every one of them was dedicated to helping others, not merely to advancing her own career, which at the time would have been an alien notion. These biographies had a huge impact upon me then, and still do. Reading about the lives of courageous women has inspired courage in me.

When I became a United Methodist bishop, I discovered that many of the male retired bishops were experts on one or more presidents of the United States. One retired bishop has what I would call a shrine to Abraham Lincoln. His admiration and knowledge of Lincoln set me on my own exploration of Lincoln's leadership during a very divisive time in our country's history. My conference chancellor, who is in his seventies and has been a community leader throughout the years in addition to his own legal career, also can rattle off countless lessons from numerous presidents that he has read about and studied.

We rely on contemporary leadership literature to inspire and shape our skills too often. Biographies, memoirs, and people around us are full of leadership lessons. I'm struck how different the leadership literature can be in its theoretical approach from the real life and lived-experience of a variety of people, especially women, who have brought their gifts to make a difference in their time and context of history.

Women who inspire courage have a focus and drive centered on neither self, career development, nor even the desire for fame or money; their motivation is determination that makes a difference for others—women on a mission. I'm reminded of the women who received the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011: Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee, and Tawakkul Karman. These are all women who have worked hard and sacrificed for others, seeking major changes in difficult if not desperate situations. Their courage inspires us, especially as women, to lead in difficult situations, often without recognized authority or positional power, to make change for our own lives and the lives of others.

When people ask me what I like about being a bishop, I tell them that I like the same thing I have always liked as a pastor: meeting interesting people. A few years ago I had the opportunity to meet Nelson Mandela's wife, Graca Machel, a woman of courage in her own right, whose story speaks to an essential component of courage in leadership. The United Methodist Council of Bishops met in Mozambique in 2007. We were all excited that Nelson Mandela, who reportedly lived down the street from where we were staying, was coming to dinner! Along with him came Graca Machel, whom few of us knew.

Were we in for a surprise. Graca Machel is the widow of the former president of Mozambique who brought the country into independence. She became the minister of education following independence. After the war, the literacy rate was seven percent literacy, but five years later, under her leadership, it was ninety percent.

She has a Methodist background and so had been asked to address the Council. She began her presentation by saying, "I am standing here as a Methodist child." She was the youngest of six daughters. Before her father died, he made her mother and sisters promise that Graca would get an education.

When she was old enough to go to school, her mother was reluctant to let her go. Getting an education in Mozambique was no small endeavor, far more complicated than putting a six-year-old on a yellow school bus; it involved moving away and not seeing her family for months at a time.

She reflected on how her mother and sisters, a significant teacher, and others had "done the impossible" and gifted her with an education. She said that it was a gift she wouldn't have chosen for herself, but once it was given, she had to give the gift to others. In our culture today, even within the church, we focus on vocation in terms of the "purpose-driven life," suggesting that, like a mystery to be solved, we must go out there and discover what the meaning of our lives will be. Machel reminded me that we have a "purpose-given life," in difficult

contexts of ministry, and it takes courage and imagination to live it out.<sup>1</sup>

It is a temptation to simply be impressed by someone like Machal instead of imagining what her life has been like, the challenges that existed to mitigate against her leadership, and the tremendous physical, mental, and spiritual strength it has taken to be who she is and to do what she has done. To be a man in her situation would have required great courage, too, but Machal's life exemplifies to me how women often exist in the same situations as men and yet, to rise to leadership and influence, they must show even more courage to overcome the added burden of social biases.

Yet, my love for meeting interesting people isn't fueled just by meeting those who are famous like Graca Machal. I have met countless women over the course of my ministry who have demonstrated and thereby inspired courage: African-American women who have faced racism and sexism with a spirit unbowed by despair; women raising children on their own and barely eking out food, clothing, and shelter, yet facing each day with hope; women who have left abusive relationships; and women who have held family and career together. The list is long and their names aren't well known to others, but they too demonstrate courage in their lives. Their courage is marked by joy and an absence of victimhood.

These and many other women I have met, read about, and love deeply have taught me courage, courage which is essential in living out the faith today, being in ministry, and providing leadership in a changing church and culture. As women in ministry and leadership, we must surround ourselves with this great cloud of courageous women!

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<sup>1</sup> Retold from Sally Dyck, *A Faithful Heart: A Daily Guide for Joyful Living*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2010), 37–38.

## Reclaiming the Role of Courage in Spiritual or Pastoral Leadership

*In the Bleak Midwinter* tells us that the police chief in the town where Rev. Clare lives and serves has never encountered a clergyperson like her before. He is always having to check his language (and is usually apologizing for his “French”), and scratching his head at her interest in the problems of the community. He can’t understand why she would want to ride in the cruiser with him to discover the community’s problems; that is when they stumble upon their first murder together. Ultimately, Rev. Clare’s commitment to her community is what spiritual leadership or pastoral leadership is meant to be.

In some religious circles of church leadership, it’s very unpopular to talk about having “spiritual leadership” or “pastoral leadership.” They both sound so passive and disconnected from life around us. I’d like to take the (unpopular), tack of trying to reclaim these descriptors regarding what is needed in church leadership today. I believe we have lost the expectation that we need courage for leadership because pastoral leadership has become equated with the image of clergy sitting around in neat, clean offices and reading scholarly and edifying books instead of being out in the community with all kinds of people, doing the countercultural, often controversial work of ministry.

The root of the word *pastor* is shepherd. In many churches across the United States, there are stained-glass windows with the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, triumphantly returning with the lost lamb in his arms and the flock obediently grazing around his feet as he walks through a beautiful green valley. This image is one, mostly idealized, notion of the shepherd.

Yet first-century shepherding was much more like an old painting by Alfred Soord. His Good Shepherd has left the safe level ground for a mountainous cliff and literally gone over the edge in pursuit of the lost lamb. He is holding precariously onto a scrub brush. An eagle is circling overhead, waiting for sheep or shepherd to be



dashed to the rocks below to become its next meal. The lost lamb is piteously clinging to the edge of nothing. The viewer is caught in the tension and uncertainty of whether the shepherd will rescue the lamb before the eagle snatches it away or whether the shepherd will plummet to his death in the attempt to rescue the lamb. The image is literally a cliffhanger because the shepherd is still in the process of reaching out to the lamb in the cleft of the mountain.

Shepherding was not for the faint-hearted. It was a job that required physical, mental, and even spiritual strength to withstand the extreme physical, mental, and spiritual conditions: steep mountains to climb, predators requiring acute awareness, and lonely nights with just the sheep and God. It was risky, dangerous, life-and-death work; their own lives were collateral for the safety of the sheep. A *good* shepherd might have been considered an oxymoron, because shepherds were treated with suspicion, made low wages, and had no status in society. Yet King David's leadership training began with his years of shepherding and carried over into his leadership with the people of Israel: he was a good shepherd who cared for the sheep, was trusted by the sheep owner, was disciplined in his physical, mental, and spiritual ability to face the dangers.

Rather than discard the pastoral image of leadership, we need to reclaim it by recasting it with contemporary images. It may help us, for example, to think of firefighters, putting their lives on the line every time they answer the alarm, rushing into a burning building to save lives at the risk of their own. They don't get to pick and choose who they will save; they're called to save the worthy and the unworthy, the victims of the fire and sometimes those who set the fire, the down-and-out in our society as well as the most prestigious. This is the Good Firefighter. Firefighting is not about sitting in the station, shining boots, and making chow for the crew, but putting lives on the line to rescue and save. Likewise, the pastor or spiritual shepherd's life isn't about living on the

level, safe, and easy plain but going over the edge for those in need.

What is the image of the good pastor today? And how do women in particular embody it? Our image of pastoral leadership must be rooted in the life-and-death conditions in which people live their lives and at the same time in the life-giving gospel of Jesus through word and deed.

The best thing that happened to me in the early years of my ministry was to land on the near west side of Cleveland, Ohio, in 1979 for my first appointment to a small church. The neighborhood was already suffering from the collapsing steel industry and corresponding struggles. That year the Cleveland school system was undergoing desegregation (Cleveland was the second most segregated city in the country), and families fled to the suburbs in droves, driving back into the city to go to church—often forgetting the neighborhoods that had been their communities for generations.

Leadership in that church required an indomitable spirit, as the people struggled with the notion of a woman minister. The man who introduced me on my first Sunday literally said, “This is our new minister, and I like her better than I thought I would!” Faint praise! Many of them had Catholic or Baptist family members and friends. As soon as they got their own heads around having a woman minister, they would encounter someone’s insistence that women could not be ministers and they would waffle again and again.

The church became a fortress against the neighborhood. For a while there was a Friday evening program where neighborhood kids could come in and play games, but even that became too much for the few suburbanites who ran it. One Friday night when the adults did not show up, one of the children wrote in chalk on the step of the church “Open up!” It was a message to us all that the church has to be out in the community or at least open to it. Bringing people inside the building wasn’t enough; we needed to be a witness to the neighborhood.

Although the parishioners weren't always the ones involved in the community, the clergy in the area still lived in the parsonages in the neighborhood—so it was our community—and we banded together ecumenically to make some major changes. Across the street from my parsonage was a pornographic theater and bookstore. The ecumenical leaders of the community worked with the city of Cleveland to get the city to purchase the property. They did, then tore it down and built a city library. That branch had the highest book circulation rate in the system for a long time!

Another one of the community improvements we worked on was to increase safety by removing the motorcycle gangs from the area. There had been violence and murders over the years, centered in the bar right across the street from the parsonage. Through the efforts of the ecumenical leaders, we were able to dry up the precinct so that no alcohol could be served over the counter, which essentially drove the motorcycle gangs out of the neighborhood. At one point in the process, the city councilman and I went to the state liquor board, and before we left, the councilman told me that we had been offered police protection in this project but he had refused it for us, saying he didn't think I'd want it. Yes, but he could have asked!

Over and over again, the leaders of the religious community worked together with as many of our parishioners as we could rally to bring improvements to the neighborhood to make it safer and more attractive. The efforts never brought droves of people into our churches—one or two from time to time—but they did bring vitality to our congregations. We were in a sense living on the edge of some difficult changes. They involved some level of risk to person and property at times, depending upon the reaction of the “powers that be,” such as motorcycle gangs who didn't want these changes in the neighborhood. But ministry felt vital, significant, and life-changing for us and the community.

Courageous leadership is needed to reach new people with the gospel because we have to go to where people

live; many people do not live on level, secure, and cultivated ground anymore. They live on the edge of financial disaster. They live on the edge of emotional meltdown as families are torn apart from brokenness in what are supposed to be the closest relationships. They live on the edge spiritually, wondering where God is in their lives and figuring that once over the edge, God will never find them again. Or their biggest fear may be that God does not care to even look for them. They feel too far over the edge for rescue.

My experiences were hardly as exciting or glamorous as Rev. Clare Fergusson's. Instead they were fraught with uncertainty, challenges, and obstacles both within the church walls as well as in the community; but I discovered a deep grounding in faith in this context for ministry as in no other. Neither faith nor ministry is for the faint-hearted. Like Rev. Clare, the focus has to be on those who are entrusted to our care and in need of whatever leadership we can provide them.

In my experience, I find that women are more likely to recognize that people in their churches and communities are living on the edge. But women who are raised to be more nurturing than courageous may view ministry only from the role of listening, praying, sitting with or accompanying, and offering encouraging words. In a changing culture, pastoral leadership requires us to exercise courage and "go over the edge" to rescue and help others, risking our own comfort and safety. Being active in the community, as clergy are encouraged to be today, means that we put ourselves on the same mean streets as the people in our churches and communities. We are not protected from the harsh realities that they face and so we need courage to be in ministry and to provide leadership to in dangerous situations.

The first wave of clergywomen who entered ministry before and into the early 1970s had a much more difficult time than those of us who came later in the decade up to the present day, but we all have our battle scars resulting from congregations who still don't "believe in" women clergy. It can be a temptation to think that the cause to

work for is the advancement and rights of women. But if we regard our ministry from the perspective of what has been given to us and therefore what we have to give, our courage increases and we will jump feet first into the rushing waters of adaptive challenges, the icy hardships of gender resistance, and the mysteries of a changing culture within and outside of the church that impact us all today.

Women in the church have often focused their advocacy on the need for their own rights within church and society. As those rights have been afforded, women's advocacy groups such as the Commission on Status and Role of Women in the United Methodist Church, have struggled for meaning. Advocacy for our own rights is tied to the advocacy for others, specifically women and children who lack basic needs and rights to health care, equal job opportunities often precluded due to race or gender, and safe families, churches and communities in which to live. I firmly believe that when we focus on our community's needs, we have a better platform from which to advocate for our own rights and privileges. Advocacy requires courage, too, especially for women who are conditioned throughout our lives to please those we serve and not to disturb the comfortable.

My focus on advocacy has been on women and children and their needs in the church and community. As a new bishop, people asked me what my "theme" or focus is in ministry. I replied that my special focus in ministry is on children. At first I'm sure that people thought that children are such a nice, warm, "namby-pamby" sort of cause; truly, children couldn't be too controversial! Yet everything about caring for the children in our communities is controversial. We agree on most of the problems—our poor education system and how it is funded, our state budgets balanced on the backs of children, levels of poverty for children and their experience of daily food scarcity, cuts to art and music as well as science and math, financial tensions in families that cause children to be neglected if not outright abused,

and the list goes on. But we rarely agree on how to solve these problems.

Children have no voice or vote about their present and future needs to grow up strong and healthy in body, mind and spirit. I was asked to speak at a rally held in the rotunda of the State Capital in support of K-12 funding in relation to the state budget one year. I don't know what I expected, but I was a little unprepared to see an entire floor filled with kindergarten children sitting in front of me. They had a supporting cast of adults scattered throughout the room, but I was addressing early elementary-age children with a political message!

I didn't want to lose my crowd so I quickly changed my approach. I looked right at them and asked them, "Did you get here by yourself today?" "No!" they all responded in one voice. "Did you drive the bus or the car that brought you from home to here where people will make decisions about your school?" "No!" they cried again and began to wonder what in the world I was thinking! But I explained to them—and any adults who would listen—that just as they couldn't get there by themselves without assistance from adults, they need the assistance of the adults in our communities around them to help give them what they didn't even know they needed yet: a well-funded and good education.

Caring for the needs of the community, especially the most vulnerable, is an essential part of pastoral leadership. Involvement in the community is more than attending some city council meetings or giving the Memorial Day invocation. Caring for the most vulnerable requires not only providing mercy ministries—such as taking food to the hungry and coats, mittens, and gloves to children—but also making sure that their long-term needs will be met through the common good of government as well as church people. Justice ministries are directed at the root causes of what makes women and children vulnerable, poor, and suffer from violence. Justice ministries require working with others and therefore are collaborative in nature: not just with others in the church or other churches but with government and

non-profit organizations. Justice requires putting oneself and the church on the front lines of the community's needs for the sake of the gospel. And that is not always neat and clean, popular and well-received. But this work does bring vitality to faith and a local church.

Justice ministry requires courage in pastoral leadership accompanied by an occasional unpopular stance based on our faith. In our divisive culture, which has bled into our churches and overwhelmed a gospel-centered worldview, courage in pastoral leadership requires having the guts to stand up for what we believe in and stand with those who are voiceless and invisible. This kind of leadership requires jumping feet first into the controversies that are gospel-based, going over the edge for people who are clinging to a mere thread of hope.

In my second church, where I was appointed for thirteen years, I had the experience of needing to stand up for what I believed and stand with those who were invisible and in the margins. It began with the wonderful experience of shepherding a congregation that was becoming more and more racially and economically diverse. The church grew and was by all accounts a vital congregation that radiated with energy through its opportunities of worship, service, and study. Although I learned that not everybody likes the church to grow, seeing vitality in quantity and quality of lives was incredibly exciting, challenging, and fun.

As a result of the multicultural growth of the congregation, people began to attend, get involved and join because they trusted that if a congregation could look so diverse on the outside, then maybe there was room for diversity on the inside as they came with questions about God's existence and God's love. Their challenge to any platitudes and easy answers about their deep theological questions energized and gave vitality to us all.

But also people who were gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (and we had them all), began to feel like it might be a safe place for them. We estimated from what

we knew about the congregation that sitting on every pew there was someone who fit one of those categories or had an immediate family member who did. I promised that people could be assured that they would not get “beat up” from the pulpit, a concern that many had with other churches of all kinds. But as their numbers grew and as awareness and visibility of the GLBT community grew in culture, it became safer to talk about sexual orientation in light of the faith rather than remain silent about sexuality.

And we did, and we did, and we did talk about sexual orientation, and acted on it in declaring the church to be open to all people. Such action forever marked them and me. I would never have imagined that I would be at times on the frontline of advocating for the full inclusion of all people, including GLBT folks, in the church. The challenge has intensified as a bishop since I am required to uphold the current disciplinary policies around homosexuality in the United Methodist Church, which state that we are to be in ministry to all people, but that homosexuality is “incompatible with Christian teaching.”

In our present divisive culture, one role of leadership is to help people talk to each other in the midst of their differences and for groups to make decisions that are forged as much in *the process of* decision making as in *the results of* the decision. I wonder if women have more practice in life when it comes to listening to each other’s differences and trying to help people who see life differently find a way to live together. Every mother I know wants that for her family! Could working for unity be a unique skill that women as leaders bring out of life experience to conflicted and divisive situations? Like the mother of a quarreling family, a woman leader is looking for the wider community to understand each other better, to give witness to an alternative to divisiveness, and to learn to live with each other in the multitude of relationships that involve differences. With the prevailing divisive attitude within and outside the church, it takes courage to guide people through a process that creates community instead of alienation.



## In Order to Have Courage, Imagination...

Leadership requires courage, and courage is fueled by imagination. I've always believed that the depth of our faith is determined by the capacity of our imagination. Imagination isn't something that spins mythical tales, but imagination is really vision: the ability to see beyond what is and what can be through the presence and power of God.

Leadership requires not too much and not too little imagination. Too little imagination is to fail to see what is possible, beyond the immediate, beyond the crisis, beyond now. I often bemoan the fact that I know my leadership is limited, not so much by my lack of skill in any area but my lack of imagination in what else could be.

Yet too much imagination can lead to paralyzing fear and worry as one imagines all the possible negative outcomes. Again, my observation and experience is that women are prone to having too much imagination at what can go wrong and therefore don't act. But I've also observed and experienced that men are more likely to have too much imagination that results in an inflated sense of possibility about their capabilities which can keep them from realizing their full potential. A little imagination about what could go wrong with the possibilities can lead to an effective strategy that leads to change. In other words, the Goldilocks balance of imagination is crucial: not too much, not too little. Collaboration between men and women or at least people with the tendencies to have too much or too little imagination may empower a vision of what is possible with God connected to the capacity of the unique and diverse gifts of a community to bring about change.

Spiritual leadership has emphasized imagination from the very beginning. The ancient prophets imagined what could happen if things continued the way they were going (in a bad way), and also what God's preferred future would be for the people. Prophets communicated their messages through alternating and rapid-fire images of judgment and hope. Leadership today must also paint a

picture of what happens when we stay on our present trajectory when it consists of harsh realities, but leadership must also help provide a glimpse of God's preferred future for us and with us.

As the church and culture both find themselves in rapid and uncertain change today, jeremiads paint pictures of ecclesiastical apocalypse and dystopia. Just as rumors in the 1960s cried that God was dead, so the dystopian rumors that the church is dead are unhelpful and unfaithful to the creative, courageous, and compassionate imagination that God's prophets of old and today possess. What is God's preferred future for the church today? It's neither utopia (which literally means nowhere to be found), nor dystopia (the worst case scenario of destruction and doom).

We recognize that we are in a process of change but every business, corporation, industry, and institution is also changing. We are in a time of dismantling in order to rebuild, and we don't know what the rebuilding of any businesses, corporations, industries, and institutions will look like in the future, including the church. We can't just hope for a future; we must imagine a new reality and put the hope for that reality into action.

Recently I heard the author Ann Patchett talk about hope on a radio program.<sup>2</sup> "Hope is a plague," she said, referring to Pandora's box, where hope was the last of the evils to be released. Hope-as-an-evil kept people from acting. Therefore, Patchett argues, hope is too passive and keeps people from doing what they need to do, because they are hoping something will change or be different or someone else will make the change so that no personal courage or action is needed. In her novel, *State of Wonder*, a character who hopes her husband is not dead says,

Hope is like walking around with a fishhook in your mouth and somebody just keeps pulling it and

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<sup>2</sup> Minnesota Public Radio, "Midmorning with Kerri Miller," June 28, 2011, <http://minnesota.publicradio.org/display/web/2011/06/28/midmorning2/>

pulling it. Everybody thinks I'm a train wreck because Anders is dead but it's really so much worse than that. I'm still hoping.<sup>3</sup>

Hope, Patchett suggests, keeps us from moving on. One doesn't *hope* to write a novel; one writes a novel. One doesn't *hope* for good health; one does what one can and then deal with what happens.

She said that it is a "horrific suffering to hope" because it keeps one from action. "Hopin' and wishin'" doesn't get anywhere or anything. Therefore, we can't hope that the church will face change and find its way forward. We must provide imaginative and courageous leadership to put hope into action.

Are women any better at imagining God's preferred future and putting hope into action? I believe imagination is nurtured within us and comes in non-linear ways through quiet, solitude, and meditation while we wash dishes and fold clothes as well as read enlightening books and make goals and strategies for effective change. In other words, I think women are (still), nurtured to consider the ways the bring out the strengths of both sides of our brains and to value the resting, gestating, dormant creative time as well as the active, emerging, and productive work.

Imagination gives us the vision and sense of our neighbor as oneself. J.K. Rowling, who wrote the Harry Potter series, spoke at Harvard University's graduation in 2008. In her address, she credited the development of her imagination to working for Amnesty International. Amnesty International is an organization that monitors human rights violations around the world. At that time in her life, she spent all day reading reports of torture and working with people who had been political prisoners, displaced from their homes, living in exile as refugees for years. She claims it caused her to imagine other people's lives, even if at times it made her very

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<sup>3</sup> Ann Patchett, *State of Wonder* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011), 43.

uncomfortable with the amount of suffering she was reading on the page.

But she said, imagination is what makes us uniquely human; it gives us the ability to imagine others' experiences that we have not had.<sup>4</sup> The capacity of our faith, especially its desire to share God's love and grace with others, is dependent upon our imagination of what it is like to be our neighbor, near or far, now or in the future. Imagination is what produces the compassion that acts on behalf of or with others to bring hope into reality.

As a leader in the church, I don't spend too much time reading reports that depict the absolute destitution of people—I'm more likely to get that through the newspaper with my morning coffee. But leadership's imagination is critical in listening to other people's experiences—those who visit local churches where they are met with barely a glance instead of a warm welcome, when conflict results because clergy and laity don't know what each is really supposed to do anymore, when pews grow emptier by the year, and worse, when no one seems to care or if one does, he or she doesn't know what to do about it. Imagination feeds on listening, learning, and relating to others about all the hurts and hopes of people in our churches and communities. Without imagination, leadership falters. Imagination requires time to hold significant conversations with others who may not have our experience or perspective. Through significant conversations in community we learn what we need to know in order to jump feet first into the adaptive challenges of our day.

Learning what we need to know is more intuitive and comfortable for women than men in my observation and experience. The experiences, thoughts, and feelings of others is the stuff of life that matters and when we take the time to listen to others, we can weave their

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<sup>4</sup> J.K. Rowling, "The Fringe Benefits of Failure, and the Importance of Imagination" in *Harvardmagazine.com*, <http://harvardmagazine.com/2008/06/the-fringe-benefits-failure-the-importance-imagination>

experiences, thoughts, and feelings into a fabric of reality that helps us to understand more deeply what is happening in people's faith in the midst of a rapidly changing church and culture. We can't wait for books to be written and we can't take the time to read that many books! We have people around us with stories to tell us that can literally change our lives, the church, our culture and world if we will listen to them.

When it comes to the ability to listen deeply to others, women have it hands down over men nine times out of ten! I have also observed that the more success men achieve, the less able they are to listen deeply to others around them, especially those they consider to be in some way less important or able or interesting or insightful than themselves. I would go so far as to say that I wonder if women achieve much of their success because they do listen to others. Listen up, men!

## **Framing the Master Narrative of Courage and Imagination**

As Einstein once said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." A story—even if specifically and uniquely one's own—can draw in or elicit the commonalities and depth of feeling that exists among us. A story captures the imagination in a way that a report from a well-documented survey or study can never do.

Part of the role of leadership is to provide the narrative that accurately reflects both the harsh realities that we face with the courage and imagination needed to face them. What we tell ourselves about who we are and what is happening to us becomes the "master narrative of who we are," Leonard Pitts, Jr., wrote in the *Miami Herald*.<sup>5</sup> A master narrative is powerful, especially at the right time and in the right way to help people put a

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<sup>5</sup> Leonard Pitts, Jr., *Miami Herald*, June 7, 2011, "Don't Blame Sarah Palin for Lack of U.S. History" <http://www.miamiherald.com/2011/06/07/2255658/dont-blame-sarah-palin-for-lack.html>.

meaningful context around their situation including both harsh realities as well as courage and imagination to move forward.

Recently I was asked to preach at a church that had decided it needed to discontinue, therefore merging its members with other churches nearby. It was reported to me that the church was very angry at the annual conference for “never sending a good pastor.” Whether that opinion is true or not, the story parishioners told themselves was that the annual conference never did anything to help them, financially or in terms of good leadership. It could be true, it could be partially true, or it could be false. But it was the story that they were telling themselves and they were sticking to it.

In the course of the worship service, we celebrated the ministry of the congregation existing for over a century. There were pictures and stories told about this congregation that included its role in the earliest presence and outreach of Methodism in Minnesota. One story told of a white Methodist buying a slave’s freedom so that the former slave could help with the mission of Jesus Christ and Methodism in Minnesota through his ability to translate the native language of the local tribe; the former slave was married to a member of the tribe. He had learned the language which he was now willing to use in order to share the gospel. The congregation was mesmerized by this story from their own past.

The celebration also told the story of the congregation’s hard work in building a church and renovating it over the years in order to be a presence in its community. And then there were community leaders from the school system who told how the congregation had a long-standing and continued impact on the elementary school across the street. In fact the celebration of ministry included the commitment to give a share of the proceeds from the sale of the building to a scholarship program.

The celebration also included the telling of the story about a neighborhood association which was started in the early 1970s when the stockyards in the area went out

of business. The church had spearheaded the effort to provide food and basic necessities for families who were affected by the adverse economy in the community. The association will continue into the future, and in fact, the head of it is a member of the church where some of the members will be joining nearby.

Other historical and ongoing outreach into the community was celebrated by the leaders who came from these organizations. Then I talked about how their master narrative will determine who they are even as they go to other congregations, encouraging them to remember their past and to take the best of it into their future.

Afterward one of the leaders of the church said to the pastor, “We should have been telling ourselves these stories over the years.” He recognized that while the stories they had been telling themselves may have given them an angry head of righteous indignation, these narratives had not served them well. In fact, he realized that if they had been telling their own historical stories, the power of that narrative might have made a difference in the situation they now found themselves: grieving the loss of a beloved faith community.

Leaders have the ability—actually, the responsibility—to capture quickly and to articulate the master narrative of a community in a given moment. For pastoral leadership, this articulation occurs not only in preaching, but even in public prayer. We fritter away the power of prayer when we forget that prayer calls us to capture and articulate in the moment whatever the occasion is. One of the reasons that people hesitate to offer public prayer may be that it takes courage to set into context even the most ordinary of situations so as to help us imagine what is needed to set hope into action through the presence and power of God.

We must constantly ask ourselves what the master narrative is that we are telling ourselves and those who are entrusted to our leadership. Is it an apocalyptic message of dystopia painted with a dull and dim view of others and our future and mission? Or is it one that captures the imagination in such a way that hope is fueled

with courage to do impossible things with God? Pastoral ministry and leadership require the latter from us all!

Unfortunately, I observe and experience more women than men telling their story from the position of victim, much like this local church, rather than that of someone who has learned, grown, and been strengthened in body, mind, and spirit through adversity. Men recall stories of their own times of adversity in such a way that embolden, bring laughter at the absurdity of it all, and provide confidence to face the next challenge. As women recall their stories of adversity, we are more likely to devolve into feeling even worse about ourselves and our ministry, feeling even less empowered today than before, as a result of the retelling of the story and making us more timid about the next challenge. How women tell their narrative is essential for strong, courageous, imaginative and hopeful ministry and leadership. Remembering strengths rather than victimization is the key to courageous, imaginative narrative.

### **Out of Imagination and Courage...Humility**

Leading change requires the collaboration, courage, and imagination of many people working together, rather than an old image of a solitary hero marching onto the field of challenge to solve the problem, living and dying alone. Women in leadership seem much more likely to be collaborative because they are more likely to recognize that they do not possess all the skills, insights, and gifts needed for the challenges we face in the church and culture today.

Leadership requires the courage to be humble about our work and ministry. There are no easy answers if there are any answers at all; we are all seeking to find our way in a rapidly changing culture. Collaboration is needed in order to move forward. When we collaborate we empower a community, causing us as individuals to diminish as the community's sense of itself increases. That shift requires humility because to work with others means that we surrender credit for whatever transpires.



There is the potential arrogance and pride that is always threatening us as leaders, especially when we're doing a good job and are successful.

I heard a woman theologian from Brazil tell a folk story at a recent World Council of Church's meeting. A rooster went up on the roof of the hen house just before dawn to crow the sun up. Every morning he would crow and crow, and sure enough, the sun would rise. He was quite proud, and everyone gave him due credit for crowing the sun up each morning.

But one day, he overslept and the sun came up anyway! The hens in the hen house realized that they didn't need him to crow the sun up each day. The rooster didn't come around for a while, and when he did, the hens made fun of him for thinking that he crowed the sun up. Then one morning, the rooster showed up on the rooftop of the hen house just like he used to before dawn. But this time, he crowed *because* the sun came up. He said, "Before I thought I sang the sun up but now I'm a poet who sings because the sun comes up."

More than anything else, perhaps women's spiritual and pastoral leadership of courage and imagination contributes a component of leadership that is more likely to sing praise rather than crow about oneself. A church leader was recounting all the wonderful successes he had before he retired. After listening to him for a while, I asked him, "Was that because you were such a good leader or were there other factors involved?" He looked me straight in the eyes and said, "Because I was a good leader!" This kind of arrogance can in the end trip us up as leaders.

But humility is another Goldilocks phenomenon: not too much, not too little. Too much humility and one lacks the confidence to act on the vision. Fearful and insecure about the ability to move forward, too much humility is paralyzing. Yet too little humility—being too full of self—doesn't make room for the insights, skills and gifts of others. Overconfidence prevents one from seeing and appreciating the contributions of others. Therefore, too little humility often results in a lack of

collaboration; a collaborative work style is essential in our day of rapid change. None of us has all of what it takes to observe, analyze, strategize, and implement change. We need each other and therefore collaboration is key to unlocking the door to the future.

Often women suffer from too much humility, uncertain of one's abilities and insights but usually more willing to collaborate with others. I know of no woman in leadership who would have credited only her own ability to any of her success as the male leader described above did. Most women I work with find it easier to work together than alone in terms of generating ideas and planning. Often we go our separate ways to implement but then come back together again to evaluate, reconnoiter and collaborate again.

If imagination is essential in order to create a sustaining vision for people to see beyond the day-to-day work, to see beyond the details and even the sacrifices, and to put hope into action, we must be careful that we do not reduce God's vision to a program of our own making to suit our own needs out of our own hubris. I'm reminded of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's warning about focusing on our visions versus God's vision:

God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious. The one who fashions a visionary ideal of community demands that it be realized by God, by others, and by oneself. They enter the community of Christians with demands, set up their own law, and judge the (people), and God accordingly...This dreamer acts as the creator of Christian community, as if their dream binds all together. When things do not go their way, the effort is called a failure.<sup>6</sup>

Bonhoeffer's words are cautionary for the way in which we impose ourselves on others with our visions. A

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<sup>6</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, translated and with an introduction by John W. Doberstein, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 27-28.

temptation of leaders today is the persistent question, “What is your vision?” as if it were truly our own. When I became a bishop, I was asked that question over and over again. My response was, “I get my vision through my ears.” In other words, it is important to listen and then cast the vision as the story that frames the context, recognizable to others and therefore has credibility, integrity and humility.

On Christmas Day, 2011, an unsigned editorial in the *New York Times* opined how “it would be nice if there really were a Santa Claus. Imagine it. No lists, no shopping, no gift-wrapping, no bills, no shipping costs, an extremely low carbon footprint—and on Christmas morning the miraculous appearance of presents” and all that makes a wonderful celebration.<sup>7</sup>

I imagined a woman editorial writer, exhausted from a season of making Christmas happen for her family wishing that instead of having to do all of those things herself, she had some mythical help from Santa Claus. Then she, if it was a she, went on to say that

it would be wonderful, too, to be woken in the earliest hours of the morning by the heralding of angels proclaiming peace on earth. Not just laying down of arms and an end to war, but an end to the conditions that cause war: gross inequality, intolerance, the endless, destructive struggle over natural resources, and the ease with which we dehumanize our fellow human beings. Imagine in its place good will and, more important, the deeds that create and embody good will.<sup>8</sup>

Again, I imagined the writer to be a woman inspired by a vision of peace on earth, emboldened to do the “deeds that create and embody good will.” But then the editorial took an unexpected turn as it concluded: “but the work

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<sup>7</sup> *New York Times*, December 25, 2011, <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/25/opinion/sunday/the-miracle-and-the-means-of-christmas.html?>

<sup>8</sup> *New York Times*, December 25, 2011.

that lies ahead, finding peace on earth and good will toward others, is wholly human, wholly our own.”<sup>9</sup>

Now I wasn't sure if it was a man or woman writer! It seemed so like a woman to me that she identified how the details of the miracle require human effort but so like a man to think it is all up to us. No, my sister or brother, it's not all up to us. None of us could jump feet first into the rushing waters of adaptive challenges like peace on earth, facing the icy hardships of “gross inequality, intolerance...and the ease with which we dehumanize our fellow human beings.” Yet that is what we are called to do in pastoral and spiritual leadership, but not by ourselves alone.

Pastoral leadership requires a spirit of humility and praise for that which God and the community can do in collaboration together. We sing because God gives us the gifts to be in leadership, not because we make it all happen. When we collaborate with each other and with God we not only survive but live with hope and joy. Pastoral and spiritual leadership is both miracle and means, not just human and not just divine. Through the miracle which is God and the means which we provide, the world can be a better place for all.

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<sup>9</sup> *New York Times*, December 25, 2011.

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**BOOK REVIEW****GOD'S TROUBLEMAKERS: HOW WOMEN OF FAITH ARE CHANGING THE WORLD**

BY: KATHARINE RHODES HENDERSON

NEW YORK, CONTINUUM PUBLISHING GROUP, 2006

247 PP. HARDBACK

ISBN: 978-0-8264-1867-8

“Well-behaved women rarely make history.” There is truth to this bumper-sticker philosophy, though women who make history rarely set out to do so, well-behaved or otherwise. This is particularly accurate among women of faith, as Katharine Rhodes Henderson discovered in this portrayal of twenty women who shared their stories of personal and communal transformation. The author, a Presbyterian pastor and president of Auburn Theological Seminary, introduces her readers to a new breed of entrepreneurial leaders: progressive religious women. Henderson introduces these religiously diverse women out of a concern that the Religious Left has been increasingly absent from the public square. The various reasons for the trend are not as important as her thesis that the world desperately needs those with religious conviction to be prophetic, activist voices in the culture.

Henderson’s interview process identified six attributes of authentic religious leadership that she weaves throughout the book: interdependence and relationships; an ethic of inclusiveness; belief in the possibility of transformation; an entrepreneurial spirit; the importance of a seamless life; and a *resistance faith* (37–38). The next six chapters illustrate the paths the women took to express those attributes in their particular context and culture. The religious expressions of the women are diverse, as are their cultural environments, but all are connected in their commitment to faith and social justice (165). Henderson’s final chapter is a charge to her readers to follow in their footsteps.

Entrepreneurial leaders are inherent risk-takers. As *social and spiritual entrepreneurs*, a term Henderson uses throughout the book, the women profiled all engaged in the socio-spiritual challenges of people learning to live together in a more humane and equitable manner (27). Their work with the homeless, the disabled, prisoners, and battered women and children, came from a holy anger at the social marginalization of classes of people. Their risks are personal, professional, and financial. The willingness to risk derives from an ethical stance embedded in each woman's expression of faith: Jewish, Christian, or Muslim. Whether they intended to become politically active, the subjects found themselves urgently committed to shaping the public's perception of the marginalized populations with whom they work. The integration of private faith into public spaces, combined with a commitment to the marginalized, are the two strands found in the expression of *authentic religious leadership*.

As she describes the components of leadership that make these women formidable, Henderson writes convincingly on feminist contributions to religious leadership (Chapter 4). Though her focus is on progressive religious expression in the public square, she calls for a more robust exploration in her chapter on leadership, particularly as she implicates gender and leadership. Though some of the women interviewed are ambivalent toward organized religion and its leaders, they express a deep and earnest desire to pull their religious institutions into socially just activism for the sake of their communities (Chapter 5). Henderson's interviews reveal that women possess a different way of leading than their religious hierarchies would recognize, which she suggests provides a corrective to the conventional systems in place.

Henderson communicates her subjects' bemused frustration at the cultural disconnect between sacred and secular and among diverse religious expressions. Their determination that faith is deeply connected to the common good may present the greatest challenge to the

dominant culture (169). This reflects a distinctly Western perspective, where religion has been relegated to the margins of the public square. The *seamless life* (Chapter 7), is one that connects all facets of life, and balances reflection with action. Balance also requires that leaders acknowledge the good in all faith expressions. She asks her readers to cultivate a deeper awareness of other religions, developing multi-faith connections for the greater good. Henderson's subjects reveal their deeply held conviction that faith must be at the center of authentic leadership; it is faith that keeps them passionately engaged, and faith that gives them energy to address the concerns they acknowledge as central to social well-being. The women profiled by Henderson all connect their activism with their faith, and their private encounter with the Divine has led each of them in their own way to shape or create institutions and influence public policy (Chapter 8).

Henderson does not attempt to delineate the infractions of the Religious Right that she argues have marginalized the Religious Left, or contrast the activism of those she profiles with that of religious conservatives. Her argument for the progressive perspective would benefit from an investigation, however nominal, of whether the religious attitudes and practices of the profiled women differ from their religiously conservative counterparts in similar activist roles. Her case for religious pluralism as a preferred worldview, which pervades the text, may be perplexing to the evangelical or religious conservative reader. Conversely, Henderson's explanation of activist faith is an essential message for all religious expressions, and should be a part of any person's journey to the center of authentic religious leadership.

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**BOOK REVIEW****WOMEN AT THE TOP:  
WHAT WOMEN UNIVERSITY AND COLLEGE PRESIDENTS  
SAY ABOUT EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

BY: MIMI WOLVERTON, BEVERLY L. BOWER, AND  
ADRIENNE E. HYLE  
STERLING, VIRGINIA: STYLUS PUBLISHING, 2009  
VII-157 PP. PAPERBACK  
ISBN: 9781-57922-256-7

*Women at the Top*, the first in the Pathways to Leadership series, highlights the journeys of nine women to key leadership positions in higher education. Utilizing both first- and third-person perspectives in the narration, authors Mimi Wolverton (series editor), Beverly Bower, and Adrienne E. Hyle offer nine biographical sketches of female college and university presidents and their rise to these positions. The pathways are as varied as the women and the institutions they lead, but each story offers insight and inspiration to those women who aspire to succeed in a perennially male-dominated field.

The book is divided into twelve chapters, with nine chapters (one devoted to each of the nine subjects), sandwiched between an introductory chapter on “story” and two brief closing chapters, offering commentary on the ongoing difficulties for women in leadership and a brief explanation of the research methodology.

As the reader is introduced to each of these nine women, s/he begins to realize the great diversity among these leaders. Some of the women moved intentionally up the ranks in institutions making their way to the goal of a presidency. Others’ ascensions are better described as the result of having been open to a variety of administrative opportunities. Some came from families in which education was a priority; many more came from working class backgrounds where education was a privilege and not one easily gained. Whatever the backgrounds and however diverse the journeys, it becomes increasingly



clear that the path to a presidency in higher education for women is not a clearly marked or easily travelled one.

Whether the presidency is of a state, community, or tribal college, it is interesting to note the similarities among the stories when it comes to the skills and qualities necessary for success, as voiced by both the narrators and the women themselves. Many of the women acknowledge the importance of physical and emotional strength, and throughout the interviews words that recur include determination, optimism, confidence, dedication, and passion. Several refer to the value of learning to read the culture of place (local, institutional and regional), and the consequences of failing to do so. It is equally interesting to note how others see and describe these successful women. In the eyes of those around them, these are women who were not afraid—or if they were, didn't show it—to make bold moves, to raise authentic voices against competing ones. These women are described as emotionally smart, authentic, and many are noted for their good sense of humor. In spite of the odds against their success, these women have achieved a presidency and, in the words of the authors, “[e]ach confronts her world with grace, her work with passion and her life with enthusiasm.”

The authors are to be commended for the integrity with which the stories are recounted. These are clearly the success stories of women and, while it is heartening to find a book dedicated to women who have reached such key positions, the reader is never under the illusion that these women represent a host of women in the workplace or that such success is easily attained. Woven throughout each of the stories are the tales of broken marriages, exhaustion, discrimination, and even presidencies lost. In telling their stories, these women do not pretend that they were not the targets of prejudice, sometimes gender, sometimes race, sometimes both. The proverbial glass ceiling may have cracks, but we have a long way to go in higher education (and many other arenas), before it will not be seen as refreshing and

unusual to have a book focused solely on women in leadership positions.

The nine narratives are two brief but important chapters, “The Road Less Travelled” and “Project Methodology.” In the former, the authors reiterate the difficulties on the uneven and unwelcoming path to college or university presidencies for women, pointing out the roadblocks put up by others (e.g., gender and race discrimination, family obligations), as well as the unfortunate lacunae of positive signals, mentoring, and encouragement along the way. In the final chapter the authors offer a brief explanation of their methodology for the larger ongoing research project on gender and effective leadership begun in 2002, as well as the criteria used in the selection of the participants for the case studies leading to the current volume. (It is worth noting here that this volume, *Women at the Top*, was soon followed by *Answering the Call: African American Women in Higher Education Leadership* (2009), and most recently by *Latinas in the Workplace: An Emerging Leadership Force* (2011)).

The stories recounted in *Women at the Top* are not about women in key leadership positions in theological education, but the journeys and the roadblocks are transferrable across disciplines. Theological educators training men and women for leadership and administration will find this a useful tool for illuminating the complexities of the pathway to leadership for women. The accessibility of the narratives can open the conversation for men and women readers. It will be up to instructors to take the conversation to the next level.

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**BOOK REVIEW****THE GIRLFRIENDS' CLERGY COMPANION:  
SURVIVING AND THRIVING IN MINISTRY**

BY: MELISSA LYN DEROSIA, MARIANNE J. GRANO, AMY  
MORGAN, AND AMANDA ADAMS RILEY  
HERNDON, VA: THE ALBAN INSTITUTE, 2011  
164 PP. PAPERBACK  
ISBN: 978-1-56699-418-7

Presbyterian clergy Melissa Lynn DeRosia, Marianne J. Grano, Amy Morgan, and Amanda Adams Riley have collaborated on an instructional, almost journal-like, how-to book for young women in ministry. As an older, second-career, African American seminarian hailing from the Baptist tradition, I hoped that I would find their writing valuable not just for young women in ministry but for all women—old and young, of varying faith traditions, who were nascent in the ministry. As I delved into the open pages and at many times openhearted sharing of these four women, I found that this was at times the case, but that those times were disappointingly rare.

In fairness to Reverends Delrosia, Grano, Morgan and Adams Riley, my hopes were self-inflicted, and not necessarily motivated by promises offered by the writers. Indeed the authors were forthcoming, and to their credit they attempted early on in the preface to stave off any notions that their experiences would be simpatico with the trials and challenges of a diverse group of clergy women. In their own words: “We recognize that our experiences are limited...For one, none of us is part of a racial/ethnic minority. We see this as a reflection of the state of our denomination [Presbyterian USA] as a whole, and we chose not to seek someone out who had not been part of our group process. Likewise we lack an LGBT...voice...Our book speaks from very particular experiences” (xv).

And they were right. The social location of this book is one of very particular mainstream, majority, privileged, and, yes, youthful experiences. As a result, anyone fresh out of seminary, but not necessarily Anglo, young, and fresh-faced, will be challenged to hear a voice among these four well-meaning clergy that resonates and connects. However, I resolutely approached the task with faith that whether young, old, first-time jobber, or on the brink of the last of several positions before retirement, there would be a core message of encouragement. And in that I was not disappointed.

The Reverend Girlfriends do at times dig soul-deep into the experiences that would shake the footing of any minority who found herself charged with ministering on stony ground. Whether despised or simply dismissed, learning to be diligent to the call is always challenging and often times intolerable. It is also a likely lesson recently matriculated seminarians will need to master.

Among the adjustments readers are warned of is the “seamless garment” aspect of full-time ministry. A lot of the book’s discussion of “robing” for ministry is literal and focuses on whether to high-heel or not to high-heel and how to retain authority while wearing pink (I jest...just a little). Rev. Grano shares the experience of being called to console a parishioner whose brother had just committed suicide and being delayed due to the need to stop at a department store to purchase suitable clothes, because she felt uncomfortable going in the pink pants she was wearing. Although I question whether the parishioner would have been as uncomfortable with pink pants as Rev. Grano was in this situation, this and similar discussions can lead the reader into more thoughtful consideration of how clergywomen can cope with the reality of always being cloaked in clerical garb in the eyes of the community and the congregants. The always “on” aspect of ministry can be disconcerting to newly minted clergy the first few times they find themselves in the unexpected presence of a parishioner, when the clergy are dressed (literally or figuratively), more for a day at the beach than “spiritual” exploits. A bad day emotionally,

spiritually, and even appearance-wise is not allowed. The often one-dimensional perception of clergy as perceived by their congregation is something the authors wisely instruct on managing rather than accepting. They advise readers to manage the expectations of others through self-care, establishing and maintaining connections with friends outside of the church network, and nurturing one's own spiritual life and relationship with God.

Other notable examples of practical advice include fighting the desperation of accepting just any call and ignoring gut feelings. Beyond learning how to interview well for a position, they wisely advise us on learning how to interview a prospective congregation and trusting God enough to pass on a call if it's not God who's doing the calling. Similarly an entire chapter, "The Eternal Associate," is devoted to a discussion of evaluating the role that's right for you in ministry and realizing that Sr. Pastor should not be a universal aspiration.

This—to thine own self be true—is a thread throughout the book, and is good advice from these young women that is applicable to all women regardless of age, race, or sexual orientation. In fact, the authors' thesis could be summed up as: be true to yourself and do not get lost in expectations of what ministry should look like or even sound like. And in the end this makes their without-apology preface confession of homogeneity a bit more digestible. They are simply following their own advice. As a woman in ministry, be true to your identity, your voice, and God's call.

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**BOOK REVIEW****DEAR CHURCH:****INTIMATE LETTERS FROM WOMEN IN MINISTRY**

BY: DOROTHY D. FRANCE

CHALICE PRESS, 2007

152 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN: 978-0-827206-39-7

Over the centuries, we have had access to pastoral letters written by priests and pastors, by prophets and purveyors of words of wisdom for the church. Rarely, however, have we had a chance to hear the heart of God through the voices of thirty-five women in ministry. And even more unusual is a collection of authors who represent the full spectrum of ministry roles within a denomination—from students and staff to presidents, academicians and those retired. Because of this wonderful collection of letters to the church, we have a glimpse into the heart of the feminine and nurturing side of ministry, where honesty and directness is so very real. Dorothy France gives us this amazing collection of writers who happen to be women in various ministry capacities in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ).

The letters are all written in a personal format, opening with the salutation of “Dear Church” and closing with the handwritten first name of the author. This personal, intentional style gives one an invitation to come in a sit awhile—to enjoy an intimate conversation with a friend—to slow down and hear expressions of the heart. Within each letter, the authors weave their personal stories and reflections with words of encouragement for the church. Although written in the context of the Disciples of Christ faith community, the letters are for us all, providing rich words to ponder.

France begins with a letter from one who has served the church from childhood—in congregational life and regional, general, and ecumenical work. Sharon Watkins, General Minister and President of the Disciples of Christ,

opens with a broad letter of challenge to the church to “open up the world to these others as you have done with me, so that their rich talents will be available to you—to us” (5). The rich talent is evident as the book continues, providing letters from lead pastors, co-pastors, associate pastors, regional staff, general staff, academic staff, students, publishers, editors, retired persons, mothers and daughters. France concludes the collection with an Epilogue and challenge of her own—the “Ten Commandments for Clergywomen.”

One might expect that the collection was for women in ministry, but France is careful to title the work as letters from women in ministry. These are valuable pastoral letters from all corners of the church, written to us all, in all ministries of the church. Contextually, they may even speak to leaders in various places of ministry, in numerous places around the world.

France concludes with her own understandings and long view of ministry. She acknowledges that her ten commandments were written many years ago as a personal guide for ministry, but also sees their affirmation throughout the letters written for our gleanings. Her ten directives offer a view into the heart of the collection of these letters. They are instructions of her own and have been valuable for her journey of ministry, but also leave us with an insightful summary of the work.

*“Ten Commandments for Clergywomen”* and for all ministry leaders! (152)

1. Believe in yourself. You are unique. There is only one you! Go out on a limb every once in a while and treat yourself.
2. Be your own person. Recognize and celebrate your gifts and strengths while recognizing your limitations.
3. Serve with gentleness and boldness of heart. When tempted to “roar like a lion,” remind yourself that you must first learn to “purr like a kitten.”

4. Set priorities. Be mindful of how you spend your time. It's your life! Learn to choose in order to go about doing good rather than just going about.
5. Trust the big picture. You do not have to know everything. No one has all the answers. Learn to network.
6. Keep a sense of humor and learn to laugh at yourself. It is a gift of grace. Humor gives you a new perspective and keeps God and you in control of a situation. It costs less than therapy.
7. Bloom where you are planted. The great temptation is to follow your own desires, to make your own plans, to be guided by your own will. Sometimes you just have to learn to wait!
8. Light your own candle. Pick your own battles. You do not have to blow out someone else's candle to light your own.
9. Trust God's guidance. When possible maintain an attitude of prayer. God will sustain you. Wait and you will receive God's gift of assurance and direction.
10. Keep your heart moist. Love the people; learn to listen to others and to God as God speaks to you.

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**BOOK REVIEW****CHURCHES, CULTURE, AND LEADERSHIP: A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF CONGREGATIONS AND ETHNICITIES**

BY: MARK LAU BRANSON AND JUAN F. MARTÍNEZ

DOWNERS GROVE, IL: INTERVARSITY PRESS, 2011

244 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN: 978-0-8308-3926-1

Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martínez have authored a practical theology book based on the premise that God's love for the world, as expressed in the incarnation of Jesus, calls the church to a ministry of reconciliation and intercultural life. Consequently, they write intentionally, helping religious leaders "to see differently and to gain the skills and competencies needed for multicultural contexts" (13). Branson and Martínez use bible studies, personal reflections, group exercises and case studies to illustrate a praxis that can enable the church to live out the gospel of reconciliation.

The book is divided into three parts: Theology and Context, Sociocultural Perspectives, and Leadership, Communication and Change. In Part One: Theology and Context, Branson and Martínez describe their methodology, which sets biblical narratives alongside our own and uses the praxis-theory-praxis as a way to develop and nurture discerning engagement with the world. While they understand the Bible as authoritative, they do not use the Bible as a blueprint. Their five-step process of praxis-theory-praxis acknowledges that we begin with our own experience and, in that context, we explore theory that then moves us to experiment with new practices. Praxis is a complete cycle of reflection, study, and action. The authors also discuss three spheres of leadership: interpretive leadership, which aids the community as it makes meaning of texts and contexts; relational leadership, which nurtures human relationships; and implemental leadership, which guides activities and structures. They conclude Part One with a discussion of

how social context, ethnicity, culture, and race “affect a missional ecclesiology that seeks to develop intercultural life” (78).

Part Two: Sociocultural Perspectives explores cultural anthropology and uses theorists like Jürgen Habermas and Louis Luzbetak to help the reader look at worldviews such as nature, time, and reality. As they move deeper into sociocultural perspectives, the authors explore how various social relations differ from one culture to another. Branson and Martínez examine Euro-American individualism and how it relates to pragmatism and antistructuralism. At the same time, they challenge leaders to “shape processes that help the congregations discern when to affirm and when to question their cultural background” (168), and urge congregants to learn from one another and confront “those areas in which specific cultures pull people away from the gospel” (168). They close Part Two considering the “unique ways people in different cultures receive, filter and interpret data” (170), arguing that leaders can use the praxis model to help people understand how their perceptions have been formed in their own cultural context. Further, leaders can “rethink how to discern Scripture’s meaning in their lives and mission”(185).

Leadership, Communication and Change are the subjects of Part Three. Branson and Martinez discuss social dynamics such as emotions, sympathy/empathy, power, and relational context; it is the leader’s role to foster attentiveness and awareness in communication. They propose that the topic of leading change “needs to be studied as an element of our context—the societal context as well as cultural and local contexts” (210), contending that each congregation and each leader do its own work rather than adopting answers from outside. In this chapter, they also discuss the work of the leader, and whether an interpretive, relational, or implementational approach is needed in a particular situational context. “Leaders do not need to know the way; we just need the capacities to encourage and guide connections, to link Scripture and context, to engage neighbors and members.

And to sanction questions and insights and innovations” (231).

Branson and Martínez conclude this book with practical suggestions for moving forward. They suggest practices such as sharing cultural narratives, rereading U.S. history, rereading scripture from a multicultural perspective, working from hospitality to shalom, and engaging life together in worship prayer and planning. Further, transformation is about leaders who can transcend traditional models and identify “new models of church that can address the increasingly multilingual, transnational, network-based reality of people” (243).

This book is helpful in a number of ways. The authors tell readers the rationale for their particular positions and perspectives. They draw on a wide breadth of scholars and thought. They are explicit about the concepts and theories they have chosen to inform their work. They repeat key concepts and methodologies throughout the work, refreshing and reinforcing as they move through the book. And throughout, they use bible study and personal and group reflective exercises to help the reader/leader develop the skills to facilitate growth and change. Finally, the book is replete with rich resources—an annotated bibliography, an appendix of theological resources, suggested readings and films for every chapter with guiding questions, as well as reflective exercises and bible studies in each chapter. I recommend it highly.

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**BOOK REVIEW****WITH GOD ON ALL SIDES: LEADERSHIP IN A DEVOUT  
AND DIVERSE AMERICA**

BY: DOUGLAS A. HICKS

NEW YORK: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2009

228 PP. HARDBACK

ISBN: 978-0-19-533717-4

Polite conversation often stops when the subjects of God, scriptures, and religion are broached. These subjects, however troublesome for an increasingly secular democracy like the United States, are precisely where Douglas Hicks becomes voluble in his important book on the responsibilities and opportunities leaders bear toward the craft of leadership. Bookended by an introductory examination of the epistemic humility of Abraham Lincoln during the war years of his presidency and a memo to Barack Obama in which he informs the new president, "You will be ordained as the high priest of our civil religion. You did not ask for this role, but it comes with the office" (170), Hicks delivers a *tour de force* on the challenges facing leaders in a deeply diverse and devout nation, and the qualities civic leaders must develop to bring the social fabric into a coherent and durable weave.

Hicks avoids facile, melting-pot accounts of religion in American public life in favor of a richly textured, pluralistic religious scene that maintains the difference, dignity, and distinctive contributions of faith traditions. As the title implies, Hicks takes as an American *a priori* that God is, indeed, "on all sides" in the lives of a diverse citizenry. Building on the continental Spanish concept of "*convivencia*," or "mutual encounter, if not reciprocal engagement" (85), developed during the eight-century-long experience of Moors and Christians on the Iberian Peninsula, Hicks argues for leadership formed at the crossroads of American life. His is an active vision of the role of the religions in bringing people into conversation and constructive civic intercourse with one another, the antithesis of *laissez-faire* co-existence content to remain

ignorant and incurious about the religious commitments of neighbors and intellectually lazy about the faith and ethics of one's own tradition. Time and again, Hicks offers hope that this most religiously diverse nation in the world may avoid the strife of intolerance in favor of the richness of a crossroads community of traditions, ideas, practices, and mutuality where devout differences bless the body politic.

Hicks contends that such an expansion of the American imagination is true to the founding principles of the republic, and even probable when examining the recent history of tensions overcome with the civic virtues of mutual respect, intelligent tolerance, and coalition building such as the post-9/11 experiences of Muslims, Jews, and Christians throughout the nation (120–132). Leadership makes the whole enterprise work, Hicks believes, and he offers a ten-point list of practical initiatives elected leaders and ordinary citizens alike must engage that alone justifies the price of the book (162–167).

This book is clear-eyed: nothing Hicks proposes is easy to do. He is painfully aware that intolerance, exclusivism, and ignorance are sinfully powerful. At times, his visioning comes close to making the fairness mistake that typological reasoning bears within itself (89–97), in which a preferential option for one tradition is masked by a philosophy of fairness (such as H. Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture* espoused in the last century, for example). But leaders are “connectors,” as Hicks argues. By leading with humility, careful handling of symbols and language, and “showing up” consistently among differing groups and communities, good leaders can and do build bridges rather than fortresses of isolation. The transformational leadership Hicks espouses, embracing religious traditions rather than eschewing them, is the catalyst necessary to enable Lincoln's “better angels” of the American spirit to prevail.

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**BOOK REVIEW****TRANSITIONS: LEADING CHURCHES THROUGH CHANGE**

EDITED BY: DAVID MOSSER

LOUISVILLE: WESTMINSTER JOHN KNOX PRESS, 2011

248 PP. PAPERBACK

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In the current challenging environment, change is constant for all of us. Our lives and our organizations are in continuous flux as we attempt to adapt to our dynamic environment. In this reality, deep transformative changes are also occurring in congregations and in those who pastor them. Yet change inside a congregation is different from that of other organizations. Business literature regarding change can provide some help, but understanding congregations' unique struggles with change is key to success or at least survival, for both pastors and people. Yet few pastors have received training on navigating deep change and transitions. As a result, the congregational landscape is littered with failed change initiatives and hurting leaders and people. Thus finding a book full of experienced perspectives on change and transitions is very welcome.

In *Transitions: Leading Churches through Change*, editor David Mosser has compiled a thoughtful and thought-provoking collection of essays and sermons for pastors of congregations in the midst of change, which today is nearly everyone. He has drawn on the wisdom of experienced pastors, gifted homiletics, researchers, and consultants to provide inspired perspectives on undergoing planned, and especially unplanned, change. The authors are generous in sharing their own experiences about mistakes they have made as well as what works and what does not. The collection offers a number of excellent sermons to both encourage and give direction to pastors encountering the choppy waters of change in their congregations.

The text is divided into four sections. The first section, “Clergy in Chaos,” focuses on developing successful strategies for clergy as they navigate challenging circumstances. Several authors offer specific suggestions on addressing and surviving anxiety-producing situations. One essay provides a method for “exegeting the congregation,” which would be especially useful for new pastors. Another essay describes how outgoing and incoming pastors can support each other, and their congregation through a pastoral transition. The author of the closing essay in this section reveals a Sunday when everything seemed to go wrong, a situation to which all pastors can relate.

“The Congregants in Adaptation” recognizes that pastors preach to people undergoing many types of change unrelated to what may be occurring within the congregation. Thoughtful essays on effectively preaching to the elderly and developing funeral sermons are provided, as is a reflection on Christian marriage (and divorce). Also included is excellent guidance for creating persuasive sermons, which are especially needed in the midst of adaptation and transition, whether in individual lives or the congregation as a whole. This section also offers several sermons well-founded in biblical texts.

The third section, “The Congregation in Crisis,” explores what happens when crises occur inside the congregation, whether it is scandal, pastoral transition, transitions brought on by circumstances such as a changing neighborhood, strong resistance to planned change, or physical disasters. Experienced pastors share their wisdom here and several have provided sermons they preached during these crises.

The final section, “The Community in Transition,” opens with a sermon on disruptive innovation, relating it to Jesus’ ministry. One essay provides thoughtful steps for congregations wanting to embrace a changing neighborhood. Another essay examines the role of core symbols in how we understand reality and what happens when those symbols change. An author reflects on how some aspects of pastoral care have not changed. The final



essay explores working with change and transition through the changing liturgical year. Overall, this last section is more theoretical than the other three.

Several themes are woven throughout the collection. One theme is the deep anxiety that change and transitions engender in pastors and people. Each section tackles this theme as it pertains to the topic with specific and helpful approaches. A second theme is the necessity of self-care strategies for leaders during change. Again, specific and helpful advice is provided. A third theme is the wealth of sermons based on biblical texts. The overall tone of the collection is that God is present in the midst of challenging circumstances. These authors have survived their transitions and are convinced that God gives wisdom in the midst, no matter what the challenge. Yet there is an understanding that change and transitions are deeply challenging to all who experience them.

Although many of the authors are United Methodist, the perspectives they offer transcend denominational boundaries by addressing issues common to all pastors and congregations. The perspectives on sermon preparation would be very useful within any theological framework. This collection provides wisdom, encouragement, and guidance for those walking through congregational transitions.

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