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**BOOK REVIEW****TRANSFORMING LEADERSHIP:  
NEW VISION FOR A CHURCH IN MISSION**

BY: NORMA COOK EVERIST AND CRAIG L. NESSAN

MINNEAPOLIS, MN: FORTRESS PRESS, 2008

235 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN: 978-0-8006-2048-6

Norma Cook Everist and Craig L. Nesson give us a practical and incisive guide to leading the transforming process of the local church in their 2008 work, *Transforming Leadership: New Vision for a Church in Mission*. In a traumatic time for mainline Protestantism in the United States, Everist and Nesson offer rich resources to tackle difficult problems and move the congregation into a transforming and transformed future. The authors' primary emphasis is on the process and systemic change that is necessary to reach the ends, or *telos*, that are responsive to the mission of the church. They recognize that God's life-giving power undergirds transformation in both process and purpose.

Everist and Nesson begin the transformative process in chapters titled "Community Formed" and "Identity Claimed." They discuss the creative resistance that develops in the process of change in the third section "Integrity Tested." Built upon the foundation of the first three sections is the culmination in "Opportunities Unleashed." The opening comments in the latter section acknowledge that the methodology focuses on the gifts God has already provided within the congregation, not an assessment of the deficiencies. This is a hopeful approach that brings together the activity of God and the response of the congregation, and aligns congregational systems to create missional opportunities for the church as a congregation and for daily living in vocation.

Everist and Nesson begin with the essential work of establishing trust and then they move to the importance of honor. It is refreshing to find authors who will deal directly with the wounds of the church and identify the

spiritual practices that will re-connect the congregation and wider church within the bonds of trust in God and each other. In developing the aspects of leadership that encompass authority, servant leadership, powerful partnerships, and leading theologically, the importance of these virtues is abundantly evident. Trust and honor are established as essential virtues that promote ethical practices and the integrity of the church's witness and community.

In my own experience of pastoral ministry, there have been many struggles about the purpose and mission of the congregation and the wider church. Everist and Nesson remind me that within each of these there was always an issue of the use of time and the sense that our time is not our own. The authors reflect on the essential nature of time that is reflected in the opening of Genesis, and they discuss the place of Sabbath. Often discarded as outdated and a threat to the gods of productivity, in the authors' view Sabbath practice is focused on the Word of God and a re-centering and refreshment in that Word. As I read this section (beginning p. 152), I was a bit amazed that the authors focused on Sunday as Sabbath; for many pastors and laity Sunday is a day of worship and spiritual commitment, but it is also a day of work. In pushing the essence of this chapter, it seems that developing a Sabbath that renews the spirit and essential relationships may not be best exercised and aligned with the church life that is now the Sunday pattern. Perhaps this is the challenge offered in this section. Perhaps it will require us to revisit the habits of the early Christians who maintained the Sabbath as well as celebrating the resurrection on Sundays.

Everist and Nesson write for a practicing church audience. They integrate theological, academic, and popular approaches. Each chapter has "helps" that focus the learning gleaned in the spirit and practice of the congregation. The authors provide questions to guide personal reflection, group conversation, spiritual practice, and transforming action.

*Transforming Leadership* helps us to understand the dynamics of congregational ministry and the essential foundations and practices for change. These are key aspects of congregational life which need to be the constant attention of its leaders. The subtitle of the book, *New Vision for a Church in Mission*, begs a companion piece that explores more fully the alignment of the foundations and practices with the mission, vision, values, and narratives of a transforming church. Everist and Nesson draw together the resources in the field in this excellent guide to foundation and process. A similar volume will deepen and quicken the church's capacity to fulfill the transforming *missio dei* as envisioned by the prophets and the ministry of Jesus Christ.

*Mark A. Fowler is Murray H. Leiffer Associate Professor of Congregational Leadership and Executive Director of the Institute for Transformative Leaders & Communities, Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, Illinois*

**BOOK REVIEW****PERSPECTIVES ON CONGREGATIONAL LEADERSHIP:  
APPLYING SYSTEMS THINKING FOR  
EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP**

BY: ISRAEL GALINDO

RICHMOND, VA: EDUCATIONAL CONSULTANTS, 2009

210 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN: 978-09715765-7-5

Casting his book as “a collection of ‘deviant perspectives’ on congregational leadership based on concepts in Bowen Family Systems Theory (BFST),” Dr. Galindo encourages pastoral leaders to move away from “tricks, techniques, and pragmatic quick fix[es]” and engage a perspective that brings insight for the complexity of human systems (3-4). Becoming learners of and applying the BFST perspective requires leaders to first understand and address their own family of origin dynamics and be vigilant about how these dynamics play out in leaders’ current relationships and emotional environments. In other words, pastoral leaders inherit the generations of the past—their own and the organization or congregation’s—and BFST enables leaders to identify these unseen or below-the-surface forces in order to lead more effectively.

The book is divided into three sections. The first presents the basics of the theory, the second offers insights for leadership from BFST, and the third applies BFST to congregations and organizations. Since much of the writing originated in Dr. Galindo’s blog, all the sections contain pithy, eye-catching topics.

After an introduction that inspires pastoral leaders to become “a positive deviant in the system, a person whose capacity to think and function differently than others in the system brings about healthy change,” Galindo explains that BFST starts with one’s self and a continual quest to become self-differentiated (1). This enables leaders to be free of over-functioning—becoming fused with and adopting others’ anxieties and responsibilities as

their own, which potentially leads to burnout. Effective leaders deal with their own anxiety, but do not rescue the system. Self-differentiation also occurs when leaders understand their own role in their family of origin, discern how that role plays out in their leadership, and behave according to their own values and principles rather than their feelings. Lack of self-differentiation causes leaders to react without reflection and intention, which may temporarily address symptoms, but in the long run does not deal with the root issues of the problem.

The first section also discusses homeostasis. According to BSFT, a system's energy is directed toward staying at or returning to homeostasis. Therefore, change introduced to the system is resisted or even sabotaged. Leaders who understand this principle are more likely to remain tenacious in the midst of change.

The second section integrates BFST with leadership by conveying lists of leadership axioms based on Galindo's many years of experience in education, leadership, and consulting. Examples include: "Four Goals of the Organizational Leader," "Five Personal Resources for Leadership," "Five Concepts of Leadership," and "Back to the Basics: Leadership Rules 101." Again, the themes of family of origin, self-differentiation, and non-reactivity are present, along with exhortations to understand one's context and operate within one's own principles. Galindo particularly urges leaders to understand "pastoral triangles." In BFST, triangles are used to identify how relationship dynamics manifest anxiety or how relationships get patterned. Pastors are continually drawn into triangles with persons (pastor plus two others) or one person and an issue. It is important for them to recognize the triangle, avoid reactivity, and only function on their side of the triangle, what they can address or control, which is only themselves and their responses.

The third section applies BFST to congregational and organizational leadership by offering insights from short, case-specific scenarios previously discussed on Galindo's blog. Most of the forty-seven scenarios are one or two

pages, with the longest being ten pages in length. Although it is impossible to summarize these varied sections briefly, the themes of discerning one's context and taking responsibility for one's actions and interactions, and in like manner encouraging others to take responsibility, stand out. In general, however, this section is a compilation of Galindo's ministry philosophy.

*Perspectives on Congregational Leadership* dances between theory, experience, and reflection, with the sharing of experiences and reflection being more dominant. It is insightful in offering the reality of systems theory in organizations and therefore why leadership is messy and sometimes does not work. The book provides a theoretical backdrop for self-awareness, self-management, and self-discipline, along with self-reflection tools such as "Traits of a Well-Defined Leader" and "The Imaginative Leader." Finally, the descriptive Table of Contents enables one to use the book for situations we all face, such as "How to Handle a Dysfunctional Staff Colleague" and "How Could They Act That Way?"

*Shelley Trebesch is Assistant Professor of Leadership and Organization Development, School of Intercultural Studies and the Max De Pree Center for Leadership, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California*



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**BOOK REVIEW****THE BUSINESS OF THE CHURCH: THE UNCOMFORTABLE TRUTH THAT FAITHFUL MINISTRY REQUIRES EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT**

BY: JOHN W. WIMBERLY, JR.

HERNDON, VA: THE ALBAN INSTITUTE, 2010

164 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN: 978-56699-404-0

John Wimberly furthers a necessary and specific conversation in *The Business of the Church*. Drawing on four decades of pastoral and public ministry experience, executive MBA training, and popular management literature, he describes and promotes effective management for faithful congregational ministry.

Wimberly distinguishes between leaders and managers in order to further his argument that the business of the church is most efficiently navigated under managerial priorities. He notes that while leaders are concerned with outputs such as establishing visions through long-range strategic planning, managers attend more closely to the inputs that determine envisioned ends.

Chapter One identifies three elements needed for effective church management. The first, systems theory, derives from the theoretical framework of congregational systems, borrowed from Edwin Friedman's *Generation to Generation*, which attends to the relationships between the parts and the whole of organizations. These parts are a balance of inputs, including personnel, facilities, and finances that produce effective outputs such as proclamation, programs, pastoral care, and mission. The second managing element is a coherent strategic plan, which creates the clarity managers and congregational systems need to make decisions toward determined goals. The third element of effective management is the role of the pastor, the "head of staff" as Wimberly calls it, serving as the lead manager for the congregational system.

Wimberly argues that attention to these three elements will produce effective management of the congregation's culture and successful outcomes by reducing anxiety and offering clarity about congregational priorities and authority. The core anxieties of congregational life that need effective management include church finances, deferred facility maintenance, and personnel costs. Wimberly recognizes that the congregational system is also connected to societal anxieties, although he gives primary attention to economic concerns.

Chapters Two through Four further detail a systems framework for effectively managing personnel, facilities, and finances. Chapter Two addresses personnel management; here Wimberly calls for the clarification of roles and responsibilities, staff alignment toward church goals, and responsible personnel policies and practices. Chapter Three attends to the managing of property and technology. Wimberly points to the importance of having a lay board of trustees who help guide key staff managers. In addition to discussing the managing of funds and personnel for the tasks of facility management, he adds practical suggestions for managing facilities in tight fiscal times for small churches, wise and responsible attention to utilities and insurance that help maximize costs, and how to address legal matters. Chapter Four offers practical and wise suggestions for managing congregational finances. Here Wimberly describes how transactions relate to assets, liabilities, expenses and revenues, and encourages readers to consider important details regarding balance sheet accounts, income statements, cash journal, and cash reports.

Each chapter ends with a “manager’s checklist” including questions and guided exercises that summarize the preceding chapter and draw the reader into further engagement the topic. Three appendices, supporting the chapter on finances, offer concrete examples of a congregation’s balance sheet, an income statement, and accounting exercises.

This book would serve well as an interactive resource for pastors serving congregations as well as for seminary courses in congregational management. One has to wonder, however, if Wimberly's concept of management is too narrow for the complexities involved in a local church's engagement in this post-Christian twenty-first century world. Can an organizational business approach found in the marketplace transfer ad-hoc to organizing ecclesial identity without recognizing larger societal influences challenging ecclesial identity? That is, is the gospel reduced to a product "output" and people to its managing catalyst of the Spirit's work? The world, under this business model, can often be conceived as a target the church enacts on, rather than creating managing discernment conversations that attend to what God is already doing in the world. Mission, for Wimberly, is a Newtonian category, one output dimension among others. Recent ecclesial organization literature, however, suggest that a missional focus is equally concerned about how to manage ecclesial identity and not merely its functional purpose value. Is not the gospel itself equally an "input" the Spirit uses to manage the church's own trust in God for the life of the world? If this is so, how can congregations also find ways to manage or partner with the creative power of the Spirit? These questions are but a few that open up the discussion that Wimberly convenes, a necessary and specific conversation for the *Business of the Church*, but this business equally includes a managing conversation of God's Spirit and the place of the world.

*David Hahn is a Ph.D. candidate in Congregational Mission and Leadership, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota*

**BOOK REVIEW****JUST HOSPITALITY:  
GOD'S WELCOME IN A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE**

BY: LETTY M. RUSSELL

EDITED BY: J. SHANNON CLARKSON AND KATE M. OTT

LOUISVILLE: WESTMINSTER/JOHN KNOX, 2009

124 PP. PAPERBACK

ISBN 978-0-664-23315-0

Letty Mandeville Russell (1929-2007), one of the world's foremost feminist theologians and longtime member of the Yale Divinity School faculty, started writing notes for her last book a few years before she died. Her partner, J. Shannon Clarkson, and former research assistant, Kate M. Ott, compiled and organized Russell's work into the volume *Just Hospitality*. In her final scholarly contribution to the academy and the church, Russell introduces an argument for moving from essentializing difference (stranger as permanent "other"), to partnering (stranger as connection with God) as opportunity for creating hospitable justice and healing a world in crisis.

Russell begins by asking the question, "Why hospitality?" Drawing on her personal narrative and biblical stories to illustrate her understanding of hospitality, Russell points to the mandate for the church to be in solidarity with strangers, particularly those who live permanently on the margins, and, further, to *love* the stranger (*philoxenia*). She also conveys this perspective through examples of her work with the World Council of Churches and her practice of hospitality with women around the globe.

The next two chapters critique normative understandings of hospitality through the lenses of postcolonial theology and feminist hermeneutics. In this section, Russell challenges the codified knowledge developed by dominant white, Western groups about "other" cultures, geography, and roles (24-26). Citing New Testament lecturer, Musa Dube, of the University of

Botswana, Russell agrees that imperialism imposes universal standards on the “other,” who is assumed to be a blank slate, and who is rendered dependent, colonized, on those who create and maintain said standards (27-28). Russell equates such assumptions and cooption to a misuse of the doctrine of election. To move forward with just hospitality, both scholars urge colonizers and colonized to sit at table together to examine the impact of colonialism and imperialism on human social locations and global interdependence. Russell focuses further on power quotients that are particularly ascribed against women of color and women of the global South. Her work with women’s experiences of familial slavery and/or HIV/AIDS throughout the world galvanized her focus on constructing tools to analyze, resist, and reconstruct how we share in God’s creation (50).

From initial analysis flows formative process. In the remainder of the book, Russell examines hospitality in biblical story and from story, reframes a theology of hospitality focused on justice. She focuses on the blessing of “riotous” difference created by God. Her contention is that in the beginning, God gave humanity the gift of difference and in time, the gift of understanding such difference at Pentecost. Often, our response to this gift is to try to limit diversity by pursuing sameness or essentializing difference, rendering it a weapon of destruction. For Russell, difference is a function of relationships in a group rather than a set of attributes, so forming coalitions across difference is the essence of God’s message. Appropriately, Russell calls for acknowledging violently inhospitable behavior of dominant groups against indigenous persons, and with Rebecca Todd Peters, challenges the imperialist use of the Great Commission (Matthew 28) to colonize peoples, as well as dominant groups’ own minds.

A theology of just hospitality requires reading the biblical text with understanding that “textual terror” is used easily against those who are already marginalized. Russell calls for a hermeneutic of suspicion that looks for varieties of meaning based on social location, with a

desire to confront patriarchy and a commitment to find God's safe space in the midst of the story. Russell sees Christ as the metaphor of God's welcome, creating safe space so that Christ's community, the church, can work for healing and justice. By challenging our own personal limits, social structural limits, and theological constructs that limit hospitality, we invite creation to flourish without requiring the "other" to become like us. Ultimately, Russell's goal for just hospitality includes actions of genuine solidarity modeled on God's welcome. "The sort of hospitality...that sees the struggle for justice as part and parcel of welcoming the stranger" (xv).

In her final work, Letty Russell interweaves personal experience with theological reflection. Some of the explanatory narrative is repetitive. However, Russell's passion for just hospitality leaps off the pages; this theological engagement is not an academic exercise alone for her. The editors enhance Russell's work by concluding each chapter with thought-questions to stimulate engagement with Russell's assertions, opening opportunity for partnering toward just hospitality in the classroom itself. I will likely adopt portions of this text for an advanced leadership class in womanist/feminist ethics of leadership because I find Russell's work compelling.

*Lisa R. Withrow is Associate Dean and Professor of Christian Leadership, Methodist Theological School in Ohio, Delaware, Ohio*

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**BOOK REVIEW****THE COLOR OF CHURCH: A BIBLICAL AND PRACTICAL PARADIGM FOR MULTIRACIAL CHURCHES**

BY: RODNEY M. WOO

NASHVILLE, TN: B &amp; H ACADEMIC, 2009

304 PP. PAPERBACK

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Less than seven percent of congregations in the United States are multiracial, and Rodney Woo, pastor of Wilcrest Baptist Church in Houston, Texas, wants this to change. He contends that *all* churches should be reaching across racial and ethnic lines, and *The Color of Church* encourages congregations to move in this direction.

*The Color of Church* is a companion volume to *People of the Dream* by Michael Emerson. While the two books address the same general topic of multiracial congregations, they differ dramatically. In contrast to the sociological focus of Emerson's book, *The Color of Church* offers a biblical argument for multiracial congregations and gives extended attention to Woo's personal narrative and the story of Wilcrest. Woo's goal is not just to inform, but to persuade. Woo writes with a strong Southern Baptist accent, and this book will resonate best with an evangelical audience.

Woo's racial background and experience give him credibility in addressing his topic. He describes himself as a Chinese-American married to a woman of Mexican descent and has lived in a range of ethnic settings. The heart of his story is tied to his leadership of Wilcrest Baptist Church, which went from being ninety-nine percent Anglo when Woo began as its pastor to becoming a congregation in which forty-four nations are represented and in which no one racial group comprises a majority.

Woo develops a biblical and theological basis for multiracial ministry. Almost every page of this book includes scriptural citations and exposition. Woo engages

much more biblical material than the standard diversity texts like the stories of Babel and Pentecost, the tearing down of walls in Ephesians 2, the call for unity in Ephesians 4, or the equality of Galatians 3. Woven into the biblical sections are stories of Woo's journey with Wilcrest over a fifteen-year period and advice on addressing issues unique to multiracial congregations.

One strength of this book is Woo's development of a "theology of discomfort" as essential for fostering a multiracial congregation. Woo is so committed to this that he once announced to his congregation that the theme for the coming year would be the "Year of Discomfort." In Woo's words, "A multiracial congregation is by nature and definition a place of contrast; this moves us out of our comfort zones and forces us to trust in the God of all peoples" (49). While he is aware that he cannot ask people to move too quickly, he wants people in congregations to expect a certain level of discomfort; he is not interested in making comfort a primary goal of the congregation.

Another strength is Woo's discussion of the two key issues related to becoming multiracial: leadership and worship. Woo argues that multiracial leadership is required in order to validate a congregation's claim that it wants to be multiracial. Diverse leadership is not optional, it is crucial. In relation to worship, Woo discusses the dynamics of music styles, preaching styles, expressive versus quiet worship, language, and time perspectives in multiracial contexts.

Woo's understanding of cultural lenses is limited. Woo argues that because a multiracial setting challenges one's own cultural blinders, a multiracial setting makes it possible to have "a more pure preaching of Scripture" (164). While I indeed hope that each of us will become more aware of our cultural biases, I contend that there is no supra-cultural position we can attain from which to read and preach scripture purely—humans are *always* embedded in culture(s), and thus Woo's desire to "help protect Scripture from cultural bias" (164) needs to be more nuanced.



Woo uses the term “nonwhites” throughout his book. This term makes the racial category of “white” normative, and all other categories are defined in relation to that norm. All distinguishing terms or phrases have their limitations, but terms such as “people of color” avoid the problem of making Anglos the normative set.

Woo frames Wilcrest’s journey as a battle and uses the military idea of rules of engagement to describe aspects of that battle. At one point he talks about “how to use force effectively to accomplish the mission objectives” (164). Given the suffering incurred by people of color in this country as a result of the use of force, as well as Jesus’ model of non-coercive engagement, I find Woo’s language here highly problematic.

These quibbles aside, the stories in *The Color of Church* inspire hope for what can be. The implementation strategies and biblical work provide rich material for congregations to discuss as they seek to reflect the diversity of God’s kingdom.

*Rob Muthiah is Professor of Practical Theology and Director of Field Education at the Graduate School of Theology, Azusa Pacific University, Azusa, California*

**BOOK REVIEW****A LIFELONG CALL TO LEARN:****CONTINUING EDUCATION FOR RELIGIOUS LEADERS**

BY: ROBERT ELDRÉD REBER AND D. BRUCE ROBERTS (EDS)

HERNDON, VA: THE ALBAN INSTITUTE, 2010,

REVISED AND EXPANDED

397 PP. PAPERBACK

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Development of religious leaders is a challenge in the context of rapid social change. No longer is it possible to think of training as a one-time, pre-service experience that equips the person for a life-time of effective ministry. Simultaneously, continuing education programs are experiencing the challenges that come with economic down-turn; when churches, denominations, and individuals have limited resources, continuing education is one of the items that is often cut. In this context, how can educators and organizations engaged in the continuing education enterprise be effective in their mission to equip men and women for a lifetime of fruitful service? Written by and for practitioners of continuing education, particularly those with academic and judiciary affiliations in mainline denominational contexts, *A Lifelong Call to Learn* explores a variety of perspectives and issues related to programs of continuing theological education for church leaders.

Part One explores historical perspectives looking at continuing education in light of organizational, cultural, and professional trends in the past century. Rouch begins the conversation by discussing continuing education movements of the 1960's and 70's in the United States. Reber surveys issues in continuing education looking into the future with challenges such as lack of organizational commitment and focus on "quick fix" type content. Of particular value is Reber's attention to the subversive role of continuing education: to subvert our inaccurate or inadequate thinking. Cervero addresses continuing

education for professionals in the church—what it is for, who will provide it, and who will benefit. Cornett frames continuing education as engagement between the church and world, envisioning the purpose as to “provide a forum for the church’s ongoing engagement of these concerns as well as gather the scholars, community leaders, and political figures that have some say about how the decisions that will determine the future well being of much of the humanity will be made” (63).

Part Two focuses on theory and research in continuing education, looking at perspectives in adult education, considering basal literature, and examining one major continuing education research project. Roberts explores facilitating innovation in leadership by creating a community of truth as a context to motivate learning through the exploration of mental models, experimentation in ministry, and evaluation of that experimentation. Marler presents an analysis of survey data of pastoral peer groups looking at the impact of group leadership, member diversity, and group funding. Roberts then considers two factors involved in effective teaching with adults: shared control and support for development of critical thinking.

Part Three presents innovations in continuing education, focusing on various programs and institutions. While not particularly innovative in the broader field of education, these chapters explore modalities that are not yet common in the arena of continuing education programs. Chapters in this section address peer group learning, coaching, education for laity and professionals, multi-faith education and education for leadership in a multi-religious society, and online education. The editors’ high value for ecumenical and inter-faith dialog is particularly reflected in this section.

Part Four focuses on administrative issues, addressing implications for continuing education programs in a larger context, whether institutional or cultural. Guthrie and Cervero address learning to read the political system of an organization to know how to negotiate toward continuing education outcomes. Maykus

gives pithy and practical advice on basic program planning, design, and evaluation. Davis proposes a strategy for planning and marketing under the rubric of learning. Oehler suggests that a program that pays attention to the whole person will be more successful both in terms of results and attendance. Macholl overviews risk assessment and mitigation. Reber and Roberts conclude with seven key questions for the future of continuing education.

The title of this text, *A Lifelong Call to Learn*, suggests a broad agenda related to the challenges and possibilities of lifelong learning. The focus of the book, however, is on the educator and the continuing education programs he/she facilitates. Touched on, but not fully addressed, is the challenge of an educational culture that assumes “the experts know what needs to be taught, have a structured and systematic way to teach it, and have a way to document and measure its achievement” (327). To what extent does the specific cultural and theological perspective of the contributors and their commitment to programs of continuing educating hinder them—and those they represent—from considering the subject of lifelong learning for religious leaders more broadly and, potentially, more effectively? Nevertheless, this text offers a spectrum of ideas and useful conversation starters for the continuing education practitioner in mainline denominational and academic contexts.

*Susan L. Maros is Professor and Online Education Specialist,  
The King's University, Los Angeles, California*