USING CHARISMA TO SHAPE INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES IN MULTIETHNIC CONGREGATIONS
CRAIG HENDRICKSON

Abstract: This paper explores the idea that charismatic leaders of multiethnic congregations should use their influence to form an interpretive community to carry out the work of missional *praxis*. Doing so helps to mitigate the effects of three adaptive challenges inherent in charismatic leadership that hinder multiethnic congregations' missional vitality and long-term viability: over-dependence on the leader, flawed vision, and cultural captivity. Specifically, interdependence and congregational empowerment are fostered as the charismatic leader gives the work back to the people, thus ensuring healthier leadership transitions. Further, more contextually appropriate and Spirit-led vision results as marginalized voices are invited into a culturally inclusive interpretive community. Finally, by developing cultural intelligence, the charismatic leader and congregants can overcome cultural captivity that hinders the adaptive capacity of the congregation through exclusionary practices and structures. The result is a stronger and more missionally vital congregation that will last beyond the shelf-life of the leader.

Introduction

My family and I love our church. Though not perfect, it is everything we have sought in a local church and more. We are an ethnically and socio-economically diverse faith community striving to embody God's love across racial, cultural, and socio-economic boundaries; we are attempting to engage our community and world through increasingly holistic and missional forms of

Craig Hendrickson works with CRMLeaders.

ministry; and most of all, we are led by a wonderfully caring, positive, and charismatic pastor who has loved and supported us through some very challenging times. The longer my family and I continue on as active contributing members, however, the more concerned I become about our church's future. My concern does not stem from the fact that our church is in decline, or that it is currently facing some kind of obvious crisis. To the contrary, our church maintains a robust average of more than 750 attendees on any given Sunday morning, has just launched a third service due to our continued growth, and, by many standards, continues to engage in effective missional ministry. Rather, my concern comes as I ponder what will happen when our pastor decides to retire or move on to another ministry. Will the person who replaces him be able to connect with and inspire people as effectively? Will he or she be able to bring people together across racial and cultural barriers and move the church forward in effective missional ministry as a multiethnic faith community? Or will the church struggle to maintain its multiethnic identity and missional vitality and begin a journey toward decline from which it cannot recover?

During my doctoral research and ten years in vocational ministry as a pastor, leadership coach, and congregational consultant with Church Resource Ministries, I have seen many multiethnic congregations enter into difficult seasons after a leadership transition, especially after a time of fruitful ministry under a highly charismatic and beloved pastor. These difficulties quite often relate to unrealistic or unmet expectations on behalf of the incoming leader and congregants alike. Congregants expect the incoming leader to keep things functioning normally as he or she somehow measures up to the idealized leader who has transitioned out. Likewise, the incoming leader expects that he or she will be able to maintain, and even exceed, the ministry of his or her predecessor. These expectations are generally untenable, however. The very reason for the congregation's success was the charismatic influence of the previous leader.

I have also discovered that lay leaders often become overly dependent upon the charismatic leader, resulting in decreased involvement among the laity in the work and life of the church. This situation contributes to disappointment and disillusionment for all parties as the new leader discovers the level of lay involvement is lower than it needs to be to sustain effective ministry and as congregants realize the new leader will not attain their lofty ideals for his or her performance.[1] Premature removal or departure of the new leader, and/or the departure of congregants looking for a new commodity to fill the gap in their faith experience often follows.[2] Thus while charisma can be a very useful resource for those leading multiethnic congregations, it can also negatively affect the congregation's missional vitality and raise the chance of difficulties during leadership transitions due to the disempowerment of congregational members.

The preponderance of writing on charismatic leadership has not provided an answer to the question I pose today in response to this predicament: what adjustments must be made by charismatic leaders of multiethnic congregations during their ministry to transform congregants' views of the leader as commodity? This question informs the thesis I will explore throughout the rest of this paper: that charismatic leaders of multiethnic congregations should use their influence to form an interpretive community to carry out the work of missional *praxis*. I suggest that

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[1] Jay Conger and Rabindra Kanungo also make these observations about charismatic leaders in organizations. Jay A. Conger and Rabindra N. Kanungo, *Charismatic Leadership in Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998), 212-237.

[2] According to Paul Metzger, leaders are one of many commodities that consumerist church-goers look for to enhance their faith experience. When leaders fail to meet expectations, congregants will often look to have their needs met at another church down the street. Consumerism especially affects the composition of congregations along race and class lines. See Paul G. Metzger, *Consuming Jesus: Beyond Race and Class Divisions in a Consumer Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007).

forming such a community lessens the congregation's dependence on the charismatic leader, resulting in a more adaptive and missionally vital congregation that can withstand leadership transitions.

To adequately support this thesis, I will carry out three tasks. First, I will explore how we have arrived at current understandings of charismatic leadership through a brief survey of historical and recent leadership literature. These insights have influenced the practice of organizational and congregational leadership for the last quarter century, yet remain conspicuously absent from literature in the emerging field of multiethnic congregational and leadership studies. Second, I will utilize Ronald Heifetz's concept of adaptive leadership[3] to explore the nature of three challenges to the adaptive capacity and missional vitality of multiethnic congregations relating to charismatic leadership: (1) over-dependence on the charismatic leader, which can result in succession challenges, passivity, and disempowerment of congregants; (2) flawed vision of the charismatic leader, brought about either by self-serving goals or unrealistic assessments of environmental factors and resources; and (3) the cultural captivity of the charismatic leader.[4] Third, I will suggest a pathway forward for leaders of multiethnic congregations to address these adaptive challenges. Drawing on literature in the fields of organizational leadership, intercultural leadership, and missional ecclesiology, I posit that leaders can inspire congregants to participative missional action through an awareness of and appropriate use of charisma.

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[3] Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[4] I draw on the work of Conger and Kanungo, *Charismatic Leadership*, and Mary L. Connelly and Paul B. Pedersen, *Leadership in a Diverse and Multicultural Environment: Developing Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2005) in this discussion.

Charismatic Leadership: A Brief Historical Overview

Flowing directly out of the trait school of leadership born out of the "great man" theories popular at the beginning of the twentieth century, the concept of charisma was first introduced into leadership studies by Max Weber in the early twentieth century.[5] Drawing on ancient Pauline uses of the term, which are the first to appear in written form,[6] Weber described charismatic leaders as highly esteemed individuals who were endowed with exceptional qualities derived from divine origin and who exerted an extraordinary influence over their followers.[7] Weber's reworked and secularized concept of charisma—a concept which remains influential in research on charismatic leadership today[8]—provided some momentum for trait research in leadership studies until its validity was brought into question through the research of Ralph Stogdill.[9] Stogdill's findings, which suggested no set of consistent traits common to all leaders or differentiating them from followers,[10] initiated a shift away from trait research and a move toward behavioral approaches beginning in the late '40s and contingency approaches beginning in the late '60s, as researchers began to look for the behavioral and/or situational factors that contributed toward effective leaders.

While research into charismatic leadership regained some traction in the '60s as sociologists and political theorists began to explore the concept of charisma in

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[5] Bernard M. Bass, *Bass & Stogdill's Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research, and Managerial Applications*, 3rd ed. (New York: The Free Press, 1990), 184.

[6] John Potts, *The History of Charisma* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 5.

[7] Max Weber, "Charismatic Authority," in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, ed. T. Parsons (New York: The Free Press), 358-9.

[8] Potts, 196.

[9] See Ralph Stogdill, "Personal Factors Associated with Leadership: A Survey of the Literature," *Journal of Psychology* 25 (1948): 35-71, and Ralph Stogdill, *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research* (New York: The Free Press, 1974).

[10] Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2003), 15-6.

relationship to political figures like John F. Kennedy, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Adolf Hitler,[11] research on the topic all but disappeared until the late '70s as researchers failed to identify a universal charismatic personality among leaders.[12] Seminal work by James MacGregor Burns changed this, however, as he reframed Weber's understanding of charismatic leadership with his description of *heroic* leaders, who through the sheer force of their persona often provide solutions to crises being faced by organizations. At the heart of Burns' approach was his differentiation between transactional and transforming leadership. While transactional leadership focuses on what is gained through the leadership transaction by both parties, transforming leadership focuses on the transformation that occurs in individuals and organizations as leadership turns followers into leaders by raising their level of motivation and morality so that they do not become overly dependent on formal leadership.[13] This work would provide the foundation for a great deal of research beginning in the '80s through the present day in what would become known as the *new leadership* approach, characterized most notably by the work of Bernard Bass, Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus, and Noel Tichy and Mary Anne DeVanna in the area of transformational leadership.[14] While charisma was only one of many factors in effective leadership for these authors—Bass, for example, sees charisma as a vital but not sufficient part of transformational leadership[15]—their focus on the attributes and behaviors of transformational leaders nonetheless sparked further research into the nature of charismatic leadership.

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[11] Potts, 127-8.

[12] Jay A. Conger *The Charismatic Leader: Behind the Mystique of Exceptional Leadership*, (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989), 23.

[13] James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 244.

[14] See Bernard M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), Bernard M. Bass in Northouse, 173-81.

[15] Bass, *Handbook of Leadership*, 196.

Since that time, a great deal of influential research in the area of charismatic leadership has occurred, with two notable theories being put forward by Robert House, Boas Shamir and their associates,[16] and Jay Conger and Rabindra Kanungo.[17] While both theories assert the importance of charismatic leadership for effective organizations, they put their emphasis in different places. House and Shamir, for example, place a heavy emphasis on the transformation of follower self-concepts as leaders tap into followers' intrinsic motivations for work. Conger and Kanungo, on the other hand, place more emphasis on the way followers attribute special characteristics (i.e., charisma) to leaders[18] due to their ability to: (1) identify and connect environmental constraints and opportunities for the organization with their followers' needs and abilities; (2) discern and communicate a powerful vision that resonates with their followers; and (3) influence and deploy followers in pursuit of that vision.[19] These similar, yet different, perspectives, along with the work of dozens of researchers who have attempted to test, refine, and expand on the work of these schools of thought over the past twenty years,[20] reveal the diversity of perspectives regarding the nature of charismatic leadership. While there is no universal agreement regarding the core

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[16] See, for example, Robert J. House and Jane M. Howell, "Personality and Charismatic Leadership," *Leadership Quarterly* 3(2) (1992): 81-108, and Robert J. House and Boas Shamir, "Toward the Integration of Transformational, Charismatic, and Visionary Theories," in *Leadership Theory and Research Perspectives and Directions*, eds. M. Chemmers and R. Ayman, (Orlando: Academic Press, 1993).

[17] See Conger, *The Charismatic Leader*, and Conger and Kanungo, *Charismatic Leadership.*

[18] Potts, 196-7.

[19] Conger and Kanungo, *Charismatic Leadership,* 49.

[20] See, for example, Kevin S. Groves, "Linking Leader Skills, Follower Attributes, and Contextual Variables Via an Integrated Model of Charismatic Leadership," *Journal of Management* 31 (2005): 255-77, and Stephen J. Zaccarro, Cary Kemp, and Paige Bader, "Leader Traits and Attributes," in *The Nature of Leadership*, eds. J. Antonakis, A. T. Ciancolo, and R. J. Sternberg (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004).

behaviors that comprise charismatic leadership,[21] or even an agreed upon definition of charismatic leadership, in this paper I will side with Conger and Kanungo's attributional approach, which posits that charisma is not some special endowment imbued by divinity as believed by Weber. Instead, it is attributed to leaders by followers who strongly identify with and believe that the leader possesses special qualities. Because of this, the strong emotional bond formed between followers and leaders can be utilized to initiate and sustain substantial change in organizations, and in this case, multiethnic congregations.

Charismatic Leadership, Multiethnic Congregations, and Missional Ministry

With the abundance of literature exploring the issue of charismatic leadership in organizations, it is interesting that a search into past and current literature on the subject reveals no examination of the relationship between charisma and missional leadership in multiethnic congregations. There are three likely reasons for this gap in the literature worthy of note here. First, because a great deal of the literature in the field of multiethnic congregational and leadership studies arose in response to the issues faced by practitioners in multiethnic congregations, the literature has focused primarily on the skills necessary to lead in the midst of complex racial and cultural dynamics[22] or on strategies for transforming unjust structures and hegemony[23] rather than on the

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[21] Kyounsu Kim, Dan Fred Dansereau, and Insook Kim, "Extending the Concept of Charismatic Leadership: An Illustration Using Bass's Categories," in *Transformational and Charismatic Leadership; The Road Ahead*, eds. B. J. Avolio and F. J. Yammarino (New York: JAI, 2002), 144.

[22] See Eric H. F. Law, *The Wolf Shall Dwell With the Lamb: A Spirituality for Leadership in a Multicultural Community*, (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1993) and Charles R. Foster, *Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 1997).

[23] See Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church: Mandates, Commitments, and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

attributes or qualities of leaders. Because of this, the literature has often drawn from the fields of intercultural leadership, cultural anthropology, and sociology to frame its discussion rather than from charismatic leadership literature or the various books by Anglo scholars applying charismatic and transformational leadership principles in congregational contexts.[24]

Second, because the missional church discussion arose primarily out of a need to reconnect missionally stagnant local congregations in the North American mission context with the *missio Dei*,[25] the two conversations have often catered primarily to separate niches within the North American church leadership community. The multiethnic literature has primarily attracted those already leading or desiring to lead multiethnic congregations, while the missional church literature has attracted those seeking to revitalize struggling congregations. Thus, while authors like Craig Van Gelder and Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk suggest that contextually appropriate missional ministry calls local congregations to engage ethnically diverse contexts through multiethnic ministry,[26] they do not flesh out the mechanics of what this should look like in an ethnically and culturally diverse congregation.

Third, because followers' perceptions of the importance of various leadership traits and behaviors are culturally and contextually specific,[27] it is possible that

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[24] See, for example, *Transforming Leadership: Jesus' Way of Creating Vision, Shaping Values & Empowering Change*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1993), and Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003).

[25] See Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

[26] See Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2008), and Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church To Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

[27] Gian Casimir and David A. Waldman, "A Cross-Cultural Comparison of the Importance of Leadership Traits for Effective Low-Level and High-Level Leaders: Australia and China," *International Journal of Cross-Cultural Management* 7(1) (2007): 47-60.

urban missiologists and congregational leadership theorists perceive that an endeavor to link charismatic leadership behaviors with those leading multiethnic congregations into missional ministry is a fruitless task. I believe that this is a short-sighted perception, however. Great potential lies in bringing literature from the three fields of charismatic leadership, missional ecclesiology, and multiethnic congregational and leadership studies into conversation with one another. To accomplish this task, however, we need a heuristic framework to link the separate discussions together. Throughout the rest of this paper, I will utilize Heifetz's framework of adaptive leadership to serve this purpose.

Adaptive Challenges Associated with Charismatic Leadership in Multiethnic Congregations

Since the mid '90s, our understanding of the nature of leadership in complex organizations has been profoundly shaped by the concept of adaptive leadership developed by Ronald Heifetz and his colleagues at the Kennedy Business School at Harvard. At the heart of adaptive leadership is a leader's ability to mobilize people in an organization or social group to tackle difficult issues so that the organization or group can thrive. Practically, this means that leaders need to develop the ability to distinguish adaptive challenges from technical problems. This process occurs as leaders take a "balcony perspective" by asking questions and collecting information that allows them to diagnose the nature of the challenge or problem accurately. According to Heifetz and his colleague Marty Linsky, leaders can distinguish between adaptive challenges and technical problems by identifying the nature of the work required, as well as by identifying who needs to carry the work out. In the case of technical problems, the work can be carried out through the skills or knowledge of leaders since the problem is straightforward and technical in nature. Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, reside

among the people themselves and require followers in an organization to learn new ways of being and doing.[28] In other words, adaptive challenges relate to changing the culture of an organization, while technical problems simply require changing strategies or specific processes. Consequently, dealing effectively with adaptive challenges requires leaders to give the work back to the people so that the people can choose between conflicting values, learn new ways, and begin the process of transforming the culture of the organization into one that is adaptive in its very nature.

This understanding of adaptive challenges is significant as we reflect on the nature of charismatic leadership in multiethnic congregations. In exploring the dark side of charismatic leadership, Conger and Kanungo suggest that dysfunctional management approaches characteristic of charismatic leaders can significantly inhibit organizational health and longevity. Some examples include (1) the creation of in-group/out-group rivalries, (2) the use of autocratic forms of leadership resulting in underutilization of political support and distorted environmental assessments, (3) the use of manipulation and exaggeration to accomplish grandiose goals brought about by narcissism, (4) the creation of excessive dependence of followers on the leader, and (5) failure to develop successors of equal ability.[29] Each of these issues represents an adaptive challenge to both the individual leader and to the organization as a whole as these challenges require significant changes in values, expectations, and practices that a simple change in strategy cannot accomplish. In other words, charismatic leaders face certain adaptive challenges that need to be addressed for the long-term viability and missional vitality of multiethnic congregations if they are to exist and thrive beyond the shelf-life of the charismatic leader. In the rest of this section I will briefly discuss what I

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[28] Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002), 14.
[29] See Conger, 153-4, and Conger and Kanungo, 211-39.

consider to be three of the most pressing adaptive
challenges facing multiethnic congregations as a result of
charismatic leadership: (1) over-dependence on the
charismatic leader, (2) flawed vision of the
charismatic leader, and (3) the cultural captivity of the
charismatic leader.

Over-Dependence on the Charismatic Leader

The issue of follower over-dependence on the
charismatic leader has been discussed at length by several
researchers who have explored the dangers of charismatic
leadership.[30] Conger and Kanungo present what is
arguably the most helpful discussion on the issue,
however, suggesting that dependence on the charismatic
leader is unavoidable at some level due to the nature of
the charismatic leader-follower relationship. According to
Conger and Kanungo, follower identification with the
leader and follower internalization of the leader's vision
and values are central processes through which
charismatic leaders influence followers. Follower
identification occurs when followers highly value the
leader's behaviors and attributes and consider them
worthy of emulation, while internalization occurs when
the leader's vision is deemed to be an expression of
followers' core values.

The problem comes, however, when followers who
are attracted to the leader's extraordinary qualities such as
dynamic vision, charismatic communication skills, and
the ability to inspire others over-identify with the leader.
This over-identification with the charismatic leader is
often triggered by a phenomenon in followers known as
transference, which in the case of leader-follower
relations manifests as a subconscious desire within
followers to replace their parent figure with someone
omnipotent, who can imbue desired qualities into them.
This resulting over-dependence on the charismatic leader

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[30] See, for example, House and Howell, "Personality and Charismatic
Leadership," and Kim, Dansereau, and Kim, "Extending the Concept of
Charismatic Leadership."

can then either be exploited to accomplish the leader's self-serving and narcissistic goals, or used constructively to facilitate followers' growth through internalization of the leader's values and vision in pursuit of the collective good of the organization.[31] When leaders choose to engage in behaviors motivated by narcissism and serving their own goals rather than engaging in more positive behaviors motivated by altruism, they often utilize techniques and strategies that elicit follower compliance rather than follower empowerment so their own ego needs and self-centered ambition will be met. This reinforces follower dependency on the skills and knowledge of the leader and hinders deep internalization of the values and beliefs necessary to transform both followers and the organization.

Clearly, then, this issue of over-dependence presents a significant adaptive challenge for multiethnic congregations because it cannot be overcome by a simple change in strategy or technique by the charismatic leader. Instead, the leader and congregants must both learn new ways of being and doing. The leader needs to shift away from a narcissistic and self-aggrandizing orientation toward an altruistic one that seeks the corporate good, while congregants need to shift toward healthy levels of identification and internalization rather than projecting subconscious needs for a heroic parent figure onto the leader. Without these shifts, which are not easy by any means, at least two negative outcomes threaten the long-term viability of the congregation. First, the ongoing congregational culture characterized by over-dependence will contribute toward the disempowerment of other key leaders and followers within the congregation as they become more and more dependent on the knowledge and skills of the charismatic leader. This over-dependence is a common and appealing trap for charismatic leaders to fall into as a leader-centered ethos meets their powerful ego needs and their desire to be perceived as heroic.[32] This

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[31] Conger and Kanungo, 212-17.
[32] Conger and Kanungo, 236.

leader-centered culture creates a leadership environment conducive only to solving technical problems as the heroic leader's knowledge and skills take center-stage while the knowledge and skills of congregants remain untapped. As this over-dependence occurs, the congregation's ability to deal with adaptive challenges is compromised, hindering their ability to adapt and thrive in a context characterized by discontinuous change.

Second, follower over-dependence on the charismatic leader contributes toward significant succession challenges that can derail a congregation during times of leadership transition. Charismatic leaders often struggle to develop leaders of equal or similar competencies. Because of their need to be the leader and their desire for the limelight, charismatic leaders often fail to develop and use junior leaders, contributing toward a leadership void in the congregation. It then becomes more difficult for the leader to give decision-making power away, weakening authority structures necessary to disperse leadership throughout the congregation to foster innovation and increase corporate wisdom. The inability to share leadership responsibilities often drives younger talented leaders looking for increased responsibilities and opportunities to other congregations where they can contribute and thrive, further weakening the system.[33]

In other cases, the perception of a heroic, omnipotent leader with all of the answers to the congregation's problems can create unrealistic expectations on the part of congregants—who are expecting another hero to provide the answers for them as they move forward under new leadership—and on the part of the incoming leader—who may believe that he or she is coming in to maintain or further develop a healthy system. Very few leaders are able to overcome the leadership deficit created by an over-dependent system, however. The inevitable result is disillusionment and disappointment for all involved as the leader realizes the level of lay involvement is lower than it needs to be to sustain

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[33] Conger and Kanungo, 236.

effective ministry, and as congregants realize that the new leader will not attain their lofty ideals and expectations. The result is often the removal or departure of the new leader prematurely, or the departure of congregants as they seek a new charismatic leader who will fill the gap in their consumer-driven faith experience.

Flawed Vision of the Charismatic Leader

A second adaptive challenge faced by multiethnic congregations with charismatic leadership is the issue of flawed vision. According to Conger and Kanungo, at least three issues can contribute toward this problem in organizations: (1) visions derived primarily from the self-serving needs of the leader, (2) underestimating the resources needed to achieve the vision, and (3) unrealistic or distorted assessments of the environment.[34] In the case of self-serving visions, they note that early successes convince leaders of their infallibility, which often causes them to become obsessed with innovations that will transform the marketplace and satisfy their ambitious agendas. This obsession causes them to invest an inordinate amount of energy into R & D, which further distances them from the reality of the marketplace.[35] This drive for achievement in pursuit of their grandiose visions can then cause charismatic leaders to greatly underestimate the human, financial, technological, and political resources necessary to pursue and accomplish the visions. As initial successes give them confidence in the accuracy of their visions, they will then attempt to speed up the process of achieving the visions.[36] This growing confidence in their own abilities to judge what is needed within the organization causes them to become less and less realistic about what is actually needed to accomplish the visions. Their overconfidence contributes toward unrealistic assessments of their market environment as they begin to exclude subordinates and

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[34] Conger and Kanungo, 218-19.
[35] Conger and Kanungo, 220.
[36] Conger and Kanungo, 223.

peers from the process and rely more and more on their own judgments. The results are crises that threaten the relevance and viability of organizations as the environment changes but the charismatic leaders' tactics remain static.[37]

The threat flawed vision presents to multiethnic congregations should be apparent. Congregations that rely on the vision of the charismatic leader to move them toward participation in God's redemptive initiatives in their communities and world run the risk of pursuing a vision influenced more by the desires and agenda of the leader than by the Spirit of God. They also run the risk of facing increased crises when necessary resources are underestimated in pursuit of the vision due to the leader's impatience and increasing reliance on his or her own judgment. Finally, they run the risk of losing touch with their continually changing contexts as they rely on old or inaccurate data and engage in programs, strategies, and processes that were designed for a context that no longer exists. While the leader and congregation may be convinced from early successes that the leader possesses what is necessary to keep the congregation vital, adaptive, and on track, in reality only the collective wisdom of the congregation is sufficient to accurately discern God's redemptive activities in a context characterized by discontinuous change. Failure to take advantage of this collective wisdom can derail a multiethnic congregation by limiting its adaptive capacity and locking it into a course that is no longer relevant.

Cultural Captivity of the Charismatic Leader

Sherwood Lingenfelter refers to culture as our palace and our prison.[38] It is our palace in that it provides us with a way of making sense of our social worlds, yet it is also our prison in that it puts limits on our ability to interpret phenomena that we encounter—especially when

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[37] Conger and Kanungo, 225.

[38] Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Transforming Culture: A Challenge for Christian Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998).

they fall outside of our cultural knowledge systems. In other words, when we lack awareness into how our culture has specifically shaped the way we interpret and interact with the world around us, we are held captive to an interpretive framework that has been shaped by our socially mediated experiences.[39] *Cultural captivity*[40] then (or what Mary Connerley and Paul Pedersen refer to as *cultural encapsulation*) is perhaps the most subtle, deepest, and consequently most difficult adaptive challenge to identify within a multiethnic congregation. This difficulty arises from the nature of cultural encapsulation, which according to Connerley and Pedersen occurs when reality is defined according to one set of cultural assumptions and stereotypes that become more important than the real world. Because we hold our assumptions to be true and legitimate above all others, we display insensitivity toward cultural variations among others because we consider their views and assumptions to be illegitimate. Further, because our assumptions have been learned and are generally held and accepted without proof, we will protect them without regard to rationality as they seem common sensible to us. This belief then eliminates our sense of responsibility to accommodate or interpret the behavior of others except from the viewpoint of a self-referenced criterion, which sets our own cultural assumptions and viewpoint as the baseline by which all others are judged. This self-focused reference point then informs a tendency toward not evaluating the viewpoints of others at all.[41]

When defined this way, cultural captivity poses a significant challenge for charismatic leaders in multiethnic congregations. As I discussed above, charismatic leaders often rely on their own judgment,

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[39] Claudia Strauss and Naomi Quinn, *A Cognitive Theory of Cultural Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

[40] I am borrowing this term from Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009).

[41] Connerley and Pedersen, 34.

making it much more difficult to evaluate the cultural viewpoint of others. When cultural encapsulation occurs, the cultural values and interpretive framework of the leader become the baseline, relegating other equally valid and often superior views and interpretations of past and current phenomena to the margins. The result is often the production, reproduction, and perpetuation of cultural hierarchies that limit corporate wisdom and diminish the adaptive capacity of the congregation. These cultural hierarchies then validate the pursuit and justification of one-dimensional approaches toward mission, thus limiting the congregation's contextual appropriateness and hindering its missional vitality.[42]

Cultural captivity, then, becomes a particularly difficult adaptive challenge to overcome in multiethnic congregations because it is usually unrecognized and lies deep beneath the surface. This dilemma is especially true in the case of a charismatic leader who is seen as extraordinary and whose views may be seen as unchallengeable by his or her congregants. While this problem can and does affect charismatic leaders from any ethnic background, white evangelical leaders are especially prone to this difficulty in the American sociocultural context because they are part of the majority group in a racialized social system where they are considered the norm and are used to getting their way.[43] Further, because white evangelicals tend to be the most racially segregated group in America, their exposure to interpretive frameworks that differ from their own is often limited, reinforcing the belief that their way of interpreting reality is the only legitimate way.[44] When this

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[42] See Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*. Rah's provocative work powerfully portrays the effects of Western cultural captivity on the nature and mission of the evangelical church.

[43] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, "Racialized Social System Approach to Racism," in *Rethinking the Color Line: Readings in Race and Ethnicity*, ed. C. A. Gallagher (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2007).

[44] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

social and cultural experience is filtered through a theological belief system that gives primacy to the individual in social and spiritual life, their interpretive framework—or what Michael Emerson and Christian Smith refer to as their cultural toolkit—forms in distinction from evangelicals of different ethnic backgrounds with different socially mediated experiences and who tend to ascribe primacy to the community.[45] The result is often confusion and a lack of missional clarity, as leaders and congregants talk past one another and cannot understand why their interpretations of reality are so divergent.

Forming Interpretive Communities in Multiethnic Congregations: A Pathway Forward

In light of the preceding discussion, what is an appropriate pathway forward for charismatic leaders to effectively address these adaptive challenges in multiethnic congregations? How can they inspire their congregants to participative missional action rather than allowing them to remain passive spectators of the *heroic* leader? Mark Lau Branson suggests the process of healthy congregational formation occurs in three spheres of leadership—interpretive, relational, and implemental. Interpretive leadership is concerned primarily with forming the church into a community of interpreters who will discern, interpret, and embody new meanings and practices that facilitate deeper participation in the Triune God's redemptive initiatives in their community and world.

This interpretive work is conducted on anything that can be read as texts, including the biblical, denominational, and historical faith narratives that have shaped the congregation: the narratives that have shaped and continue to shape the congregation, as well as the narratives present in the local context. Relational leadership primarily deals with how congregational leaders "weave new relational networks within the church

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[45] Emerson and Smith, 76.

and with neighbors…[for the purpose of] creating new contexts for speaking and listening."[46] Finally, implemental leadership is concerned with shaping and re-shaping the structures, programs, and activities of the congregation to align it with the generative meanings and relationships that have arisen through interpretive and relational work.

The problem according to Branson, however, is that many churches conduct the work in these three spheres of leadership separately, often with different people responsible for each. This bifurcation hinders congregational learning and reduces the adaptive capacity of multiethnic congregations, placing more pressure on leaders to apply technical solutions to adaptive challenges. Instead, Branson posits that these three spheres of leadership need to be integrated, suggesting the relationship between them hinges on the ongoing interpretive work that serves to discern and shape both meanings and congregational practices essential in the process of congregational, spiritual, and missional formation.[47]

The formation of an interpretive community becomes paramount, then, for charismatic leaders desiring to overcome the adaptive challenges discussed above as they try to engage their congregations in contextually appropriate mission *praxis*. This is no easy task, however, as charismatic leaders are especially prone to this bifurcation of interpretive, relational, and implemental work due to their tendency to rely on their own interpretive capacities to identify changes, threats, and opportunities in the context. Likewise, congregants who have primarily been spectators of the heroic leader and consumers of his or her religious goods and services often are quite content for the leader to continue carrying

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[46] Mark Lau Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," in *The Missional Church in Context: Helping Congregations Develop Contextual Ministry*, ed. C. Van Gelder (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 121.
[47] Branson, 118-25.

out interpretive work on his or her own. That, after all, is what the leader is paid for. Consequently, when leaders begin to push for congregants' participation, and especially when conflict arises during the process, it is tempting for these religious consumers to go down the street to another church that will place no such demands on them. This makes the transition into true participatory interpretive work extremely challenging (an adaptive challenge in itself!). How then can the charismatic leader and the congregants overcome these barriers and establish an interpretive community in a multiethnic congregation?

Giving the Work Back to the Congregation

In his work exploring the nature of leadership in public organizations, Matthew Valle argues that the nature of ongoing and unpredictable environmental change requires leaders of these organizations to focus their primary energy on creating an adaptive organizational culture through an appropriate use of charismatic leadership. He argues an organizational culture that is adaptive at its core can provide creative solutions to challenges facing the organization because it fosters an environment that is conducive to innovation. To create an adaptive culture, however, leaders must tap into the wide range of skills possessed by the diverse members within their organization so that they can gather and interpret the information necessary to accurately assess their environment and situation.[48] The leader can then guide the members of the organization toward resolving any crises the organization is currently facing rather than attempt to provide the solutions with partial or inaccurate data. In other words, leaders need to give the work back to the people[49] so they can collectively

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[48] Matthew Valle, "Crisis, Culture, and Charisma," in *Contemporary Issues in Leadership*, 6th ed., eds. W. E. Rosenbach and R. L. Taylor (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006), 111-6.
[49] Heifetz and Linsky.

evaluate the organization's situation and take the steps necessary for effective action.

This task of giving the work back to the people is also crucial for those leading multiethnic congregations, as congregations have the same sort of dynamic and interdependent relationship with their contexts characterized by discontinuous change.[50] To facilitate this task, however, it is necessary for the charismatic leader to create what Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky call a *holding environment.* A holding environment is a containing vessel that allows groups of any size to collaborate together in safety as they uncover and discuss the various facets of a challenging situation they are facing. It provides the structure necessary to help groups work through conflicts that can occur as divergent values and perspectives come into contact with one another through the course of dialogue and discernment, and in this case, as new practices are being formed. While the nature of a holding environment varies across different cultural boundaries, there are some common elements that serve to mitigate tensions and strengthen group cohesion across cultural lines. Some of these according to Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky are shared language, orienting values, and purposes; a history of working together; lateral bonds of affection, trust, and camaraderie; trust in authority figures and structures; and a comfortable meeting room to facilitate openness.[51]

With these elements in mind, I suggest that a charismatic leader attempting to give the work back to a congregation needs to create a holding environment on both an individual and a corporate level. Due to the nature of an over-dependent congregational system created by a charismatic leader, personal change in the leader must accompany and support the corporate change

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[50] See Roxburgh and Romanuk; Van Gelder.

[51] Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 155-56.

being initiated in the congregation.[52] Without deep change at both of these levels, long-term change is unsustainable. The reasons for this, according to Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, are the leader's and congregation's immunity-to-change systems.[53] At the heart of an immunity-to-change system are what Kegan and Lahey refer to as competing commitments which prevent individuals and organizations from attaining long-term sustainable change. These internal commitments prevent us from changing undesirable behaviors because they are what actually motivate those behaviors. Without addressing the motivating factors behind the behaviors, leaders and the larger systems of which they are a part are unlikely to engage in and sustain adaptive change. Instead, the focus will remain on providing technical solutions to address the behaviors that are symptoms of those commitments.[54] For true adaptive work to occur, the individual leader and the congregation both need a place of safety where these competing commitments can be raised and addressed.

For an individual leader, this holding environment can often take the form of a coaching relationship (or relationships) that will provide the "lateral bonds of affection, trust, and camaraderie"[55] necessary for the leader to identify the competing commitments that

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[52] I acknowledge that this process of establishing and maintaining new practices and structures is much more difficult for some leaders than others. In fact, for many leaders it will simply be impossible. Howell's understanding of the differences between personalized charismatics (those who objectify their followers and utilize them only to accomplish their own goals) and socialized charismatic leaders (those who articulate follower-driven goals and help to develop them) is helpful in identifying those leaders who are most likely to resist or struggle with personal change. For an in-depth discussion of this issue see either House and Howell, "Personality and Charismatic Leadership," or Kim, Dansereau, and Kim, "Extending the Concept of Charismatic Leadership."

[53] Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *Immunity to Change: How To Overcome It and Unlock the Potential in Yourself and Your Organization* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009).

[54] Kegan and Lahey, 35-6.

[55] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, 156.

inform their current leadership behaviors. In the safety provided by a coaching relationship, the leader can explore his or her competing commitments to be the hero, to be admired, or to be seen as right. As these commitments are uncovered and addressed, a realistic pathway forward can be plotted for the development of the leader. As the leader then begins to implement and maintain the new practices and structures necessary to establish and maintain an interpretive community, the coach can provide accountability and support when the leader receives pushback from congregants used to the usual way of doing things.

On a corporate level, I suggest the best way to create a holding environment is through the creation of *construction sites* where missional identity formation can occur. In their work on ethnic and racial identity formation, Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann assert that the formation of ethnic and racial identity takes place in construction sites where groups of people try to "cope with the situations they encounter, pursue their objectives, make sense of the world around them, and identify themselves and others."[56] Within these sites—which include social institutions like religious congregations—these groups face various opportunities and constraints (competing commitments) that interact with their own interests and capital resulting in the formation of ethnic and racial identity.[57] While Cornell and Hartmann suggest the congregation is itself a construction site as a social institution, what I am proposing is that the charismatic leaders of multiethnic congregations set up intentional construction sites to carry out the work of missional identity formation so that

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[56] Stephen Cornell and Douglas Hartmann, *Ethnicity and Race: Making Identities in a Changing World*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2007), 211-2.

[57] Cornell and Hartmann propose six construction sites where ethnic and racial identity formation occurs: (1) politics, (2) labor markets, (3) social institutions, (4) residential space, (5) culture, and (6) daily experience (208-12).

the interpretive and adaptive capacity of the congregation can be developed.

This process of missional identity formation necessarily involves creating new shared meanings of the context, of the nature of congregational life and mission, and of the dynamic relationship between them. It can occur in such varied, but intentional construction sites as (1) listening groups,[58] put together for a specific duration to discern the Spirit's activities in, through, and around the congregation; (2) all church gatherings, or summits, where the faith community can collectively explore the corporate, contextual, and theological narratives that have shaped the congregation;[59] or (3) existing programs like Sunday school classes, small groups, or ministry teams where intentional conversations and discernment can occur for a time at the behest of the leader. Each of these sites provides the space necessary for congregants and leaders to corporately listen, dialogue, and discern the Spirit's activity among them and in their context so that they can shape new meanings and practices with minimal intervention and control from the charismatic leader. Any interventions made by leaders need to be short and straightforward, involving basic leadership tactics such as "making observations, asking questions, offering interpretations, and taking actions."[60] The use of these tactics needs to be calculated, as each can yield unexpected results. Some will bring peace to a situation while others will disrupt; some will deflect attention from the issue while others will attract it. When used effectively, however, these tactics can foster healthy interdependence with the leader rather than over-dependence, as congregants are given the relational and spiritual space necessary to create shared meanings and innovate in ways that are Spirit-led and contextually appropriate.

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[58] Roxburgh and Romanuk.

[59] Loren B. Mead and Billie T. Alban, *Creating the Future Together: Methods To Inspire Your Whole Faith Community* (Herndon, VA: Alban, 2008).

[60] Heifetz and Linsky, 134.

Forming a Culturally Inclusive Interpretive Community

While the practice of giving the work back to the people is important for creating healthy leader-follower relationships, it is not sufficient to guard against the challenge of flawed vision in multiethnic congregations. To overcome this particular challenge, it is essential for the charismatic leader to give the work back to the *right* people. By this I do not mean seeking out strategic thinkers, CEOs, or other visionary leaders within the congregation to contribute to the vision. Instead, I mean that the charismatic leader needs to invite culturally diverse voices from within the congregation into the interpretive community. The problem for a multiethnic congregation is that the interpretive task is complicated by two factors. First, the congregation is likely sitting in an ethnically and economically diverse social location in a city whose cultural context is continually in flux. In diverse urban environments there is continual movement of people from one community to another via migration and immigration, gentrification, and suburbanization. This flux contributes toward the discontinuous change environment described earlier, making it extremely challenging for one leader from a distinct cultural background to accurately discern what is going on in the church's context because he or she may not have full insight into the cultural composition or changing values of the community. Leaders may also have fear of the changes that have been occurring, thus obscuring their vision further. In some cases, they may not even be aware that the context has changed at all!

The second complicating factor is that people from various cultural backgrounds within the congregation bring their different cultural toolkits to the interpretive task. The diverse nature of these toolkits can lead to significantly different interpretations of the issues facing the congregation or groups within the community. Depending on which cultural tools are utilized, for example, the focus of interpretation may be on the level

of individuals and families, or on oppressive systems and structural inequalities.[61] What may look like the Spirit at work through one set of cultural lenses may in fact be undetectable or even offensive through another. The natural tendency of many leaders is to avoid this problem by gathering like-minded people around them to reduce tension and conflict. For charismatic leaders this solution can be especially tempting, as their goal is usually bringing people into alignment with their vision as quickly as possible rather than allowing the vision to get derailed by divergent perspectives and conflict. It is essential for charismatic leaders to resist this temptation, however, as the disagreements that can arise due to divergent interpretations of the context, of the biblical narratives, or of the nature of the church in mission are essential for truly discerning a complete picture of what the Spirit of God is trying to do in and through a multiethnic congregation in its context.

The practical implication of this discussion for charismatic leaders of a multiethnic congregation, then, is that voices that have been marginalized within the congregation—by exclusionary racial or cultural beliefs, values, or practices, by top-down models of heroic leaders, or by the exclusivist modern framework for reading Scripture that marginalizes any other interpretation and knowledge of God[62]—need to be invited into the conversation. While space does not permit the in-depth treatment of this issue that it deserves, I will briefly suggest two ways that marginalized voices can be heard. First, leaders need to be intentional about inviting representation from the distinct cultural groups present in the congregation into the formalized construction sites. As these construction sites take shape, there then needs to be intentionality to ensure that

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[61] See Emerson and Smith.

[62] S. Steve Kang, "The Bible and the Communion of Saints: A Churchly Plural Reading of Scripture," in *This Side of Heaven: Race, Ethnicity, and Christian Faith*, eds. R. J. Priest and A. L. Nieves (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 224.

participants do not voluntarily segregate along cultural lines. A healthy level of heterogeneity must pervade these groups to ensure that the diversity of perspectives present is represented in the dialogue. Second, in the case of corporate theologizing—which is essential to discerning Spirit–led vision—leaders need to invite voices from other sociocultural traditions within America, as well as voices from the global community, into the interpretive process to ensure a truly plural reading of Scripture devoid of cultural encapsulation. Hearing the full range of perspectives may mean listening to the voices of Black theology and Latin American Liberation theology to name but two voices from among many. Intentionally including marginalized voices helps diverse congregants to become more aware of the sociocultural embeddedness they each bring to the text, resulting in fullness and richness in meaning that cannot be attained through a single cultural framework.[63]

Increasing Cultural Intelligence

Finally, as charismatic leaders and congregants engage in interpretive work together as an inclusive faith community, it becomes essential for leaders and congregants alike to explore, share, and interpret their personal narratives. This process helps them to gain understanding of how God has been at work in their own and in other individuals' lives, especially relating to their cultural formation. Without this personal interpretive work, they are unlikely to recognize the sociocultural frameworks that inform the lenses through which they interpret and engage their social, spiritual, and biblical reality. In other words, they will remain captives to their culture, resulting in an inability to identify how their own attitudes, values, and practices may be contributing to exclusionary relationships, structures, and practices with cultural *others*. They will also remain blind as to how their cultural captivity may be hindering their corporate

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[63] Kang, 224-7.

discernment of a contextually appropriate Spirit-led vision for the church.

To address this situation, I suggest the charismatic leader should facilitate the development of what David Livermore calls cultural intelligence[64] on a personal and corporate level. Developing cultural intelligence enhances the interpretive capacity of the leader and the congregation as they are freed from their cultural captivity and brought into new awareness of the validity of other cultural values and viewpoints. To facilitate this process, cultural autobiographies should be developed by leaders and congregants alike and shared in construction sites to cultivate awareness of the cultural frameworks that inform their values, assumptions, and behaviors—especially in relationship to cultural others. As these cultural autobiographies are developed and shared, knowledge of self and others increases, and new understandings are reached that lead to new relationships being formed across old boundaries. As these new relationships are formed and former boundaries are broken down, corporate cultural intelligence increases and the interpretive capacity of the congregation is enhanced. The result is a more adaptive and missionally vital congregation that can withstand leadership transitions and adapt to a constantly changing and unpredictable sociocultural context.

Concluding Thoughts

Charismatic leaders possess an extremely powerful commodity for congregational and missional formation—the ability to inspire trust and commitment from followers. This commodity can be a valuable asset for initiating and sustaining the changes necessary for mobilizing ethnically diverse congregations into highly impactful ministry in their diverse communities and world. By fostering an adaptive culture among their followers through the formation of an interpretive

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[64] David A. Livermore, *Cultural Intelligence: Developing Your CQ To Engage Our Multicultural World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009).

community, charismatic leaders and their congregations can more effectively discern and participate in the Trinity's redemptive initiatives in their constantly changing sociocultural context. Leaders can also ensure their legacy will last well beyond their shelf-life as they foster healthy interdependence between themselves and their followers, resulting in strong and missionally vital congregations that can thrive through leadership transitions. My prayer is that charismatic leaders of multiethnic congregations across America's great urban centers will heed this call to empty themselves and inspire their congregants to pursue their true identity as a called and gathered people, sent into the world to "declare the praises of Him who has called…[us]…out of darkness into his wonderful light."[65]

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[65] 1 Peter 2:9b