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# OPPOSABILITY: UNEARTHING CHRISTIANITY'S OPPOSABLE INNER LOGIC AND ITS CAPACITY TO FORM LEADERS FOR ADAPTIVE LEADERSHIP IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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## Abstract

An interdisciplinary approach that places leadership theory in conversation with Christian theology permits one to identify an opposable inner logic in Christianity that has the capacity to form individuals to respond to either/or scenarios through integrative thinking and adaptive leadership. When considered together, Roger Martin's *The Opposable Mind*, Richard Heifetz's *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, and insights from the Christian tradition demonstrate the presence of an opposable inner logic within Christianity that can foster opposable thinking. Within this conceptual framework, Bill Robinson's presidency at Whitworth University (1993–2010) illustrates Christianity's capacity to prepare leaders for adaptive leadership. Two prescriptive conclusions follow about the formation of leaders for the contemporary world.

## Introduction

Leadership in the church, academy, and civic life increasingly involves facing situations in which decisions must be made without good alternatives.<sup>1</sup> Shrinking budgets, denominational reconfiguration, and the growing proliferation of disinterest in religion can produce unsettling contexts in which leaders encounter problems of seemingly unsolvable proportions.<sup>2</sup> In such a cultural milieu, the exercise of influence—for leaders and followers alike—

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the concepts explored in this essay emerged from my study and conversations with L. Gregory Jones. His influence on the emergence and final form of this essay extends far beyond the few points where he is formally cited.

<sup>2</sup> Roger Martin, *The Opposable Mind: Winning Through Integrative Thinking* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2007), 7.

requires negotiating seemingly irreconcilable alternatives by exploring integrative options.

In response to these perennial challenges, this essay places Roger Martin, a leading voice in business management, and Ronald Heifetz, a prominent leadership theorist, in conversation with resources from the Christian tradition. When read together, the combination of these voices offers mutually illuminative insights. One the one hand, Martin's and Heifetz's frameworks offer the conceptual categories to identify four artifacts of the Christian tradition that can inform integrative thinking and prepare individuals for adaptive leadership. To a similar extent, the Christian tradition offers theological resources that can deepen Martin's and Heifetz's reflections on the means by which individuals are schooled to think, act, and lead in a particular manner.<sup>3</sup> Through the analogy of an archaeological dig, four "artifacts" will be "unearthed" and examined against contemporary practice by Christian leaders and reflection by scholars. This examination furthers Martin's and Heifetz's theses by illuminating the importance of precognitive elements within leadership theory and the necessity of critically considering leadership development according to precognitive means of formation.<sup>4</sup> According to this line of reasoning, critical reflection on leadership theory and attention to the formative potential of experiences, narratives, and practices may contribute to leadership development.

Four elements provide the structure for this essay: (1) defining *opposable thinking* and demonstrating the congruence of this concept with Heifetz's description of adaptive leadership,<sup>5</sup> (2) identifying four artifacts within the Christian

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<sup>3</sup> For example, whereas Martin's argument considers how leaders employ integrative thinking to face seemingly irreconcilable problems, this essay considers the precognitive formation of leaders to suggest that the Christian tradition contains an opposable inner logic that prepares leaders who are trained in the tradition to practice integrative thinking.

<sup>4</sup> Martin's discussion of "stance" is the closest he comes to considering precognitive principles (Martin, *The Opposable Mind*, 91–97, 107–138).

<sup>5</sup> L. Gregory Jones first introduced me to the congruence of these two concepts.

tradition that suggest the presence of an opposable inner logic that can prepare individuals to exercise adaptive leadership, (3) developing a case study of Bill Robinson's presidency at Whitworth University (1993–2010) that illustrates the potential of individuals who are schooled in the Christian tradition to exercise adaptive leadership, and (4) exploring two implications about leadership training and formation that follow from this rereading of leadership literature in light of Christianity's opposable inner logic.

### ***Opposable Thinking and Adaptive Leadership Defined***

*Opposable thinking*, as this essay understands it, refers to the ability to “face constructively the tension of opposing ideas/options/realities to generate an unexpected alternative, such as a new idea/option/reality, that contains elements of the opposed elements but is superior to each.”<sup>6</sup> Although this definition draws heavily on Martin's *The Opposable Mind*, its application here differs in one decisive manner: Instead of considering the “capacities and skills that people must develop to practice integrative thinking and exploit the full potential of the opposable mind,”<sup>7</sup> as Martin does, this essay seeks to consider the *tradition* that engenders integrative thinking. Examining “capacities and skills” can prove illuminative; however, this essay attempts to think within the logic of the Christian tradition that informs individuals' precognitive disposition to the world and capacity for integrative thinking. *Opposable inner logic* denotes the quality of the Christian tradition that maintains a constructive tension between seemingly opposing ideas by means of an unexpected alternative.

In this sense, the definition of *opposable thinking* offered here shares much in common with Heifetz's understanding of adaptive leadership. Employing an approach similar to Martin, Heifetz's *Leadership Without Easy Answers* offers a reappraisal of leadership theory that responds to the complex challenges of life in community at the end of the

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<sup>6</sup> Both the language utilized in this definition and the conceptual categories rely heavily on a nuanced reading of Roger Martin's *The Opposable Mind*.

<sup>7</sup> Martin, 15.

twentieth century. In contrast to the emphasis on transforming leadership expressed in James MacGregor Burns's seminal *Leadership*,<sup>8</sup> Heifetz accents the need for leadership that offers adaptive responses that engage a community in a generative leadership dynamic of co-creativity.

For Heifetz, much as for Martin, society contains “tough problems,”<sup>9</sup> which require a distinct form of thinking and leadership. Heifetz presents adaptive leadership as the exercise of authority in pursuit of value-driven solutions that engage a community in a solution's execution.<sup>10</sup> He develops his account by exploring the adaptive use of authority (Part II), the potential to exercise leadership without formal authority (Part III), and the principles that promote the sustainable practice—communally and individually—of adaptive leadership (Part IV). Heifetz offers seven aspects of a framework for mobilizing adaptive work, which aptly summarize the logic of his theory: providing a holding environment, commanding and directing attention, regulating access to information, controlling the flow of information, exercising the power to frame issues, orchestrating conflict, and choosing the decision-making process.<sup>11</sup> Though exercising authority in the form of adaptive leadership might require “walking a razors edge,”<sup>12</sup> Heifetz suggests that adaptive responses to problems have the capacity to cultivate community-based solutions that decentralize authority and promote the sustainable resolution of present and future challenges.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: HarperCollins, 1978).

<sup>9</sup> Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 26.

<sup>10</sup> Heifetz, 69–100.

<sup>11</sup> Heifetz, 103–104.

<sup>12</sup> Heifetz, 126.

<sup>13</sup> Heifetz, 66. John S. Burns's leadership river metaphor and diagram that describes the complex interaction of leadership theories provides a helpful perspective that complements Heifetz's argument at this point. In identifying the three contributing influences to the historic development of leadership theory, Burns uses the image of “Community Lake” to characterize human beings' social and communal character that reflects the “ageless need for

## Christianity's Opposable Inner Logic

With these conceptual categories in view, rereading the Christian tradition illumines four artifacts that suggest the presence of an opposable inner logic and demonstrate notable conceptual resonance with Martin's and Heifetz's conceptual categories. In the order they will be examined, these artifacts are: the Chalcedonian Creed, an orthodox understanding of concurrence, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, and Paul's description of human identity in Galatians 3:26–29. Though these artifacts are not representative of the entire Christian community, identifying them might point to future avenues for research and exploration. Like the preliminary findings in an archaeological dig, these four artifacts provide an outline of the general contours of Christianity's opposable inner logic rather than an exhaustive defense. A brief description of each illustrates how the Christian condition contains elements that face constructively the tension of opposing ideas/options/realities to generate an unexpected alternative, such as a new idea/option/reality that contains elements of the opposed elements but is superior to each.

### *The Two Natures of Jesus Christ: Opposability as a Property Basic to Christianity*

The opposable nature of the Christian faith is paradigmatically elaborated in one of its foundational statements, the Chalcedonian Creed. It provides an early, succinct summary of Christian theology's guiding convictions and an entry point to begin articulating Christianity's opposable inner logic. At Chalcedon in A.D. 451, more than five hundred bishops affirmed: Jesus Christ is perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, acknowledged in two natures without confusion, change, division, and

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humanity to effectively administer and govern human social and political interaction" (John S. Burns, "The Leadership River" in *Organizational Leadership: Foundations & Practices for Christians*, eds. John S. Burns, John R. Shoup, Donald C. Simmons, Jr. [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2014], 96).

separation, not parted or divided into two persons, but eternally and purely one and the same only-begotten Son, God, Word, Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup> Such language leads Mark Noll, a noted historian, to claim that Chalcedon posits a particular “two-in-one-ness” or “doubleness”<sup>15</sup> about Jesus. This affirmation of the two natures of Christ, he concludes, reflects an inherent, binary character of Christianity that suggests that knowledge and insight can come from two possible directions.

However, when one rereads the Chalcedonian Creed in light of the definition of opposable thinking offered above, a subtly yet significantly different conclusion about the application of the Chalcedonian Creed emerges through its affirmation of the hypostatic union. Chalcedon’s revolutionary affirmation of the hypostatic union reflects Christianity’s opposable inner logic by affirming the union of two natures, divine and human, in Jesus Christ. The revolutionary insight of Chalcedon, thus, is not that in Christ *two* natures were unified into one, but that in Christ, two natures were unified into one hypostasis without confusion, change, or division. In response to the seemingly irreconcilable difference between Jesus’ humanity and Jesus’ divinity, the Chalcedonian Creed’s affirmation of the hypostatic union reflects a distinct, opposable inner logic that produces the foundational assumption of Christian theology: Jesus Christ is both human *and* divine. Historically, where individuals emphasize the distinction, error quickly follows, while faithful forms of witness follow where individuals preserve unity without confusion.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> “The Chalcedonian Creed,” *Creeks and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, eds. Jaroslav Pelikan and Valerie Hotchkiss (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2003), 181.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Noll, *Jesus Christ and the Life of the Mind* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2011), 45.

<sup>16</sup> For further reading, see Alister McGrath’s *HERESY: A History of Defending the Truth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009).

*Concurrence: Preserving Divine Sovereignty and Human Action*

Evidence of Christianity's opposable inner logic is not restricted to the relationship between the two natures of Christ. Rather, the orthodox understanding of concurrence (*concursum*) also reflects a distinct opposable logic. It is first necessary to explain how Christians have understood concurrence in order to understand the logical link between this concept and Martin's and Heifetz's work.

Concurrence references the conviction that the creature does possess spontaneity even while the Creator maintains absolute governance.<sup>17</sup> As theologian Otto Webber explains, the orthodox understanding of concurrence comes through recognizing the tension created by two seemingly polar positions. On the one hand, human recognition of the seriousness and importance of human responsibility and spontaneity can lead to a prioritization of creaturely activity over God's. On the other hand, recognizing God's absolute superiority and dominion over creation can force the emphasis in the opposite direction.<sup>18</sup> When posed in this way, an unresolvable issue emerges because human spontaneity must capitulate to the second option. Yet, as Webber suggests, an orthodox understanding of the concurrence of divine and human action involves considering an unexpected alternative, developing a deeper doctrine of God in response to the revelation of Jesus Christ. Webber summarizes:

Because God finds his own honor in being the God of man chosen in Jesus Christ, because his righteousness consists of his mobilizing his Being as God for man, the creature's being claimed for the superior decrees of God is not his entrapment in an alien event but rather his being allowed to participate in the event which applies to himself most of all.<sup>19</sup>

Much as the Chalcedonian Creed holds two seemingly irreconcilable ideas in a constructive tension to affirm the

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<sup>17</sup> Otto Webber, *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. 1, trans. Darrell Guder (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981), 517.

<sup>18</sup> Webber, 517.

<sup>19</sup> Webber, 522.

hypostatic union and much as Martin suggests that leaders employ integrative thinking, the orthodox understanding of concurrence produces an unexpected alternative: the freedom of humankind and the sovereignty of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup>

Psychologists David Myers and Malcom Jeeves offer an image that helpfully explains Webber's analysis of the seeming paradoxical relationship between divine sovereignty and human action. They write:

Our situation is like that of someone stranded in a deep well with two ropes dangling down. If we grab either one alone we sink still deeper into the well. Only when we hold both ropes at once can we climb out, because at the top, beyond what we can see, they come together around a pulley.<sup>21</sup>

Emphasizing either divine sovereignty or human autonomy alone creates a more problematic solution. Whereas the first can promote a dogmatic determinism, the latter can fail to recognize the limits of human wisdom. Much as Martin advises, an unseen third option is necessary—pulling on both ropes, for far above they are bound together.

### *Jesus' Crucifixion and Resurrection: Embodied Opposability*

Despite the presence of Christianity's opposable inner logic, experiences with contemporary institutions quickly force the recognition that individuals and communities do not always act according to this logic. Neither Martin nor Heifetz offers a complete account for this phenomenon. However, the Christian tradition, which attributes the corruption and dysfunction of institutions to sin, can deepen Martin's and Heifetz's work at this critical juncture. In this way, evaluating the effects of sin presses for a deeper account of Christianity's opposable inner logic that accounts

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<sup>20</sup> For a similar account, see J. I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2012).

<sup>21</sup> David Myers and Malcolm Jeeves, *Psychology through the Eyes of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 76–7. I am indebted to Casey Benac for directing me to this illustration.



for the daily experience that the way things are is not how they were meant to be and brings to light a third artifact. Such an account reflects the inner logic of another Christian Creed, the Nicene Creed.

The Nicene Creed, another early Christian statement of faith, provides an entry point into Christianity's understanding of the relationship between sin and Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection in a way that further reflects Christianity's opposable inner logic. Such a rereading offers an account that accentuates Christianity's opposable inner logic by illustrating how in the death and resurrection of Jesus, God embodies this opposable inner logic. When read together with Martin and Heifetz, the Nicene Creed offers an explanation for the dysfunction of institutions while also pointing to their redemption and transformation.<sup>22</sup>

Illustrating how the Nicene Creed reflects Christianity's opposable inner logic first requires summarizing the effects of sin according to Christian theologians. Despite Christian theology's assertion that sin is a central category necessary to understanding current human existence, the tradition is heir of a deafening pluriformity of understandings and interpretations. Cornelius Plantinga's and Terry McGonigal's work considers the effects of sin by evaluating Scripture's account of God's intentions for creation. According to Plantinga, God's desire is to establish *shalom*. Within this conceptual framework, Plantinga provides a normative definition for *shalom* that helps to elucidate the nature of human sin:

In the Bible *shalom* means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight—a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, all under the arch of God's love.

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<sup>22</sup> For a brief discussion of the redemption and transformation of institutions, see Dustin Benac, "Revelation's City Without a Temple, a New Vision for Institutions," *Faith & Leadership* (September 2013), <https://www.faithandleadership.com/dustin-d-benac-revelations-city-without-temple-new-vision-institutions>.

*Shalom*, in other words, is the way things are supposed to be.<sup>23</sup>

For Plantinga, *shalom* includes far more than traditional notions of peace, such as armistice, the absence of conflict, or amiable relations. Rather, *shalom* expresses cosmic flourishing involving the entirety of God's creation. Following Plantinga's vision of *shalom*, McGonigal notes five aspects of *shalom*: *shalom* order, *shalom* relationships, *shalom* stewardship, *shalom* beauty, and *shalom* rhythm.<sup>24</sup> This produces a depiction of *shalom* as an intertwined web in which God's *shalom* intentions cannot be expressed apart from the combination of all five aspects.

Yet things are clearly not as they were supposed to be— if the world is anything, it is not *shalom*—and it is not *shalom* because of sin. In response to this, McGonigal suggests that sin results in the fracturing of God's five-part *shalom* web. This yields an understanding of sin as “anti-creation”<sup>25</sup> in which through a personal affront to God,<sup>26</sup> sin leads to the systematic fracturing and unbinding of God's five-fold *shalom* intentions. Ultimately, with the shattering of *shalom*, not a single aspect of creation—including organizations and institutions—remains unaffected.

Within this framework, Christian theology affirms Jesus Christ's crucifixion and resurrection as the central theo-historical event that mediates grace and reorders the anti-creative effects of sin and death. Notably, the Nicene Creed's description of this event reflects Christianity's opposable inner logic whereby Jesus' crucifixion yields an unexpected alternative. The Creed affirms:

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<sup>23</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, *Engaging God's World: A Christian Vision of Faith, Learning, and Living* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2002), 14–5.

<sup>24</sup> Terry McGonigal, “If You Only Know What Would Give You Peace: Shalom Theology as the Biblical Foundation for Diversity” (2010), 3–6, accessed April 30, 2014,

[http://studentlife.biola.edu/page\\_attachments/0000/1395/ShalomTheology-TerryMcGonigal.pdf](http://studentlife.biola.edu/page_attachments/0000/1395/ShalomTheology-TerryMcGonigal.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Plantinga, *Engaging God's World*, 29.

<sup>26</sup> Cornelius Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1995), 13.

We believe... in one Lord Jesus Christ... through whom all things came to being; for us humans and for our salvation he came down from the heavens and became incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, became human and was crucified on our behalf under Pontius Pilate; he suffered and was buried and rose up on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures.<sup>27</sup>

Nicaea affirms God's reconciliation of sin, the fracturing of *shalom*, and God's *shalom* intentions by way of an unexpected alternative—death and resurrection. Between sin, the cosmic fracturing of *shalom* through individual and corporate culpability, and God's *shalom*, universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight, stretches a mighty gulf. Is reconciliation possible? Nicaea affirms that Christ's death and resurrection on behalf of humanity mysteriously work toward "our salvation."<sup>28</sup> In this, Christianity's opposable inner logic finds further manifestation in one of Christianity's basic doctrinal statements as it describes how God reconciles two seemingly opposable realities (sin and God's *shalom*) through an unexpected alternative—death and resurrection.

Yet doing so requires the initiative of an external actor to restore God's *shalom* intentions. Accordingly, Nicaea affirms: "God came down from heaven and became incarnate." The Christian tradition affirms that only because of God's cosmic in-breaking through the person of Christ is reconciliation of seemingly irreconcilable alternatives possible. Only by God moving from the outside to the inside, embodying a creation fractured by sin, does God mysteriously restore creation to the way things were meant to be.

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<sup>27</sup> "The Nicene-Constantinople Creed," *Creeks and Confessions of Faith in the Christian Tradition*, vol. 1, 163.

<sup>28</sup> Soteriological assumptions will invariably impact one's interpretation of this point, but answering these questions is not essential to the logic of this argument.

*Christian Identity: Opposability Redoubled*

Finally, Paul's narration of human identity in Galatians 3:26–29 provides a fourth artifact of Christianity's opposable inner logic that reflects the emergence of an opposable construction of identity. Much as Martin developed his account in response to “problems that appear to admit of two equally unsatisfactory solutions,”<sup>29</sup> Paul's statement that “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female” (3:28) should be understood against the backdrop of “a pair of opposites” in the Greco-Roman and Jewish world.<sup>30</sup> In Paul's day, much as in ours, these antinomies served as the “fundamental building blocks of the cosmos,” and society widely recognized the presence of cosmic polarities.<sup>31</sup> Much like contemporary leaders, Paul lived and wrote in an either/or world. However, his description of the construction of human identity in Galatians 3:26–29 navigates the cosmic antinomies of his time by means of an unexpected third alternative.

Against the backdrop of cosmic antinomies, in Galatians 3:26–29 Paul presents an understanding of human identity

<sup>29</sup> Martin, 7.

<sup>30</sup> J. Louis Martyn, “Apocalyptic Antinomies in Paul's Letter to the Galatians,” *New Testament Studies* 31(3) (1985): 413. Martyn defines *antinomy* not as an antithesis, but as a reality that “lies at the foundation of the cosmos” (115). Henry Liddell and Robert Scott provide an alternate gloss on this term by defining the word Aristotle uses to discuss antinomies as: “contrariety, opposition” (Henry Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* [Oxford, U.K.: Clarendon, 1996], 555).

<sup>31</sup> J. Louis Martyn, *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 2002), 116–17. Aristotle's description of the Pythagorean Table of Opposites indicates the pervasive understanding of antinomies that governed Paul's hearers in the Greco-Roman world: “Other members of [the Pythagorean] school say there are ten principles which they arrange in two columns of cognates—limited and unlimited, odd and even, one and plurality, right and left, male and female, resting and moving, straight and curved, light and darkness, good and bad, square and oblong” (Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, trans. Hugh Tredennick [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003], 985a). Although there is some debate over Paul's knowledge and use of the work of Aristotle, it is likely that Paul has this construction of reality to draw upon even if he is not reading Aristotle because he writes in a world where Aristotle remains influential.

that moves beyond these either/or antinomies by affirming unity and particularity through participation in Christ and illustrating how both are radically shifted through this participation. It might be helpful to review Paul's words from Galatians at this point:

For in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to the promise. (NRSV)

In a distinctly opposable manner, here Paul suggests a cosmic unification in which the polarities that previously promoted division are renegotiated through participation in Christ. The grammatical position of the phrase "for all of you" in the first position in Greek illustrates the priority of unity and participation in Paul's rhetoric in Galatians 3:26. Moreover, Paul's use of the second-person plural "all of you" and appeal to a collective audience should not be understood as an appeal to a single, homogeneous group, but as a pointed rhetorical move to unify Paul's diverse Galatian hearers. Given the prescriptive conclusions that will follow, within this new, collective identification, embodied acts serve as the means by which individuals are incorporated into this new identity in Christ. Paul writes: "You were baptized into Christ" (3:27) and then clothed with Christ. Such an embodied understanding evokes a theatrical comparison in which "putting on Christ" means fully embodying in a manner similar to actors on a stage.<sup>32</sup> Understood as such, in Galatians Paul encourages his hearers to play their part.

But which part does Paul exhort the Galatians to play, and what does this role suggest about their identity? Paul admonishes the Galatians to play the part appropriate to the times, stating "For you are all one in Christ Jesus" (3:28). In

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<sup>32</sup> James Dunn, *Epistle to the Galatians* (London: Baker Academic, 1993), 205.

this phrase, Paul emphatically affirms the new oneness in Christ by reintroducing the second-person plural pronoun in a prominent position in conjunction with *one*. This entails a “radical shift”<sup>33</sup> of old identity markers as Paul suggests the undoing of the distinctions between Jew and Greek, slave and free, male and female. With newness established, Paul emphasizes unity by circumscribing the Galatian community within Christ. Thus, in Paul’s address to the Galatians, he suggests that the either/or has vanished and something entirely new has come.

However, to stop here in affirming Paul’s announcement of anthropological unity alone overlooks the profundity of Paul’s logic. Even while he announces a new unity that confronts the cosmic antinomies, Paul also introduces a new identity in which the individual does not disappear within the New Creation, but becomes constituted in relation to Christ and others through participation. Much as in the previous three artifacts, for Paul participation in Christ represents a third alternative. An individual’s identity within the Galatian community assumes proper form only in relation to the corporate identity of the new community that forms in Christ.<sup>34</sup>

This reading presents an opposable account of Christian identity that rejects the seeming either/or expressed in Galatians 3:26–29 to suggest a third option. Instead of the

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<sup>33</sup> Susan Eastman, *Recovering Paul’s Mother Tongue: Language and Theology in Galatians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2007), 2.

<sup>34</sup> This reading follows the logic Susan Eastman applies to her reading of Romans 5–8. Eastman argues for the construction of human identity both in relation to Christ and to community. Providing an apt summary of the present argument, she rejects the corporate/individual dichotomy and Cartesian dualism that characterize some Pauline scholarship and presses: “Why should we assume that Paul thought in such an either/or fashion in regard to the construction of the person?” Susan Eastman, “Double Participation and the Responsible Self in Romans 5-8,” in *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5-8*, ed. B. R. Gaventa, (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 96.

As I have argued here, Eastman seeks to bring the individual back onto the interpretive scene and then provides an account of identity in accord with Paul’s logic.

cosmic antinomies that colored the Galatian context, Paul proclaims unity in Christ that preserves the individual's particular identity and locates identity within the context of community. Christian identity is constituted both individually in relation to Christ and in relation to others.

### *Conclusion*

The four artifacts introduced above describe the general contours of Christianity's opposable inner logic even while it remains an incomplete characterization. Although the commonality between these four artifacts suggests that Christianity contains an opposable inner logic, the specific content of this logic cannot be fully outlined given the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, if an opposable inner logic exists, it will be manifest in other unexpected places and manners, and it will inform historical and contemporary Christian practice.<sup>35</sup> Rather than representing a complete mural, the four artifacts offered above may be understood as representing the initial discoveries in an archaeological dig. With Martin's help, we have removed the top few levels of soil and found peculiar commonality among several elements of the Christian tradition. Although it is possible that these four artifacts might reflect disparate realities, they may also be connected in a more profound way. Like the spires of an ancient city, the four artifacts described above may represent the initial indicators of a larger network of interconnected ideas, like a buried conceptual city, lying below the surface. The connection of these artifacts can only be explored by digging deeper.

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<sup>35</sup> John Wesley provides one historical example. Henry Knight characterizes Wesley in a distinctly opposable manner: "What was so attractive about Wesley was his refusal to engage in oppositional thinking. He could make theological distinctions, and was not hesitant to take a stand on issues he deemed important. But where others saw only mutually exclusive options, Wesley found mutual interdependence" (Henry Knight, "The Presence of God in the Christian Life: A Contemporary Understanding of John Wesley's Means of Grace" [Ph.D. diss., Emory University, 1987], viii).

## Bill Robinson: Formed through Christianity's Opposable Inner Logic

Examining the leadership practices of Bill Robinson at Whitworth University further suggests the relationship between Christianity's opposable inner logic and Martin's and Heifetz's work and illustrates the generative potential of Christianity's opposable inner logic to form individuals for adaptive leadership. In particular, Bill Robinson's negotiation of the seemingly irreconcilable either/or alternatives of modernity while serving as president of Whitworth University from 1993 to 2010 provides an exemplar that employs integrative thinking and adaptive leadership in his institutional context. While modernity's value-neutral theory of knowledge called into question previously accepted forms of knowledge and authority and pressed many higher-education institutions to fall to one side or the other of the liberal conservative divide,<sup>36</sup> Robinson's narration of Whitworth's mind and heart mission sought to traverse a *via media*. Meanwhile, situating Robinson's integrative leadership within a larger interpretive framework permits one to consider the formative potential of Christianity's opposable inner logic to enable Christian leaders to utilize adaptive leadership.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> For a lucid characterization of the *zeitgeist* of modernity, see Thomas Pfau's exordium to *Minding the Modern* (Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013], 1–8).

<sup>37</sup> Although scholars have offered diverse accounts of how the Christian tradition forms individuals to participate in the world, this essay proceeds with the widely accepted assumption that the operative Christian tradition in which individuals participate does in fact form them in a particular manner. For example, Stanley Hauerwas and Sam Wells begin *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* by asserting that Christian tradition comprised of Scripture, tradition, and community does in fact form individuals and communities in a particular manner (Stanley Hauerwas and Sam Wells, *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Ethics* [Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 2004]). James K. A. Smith's *Cultural Liturgies* series makes a similar, though distinct, assertion contending that human beings are *sui generis* affective creatures for whom embodied practices in the context of a body politic contribute to the formation of a Christian *habitus*. For Smith, humans are not minds held in bodies, but rather are holistic “beings-in-the-world” for whom bodily participation produces a

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*Bill Robinson: The Narrow Ridge of Mind and Heart*

On October 29, 1993, a firmly built man rises in academic regalia and strides easily to a podium. Those gathered include his wife, Bonnie, their three children, and the faculty, staff, and students of Whitworth University.<sup>38</sup> At 43, he might appear an unlikely candidate to assume the leadership of a religious institution of higher education, much less one who would chart a deliberate course amid modernism's swirling currents that regularly produced liberal and conservative factions, but his demeanor betrays no uncertainty. He begins by describing the divided religious landscape Christians inhabit and the intellectual challenges before Whitworth. With these words, he casts a vision for the future:

Labeled as too reckless by those on our right and too religious by those on our left, we will be faithful to George Whitworth's prayer of mind and heart. Hearts united by our faith in Jesus Christ and minds that crave truth and knowledge wherever they may be found.<sup>39</sup>

In the coming months, Robinson would explain this vision using a metaphor that reflects a manner of opposable, integrative thinking: traveling a narrow ridge.<sup>40</sup> This metaphor came to characterize Robinson's presidency and demonstrates a mode of institutional thinking that deploys integrative thinking and adaptive leadership to resist

precognitive know how. (James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, vol. 1 of *Cultural Liturgies* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2009] and *Imagining the Kingdom*, vol. 2 of *Cultural Liturgies* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2013]. See especially *Imagining the Kingdom*, 41–80.)

<sup>38</sup> Originally founded as Whitworth College, the board of trustees voted to officially change the name to Whitworth University in 2005. For the sake of clarity and to reflect Whitworth's current nomenclature, the current designation will be used.

<sup>39</sup> Bill Robinson, "Inaugural Address" (Whitworth University, Spokane, Wash., October 29, 1993).

<sup>40</sup> Robinson acknowledges that the inspiration for the metaphor came from Martin Buber's *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 243. Robinson's first documented use of this metaphor occurs in an interview with *Whitworth Today*, "Traveling the 'Narrow Ridge,'" (Winter 1993–1994).

institutional isomorphism and to inspire traditioned, institutional innovation.

When Robinson arrived at Whitworth, the legacy of modernism's polarizing effect on higher education and particular institutional responses to modernism at Whitworth created a context characterized by seemingly irreconcilable alternatives. Founded in 1890 as a Presbyterian college in Washington amid the surge of missionary zeal,<sup>41</sup> Whitworth faced modernism's polarizing effects through its vacillating emphasis on an education of the mind and an education of heart. Whitworth's first catalogue illustrates the *zeitgeist* of Whitworth's founding while anticipating the challenges that would follow: "Guarding well the moral and religious life of students, ever directing them in the pursuit of that learning and culture of mind and heart that make the finished scholar."<sup>42</sup> As demonstrated in this early catalogue, two distinct forces influenced Whitworth's founding: reason (mind) and religion (heart). Much as Martin notes in his analysis of integrative thinkers, the revolutionary insight of Whitworth's mission lies in the *and*.<sup>43</sup> Rather than omitting one or the other or prioritizing one at the expense of the other, Whitworth's founding mission presents the formation of the mind and the heart as determinative of its institutional vision. This emphasis on mind *and* heart would come to serve as Whitworth's guiding vision and create an institutional context in which Robinson could initiate a conversation about Whitworth's institutional identity.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Dale Soden and Arlin Migliazzo, "Whitworth College: Evangelical in the Reformed Tradition," in *Models for Christian Higher Education*, eds. Richard Hughes and William Adrian (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 166.

<sup>42</sup> Whitworth Catalogue, 1890, quoted in Dale Soden, *An Enduring Venture of Mind and Heart* (Spokane, Wash.: Whitworth University, 2010), 19.

<sup>43</sup> Martin writes: "Most integrative thinkers quite explicitly refuse to accept tradeoffs that the rest of the world tells them are unavoidable. Meg Whitman, CEO of eBay, is typical. She describes the secret of eBay as "this idea of 'and.' It's not just community for community's sake, and it's not just commerce for commerce's sake. It's the two of these things combined, which is quite powerful" (Martin, 113–14).

<sup>44</sup> Soden, 19.

However, Whitworth's institution leadership throughout the two decades preceding Robinson's arrival demonstrated binary, either/or thinking rather than integrative thinking.<sup>45</sup> For example, the contrasting presidencies of Edward Lindaman (1970–1980) and Robert Mounce (1981–1987) reflect juxtaposed responses to modernity through their reliance on *either* the prevailing liberal *or* conservative values. For example, following the cultural upheaval of the 1960s, Lindaman drew from a liberal theological tradition<sup>46</sup> to introduce a “progressive spirit” that many students believed “would make Whitworth a leader among Christian colleges.”<sup>47</sup> Lindaman, an executive of the aerospace industry, sought to accommodate emerging intellectual trends to Whitworth's mission and affirm Whitworth's liberal arts tradition.<sup>48</sup> Entrusted with Whitworth's historic vision of an education of the mind and heart, Lindaman emphasized the education of the mind in accordance with the liberal tradition of his time.

By contrast, Mounce's presidency redefined Whitworth's identity along conservative lines through a renewed emphasis on Scripture. A conservative Baptist and a biblical scholar by training, Mounce's hiring reflected a national swing in a more conservative direction as America emerged from the turbulent 1970s and modernism's rhetorical force began to wane.<sup>49</sup> Mounce sought to reestablish Whitworth's pietistic distinctiveness<sup>50</sup> in three ways: by hiring faculty who emphasized their belief in Jesus Christ, by instituting a requirement that applicants for faculty positions must submit a faith statement,<sup>51</sup> and by continuing to distinguish

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Martin, 9.

<sup>46</sup> Soden and Migliazzo, 176.

<sup>47</sup> Soden, 123.

<sup>48</sup> Bill Robinson, interviewed by Dustin Benac, October 17, 2013.

<sup>49</sup> For a brief analysis of this movement, see George Marsden's “Concluding Unscientific Postscript” in *The Soul of the American University* (George Marsden, *The Soul of the American University: From Protestant Establishment to Established Nonbelief* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1994], 429–44).

<sup>50</sup> Robinson, interviewed by Dustin Benac, October 17, 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Soden and Migliazzo, 175–76.

himself as a New Testament scholar.<sup>52</sup> Whereas Lindaman emphasized Whitworth's mission to form students' minds, Mounce pursued a conservative course by seeking to form their hearts according to the template of Scripture.

With this context, Robinson inherited an institution that contained the historic potential for integrative thinking but presently stood divided because of the respective legacies of Lindaman's and Mounce's binary thinking and polarizing leadership. Nevertheless, upon his arrival Robinson encountered a divided culture that emerged from Lindaman and Mounce both failing to live into the *and* that represented the core of Whitworth's mission. Yet Robinson also sensed the timeliness of a third option. "Whitworth had swung like a pendulum over a fifty-year period," reflected Robinson. "When I arrived I felt like there was a competitive relationship between the more conservative and the more liberal faculty."<sup>53</sup> Yet even while describing the factions that persisted among the faculty, Robinson noted the unifying and generative potential of Whitworth's mission. For Robinson, Whitworth's religious tradition created the common ground to begin exploring integrative solutions. "Whitworth universally embraced Christ and Scripture," he reflects, "so I just thought we needed to leverage the breadth we have and show how these relationships can be complementary rather than competitive."<sup>54</sup> In Heifetz's terms, Robinson's narrow ridge vision for Whitworth regarded Whitworth's religious tradition as the "holding environment"<sup>55</sup> that could sustain a collaborative rather than a competitive vision for community. As Hugh Hecló's account suggests, Robinson's vision for a third way began to emerge as he learned to see the institution from "the inside out."<sup>56</sup> In Whitworth's historic Christian commitments, he

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<sup>52</sup> Mounce served on the translation team for the NIV, and later served on the teams for the NLT and ESV.

<sup>53</sup> Robinson, interviewed by Dustin Benac, October 17, 2013.

<sup>54</sup> Robinson, interviewed by Dustin Benac, October 17, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Heifetz, 103.

<sup>56</sup> Hugh Hecló, *On Thinking Institutionally* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 82.

found institutional seeds that created the possibility of pursuing his narrow ridge vision.

Consequently, Robinson deployed adaptive leadership to narrate an integrative vision for Whitworth's identity shortly after his arrival that exemplified institutional thinking by engaging the tradition Whitworth inherited and that expanded the tradition Whitworth was creating.<sup>57</sup> As described previously, Whitworth's founding mission provided an historic precedent to begin thinking in an integrative manner. Although the legacy of Lindaman's and Mounce's presidencies served to divide Whitworth's faculty, Robinson located the potential of an integrative third option by mining more deeply into Whitworth's history beyond the recent, memorable past. Meanwhile, Whitworth's historic Presbyterian identity offered ideological and theological cohesion to the community by representing a common ground within a deeply divided institutional landscape. To use Hecló's language, Robinson's engagement with Whitworth's historic identity and the divided institutional landscape reflects a mode of "faithful reception"<sup>58</sup> in which he sought to preserve a meaningful relationship with the tradition he received even as he sought to narrate an alternative vision for the future.

As Robinson narrated his alternative vision through the narrow ridge metaphor, he also expanded the normative vision that served to construct Whitworth's institutional identity.<sup>59</sup> Though Robinson is deeply steeped in the Christian tradition,<sup>60</sup> his exposure to the narrow ridge

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<sup>57</sup> For Hecló, institutional thinking involves stretching one's time horizons "by making [conduct] beholden to its own past history and to the history it is creating" (Hecló, 110). Martin introduces the importance of experience in similar terms with the phrase: "Using the Past, Inventing the Future" (Martin, 169).

<sup>58</sup> Hecló, 98.

<sup>59</sup> Robinson's narration of Whitworth's mission reflects William Frame's description of a college president's envisioning task (William Frame, *The American College Presidency as Vocation: Easing the Burden, Enhancing the Joy* [Abilene, Tex.: Abilene Christian University Press, 2013], 51–83).

<sup>60</sup> Robinson was raised Baptist by parents who both taught at Moody Bible Institute. Robinson attended Moody for a time but later transferred to the

analogy came from outside the Christian tradition as he first encountered the image in his reading of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber. In *Between Man and Man*, Buber writes: “On the far side of the subject, on this side of the object, on the narrow ridge, where *I* and *Thou* meet, there is the realm of ‘between.’”<sup>61</sup> In this realm of “between,” Robinson found fresh language to describe Whitworth’s historic mission in a manner that brought unity and inspired innovation.

In Robinson’s case, his rootedness in the Christian tradition enabled him to receive insights from beyond the traditional canon of Scripture and Christian teaching and incorporate Buber’s insight into Whitworth’s institutional identity. At the same time, it was precisely the particularity of Whitworth’s historic identity as a Presbyterian institution and the preservation of distinct Christian practices within Whitworth’s community that provided cohesion to Robinson’s narration of his narrow ridge vision and moral credibility to his pursuit of such a vision.<sup>62</sup> Even if the inspiration for Robinson’s narrow ridge innovation emerged from outside the Christian tradition, the Christian tradition gave Robinson’s vision a foundation to stand on and

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University of Northern Iowa. After becoming Presbyterian at 22, Robinson studied at Princeton Theological Seminary and later received his Masters from Wheaton College and his Ph.D. from the University of Pittsburgh. Robinson served as the president of an Anabaptist college, Manchester University, from 1986 to 1993. When asked if his diverse denominational heritage informed his opposable thinking, Robinson explains that it is difficult to narrate the precise impact of his formation: “I don’t know if it was a cause or an effect” (Robinson, interviewed by Dustin Benac, October 17, 2013). As Robinson’s experience attests, one cannot determine the precise impact of formative experiences or ideas, but merely note a plausible correlation.

<sup>61</sup> Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 243.

<sup>62</sup> At this point, Alasdair MacIntyre’s narration of the interwoven character of tradition, practice, narrative, and institutions provides a helpful interpretive lens by which to examine Whitworth during Robinson’s presidency and Robinson’s leadership in pursuing his narrow ridge vision (Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. [Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984], 181–225).

provided the impetus to begin “walking” the narrow ridge. Thus, Robinson’s refusal to accept the apparent either/or presented to him by articulating Whitworth’s mission as walking a narrow ridge supercharged Whitworth’s mind and heart mission; it also gave Whitworth’s community a language to synthesize seemingly oppositional elements of its history.

In deploying his narrow ridge metaphor, Robinson displayed adaptive leadership through his ability to control information, frame issues, and promote strategic engagement within Whitworth’s community to embody his vision of a narrow ridge. When considered within Heifetz’s framework, Robinson’s narration of the narrow ridge metaphor exemplifies four of the characteristics of adaptive leadership that Heifetz presents.

First, Robinson’s leadership involved commanding and directing attention. In his early descriptions of his narrow ridge vision—in his inaugural address, for example—Robinson directed attention beyond Whitworth’s recent history of institutional division to its historic identity and its uniqueness. Possibly for the first time, Whitworth’s identity was explained not in terms of what it opposed (e.g., liberalism or conservatism), but in terms of its uniqueness. Robinson also directed attention to the future as his narration of the narrow ridge attended to the history Whitworth was creating.<sup>63</sup>

Second, Robinson controlled access to information and the flow of information. Throughout the early years of his presidency, Robinson tried to describe his narrow ridge vision repeatedly and in many different ways. For example, reflecting on the early years of his presidency, Robinson shares, “I was looking for so many different ways to say it. I would say, ‘This is a place where we are going to hold our convictions high and be curious,’ but it was all really the same.”<sup>64</sup> Though the narrow ridge metaphor eventually stuck, Robinson’s persistent, consistent, and clear messaging

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<sup>63</sup> Cf. Hecló, 110.

<sup>64</sup> Robinson, interviewed by Dustin Benac, October 17, 2013.

contributed to a collective understanding of what Whitworth was for rather than what it was against.

Third, Robinson's leadership demonstrates his intention to frame issues symbolically in a manner consistent with his articulation of the narrow ridge vision. For example, Robinson intentionally expanded the president's cabinet shortly after arriving at Whitworth by adding two institutionally symbolic figures. First, Robinson upgraded the campus chaplain to a dean's-level position and added this newly hired individual, Terry McGonigal, to the president's cabinet. At the same time, he appointed Gordon Watanabe from the school of education as a special assistant to the president for diversity and member of the president's cabinet. Robinson then sat down with McGonigal and Watanabe and described the extent to which he hoped the two would "be one another's biggest fans."<sup>65</sup> In the ensuing collaboration between the two, McGonigal and Watanabe sought to demonstrate the interrelatedness of two often-opposed ideas: diversity and the Gospel. In this way, Robinson offered a symbolic gesture to the Whitworth community about the extent to which his narrow ridge vision offered integrative solutions to traditionally opposed alternatives.

Fourth, Robinson's use of adaptive leadership through his narration of the narrow ridge vision served to prepare Whitworth to resist the trend toward institutional isomorphism. As Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell summarize, isomorphism is a "constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions."<sup>66</sup> According to DiMaggio and Powell, three mechanisms may drive institutional isomorphism: coercive, mimetic, and normative.<sup>67</sup> Applied to a religiously affiliated higher education institution, evidence of these three forms of

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<sup>65</sup> Robinson, interviewed by Dustin Benac, October 17, 2013.

<sup>66</sup> Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell, "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields," *American Sociological Review* 48(2) (April 1983): 149.

<sup>67</sup> DiMaggio and Powell, 150.



institutional isomorphism may exist in the form of regulation from governmental or accrediting agencies (coercive), modeling institutions after others that are perceived as being “successful” in response to uncertainty about the future of religious higher education (mimetic), and increasing specialization and professionalization in higher education (normative).<sup>68</sup>

In this way, Robinson’s narration of an integrative vision that characterized Whitworth’s mission as walking the narrow ridge of mind and heart served to resist institutional isomorphism. For Robinson, the institutional trend toward isomorphism required a vision that emphasized Whitworth’s distinctiveness: “If we just became one more Presbyterian college that secularized, we would lose our faithfulness to Christ... on the other hand, if we became the Wheaton of the Northwest, that was equally horrifying to me.”<sup>69</sup> Instead, he chose an integrative route that sought to hold the possibility of secularization and the possibility of mimesis in a constructive tension. For Robinson, this gave rise to his use of the narrow ridge metaphor characterized by “a deep commitment to Christ and a deep commitment to Scripture while also staying open to a whole world of ideas.”<sup>70</sup>

In refusing to choose between intellectual secularism and religious dogmatism, Robinson narrated a vision for Whitworth that provided Whitworth with a distinct institutional identity in the larger landscape of religious higher education. Faculty and staff welcomed the departure from inner-institutional politics and applauded Robinson for giving Whitworth a language to talk about its social identity. “[The metaphor] made people feel like we were doing something higher and better rather than just compromising,” shares Robinson.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, Robinson’s re-narration of Whitworth’s mission combined with strategic institutional

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<sup>68</sup> DiMaggio and Powell, 151–52.

<sup>69</sup> Robinson, interviewed by Dustin Benac, October 17, 2013.

<sup>70</sup> Whitworth University, “With Grace and Truth: The Robinson Presidency (Part II),” May 25, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1X0f1cCayZI>.

<sup>71</sup> Robinson, interviewed by Dustin Benac, October 17, 2013.

decisions began yielding increased institutional stability.<sup>72</sup> As a result, Robinson's integrative narration of Whitworth's identity as traveling a narrow ridge enabled Whitworth to resist institutional isomorphism by focusing on its uniqueness while, over time, such an emphasis contributed to Whitworth's long-term institutional stability.<sup>73</sup>

When Robinson resigned in 2010, his successor, Beck Taylor, continued Robinson's vision of walking the narrow ridge. When Taylor rose, as Robinson had, for his own inaugural address, Taylor described both his task and Whitworth's mission in terms of a narrow ridge:

Whitworth's commitment, as Bill Robinson has so eloquently framed it, to walk the "narrow ridge" between these seemingly competing ideas is what has defined our purpose and community since 1890, what gives form and expression to our educational activities today, and what will ensure Whitworth's

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<sup>72</sup> Soden, 183.

<sup>73</sup> The long-term durability of Robinson's narrow ridge vision remains to be seen. Andy Crouch's explanation of the recipe for an institution as including four ingredients (artifacts, arenas, rules, and roles) plus three generations provides suggestive categories by which to consider the long-term durability of Robinson's vision (Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2013], 178). Much as Crouch argues that it takes three generations to make an institution—to transform a cultural pattern into an institution—one might also argue that it takes three generations to "un-make" an institution. Over the course of three generations, the patterns, practices, and stories that once comprised an institution may become lost or forgotten. As David King demonstrates in his analysis of World Vision (David King "World Vision: Religious Identity in the Discourse and Practice of Global Relief and Development," *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 9[3] [Sept. 2011]: 21–8), institutional changes are often more complicated than a simple recipe. Nonetheless, Crouch's language thematizes the way in which institutions are made and un-made over time. Accordingly, in a recent conversation with an academic advisor about this essay, he forecasted that Whitworth would no longer be walking the narrow ridge by the third president that follows Robinson, but will have come down on the liberal side of the institutional spectrum. It remains to be seen whether Whitworth's institutional identity will validate this prediction.

vital place in the landscape of American higher education in the future.<sup>74</sup>

By describing Whitworth's mission as walking a narrow ridge, Robinson engaged in a mode of institutional thinking that received a tradition—comprised of Whitworth's historic mission and a divided institutional landscape—and employed adaptive leadership to re-narrate the received tradition in a more hopeful vision for the future. Through his use of adaptive leadership, Robinson narrated a compelling vision for the community and engaged Whitworth faculty, staff, and students to resist institutional isomorphism by embodying his vision for Whitworth's distinctiveness. Although the task of negotiating the complex institutional and ideological landscape in contemporary society might more often feel like walking on a razor's edge than on a narrow ridge for many institutional leaders,<sup>75</sup> Robinson's example suggests that such a narrow road can be, and has been, traveled.

### **Opposability: The Impetus for Adaptive, Institutional Leadership and Thinking**

The combination of the four artifacts of Christianity's opposable inner logic and Robinson's use of adaptive leadership in a manner that reflects this logic permits two prescriptive conclusions about the formative potential of Christianity's opposable inner logic to form leaders for the contemporary world. First, if Christianity contains an opposable inner logic that has the potential to form individuals for adaptive leadership, then the formation of such an imaginative capacity requires that Christian leaders understand the basic tenants of the Christian tradition. In contrast to Martin's conclusion that attempts to narrate how individuals can "build integrative thinking capacity,"<sup>76</sup> the formative potential of Christianity's opposable inner logic, as

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<sup>74</sup> Beck Taylor, "Inaugural Address" (Whitworth University, Spokane, Wash., October 15, 2010).

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Heifetz characterizes leadership with authority as standing upon "a razor's edge" (Cf. Heifetz, 125–49).

<sup>76</sup> Martin, 24, 91–191.

presented here, suggests that enmeshment in the Christian tradition has the capacity to form individuals for integrative thinking. This implies that it is imperative for Christian leaders—and those tasked with training them—to deepen their understanding of the Christian tradition in which they stand. Doing so might require moving beyond a tacit acknowledgement of religious values—such as that offered by James MacGregor Burns<sup>77</sup>—by cultivating a deeper understanding of the history, theology, and practices that have sustained Christians throughout history. Although select contemporary leadership theorists have moved past Burns in this regard,<sup>78</sup> the practice of contemporary, Christian leadership can remain equally agnostic for lack of understanding of the convictions that shape the Christian tradition and the practices that have sustained Christians throughout history. To put it slightly differently, the historic gap between the conference room and the church must be closed, but Christian leaders cannot be expected to close this gap if they do not have an understanding of the resources needed to do so. However, as leaders and scholars move to close this gap—as theorists and practitioners “dig deeper”—they might encounter new resources that can continue to sustain their work and new insights that can illumine leadership theory.

Second, the existence of an opposable inner logic suggests that the practices of the Christian tradition also represent formative resources that can prepare individuals for leadership in contemporary society. As presented previously, leadership in the contemporary world requires neither dogmatic idealism nor entrepreneurial capitalism, but a distinct mode of institutional engagement that simultaneously considers an institution’s long tradition and those who will become heirs of the institution. Hecló characterizes such institutional engagement as “institutional thinking.”<sup>79</sup> In a manner reminiscent of Martin’s logic, Hecló describes institutional thinking as stretching one’s time

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. James MacGregor Burns, 29–41.

<sup>78</sup> Cf. John S. Burns, 96–120.

<sup>79</sup> Hecló, 109.

horizons “by making [conduct] beholden to its own past history and to the history it is creating.”<sup>80</sup> For Hecló, institutional thinking is learned experimentally and is like an art in that it is fundamentally “a matter of doing in order to learn more deeply about what one is doing.”<sup>81</sup> This produces a distinctly opposable vision in which, by facing constructively two seemingly irreconcilable temporal realities (the past and the present), one generates an unexpected alternative embodied in institutional thinking.

However, Hecló’s, Martin’s, and Heifetz’s accounts stop short in their consideration of the formative tradition that informs integrative, institutional thinking and adaptive leadership. For each, their accounts read as if one can learn integrative/institutional thinking or cultivate adaptive leadership *in vacuo* and apart from external agents. Though each offers helpful concepts, they overlook the interwoven, embodied nature of leadership and formation. If, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty has noted, humans are “beings-in-the-world”<sup>82</sup> for whom bodily participation in the world informs our orientation in and to the world, the human capacity to think and act in a certain way cannot be divorced from the particular location of embeddedness. In fact, considering an institution’s “past history” and “the history it is creating”<sup>83</sup> is to consider the tradition that has informed an institution, the tradition an institution is creating,<sup>84</sup> and the embodied actions that are proper to a tradition and to the institution that is shaped by a tradition.<sup>85</sup> Leadership and the formation of leaders remains an embodied venture.

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<sup>80</sup> Hecló, 110. Martin introduces the importance of experience in similar terms with the phrase “Using the Past, Inventing the Future” (Martin, 169).

<sup>81</sup> Hecló, 192.

<sup>82</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), 92.

<sup>83</sup> Hecló, 110.

<sup>84</sup> This type of logic echoes L. Gregory Jones’s account of “traditioned innovation.” See L. Gregory Jones, “Something Old, Something New,” *Christian Century* (February 19, 2014): 33–6.

<sup>85</sup> For an illuminative exploration of the interrelated character of “tradition” and “institutions”, see MacIntyre, 204–43.

The embodied character of leadership implies that it is imperative for leaders and leadership theorists to consider the embodied activities that contribute to leaders' formation. Much as Paul noted in Galatians 3:27, embodied activities—such as baptism—not only initiate individuals into a community but also contribute to the formation of an individual's imagination.<sup>86</sup> This conclusion is especially germane for those who promote Christian visions of leadership because the Christian tradition hinges upon Jesus' embodiment and has been sustained by embodied practices. The Gospel of John begins:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. The word became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:1, 14 NRSV)

Since the bodily crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus, embodied practices have sustained the church. From kneeling in prayer to receiving the elements in communion to the witness of the martyrs, the Christian tradition is inescapably bound to bodies. Consequently, formation through the Christian tradition requires training in and attention to the embodied practices that have sustained faithful Christian witness.<sup>87</sup> Doing so, to use Hecló's language, has the capacity to school individuals in this art such that the skills, language, and practices that are basic to this tradition can be translated to other arenas. As Robinson demonstrated, his deep rootedness in the Christian tradition enabled him to develop an innovative solution to Whitworth's historic divisions that drew from the insights of another religious tradition. The result contributed to the

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<sup>86</sup> Craig Dykstra's discussion of pastoral and ecclesial imagination demonstrates the complex network of experiences and ideas that shape individuals and communities in such a manner. Cf. Craig Dykstra, "Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination" in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, eds. Dorothy Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2003), 43–61.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. Dorothy Bass, ed., *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2010).

flourishing of Whitworth's community. However, Robinson and other Christian leaders cannot draw on the resources of the Christian tradition if they do not know the tradition or neglect to participate in the embodied, formative practices that have sustained faithful Christian witness.

## Conclusion

Much as an archaeological dig begins by surveying the land and noting distinguishing features of the soil and the surrounding landscape, this essay has sought to clear the ground to consider Christianity's opposable inner logic and its capacity to form leaders for the contemporary world. Martin's *The Opposable Mind* and Heifetz's *Leadership Without Easy Answers* provide two helpful guides that enable one to identify four artifacts within the Christian tradition and suggest significant continuity between Christianity's opposable inner logic and contemporary leadership theory. Although Martin's and Heifetz's work offers numerous descriptive insights, they neglect to probe deep enough into the formative logics of experience and tradition. They do not dig deep enough. Picking up where they leave off and attending to the opposable inner logic of the Christian tradition deepens Martin's and Heifetz's accounts by emphasizing the formative potential of precognitive elements and their importance for leadership development. For Christian leaders, the four artifacts identified here have the capacity to foster integrative, opposable thinking to meet the challenges of either/or scenarios in contemporary society.

The presence of an opposable inner logic offers those in positions of Christian institutional leadership a specific course of action in the face of either/or decisions: dig deeper. Much as Robinson did, when confronted with seemingly irreconcilable alternatives, individuals can dig deeper into the Christian tradition. They can dig deeper into the history and mission of their institution. They can dig deeper into the formative stories and experiences that construct meaning in contemporary society. And as scholars and practitioners mine the Christian tradition in this way,

they may encounter additional artifacts of Christianity's opposable inner logic that can similarly enable them to perceive previously unforeseen options and possibilities. Although the tough problems that either/or scenarios represent will persist, the presence of Christianity's opposable inner logic offers resources to explore the possibility of unexpected alternatives that lie beyond the perceived limits of the present alternatives. As Christian leaders draw on the resources latent within Christianity, hope remains that an unexpected alternative might still be found.

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