"NEXT [WO]-MAN UP: EXAMINING PROPHETIC LEADERSHIP TRANSITION IN MOSES AND MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR."
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Abstract

Relating the transitions in leadership from Moses to Joshua and from Martin Luther King Jr to the Civil Rights Movement, this article argues that it is imperative that prophetic leadership discerns leadership succession for a community, organization, or movement in order to fulfill more successfully its vision of the preferred future. It discusses the qualities necessary for both current and prospective leaders to increase the chances of a healthy leadership transition as well as the practices required to discern the next leader(s).

In 1968, Martin Luther King, Jr., delivered a speech famously known as "I've Been to the Mountaintop" in Memphis, Tennessee. He eerily and prophetically spoke about his impending death, which would prevent him from continuing to lead the Civil Rights Movement (CRM). The next day, on April 4th, standing on his balcony on the second floor of the Lorraine Motel, King was assassinated. His leadership of arguably the most culturally transformative movement in U.S. history came to a tragic halt. Once the dust settled after his funeral and a period of nationwide grieving, one question needed to be answered: "Who would now lead the movement?" Within a decade, the movement declined and eventually lost its potency and relevance. This dynamic raises the question of the movement's preparedness for life after King. Was this a critical weakness in King's leadership? Was the responsibility to prepare a successor to continue the vision of the CRM left to King?

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This paper is not suggesting that no young leaders from the CRM continued the legacy of Martin Luther King, Jr., and others. However, this paper's critique of the CRM's leadership transition focuses on the lack of intentionality—as modeled by the Moses/Joshua transition—in identifying the leader(s) who eventually would carry on the work of King for the Black community. How could a more explicit succession model—considering the climate of violence in response to the fight for racial justice—have contributed to the continuation of the CRM? The leadership transition of Moses to Joshua offers a biblical and practical model that has relevance for leadership transitions today

In his speech, King drew from the life and ministry of Moses when he said, "We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me now. Because I've been to the mountaintop…He's allowed me to go up to the mountaintop. And I've looked over. And I've seen the Promised Land. I may not get there with you."[1] This allusion sets the framework for analysis of leadership during times of transition. What can we learn from both leaders about discerning divine transition that does not include their leadership going forward? Did Moses get it right? Did King and the CRM leaders get it wrong given its significant decline following King's assassination? This paper contends that prophetic leadership involves discerning and executing intergenerational leadership transition for a community or an organization that intentionally prepares the next leader(s) for a new season in the life of the community or organization. This transition is critical because of the generational shift in worldview, theology, and ethics as evidenced by comparing Millennials to previous generations of GenXers, Boomers, and Elders.

In making the claim articulated in the above thesis, the Moses/Joshua transition and events leading up to it described in Deuteronomy 31–33 and Numbers 27 will serve as the framework for discerning the ideal leadership transition. It is through this lens that Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Civil Rights Movement

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[1] Martin Luther King, Jr., "I See the Promised Land," in *A Testament of Hope: Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King*, Jr., ed. James M. Washington (New York: Harper One, 1986), 286.

leadership will be critiqued. It is also through this mosaic framework that this paper will define prophetic leadership. Prophetic leadership is discerning God's will, conveying God's will to the people, and executing God's will to sustain the life and progress of the community or organization toward the hope that God has for the people. Abraham Heschel asserts the prophet makes God's voice audible,[2] while Tercio Junker, in *Prophetic Liturgy*, adds, "in like manner, through the prophet's eyes, the invisible God becomes visible."[3] It is through the prophet's witness and rhetoric that the community is able to see and hear the activities of God. Gerhard von Rad makes similar claims in defining the prophet and thus, the prophetic ministry. He states, "The prophetic message is diverse, depending on the individual personality of the prophet, the temporal context, the needs of the people, and the content of the revelation."[4] William A. VanGemeren adds, "Each prophet was compelled by the Spirit to bear witness to the plan of God…[and] Moses was the fountainhead of the prophetic movement."[5]

In keeping with the prophet's primary responsibility to reveal God's plan, I am broadening the understanding of the prophetic ministry beyond the most recognized prophet's role in confronting social ills and condemning sinful behaviors of the people. Walter Brueggemann, in *The Prophetic Imagination*, rightly contrasts conservative and liberal understandings of the prophetic ministry. He describes the conservative view of the prophet as the fortune-teller pointing out the things to come with reference to Jesus; conversely, he says the liberal sees the prophetic as righteous

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[2] Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets*, 22.

[3] Tercio Bretanha Junker, *Prophetic Liturgy: Towards a Transforming Christian Practice* (Eugene, Ore.: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 4, Kindle Edition.

[4] Gerhard von Rad, *The Message of the Prophets*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); found in William A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 44.

[5] William A. VanGemeren, *Interpreting the Prophetic Word: An Introduction to the Prophetic Literature of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1990), 44–45.

indignation along with social action in the present.[6] However, I will focus on another aspect of prophetic leadership into the future to articulate and lead the people according to God's will and discernment for leadership transition. Essentially, prophetic leaders must mediate the transition to the next leader(s) to succeed them according to God's will.

Studies regarding leadership transition, particularly within the USAmerican church, reveal a significant shift in the spiritual landscape of the country. The younger generations—GenXers and Millennials—have different views and priorities than the older generation—Boomers and Elders—as they relate to evangelism, social justice, and views on same-sex marriage. This shift in the "terrain" requires a corresponding shift in leadership to shepherd congregations effectively. For instance, various generations of Christians show notable differences with regard to social justice, particularly the church's response to the history of racism in the United States. The younger the Christian is, the more likely the Christian is to want the USAmerican church to become actively involved in addressing the country's history of racism. A Barna Group study revealed that twenty percent of Millennials say the church should do nothing to address racism, but thirty-four percent of Elders and thirty-three percent of Boomers say the same. In the same study, when asked whether the church should repair the damage—repent, reparations, and so on—thirty-five percent of Millennials agree, while twenty percent of Boomers and seventeen percent of Elders agree. Lastly, the study shows that a call for the church to repent is agreed upon by twenty-three percent of Millennials but only eleven and ten percent of Boomers and Elders, respectively.[7]

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[6] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination: Revised Edition* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 2001), 2, Kindle Edition.

[7] The Barna Group, "What Is the Church's Role in Racial Reconciliation," Barna.com, July 30, 2019, https://www.barna.com/research/racial-reconciliation/ (Accessed May 25, 2020).

Aside from social justice issues, the nation is becoming more and more secular,[8] and the church is embracing and even adopting more secular worldviews or practices as compatible with their faith than ever before. For example, a 2016 Barna survey indicated that when it comes to the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), forty-five percent of Millennial support it, compared with twenty-four percent of GenXers, twenty percent of Boomers, and fifteen percent of Elders.[9] However, just four years after that survey, sentiments are changing even more swiftly in support of BLM. According to a recent *New York Times* article, following the cluster of murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, USAmericans across the board show a 28-point increase in support of Black Lives Matter.[10] BLM, as an organization, does not identify as Christian, and it unapologetically affirms the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ) community. The shift among younger people to a more secular acceptance and expression of faith than traditionally seen is likely to reveal an even more profound generational divide in the church.

Furthermore, when it comes to one of the central themes in the Christian mission, evangelism, the tide is turning. Twenty-eight percent of Millennials "strongly agree" that it is wrong to share their faith with someone of another faith with the hope of converting that person to the same faith; an additional forty-seven percent

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[8] The Barna Group, "Tracking the Growth and Decline of Religious Segments: The Rise of Atheism," Barna.com, January 14, 2020, https://www.barna.com/rise-of-atheism/ (Accessed May 25, 2020). In 2003, eleven percent of the nation identified as atheist, agnostic, or no religion and eighty percent identified as Christians. By 2018, the nation grew to twenty-one percent identifying as atheist, agnostic, and no religion, and those identifying as Christians declined to seventy-two percent.

[9] The Barna Group, "Black Lives Matter and Racial Tension in America," Barna.com, May 6, 2016, https://www.barna.com/research/black-lives-matter-and-racial-tension-in-america/ (Accessed July 11, 2020).

[10] Nate Cohn and Kevin Quealy, "How Public Opinion Has Moved on Black Lives Matter," nytimes.com, June 10, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/10/upshot/black-lives-matter-attitudes.html (Accessed July 17, 2020).

of Millennials are unsure about conversional evangelism.[11] That makes a total of about seventy-five percent of Millennials who do not regard evangelism, as commonly understood, to be a priority for their Christian witness. Conversely, a much smaller percentage of older generations–twenty percent of Elders, nineteen percent of Boomers, and twenty-seven percent of GenXers–"strongly agree" that it is wrong to share your faith with the expectation that others would be converted.[12]

As the ethos and worldview of the community undergo these generational shifts, leadership will be required that can relate and guide communities in a way that remains true to the foundational teachings of the faith but are adaptable enough to remain effective in a shifting culture.

Moses and Joshua as Leadership Transition Model

It is important to understand the Moses/Joshua transition. Moses was declining in his ability to lead the Israelites and Joshua was being prepared to succeed as the shepherd in order to fulfill God's plan for Israel. In this liminal time, God's plan can either be fulfilled or missed. Moses was 120 years old at the end of his life and ministry. He mediated between YHWH and the people and shepherded them through the wilderness toward the promised land of Canaan. He discerned the voice of God instructing him to "Go up into this mountain of Abarim" (Num. 27:12 NRSV)[13] and view the land God promised the Israelites. Moses was granted the opportunity to see the land, but not to enter the land with the people he had led for forty years. In that moment, Moses also discerned the Lord's voice telling him why he would not enter the land. He remembered the "waters of Meribah" where the

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[11] The Barna Group, "Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism Is Wrong," Barna.com, February 5, 2019, https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/ (Accessed May 25, 2020).

[12] The Barna Group, "Almost Half of Practicing Christian Millennials Say Evangelism is Wrong," Barna.com, February 5, 2019, https://www.barna.com/research/millennials-oppose-evangelism/ (Accessed May 25, 2020).

[13] All Bible references are NRSV.

people quarreled with him because there was no water for them to drink. In his anger, Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to the rock as God has instructed him. Rather than demonstrating the holiness of God to the people, Moses mirrored the rebellious attitude and actions that the people showed him (Num. 20:10–13). This moment was the turning point when it became clear that Moses would not be completing the journey into Canaan as head/shepherd of the people.

Leadership transition begins when the leader starts to execute God's instructions. Simply hearing the instructions or the revelation does not mean the transition is beginning because prior to taking the necessary steps toward transition, the prophet still has the choice and the potential to disobey and undermine God's directives. Before the transition officially began, Moses discerned the voice of the Lord instructing him to choose Joshua and lay hands on him in ceremonial fashion before the priest Eleazar and the people (Num. 27:18, 19). Moses was given clear, fairly detailed instructions to publicly invest the authority that YHWH had given him into Joshua. Aside from discerning that he would not be the one to lead the community of Israelites into Canaan, choosing Joshua and assigning leadership authority was of primary importance.

It is important as a leader to appreciate that the timing of divine transition is not determined by human wisdom but by God. This is a vulnerable place for a leader. As Ruth Barton narrates in *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership* regarding this space of vulnerability, "It is a place where we are not in control, God is.… In our encounters with God we die not only to the expectations of others but also to ourselves.…"[14] While this is a time of vulnerability for leaders, it is also a time of honesty with God, others, and especially self. Though not an exhaustive list, the story of Moses brings to light three qualities that ought to be considered for leadership: (1) effective leadership through faithfulness, (2) understanding when the assignment or role has been fulfilled, and (3) admitting when the leader has reached the limits of his or her

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[14] Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 2008), 210.

capacity or ability to lead. The following sections will analyze these three qualities in Moses's leadership during transition.

Leadership Effectiveness Through Faithfulness

Moses's encounter with YHWH in Numbers 20:11 was a critical moment in his life and leadership. This scene, parsed from the rest of his forty years of leading the people through the wilderness, does not depict him in his best light as a leader. However, his actions provide an essential lesson for every Christian leader today. He was instructed by YHWH to speak to the rock and command it to provide water for the people (Num. 20:8). Because he was agitated at the people for complaining, he disobeyed God. Moses's ineffectiveness as a leader is seen here in his unfaithfulness to YHWH's instruction. He demonstrated a lack of patience and capacity to further endure resistance from the people he led. The people had shown a penchant for complaining early in the wilderness journey. In previous instances, Moses responded with the appropriate maturity and, according to J. Robert Clinton, YHWH honored that maturity by vindicating Moses through God's own faithfulness.[15] Those responses allowed him to build "relationship equity" as a leader. However, this time Moses was quick to anger. His patience had worn thin, and he did not display a "holy" witness for YHWH in that moment. Clinton might say this was an "obedience check" that Moses failed. An obedience check, according to Clinton, "is a process item through which a leader learns to recognize, understand, and obey God's voice."[16] Effectiveness for the Christian leader is not exclusively measured by the response of the community, but also by how one discerns and faithfully executes the directives of God.

Leadership effectiveness is conventionally measured in producing the desired result;[17] in the case of prophetic leadership, effectiveness is instead measured in producing God's desired results through a leader's obedience to God's voice. In other words, God's

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[15] J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress, 1988), 108.
[16] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 63.
[17] "effectiveness," www.dictionary.com/effectiveness

desired results for God's people are never separate from a leader's faithfulness. If this were not true, one could justify producing results by their own means, thereby circumventing God and functioning autonomously. Moses's unfaithfulness in this moment demonstrated that he could achieve the results (providing water for the people) in such a way that did not represent God's will (based on God's instructions to Moses) and God's character. As the mediator between YHWH and the people, Moses was accountable for being YHWH's witness, which determined the faithfulness of his leadership. This leadership model aligns with Clinton's stewardship model, which he says, "is a philosophical model which is founded on the central thrust…that a leader must give account of his/her ministry to God."[18] A leader's actions must be accountable to God; because of the leader's influence with the people, the leader models what is or is not acceptable behavior (right or wrong) to be mimicked by the people. If the behavior modeled is inappropriate or even sinful, even if it accomplishes the desired results, the results may be short-lived. However, these short-lived results might come with long-term consequences because God responds according to God's will to the faithfulness or unfaithfulness of the leader(s). Leaders' faithfulness or unfaithfulness is often reflected in the entire community.

Fulfillment of Assignment/Role

What Moses demonstrated for today's leaders to emulate was the humility to acknowledge that his role as leader had neared its end. In Exodus 3, where God first encounters and assigns Moses the task to save the Israelites from a life of oppression, God tells Moses, "bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt" (Ex. 3:10). When he fulfills that part of the assignment, Moses "shall serve God on this [Sinai] mountain" (Ex. 3:12). However, before that, God tells Moses "I have come down to deliver them out of the land of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a

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[18] J. Robert Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory: A Self-Study Manual for Analyzing the Development of a Christian Leader* (Altadena, Calif.: Barnabas Resources, 1989), 57.

good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.…" (Ex. 3:8). It is interesting that God keeps the responsibility of bringing the Israelites into the Promised Land on God's self. Moses's primary mission was to bring them out of Egypt.

Moses succeeded in fulfilling the initial directive, which was to be YHWH's agent for freeing his Israelite brothers and sisters from an oppressed state of existence. Although Moses's actions kept him from entering Canaan with the Israelites, he was gifted the opportunity to see the physical Promised Land. But Barton insightfully suggests that "for Moses the presence of God was the Promised Land."[19] With the exception of one documented critical error in judgment, Moses was faithful to his calling to the very end. He was faithful to the degree that he fulfilled the assignment, but he was also faithful in that he did not attempt to overextend his assignment beyond God's directive.

Acknowledging Limitation of Capacity/Ability to Lead

The third quality of a leader that Moses demonstrates is the willingness to admit that he reached the limits of his capacity and ability to lead the people. To be clear, this is distinct from acknowledging the limits God placed upon his assignment. It is a most daring and humble admission because a leader's worth and identity are often inextricably tied to the person's abilities.

In Deuteronomy 31:2, Moses tells the people of Israel, "I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in." What does Moses mean by this? Was he unable because YHWH prohibited him, or did he mean he no longer had the physical, emotional, or mental capacity to make it to Canaan? The Hebrew word for "able" is *yakhol*. It has a range of meanings that might apply in this text. It means "to be able, to prevail…to be able to endure something… to be capable, to have the ability or power to do something."[20] In addition, the phrase "to go out and come in" is associated with the idea of shepherding. Moses uses the same terminology in Numbers

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[19] Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 214.
[20] Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, eds., *The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament: For Deeper Understanding of the Word* (Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG Publishers, 2003), 446–447.

27:16–17 when responding to YHWH's revelation to him that he would soon be "gathered to his people" and to commission Joshua as his successor. In asking God to appoint someone to lead Israel, he says, "appoint a man over the congregation who shall go out before them and come in before them…that the congregation of the Lord may not be as a sheep that have no shepherd."

Moses was likely speaking about his ability to continue shepherding Israel because of the explicit mentioning of his age. However, yakhol is also used in the negative sense to indicate a person's incapacity "to maintain an attitude or state of condition."[21] With the help of divine revelation, he demonstrated the honest self-assessment he previously displayed in Deuteronomy 1:37 when he also honestly acknowledged that the Lord was angry with him and would not permit him to enter the Land. The combination of Moses's own physical and emotional limitations and lack of God's favor to continue shepherding the people rendered him incapable of entering Canaan.

To not acknowledge his limitations would have been the kind of self-deception that would likely lead to unhealthy and ineffective leadership, as well as potential unfavorable consequences for the people. Apparently, YHWH had equipped Joshua with the Resource to lead the people the remainder of the journey into the Promised Land.[22] God described Joshua in Numbers 27:18 as, "a man in whom is the Spirit…" This is an indication of the inner power imparted to Joshua and the inner work God had performed on Joshua to prepare him for this role. Moses acknowledges his limitations and perceives the word of YHWH that Joshua will have the empowerment of the Spirit to continue the mission.[23]

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[21] Baker and Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament*, 447.

[22] Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 33. Leadership is physically, emotionally, and mentally taxing because of conflicts and challenges—two ways by which God processes a leader. Clinton contends, "God processes a person by bringing activities, people, and problems…into his or her life. We call these process items."

[23] Clark Pinnock emphasizes the role of the Spirit to lead the collective mission of the people of God as well as the individual to fulfill God's plans in *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downer's Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1996), 164.

Joshua had a new vision and understanding of the terrain ahead of them. He was sent ahead with Caleb and a man from each tribe to spy on the land of Canaan. Moses, upon naming Joshua as one of the spies, changed his name from Hoshea (salvation) to Joshua (Jehovah is salvation). Being one of the spies sent ahead into Canaan, Joshua literally had a vision of the land they would be entering. The landscape of Canaan with its inhabitants is a new vision that he, Caleb, and others would convey to Moses, Aaron, and the congregation. This is not a vision of wilderness, but of promise. Joshua's vision was in the literal sense. But while he could actually see and touch the Promised Land, it stands analogous to what emerging leaders must possess. Emerging leaders must be willing and able to see beyond the existing culture and circumstances into what they discern might be unfolding.

This Moses/Joshua model for transition is valuable for present leaders. Leadership transition is inevitable for any community or organization. However, transition must be stewarded well by discerning who God has prepared and desires to appoint to lead the people. Entering a new land, with new terrain and new challenges, requires new leaders with new insights and abilities to complete the next phase of God's mission. The Promised Land, as a metaphor for today's leaders, represents new vision and a new space for the community. The leadership required to navigate and endure the wilderness is not the same leadership required to enter, survive, and thrive in the newness of the Promised Land.

In the unprecedented times of the Covid-19 pandemic, where church buildings are empty and church campuses are desolate, online worship services have become the imperative if churches want to continue holding their services. The challenge for some older pastors without the staffing to help manage technology is how to switch gears to online, virtual worship services if they did not have the requisite infrastructure in place prior to the pandemic. For younger pastors who either have the infrastructure in place or at least the knowledge, the shift is likely much easier to reach a generation that is accustomed to and comfortable with virtual worship in place of in-person worship. The future might hold even more unexpected disruptions that require understanding of

technology over brick-and-mortar, or community from a distance instead of face-to-face for a period of time. The next "Joshuas" ought to be intentionally sought after and prepared for such disruptive and unexpected transitions.

Martin Luther King and CRM Leadership

Martin Luther King, Jr., was the face and the preeminent voice of the Civil Rights Movement from the moment he gave his first impromptu speech at Holt Street Baptist Church on December 5, 1955. He displayed a natural ability to inspire African Americans through soul-stirring oratory and sheer charismatic presence. However, the leadership of the CRM, while often deferring to King's leadership and vision, was made up of many more people. King was the magnetic spokesperson, but strategy was the work of a formal leadership team effort, which included Ralph Abernathy, A. Philip Randolph, and others.[24] The essential "others," often unrecognized and underappreciated, included in this strategic leadership structure were the grassroots organizers of the Woman's Political Council (WPC), founded by Mary Fair Burks and succeeded by Jo Ann Robinson, the initial visionaries and planners of the Montgomery Bus boycott.[25]

Although King was the voice and face of the movement and carried much weight in terms of vision casting and decision-making, the style of leadership implied in the structure was more by committee than it was hierarchical. King often sought the counsel of his peers, particularly in times of crisis. Donald Phillips writes, "King was a master at alliance building. Martin strategically set out to establish trust and build personal relationships with the leaders of the national civil rights groups."[26] This aspect of King's

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[24] Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years 1954–63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 120–141, Kindle Edition.

25 The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Kinginstitute.standford.edu, https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/encyclopedia/womens-political-council-wpc-montgomery; This entry is part of the Montgomery Bus Boycott Collection.

[26] Donald T. Phillips, *Martin Luther King, Jr. On Leadership: Inspiration and Wisdom for Challenging Times* (New York: Warner, 1998), 138, Kindle Edition.

leadership was apparent as he built relationships with well-respected clergy, controversial figures like Bayard Rustin, and entertainment celebrities like Harry Belafonte.[27] Phillips claims, "Martin included other leaders in his plans on a variety of initiatives and, through constant communication, made sure that they were informed of the SCLC's plans."[28] King would thrive in this style of leadership until near the end of his life when his main "alliances shrank."[29] King began to focus his attention and energy on broader issues than the racism that plagued African Americans in the South, such as the Vietnam War and poverty across racial lines.

Despite King's practice of consultation, the CRM leadership demonstrated a hierarchy based on gender. A glaring shortcoming of King and the CRM's leadership structure is the absence of women leaders. Including women as potential leaders of the movement, besides morally valuing women as equal, would have functionally served to improve leadership succession by broadening the pool leaders to choose from. From the very beginning of the movement, before it was widely recognized, women were on the front lines. In fact, King was elected president of the Montgomery Improvement Association just four days after Rosa Parks was arrested. In that meeting, E.D. Nixon, president of the Alabama branch of A. Philip Randolph's Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters[30] and friend of Parks, expressed his indignation for the men for allowing the women to take the brunt of the risks in resistance up to that point. Taylor Branch describes Nixon's rebuke this way:

> Nixon rose up in anger… "Let me tell you gentlemen
> one thing. You ministers have lived off these washwomen

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[27] King's strategy of relationship building as a leadership style was informal and a strategic part of the structural organization. It was informal in that it was natural for King to develop friendships with all types of people, especially if it could help the movement. It was a part of the organizational structure in that the movement needed the assistance of African Americans from all spheres of influence in order to be successful.

[28] Phillips, *Martin Luther King Jr. On Leadership*, 138, Kindle Edition.

[29] Marcus "Goodie" Goodloe, Ph.D., *King Maker: Applying Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s Leadership Lessons in Working With Athletes and Entertainers* (Redondo Beach, Calif.: Dream Life Loud, LLC, 2015), Loc. 984, Kindle Edition.

[30] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 120, Kindle Edition.

for the last hundred years and ain't never done nothing for them." He threatened to expose the ministers as cowards before the mass meeting if they tried to hide. He scolded the ministers and everyone else for letting the women bear the brunt of the arrests and then backing down like 'little boys.' "We've worn aprons all our lives," he said. "It's time to take the aprons off…. If we're gonna be mens, now's the time to be mens."[31]

In this hierarchical culture, where the women had been doing most of the work, the men came in and received most of the public's attention.

Women were relegated to the background of administrative work, with men dominating in the foreground. For example, Ella Baker was widely known for her grassroots organizing abilities with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Upon recommendation, King reluctantly offered her the role of "ad hoc staff commander" for the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC).[32] King assumed the board members would prefer a [male] preacher, but he agreed to hire Baker as long as she was not being paid by the SCLC and received "only an 'acting' director's title."[33] Her abilities and experience could not break through the male chauvinistic wall erected by the patriarchal leadership structure of the movement.

The unwillingness to recognize the leadership gifts of women was a blind spot for the CRM leadership and might have cost them potential longer-term leadership stability. The women had proven they could organize, strategize, and inspire the next generation of leaders—this was Baker's claim to fame.[34] Including women as voices and faces could have spread the burden more evenly and broadened perspective and wisdom on strategy. More prominent alliances that went against the grain of the patriarchal culture of the times could have produced not only leaders during the fifties and

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[31] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 231, Kindle Edition.
[32] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 231, Kindle Edition.
[33] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 231, Kindle Edition.
[34] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 231, Kindle Edition.

sixties, but the next generation of civil rights leaders could have sprung from the ranks of the women, as well.

Three Practices for Discerning Transition

Moses's transition to Joshua functions as a model for leaders to follow when discerning divine transition for a community or an organization, particularly when the transition does not involve his or her leadership for the succeeding phase in the life of the community or organization. The Moses/Joshua model provides a framework for biblical and practical ethics for discerning and executing transition. Three practices can be observed from Moses as a leader that are critical to healthy transition for a community or an organization: identification, commissioning, and release. It is through this tridimensional lens that I will critique the leadership of King and the CRM leaders and that I may provide a framework for future leaders.

Identification

A leader must have vision for three things: (1) a vision of the promised land/future (where the community should go), (2) a vision for his or her leadership capabilities, and (3) the qualities and capacities needed for the next leader(s). Before the Israelites crossed the Jordan to march into the Promised Land, YHWH instructed Moses to go up on Mount Nebo, the highest mountain peak in the area, to get a vision of the promised land YHWH reserved for Abraham's descendants. This might seem to be a cruel request of YHWH, but in fact it might have been grace extended to Moses for all his years of faithfully leading the people aside from a moment of disobedience. This is the imagery that Martin Luther King, Jr., used in his final sermon before he was murdered. Both Moses and King were assured of the future of their respective movements by divine revelation.

The revelation articulated by King served to inspire all those who labored with the CRM to continue the progress forward. It gave a sense of urgency because their leader sensed a threat against his life, which would be a threat to the life of the movement, and it built anticipation that the next victory hoped for was in reach.

King thrived in communicating vision of the "promised land." From the "I Have a Dream" speech on the Lincoln Memorial steps to his speech at Memphis titled "I See the Promised Land," he consistently inspired a vision of what could become of the nation and the African American/White experience in USAmerican society. King had the oratorical skills and poetic brilliance to evoke the country's collective imagination, which ranged from refreshing to uncomfortable. He did this while simultaneously dramatizing the cruel memories of its history. In his "I Have a Dream" speech, his refrain of "Let freedom ring…" encapsulated the inclusive breadth across which King's vision of societal change spanned, from the "mighty mountains of New York" to "curvaceous slopes of California" to "every hill and molehill of Mississippi."[35] He also alluded to the depth of interrelated joy and experience of citizenship when he said, "little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers."[36]

He spoke of children engaged in unrestricted play, joining hands as perhaps potential leaders that will one day join hearts, minds, and strategies in solidaric work to initiate and improve upon cultural change. King and the CRM leadership envisioned the fellowship of its black and white citizens, but it never cast a vision of the next Martin Luther King or Ralph Abernathy—or because of even more profound blind spots, the next Jo Ann Robinson—as prominent voices and faces of Black leadership.

The second type of vision that leaders need is the ability to assess honestly their capacity as a leader. Moses humbly articulated an honest vision of himself. He understood that he made a choice earlier in his leadership that cost him entry into Canaan. But more immediately, unfettered by self-deception, he knew that he no longer had the grace or the ability to continue with the people. His remark in Deuteronomy 1:37 that YHWH was even angry with him and would not permit him to go into the land underscores his

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[35] Martin Luther King, Jr., "I Have a Dream," in *A Testament of Hope: Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: Harper One, 1986), 220.

[36] King, "I Have a Dream," in *A Testament of Hope*, 219.

recognition that he no longer had the grace of God to go further. But in Deuteronomy 31:2, as mentioned above, he admits he is "no longer able…" Without sincere self-assessment acknowledging limitations in one's leadership, there is no authentic invitation for the next leader(s). The antithesis of this is Saul's prideful resistance to the transfer of the grace of the Spirit upon David when Samuel anointed him the next king of Israel. That transition would prove to be toxic, stressful, and bloody.

King, too, in his final speech before his death recognized the limits to his leadership, not because of a lack of ability, but because of impending threats upon his life. He often spoke and wrote about the weight of the suffering he had to endure.[37] He reflected on a previous attempt at his life and the threats that were swirling around even as he landed that morning in Memphis.[38] His limitations might have been in the grace of the physical protection from violence needed to continue. However, he still spoke as if he would be continuing in the fight with his audience. Statements like, "[W]e've got to give ourselves to this struggle until the end,"[39] or, "We've got some difficult days ahead,"[40] are indications that King might have been either wrestling with his own impending end and his desire to continue, or that he was intent on instilling hopefulness to the audience. King offered a realistic vision of a "promised land" with struggle but not without hope.

A third type of vision a leader needs to have is a vision of the next leader or leaders' qualities and capacities to lead. Clinton writes, "A major function of all leadership is the selection of rising leadership. Leaders must continually be aware of God's processing of younger leaders and work with that processing."[41] Joshua was not just any leader. He had been groomed for some time, much in the

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[37] Martin Luther King, Jr., "Suffering and Faith," in *A Testament of Hope: Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. James M. Washington (New York: Harper One, 1986), 41.
[38] King, "I See the Promised Land," in *A Testament of Hope*, 285–286.
[39] King, "I See the Promised Land," in *A Testament of Hope*, 283–284
[40] King, "I See the Promised Land," in *A Testament of Hope*, 286.
[41] J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: NavPress Publishing, 1988), 201.

same way Jesus groomed the disciples. He had been present with Moses. God identified Joshua, and Moses displayed the humility and wisdom to recognize what God was doing not just for Joshua, but for the community of Israel. Joshua was chosen because the Israelites needed him in order to continue into the land. Joshua was chosen by Moses to lead a group of men to a successful battle versus the Amalekites (Exodus 17:9–14). He was called Moses's assistant and joined him on the mountain of Sinai (Exodus 24:13), and he had spied the land with Caleb and others (Numbers 14:6).

Joshua had three necessary qualities as an emerging leader: (1) a learning posture, (2) new vision and understanding of the terrain ahead, and (3) new energy. As stated above, Joshua was Moses's assistant and kept close company with him. He joined Moses on Mount Sinai where Moses would go to meet with God and remain for forty days and nights. This is a foreshadowing of the mentor/mentee relationship that Jesus had with Peter, James, and John as they joined Jesus in intimate settings that the other disciples were not privy to, according to the narrative in the gospels. They, too, were on a mountain with Jesus witnessing the transfiguration scene. The Hebrew word for assistant describing Joshua's relationship to Moses means "chief assistant to an authority figure."[42] His official role was to serve Moses. His unofficial task, undoubtedly, was to learn from Moses.

Emerging leaders must have vision and understanding of the new terrain with new challenges and opposition as well as new opportunities that might potentially present themselves. The CRM addressed issues such as segregation and economic inequality. While the former was no longer an issue in terms of legalized segregation, the latter was still manifesting itself and would do so in more destructive ways after the CRM. Declining cities would turn into gang territory because of unemployment and lack of resources. Mass incarceration would be the "new Jim Crow." Just a decade after King, the prison population began a sustained rate of growth

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[42] Warren Baker and Eugene Carpenter, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary Old Testament: For a Deeper Understanding of the Word* (Chattanooga, Tenn.: AMG Publishers, 2003), 1204.

in 1973 from 161 inmates per 100,000 in 1972 to 767 inmates per 100,000 in 2007.[43] Wherever there is poverty in the United States, African Americans typically suffer much more than most communities, especially when compared to white people.[44] This is especially true when it comes to incarceration rates because "the geography of incarceration is contingent on race and concentrated poverty, with poor African American communities bearing the brunt of high rates of imprisonment."[45]

The CRM had Joshuas already in the organization—Andrew Young, Jesse Jackson, and John Lewis to name a few. These would be the leaders of the next generation addressing through government, the pulpit, and grassroots efforts, the new ways systemic racism would oppress African Americans and other people of color. The next generation would begin to see the emergence of women leaders. This is one area where King and the CRM missed it. Considering the emergence of Black women in visible and vocal leadership positions in the 1970s—like Angela Davis and Shirley Chisolm—the CRM missed an opportunity to enter the new terrain of broader, more inclusive Black leadership. Ella Baker and the younger versions of Baker should have had space to be voices in the movement and beyond. The patriarchal style of leadership, which marginalized African American women, would not have been effective for much longer. It would require a new ethos led by new visionaries. Young, Jackson, and Lewis eventually followed their own paths and callings, but the movement suffered as the Black Power Movement became prominent and caught the attention of the younger generation, who were no longer receptive to King's nonviolent direct action. They were ready to take action because the CRM had not produced more results at a faster pace. As a result of the combination of patriarchy and the next generation's disinterest in a nonviolent approach to

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[43] *The Growth of Incarceration in the United States: Exploring Causes and Consequences*, eds. Jeremy Travis, Bruce Western, and Steve Redburn (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2014), 33.

[44] Scott Winship, Richard V. Reeves, and Katherine Guyot, "The Inheritance of Black Poverty: It's All About the Men," Brookings.edu, March 22, 2018, https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-inheritance-of-black-poverty-its-all-about-the-men/ (Accessed July 12, 2020).

[45] Travis, The Growth of Incarceration in the United States, 283.

social justice, the movement and its ethos began to weaken and fade into the background as more militant forms of resistance increased.

Commissioning

It is also important how the prophet embodies and engages in practices that make the invisible concrete. Junker emphasizes this in saying, "Christian liturgical celebrations are places, as ritual acts, for constructing an effective consciousness in terms of persons being allowed the space to actively participate in the spiritual and concrete world."[46] The ritual discussed in this paper is "commissioning." This act of making visible what YHWH has ordained—including the community as a collective witness and heightening the consciousness of the people as to what YHWH is actually doing—is a critical step in the process of prophetic leadership transition between Moses and Joshua. The value and role of rituals and ceremony should not be lost on today's leaders.

Ritual is a central theme in Ancient Near East culture. Rituals especially play a significant role in the life of the Israelites. Samuel Balentine asserts in his commentary on Leviticus that human observances of rituals image back to God's creational order.[47] He claims that, "when rituals are faithfully enacted, God's presence is palpably available."[48] In addition, rituals are more than a way of thinking about the world; they are a way to conceptualize the world in concrete ways. There is theological and practical "knowing" that occurs with enacting rituals.[49] Beginning with Adam, God has shown a pattern of publicly affirming one who God appoints. This might occur as divine revelation as in the examples of Adam and Moses. The prophet might reveal this, as with Saul and David. It also might occur by God's audible confirming voice as with Jesus at his baptism. This ceremonial practice, as part of the communal liturgy, engages the community by inviting community members to be present and involved in the transition.

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[46] Junker, *Prophetic Liturgy*, Loc. 149, Kindle Edition.
[47] Samuel Balentine, *Leviticus* (Louisville, Ken.: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 4.
[48] Balentine, *Leviticus*, 4.
[49] Balentine, *Leviticus*, 4–5.

Interestingly, King had an informal public affirmation of his leadership. Just days after Rosa Parks's arrest, a secret meeting was held at Holt Street Baptist Church. King and Abernathy were in attendance, along with other African American community leaders who were planning the Montgomery Bus Boycott. That day, they nominated and confirmed King to be president of the Montgomery Improvement Association, and he had just a few minutes before giving his famous Holt Street Baptist Church speech to "kick off" the movement. The secret meeting was analogous—whether consciously or not—to Moses commissioning Joshua in the "tent of meeting" (Deut. 31:14–15). That evening cemented King as the leader as he gave his speech, witnessing his gift and the reception from the audience.[50] He was not prepared for that opportunity— he was thrust into it. Nor did he have the chance at the end of his life to prepare the next King to take his place.

John Lewis, who passed away on July 17, 2020—among others, including Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young, and C.T. Vivian— was a protégé of King. He continued the legacy and spirit of the CRM and the nonviolent direct action after King's assassination through his life and service as a U.S. Congressperson representing the state of Georgia for decades until his recent death. However, Lewis did not have the quasi-ceremony of a vote and subsequent public acknowledgment as the next leader of the movement in the way King did when he was chosen to be the leader of the CRM.

Barton recognized in King's final speech that he was resolved that the end might be near, just as Moses believed. He said if he did not get to the "Promised Land" with the people, it did not matter to him anymore. He was not wrestling with God about seeing the vision through.[51] However, what Moses did that King and the other leaders did not do was discern the next leader(s) for the movement and intentionally prepare them for stepping into leadership roles if necessary. King and his team did not publicly or ceremonially affirm any leadership to hand the baton to for the next leg of the social justice race.

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[50] Branch, *Parting the Waters*, 136–141.
[51] Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership*, 216–217.

Release

For the sake of growth for succeeding leadership, the final solidifying act of releasing is critical. Moses went before the elders and the congregation to officially relinquish the role of leader to Joshua. Moses spent four decades leading the Israelites, though with much grumbling against him. It is his voice that they were accustomed to. While change in general is difficult, it is especially difficult when taking into account relationship dynamics where individuals or groups are expected to alter particular attachments to one person and entrust themselves and their collective destiny to another. This can be a traumatic experience if not done well.

Releasing is solidified in the previous leader's separation. In Moses's case, his separation was unavoidable in his death. For pastors or churches or leaders of organizations today, it could come in the form of retirement, relocating to another church, or intentional absence from the community. Like Moses, King's separation from the organization, the African American community, and the nation was the result of death. The CRM's problem was that they had not chosen a leader(s) to succeed King in the credible event of his untimely assassination.

Conclusion

Transition in leadership is inevitable. It is not a matter of if it will happen, but when and how healthy and successful the transition can be made. The timing of transition is vital to the health, mission, and longevity of a community or an organization. To miss this opportunity might cost the community or organization the longevity of its collective life. Discerning divine transition requires humility, self-honesty, trust and communication between leadership and community, and identification of the next leader. Moses exemplified these qualities while discerning the voice of God and identifying Joshua. One could be rightfully critical of Martin Luther King and the leadership of the CRM for lack of preparedness in identifying the next leader(s)—whether male(s) or female(s)—to continue the necessary work of the movement. Although King discerned, and in an eerily prophetic manner spoke of his impending death, he had not shown evidence of intentionality

and ceremonially recognizing the individuals who should succeed him as voices and faces of the movement for the next generation. With the rise of the Black Power and specifically Black Panther movements, the change in culture, and new manifestations of old issues, the next generation of African Americans were not drawn to the CRM in the fight for justice as their predecessors were.

For the sake of critical reflection, several questions seem fair to ask. How well did King and the CRM leaders employ intergenerational alliance-building? Is this where King and the male leadership failed to discern the potential move of God entering the next phase of the movement? Did they miss preparing the next Martin Luther King, Jr.? Were they consciously or unconsciously resistant to the next Ella Baker or Jo Ann Robinson among them?

The transition involving Moses and Joshua should serve as a model framework for how and why healthy leadership transition should be executed. It likely sustained the life and mission of Israel in spite of their collective shortcomings. Transition in leadership prepares the entire community to transition into the new terrain of the Promised Land.

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