
**INTRODUCTION: ENGAGING THE PROPHETIC DIMENSION OF
CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP**
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Welcome to the Fall 2020 issue of the *Journal of Religious Leadership*. As is our custom, the fall issue takes its theme from the preceding Conference of the Academy of Religious Leadership and is constituted largely by its presentations. As we gathered online in April 2020, we were treated to rich array of intellectual offerings that delighted our minds and challenged our hearts.

We are grateful to former ARL President Jeffrey Tribble for convening the conference around the topic, “Engaging the Prophetic Dimension of Christian Leadership.” In his call for papers, he posed several questions to stimulate and evoke our best thinking around prophetic leadership. Given the tumultuous and contested times we live in, his questions continue to guide our engagement with communities and the wider society in matters of peace and justice, especially for the “least of these”:

- How does the prophetic tradition in the Bible as well as historical and contemporary prophetic figures inform practices of compassion and justice?
- How might a “prophetic imagination” guide social action to counter the economics of inequality, the politics of oppression, and the co-opting of God’s freedom to be present and act where God chooses?¹
- What leadership models, theories, methods, and strategies are useful for inspiring, energizing, and sustaining prophetic leadership?
- What spiritual practices inspire faith, hope, and courage to act boldly and wisely in the face of danger and threats by dominant principalities and powers?

¹ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*, Second ed. (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2001), 21-37.

The essays in this issue offer powerful answers to these questions from very different perspectives. Each and all together expertly draw upon wisdom of tradition, imaginative insight, and down-to-earth practices to inform and inspire prophetic engagement.

In his Presidential Address, “Engaging the Prophetic Dimension of Christian Leadership,” Professor Jeffery L. Tribble, Sr., called the Academy’s attention to “the present national context of partisan political leadership, a global pandemic, social unrest, and an outcry for addressing America’s original sin of racism against indigenous people, Black people, and other people of color.” In the present-day context of political toxicity, he issued a clarion call to “study, reflect on, and engage the prophetic dimension of Christian leadership in order to better understand how to effectively equip faith leaders for ministry leadership that critiques, challenges, and transforms an array of structural injustice and systemic sins against Creation and humankind.” One of Tribble’s concerns in the essay is the challenge of “prophetic truth-telling in a post-truth era.” In the months after this prescient presentation was delivered, we have witnessed the horrifying consequences (ie., over 200,000 dead; many times that number seriously ill) that the systemic dissemination of lies and disinformation perpetrate during a deadly pandemic.

The Rev. Phil Allen takes up the problem of succession from leader to leader and offers an illuminating reconception of the prophetic vocation. In his article, “Next [Wo]-Man Up: Examining Prophetic Leadership Transition in Moses and Martin Luther King, Jr.,” Allen juxtaposes the biblical relationship between Moses and Joshua to the lack of leadership transition during the Civil Rights Movement. His main argument is that prophetic movements not only need a vision for the future; they also require planning in leadership transitions in order to make visions come to fruition. So, Allen exhorts those who are prophetic leaders to plan for their succession as an essential step in the direction of the “promised land”. But he does not stop there. Allen points to the understandable but unfortunate blindness of the Civil Right Movement to the leadership of women, and he argues essentially that we will not discover the next generation of leaders by looking in the mirror. Current leaders need to call forth the “next generation” of potential

leaders, attending especially to those who are different from current leadership and can better address significant changes in culture.

Taking up the topic of Black Prophetic Preaching, The Rt. Rev. Edward Donalson III invites readers to consider the centrality of preaching to prophetic leadership and the ability of religious communities to resist moral malformation and dehumanization by learning to reflect more vividly the image of God in which we are created. In his essay, “Voices from the Margins: A Renaissance of Black Prophetic Preaching and Leadership in Problematic Times,” Donalson helps readers clarify the racial construction of the Black Church vis-à-vis whiteness: “Whiteness is the social construct of power and domination rooted in anti-Blackness. . . . Blackness is then anything and anyone rendered socially other by those situated closest to power and privilege.” Prophetic preaching, then, is the liberative practice of “holding up a mirror” to the folly of the dominant power structure and painting “a new world with the toolkit of oral performance, imagination, and keen intellectual investigation so that the hearer is left with a picture of a preferable future.”

From the St. Andrew Blackadder Church in Scotland, we hear from the Rev. Dr. Neil J. Dougall, who considers what it means to be a prophetic minister in Scotland. In his article, *Prophetic Leadership: What Is It And Does It Matter?* he takes up the subjects of being prophetic and being a leader. He deftly analyzes them independently and then weaves them together constructively in the context of his homeland and tradition. Being prophetic entails describing and embodying “God’s alternative reality”, he argues. But being a leader has necessarily to do with organizing a group to achieve a common goal. *Leaders* act strategically, involve others, and build coalitions. *Prophetic* leaders, then, exercise these skills in order to articulate a common vision of God’s desire and live into it.

The Rev. Dr. Kristina I. Lizardy-Hajbi’s article, “Frameworks Toward Post/Decolonial Pastoral Leaderships,” is the first part of a two-part exploration of post-colonial and decolonial pastoral leaderships. With analytical precision and practical richness, Lizardy-Hajbi offers an accessible and helpful foray into what is often felt as a difficult, conceptual morass. Her clear writing defines and describes colonialism, postcolonialism, and decoloniality –

and their intersections – especially with regard to their bearing on how pastoral leaderships and ecclesial contexts in the United States can be reimagined beyond conventional norms to become more welcoming, diverse, and transformative. Her essay illumines, e.g., the rise of Black Lives Matter and of anti-racist approaches as prophetic movements that challenge homogeneity, hegemony, and Eurocentric supremacies. She also calls much-needed attention to the fact that leadership is often exercised by pluralities – by groups and communities – that are hybrid, variegated, and polyvocal, and in so being reflect more fully the wondrous diversity that is the Reign of God.

All told, this splendid array of articles invite us to reimagine and relanguage our worldviews, our communities, and our lives. They challenge us to unmask the ways we participate in oppressive systems; they help us see more clearly into hidden dynamics and hear more fully the voices which have been subjugated. We are welcomed into a more biblical, more just, and more beautiful vision of wondrous plurality and diversity, all of which lives and moves and has its being in the Divine Life.