
BOOK REVIEW***LEADERSHIP, GOD'S AGENCY & DISRUPTIONS: CONFRONTING MODERNITY'S WAGER.***

BY: MARK LAU BRANSON AND ALAN J. ROXBURGH

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Modernity's wager is that "life can be well-lived without God" (35). Autonomy and the ability for individuals and societies to continually reshape themselves are hallmarks of this wager. Branson and Roxburgh believe that Christians (and especially Christians from Euro-tribal churches) have unwittingly bought into this narrative and thus are enacting leadership strategies that are almost completely devoted to human agency. Against this they set a vision of God's agency and the ways that God has been at work in the biblical narratives. They call for Christian leadership to have distinctive practices and goals. Their assumption is that "the basis of leadership within the Christian narrative begins with the question of God and what God is doing in the world" (5). Working with Jeremiah, Matthew, Acts, and Ephesians, they demonstrate God's work and the leadership response in various biblical narratives. This results in the need for leaders to create a habitus, or "taken-for-granted ways a group of people live in relationship with one another" (168). The leadership responsibility is to shape practices, which are the "ways in which a group goes about working out its habitus" (171). This book is the result of Branson's and Roxburgh's long-standing collaboration in working with congregations and their conviction that most "Christian" leadership practices are highly secularized.

At the heart of this book is engagement with biblical narratives and the ways that God works to shape interpretive leaders, nurture learning communities, and disrupt human expectations. They explore the way that Jeremiah interprets massive discontinuous

change for the people of God. They show how Matthew uses action-reflection for communities who need to be “fully reoriented around the announced presence of God’s reign” (121). They read Acts not as an evangelistic tract but as a way to understand more fully how to keep up with God’s action and follow God’s initiatives. The book of Ephesians helps us engage concepts of empire and see ways that “loyalty to God gets colonized by nationalism and the church’s vocation gets confused with careers and industries” (161). In engaging these biblical narratives, they seek to connect thinkers like Jürgen Habermas, Paulo Freire, and Everett Rogers to church leadership. Their goal is to “go deep” into the philosophical underpinnings of Western thought and leadership theory in order to help readers be reshaped from our modern, Western assumptions about leadership and ecclesial life.

Following this re-orientation of our leadership imaginary, Branson and Roxburgh move us to leadership practices. They note that leadership is often seen as being an expert and telling people what to do. Believing this to be inadequate and often missing God’s agency, they want leaders to shape the way people live in relationship to one another (the *habitus*). This happens through paying attention to the ongoing practices of the congregation. Leaders need to ask questions rather than give answers. They need to find people who are (often) outside of the established ways of organizing congregations and denominations. These practices are profoundly local, which means seeing what is going on in the neighborhoods around us. Branson and Roxburgh also call for leadership that is improvisational, which requires discovering what God is doing as we go along rather than simply enacting an already decided upon plan. Ultimately, they are deeply theological as they seek to articulate Christian leadership that follows the Holy Spirit into uncharted territory.

I often find my seminary students arriving in class believing that already know what needs to happen through their leadership. Whether it is social justice or individual conversion, most students seem to have already decided their desired outcomes. The result is that they functionally have little need of God, except to provide the ethical or evangelistic ends of their work. When asked how God is

involved in their ministry, they do not have much of an answer. Branson and Roxburgh are providing that answer. Truthfully, it is a profoundly disruptive answer because it shows that the church's goals are already profoundly shaped by modernity, with a resulting secularization of ministry. That makes this an important book for teaching leadership that is demonstrably Christian, because it gives a way to help student engage leadership theologically and not just functionally.

Michael Wilson
Donegal Presbytery
Lancaster, PA